



## **SOCIOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGION AND ECONOMY: EMERGING SPIRITUALITIES AND THE FUTURE OF WORK**

### ***Guest Editors' Foreword***

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This issue of *Studia Sociologia* focuses on alternative forms of spiritualities and the proliferation of literatures and programs of self-development (Carrette and King, 2005) emerging in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). This thematic group organizes an extensive discussion centred on the ways in which these forms of religiosity/spirituality are constituted through bio-politic mechanisms of generating a productive subjectivity (Foucault, 2007, 2008) and through socio-economic technologies of articulating a competitive and pro-active personality in the context of a new neo-liberal order (Dardot and Laval, 2014). The participating authors explore the emergence of alternative forms of spiritualities within the new post-socialist work environment and the increasing emphasis placed on the entrepreneurial development of the self; they seek to analyse the processes that converge towards supplying the post-socialist citizens with the motivational structures needed to become more competitive and productive in the global capitalist economy into which CEE countries have been incorporated in the past two decades.

The analysis of these cultural and religious changes allows a deeper understanding of the implementation of capitalism and of the transformations it has generated in CEE countries during the last two decades and provides us with a more nuanced perspective on how economic processes are embedded and justified in the peripheries of Europe. The studies focus on a diverse set of problems ranging from the booming sector of personal development services, to startups and the local narratives of capitalism, to discussions related to shifts within the traditional religious fields and the emergence of innovative forms of spiritualized subjectivities that emphasize creativity and self-development of individuals.

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The main aim of this issue is to analyse the recent economic transformations and spiritualities, understood in a broad sense. This is why it was important to connect the papers of this issue to the recent organizational and work studies that emphasize the means through which individuals, described as being in search of professional flexibility and autonomy, simultaneously strive for the reconstruction of the unity of the self. Despite the fact that the new logic of career construction analysed by Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) explicitly refers to the 'new spirit of capitalism', spirituality is reduced in these accounts to a complex of metaphors, images and symbols that shell material and economic actions, and is not analysed as a self-sustained phenomenon. Starting from an understanding of the 'new spirit of capitalism' as a form of innovative spiritualized ideas and practices and not exclusively as a matter of significance for economic endeavours, these studies contribute to showing how the new spiritualized cosmologies constitute proximities with the recent economic transformations.

In terms of researching alternative spiritualities, these studies proceed from a criticism of the phenomenological paradigm that informed research programs focused on private and invisible religiosity, which they treated as 'neutral' transformations produced by a process of cultural post-modernity. Following the work of Carrette and King (2005), Foucault (2005) and Rose (1990, 1996, 1998) it is important to look at how these spiritualities mediate forms of governmentality and self-transformation that enable a better insertion into the entrepreneurial logic demanded by the new economic practices focused on competitiveness and flexibility.

The merging of these two analytical registers, namely the focus on economic transformations, entrepreneurial development of the self and management of work on the one hand, and alternative spiritualities, spiritual development and cultural ontologies on the other hand, allows for a promising approach in investigating the social transformations of CEE. Strong religious structures and identities still shape the integration of these former communist countries into the neo-liberal economic system.

Anca Simionca's inquiry into the blooming sector of personal and spiritual development in Romania starts from the existing descriptions of the type of subjectivity that both the neo-liberal logic and these development services have been documented to encourage. The centrality of the self and the individualization of the relation between labour and capital entailed in it lead to several consequences: the sovereignty of the self in relation to its environment, the lack of importance of social ties and solidarity, and the reduced importance of the community. Her analysis identifies the main points of ambivalence in relation to these desiderates and documents mutations that she encountered in her research.

Natasa Szabo investigates how *Bridge Budapest*, a Corporate Social Responsibility organization founded by leading Hungarian IT startups, sets for itself the mission of shaping values towards an embracing of entrepreneurship and of capitalism in general. Her analysis shows the strong investment the organization has in transforming attitudes and ideologies surrounding capitalism in post-socialist Hungary, namely to produce what the author calls a local spirit of capitalism. This consists, on the one hand, of restoring the legitimation of some of the core institutions of capitalism, such as the enterprise and the entrepreneur, and of exposing the counter-hero, the provincial 'postcommunist cheater' that comes in opposition to the risk-taking, innovative and ethical figure of the entrepreneur hero. On the other hand, through rethinking the management of work, it pushes towards the emergence of the ideal-typical autonomous and self-motivating employees.

Elena Trifan is interested in the consequences of taking part in personal development programs upon the daily lives of individuals. To this end, she describes how practitioners are applying the principles and techniques of personal development in order to elicit change in the ways in which individuals relate to themselves and to others. Based on ethnographic data gathered in Bucharest, Romania, her paper aims to show how being immersed in practices of self-development impacts upon and restructures everyday experiences. Her emphasis lays on the negotiations surrounding the values inscribed in techniques of personal development and the reconfigurations they effect.

Sorin Gog's paper focuses on the transformation of the traditional religious landscape and the emergence of alternative spiritualities among the younger generations from Romania. The paper investigates the new spiritualized technologies of the self that sacralize subjectivity and the specific mechanisms through which a new interiority is socialized, an interiority that emphasizes self-development, creativity and immanent wellbeing and authenticity. The analysed statistical data reveal a process of de-institutionalization of religious belief and an opening towards a more spiritualized understanding of religion. Drawing on ethnographic material, interviews, blogs and sermons, the author shows how the new alternative spiritualities are producing individualizing religious practices that encourages the spiritual subject to rely on their inner resources in order to be more authentic, creative and pro-active. The aim of these subjectification techniques is to instantiate a spiritual interiority that is self-referential and strives for a creative autonomy that enables self-realization and self-amplification.

Andrada Tobias's study meticulously looks at different types of spiritualities and explores the way they are embedded in a complex life-style that revolves around living in the present. These subjectification techniques enhance wellbeing

and the consumption of literature of personal development. Drawing on a post-foucauldian conceptual framework she analyses complex ethnographic material and questions if there is evidence for the creation of spiritual technologies of power which enable the formation of neo-liberal subjectivities. The author reconstructs the requirements of personal change demanded by the new spiritualities and outlines some of the main structures involved by these transformations that produce self-accountability, responsibility and personal freedom, all important features of the current neo-liberal economic transformations. The paper concludes with stressing the importance of distinguishing between spiritual development programs and generic spiritualities that do not produce neo-liberal subjectivities and which sometimes articulate an anti-capitalist critique of present day societies. The author emphasizes the need for analytical categories that allow us to see the divergent political projects embedded in the field of alternative spiritualities.

In line with this, Cristine Palaga's paper proposes a parallel between forms of spirituality that are animated by neo-liberal subjectivities and cults that aim at reviving ancient religious ideas and practices; the latter are part of the same trend of alternative religions that are critical of institutionalized Christianity. This research aims at reconstructing the way Neo-Pagan communities become critical of modernity and propose a counter-cultural lifestyle that aspires to produce alternatives to the capitalist societies which are based on individual competitiveness and consumption. As opposed to this, Neo-Pagans return to nature and spiritual imaginaries, articulate an ethic based on integrity and virtue and avoid assimilation by mainstream society. In comparison to this, the contemporary spiritual development programmes and alternative spirituality emphasize productivity, entrepreneurialism and self-realization, values which are important for the corporate world. The author brings an important contribution in exploring how the neo-liberal transformations are contested and resisted from within the field of alternative spiritualities as well, and the way Neo-Pagan groups' moral reframe moral communities in order to engage with the vast social and economic transformations taking place in Eastern Europe.

Cecilia Rubiolo's paper tackles the issue of neo-liberalism from a more complex perspective. Based on thorough and rigorous ethnography, the paper focuses on 'neo-liberalism from below' and the ways in which Evangelical groups develop practical dispositions (related to work ethic and entrepreneurial practices) that enable trans-national migration networks and the insertion in the Italian labour market. The research follows these migrants from their local communities from Vicovu de Sus in Romania to Turin in Italy and analyses their work arrangements, religious interpretations, life-style and gender roles, and the way these enable a better insertion in the global capitalist market economy to the point that they become important local entrepreneurs in Italy. The author

brings an important contribution in understanding the specific modes in which religious practices of communities in Eastern Europe shape migration networks, global markets and trans-national regimes of accumulation.

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