

INDIVIDUAL RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION OF THE POPULATION IN THE OHRID-STRUGA REGION

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Abstract

Major changes in society, both economic and political, as well as social, are also accompanied by changes in value priorities in the social system of values. Those changes are quite dynamic and intense. Exposed to the influences of social, political and cultural developments, people find it more difficult to adapt and lose confidence in their own abilities to solve the many important tasks they face. People look for help in solving these tasks in religion, which through its teachings offers a philosophy of life, which is in line with the teachings of a certain denomination, that is, it establishes a mutual relationship with them, while offering solutions to people for the many issues they are faced with in everyday life. Of course, the role of the confessional communities, which through their activities and organizational forms, are increasingly trying to attract attention, while filling the gaps that other social institutions and organizations have failed to fill, is also important. The

research was carried out in the Ohrid-Struga region, which includes the municipalities of Ohrid, Struga, Vevcani and Debarca, a region in which two confessional communities operate, namely: the Macedonian Orthodox Church – Ohrid Archdiocese and the Islamic Religious Community, and which with its characteristics as a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional environment represents in some way a minimized form of the Macedonian multicultural, that is, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society. In this research, we started from the premise that religiosity is correlated with the following socio-demographic characteristics: religious affiliation, gender, age, place of residence (city-village), marital status, level of education, occupation of respondents, number of members in the household and the social status of the respondents. This paper will present part of the research results that refer to only one segment, that is, the individual religious identification among the population in the Ohrid-Struga region according to socio-demographic characteristics.

Keywords: religion, religiosity, religious identification, indicators, socio-demographic characteristics

Introduction

When studying religion and religiosity as multidimensional and quite complex phenomena, it is not enough to study them only from one aspect, that is, only from one scientific discipline, but rather a multidisciplinary approach is needed. So, we must emphasize that the sociological approach is only one of the possible approaches in the study of religiosity.

From a sociological point of view, religiosity is related to a certain dependence on social changes that in some way determine the influence and meaning of religion in society, which is certainly a characteristic of these areas as well. The political and social transformations in the Republic of North Macedonia since the nineties have an impact on the redefinition of the position and role of religion in society. The transition period in our country was accompanied by the revitalization of religion and desecularization of society. In short, the revitalization of religion in our country can be described as a movement from a privatized and marginalized position to deprivatization of religion and desecularization of society. These processes are seen through the increase in the number of believers, especially among the younger population, as well as the connection and dependence of religion on politics and vice versa.

Theoretical background

Many social science theorists who have dealt with the question of what religion is have encountered serious difficulties in trying to answer this question. "There is a large number of researchers, members of various scientific disciplines, who share the opinion that religion and religiosity are extremely complex and dynamic social phenomena. On the other hand, the number of researchers who agree with a single definition of the term religion and religiosity is small" (Bashkimi 2021: 13). "The reason for the many types

of definitions of religion and religiosity should not be sought only in the complexity of these phenomena, but also in the different angles of view, embodied in numerous disciplinary approaches and in their frameworks of different theoretical understandings” (Blagojević 2005: 36-37). The complexity and dynamics of religion and religiosity as social phenomena on the one hand and the numerous disciplinary approaches on the other hand are the reason for the large number of definitions of religion and religiosity. However, those differences continue in the sociological approach itself in defining these social phenomena “which are most evident at the level of global sociological theories such as: Functionalist, Marxist and phenomenological” (Bashkimi 2021: 13).

Despite these differences, at the beginning of any research, as in our case, there should be a precise and clear definition of religion and religiosity, because without it research is not possible. Depending on the goals of the research, the researcher can eliminate some of the many definitions of religion that differ from each other by means of selection. “Since the purpose of the research in our case is aimed at researching established (institutionalized) traditional religions and conventional religiosity, it is necessary to start from this kind of definition” (Bashkimi 2022: 10). But that does not mean that that definition should be closed and eternal. “At the beginning of the research, the definition of religion clearly limits the subject of the research, but at the end of the research, there is an opportunity to correct and supplement the initial definition of religion with arguments from the research itself. So all the time we are dealing with a working definition of religion, because the complete definition of religion is its true history” (Blagojević 2005: 39).

For the sake of greater transparency, in the following we will briefly see what some definitions of religion look like, which represent a basis for building a good heuristically fruitful definition. So, for example, for Giddens,

who makes a distinction between what religion cannot be and what religion actually is, “the characteristics that are common to all religions refer to the following elements: religion always implies the existence of a series of symbols with which evokes a sense of respect and awe; then rites and ceremonies in which the community of believers participates are important for religion” (Gidens 2001: 272). Hose Casanova (1994) emphasizes the public role of religion in the modern world. Hervieu-Leger (2000) analyzes the role of religion in secularized and globalized societies, offering a framework to study its transformation, the growth of spiritual individualism, and the challenges confronting traditional religious institutions. According to Vuko Pavičević, the definition of religion is built or made up of five elements: the idea of a supernatural being, religious feelings, religious symbols, ritual and religious organization. He gives the following phenomenological definition of religion: “Religion is an organized set of beliefs, feelings, symbols, cult actions and moral rules related to the idea or concept of the otherworldly Being, which is taken care of by a special organization-the worm” (Pavičević 1980: 17). For Šušnjić, religion must primarily be defined by its essence, not by its function. According to him, “religion can be considered any belief in an absolute and mystical power, on which man depends and which controls his life and death, but which he can influence, if he behaves in certain ways; he can express his experience with that power in a cognitive, emotional, practical and mystical way, i.e. in the form of teaching, rites, community of believers or charismatic personalities; the acquisition and expression of experiences with that strength has a certain meaning for him, and a certain importance for the community, because without it his life and the life of the community would look completely different” (Šušnjić 1998a: 50). While Ivan Cvitković defines religion as “belief in the Supernatural and sacred expressed through religious customs, rites and symbols for which religious organizations and religious leadership stand, and

which provides the followers of a given religion with moral definitions” (Cvitković 2005: 37). Bešić and Djukanović will emphasize that the definition of religion should contain the following elements: faith, sacred, collective, transcendent and cultural-historical conditioning. According to them, “religion represents a culturally-historically conditioned and collectively ascertained faith in the sacred, which as such is of a transcendent nature” (Bešić i Đukanović 2000: 32).

Some authors, when defining religion, emphasize its subjective side, i.e. individual experience, while others point out that religion represents a special specific organization. “Religion is essentially a broad term in which religiosity and confessional communities find their place” (Bashkimi 2021: 14). In addition to the subjective dimension of religion, i.e. religiosity, we should mention that religion also exists as a special specific organization, i.e. confessional community. In that context, it is important to note that the eminent sociologist Grace Davie regarding the sociological approach to religion claims that the discipline of sociology is about pattern, it is concerned both with the non-random ways that individuals, communities and societies order their lives and with finding explanations for these ways of behaving (Davie 2007: 5).

As we previously mentioned, two confessional communities operate in the examined area: the Macedonian Orthodox Church – Ohrid Archdiocese and the Islamic Religious Community.

Research results

The Ohrid-Struga region, as we have already mentioned, consists of the municipalities of Ohrid, Struga, Debarca and Vevçani and is located in the southwestern part of the Republic of North Macedonia with a total area of about 1,333 km². The Ohrid-Struga region, with its characteristics,

represents a multi-cultural, i.e. multi-ethnic and multi-confessional environment. According to the Census of Population, Households and Apartments in the Republic of Macedonia in 2002, the total population in the Ohrid-Struga region is 127,065 inhabitants, of which 58,592 belong to the cities of Ohrid and Struga. In terms of religious affiliation, 74,975 (59.1%) declared themselves Orthodox, 50,721 (39.9%) Muslims, 178 (0.1%) Catholics and 1,191 (0.9%) declared themselves to belong to another religion group (State statistical office 2022).

Quota purposive sampling was used in this research. Quotas express the variation of the phenomenon under investigation. In accordance with the subject of research and the expected goals, as well as with the research approach itself, the design of the sample was made. The sample consists of 400 respondents over the age of 18, selected according to pre-defined relevant characteristics. That is, when determining the quotas in the sample, care was taken to reflect the various geographic and socio-demographic characteristics of the examined area. For this purpose, the sample includes subjects from different settlements in the Ohrid-Struga region and with different socio-demographic characteristics, which correspond to the geographical and socio-demographic characteristics of the examined area. The survey research, that is, the questionnaire adapted to the research model, represents a primary source of data, complemented by other research techniques such as observation and informal conversations. This research was conducted during 2015 and 2016 and is part of the research entitled "Religiosity among the population in the Ohrid-Struga region" (Bashkimi 2022).

The research used indicators that cover the four components of religiosity, namely: Indicators that refer to the cognitive-emotional component, that is, belief in the sacred, i.e. identification with a particular religion through the acceptance of religious teachings; Indicators that refer to

the conative component, that is, the behavior of respondents in society, which stems from the moral aspects of religion; The indicators that refer to the action component, i.e. that cover the practice, i.e. religious practice within religious organizations through which a sense of religious belonging develops; As well as the indicators that refer to the knowledge of the theological doctrine of one's own religion. The questions in the questionnaire, that is, the indicators, are arranged in a way that covers all components of religiosity. We should point out that in this research we used the term "classical" religiosity, a term taken as it was used by all significant researchers in our area. The survey questions in the first part of the questionnaire are the same for all respondents, while the questions in the second part of the questionnaire are different and adapted according to the religious affiliation of the respondents (Bashkimi 2022).

As we have already pointed out, in this research we started from the premise that religiosity as a subjective category, i.e. as a dependent variable, is conditional, i.e. it is correlated with the following independently variable categories, i.e. socio-demographic features, namely: religious affiliation, gender, age, place of residence (city-village), marital status, level of education, occupation of respondents, number of members in the household and social status of respondents. This paper will show part of the results of the research that refer to only one segment, that is, to the individual religious identification among the population in the Ohrid-Struga region, depending on socio-demographic features.

All segments of religiosity will be shown depending on the already mentioned socio-demographic characteristics. In this way, we will try to make a typology of religiosity according to socio-demographic characteristics, that is, to obtain a profile of people according to the degree of religiosity depending on socio-demographic characteristics. Based on the answers to the questions, the respondents were categorized into certain degrees of

religiosity. The first category, i.e. respondents with a low degree of religiosity, include those respondents who answered the questions with “I do not agree” (e.g. with the attitude that one should believe in God, after the transitory earthly life, thanking God eternal life awaits us, etc.) and who answered the questions with “never” (e.g. do you pray during the day, do you fast, etc.) or who answered “wrongly” to the questions related to knowledge of the theological doctrine of their own religion. In the second category, respondents with a medium level of religiosity include those respondents who answered “I don’t know” and “somewhat” to the questions. While the third category, i.e. respondents with a high degree of religiosity, include those respondents who answered the questions with “I agree”, answered the questions “regularly” and “correctly”. Through the answers to the questions that cover all the segments of religiosity, i.e. the percentage mean value of the answers to the segments of religiosity, the belief in the sacred, the attitude of the respondents in society that stems from the moral aspects of religion, religious practice and knowledge of the theological doctrine of their own religion and depending on the socio-demographic characteristics, we will try to obtain the profile of the respondents with a high, medium and low degree of religiosity, depending on the socio-demographic characteristics.

At the beginning, we will show the degree of religiosity among the population in the Ohrid-Struga region, depending on the religious affiliation of the respondents.

T-1: Religious affiliation

Degree of religiosity	Religious affiliation					
	Orthodox			Muslim		
	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree
Overall mean	13.5%	22.3%	63.5%	3.8%	10.2%	84.8%

From the obtained results of T-1, it can be seen that the percentage of respondents with a high degree of religiosity is significantly higher among respondents from the Islamic religion (84.4%) compared to respondents with a high degree of religiosity among respondents from the Orthodox religion (63.5%). That is, 84.4% of the respondents from the Islamic faith and 63.5% of the respondents from the Orthodox faith responded to the questions from all segments of religiosity with “agree”, “regular” and “true” to the questions asked.

In the following, we will show the degree of religiosity among the population in the Ohrid-Struga region, depending on the gender of the respondents.

T-2: Gender

	Gender					
	Male			Female		
Degree of religiosity	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree
Overall mean	9.7%	17.8%	70.1%	7.8%	16.1%	74.2%

From the obtained results of T-2, it can be seen that the percentage of respondents with a high degree of religiosity is significantly higher among female respondents (74.2%) compared to respondents with a high degree of religiosity among male respondents (70.1%). That is, 74.2% of the female respondents and 70.1% of the male respondents answered the questions asked from all segments of religiosity with “agree”, “regular” and “correct” to the questions asked.

In the following, we will present the degree of religiosity among the population in the Ohrid-Struga region, depending on the age of the respondents.

T-3: Age

	Age								
	18-29			30-59			60+		
Degree of religiosity	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree
Overall mean	8.7%	17.8%	71.3%	8.7%	17.2%	72.1%	8.7%	14.4%	74.9%

From the results obtained in T-3, it can be seen that the percentage of respondents with a high degree of religiosity is significantly higher among respondents over 60 years of age (74.9%) compared to respondents with a high degree of religiosity among respondents aged 30-59 year old (72.1%) as well as respondents with a high degree of religiosity among respondents aged 18-29 years old (71.3%). That is, 74.9% of respondents over 60 years old, 72.1% of respondents aged 30-59 years old as well as 71.3% of respondents aged 18-29 years old answered the questions asked from all segments of religiosity with “I agree”, “regularly” and “correctly” to the questions asked.

In the following, we will show the degree of religiosity among the population in the Ohrid-Struga region, depending on the place of residence of the respondents (city – village).

From the results obtained in T-4, it can be seen that the percentage of respondents with a high degree of religiosity is significantly higher among respondents from rural areas (74.7%) compared to respondents with a high degree of religiosity among respondents from urban areas (69.1%).

T-4: Place of residence

Degree of religiosity	Place of residence					
	City			Village		
	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree
Overall mean	10.1%	18.1%	69.1%	7.3%	15.9%	74.7%

That is, 74.7% of respondents from rural areas and 69.1% of respondents from urban areas responded to the questions from all segments of religiosity with “agree”, “regular” and “correct”.

In the following, we will present the degree of religiosity among the population in the Ohrid-Struga region depending on the marital status of the respondents.

From the results obtained in T-5, it can be seen that the percentage of respondents with a high degree of religiosity is higher among respondents with a marital status of married (73.7%) compared to respondents with a high degree of religiosity among respondents with a marital status of single. i.e. unmarried (68.6%), followed by respondents with a high degree of religiosity, those with a marital status of widowed (63.0%) and finally, the lowest number with a high degree of religiosity among respondents with a marital status of divorced (60.5 %).

T-5: Marital status

Degree of religiosity	Marital status											
	Married			Single			Divorced			Widowed		
	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree
Overall mean	7.8%	16.4%	73.7%	15.8%	18.5%	68.6%	16.6%	22.9%	60.5%	15.1%	18.0%	63.0%

That is, 73.7% of respondents with marital status married, 68.6% of respondents with marital status single, i.e. not married, 63.0% of respondents with marital status widowed and 60.5% of respondents with marital status divorced, to the questions asked, from all segments of religiosity answered with “I agree”, “regularly” and “correctly” to the questions asked.

In the following, we will present the degree of religiosity among the population in the Ohrid-Struga region depending on the level of education of the respondents.

T-6: Level of education

Degree of religiosity	Level of education								
	No education, incomplete primary education and completed primary education			Completed secondary education			Higher education, master’s degree, doctorate		
	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree
Overall mean	8.0%	14.7%	76.0%	9.5%	18.4%	69.8%	9.4%	18.2%	69.4%

From the results obtained in T-6, it can be seen that the percentage of respondents with a high degree of religiosity is higher among respondents with no education, with incomplete primary education and with completed primary education (76.0%) compared to respondents with a high degree of religiosity among respondents with completed secondary education (69.8%) and the respondents with a high degree of religiosity those with completed higher education, master’s degree and doctorate (69.4%).

That is, 76.0% respondents with no education, with incomplete primary education and with completed primary education, 69.8% of respondents with completed secondary education and 69.4% of respondents with completed higher education, master’s and doctorate who, to the

questions posed by all segments of religiosity responded with “agree”, “regular” and “correct” to the questions asked.

In the following, we will show the degree of religiosity among the population in the Ohrid-Struga region, depending on the occupation of the respondents.

From the results obtained in T-7, it can be seen that the percentage of respondents with a high degree of religiosity is higher among respondents who declared that they are unemployed (75.9%) compared to respondents with a high degree of religiosity who are with NQW (Non-Qualified Workers), SQW (Semi-Qualified Worker), QV (Qualified Worker) and HQV (High Qualified Worker) workers (72.4%), respondents with a high degree of religiosity, (SSE) Civil servant with secondary education, (HVE) higher vocational education, (UE) university education and finally respondents who declared that they are farmers by occupation (63.5%).

T-7: Profession

		Profession														
		Farmers			NQW, SQW, QV, HQV			Civil servant with secondary education, higher vocational education, university education			Pensioners			Unemployed		
Degree of religiosity		Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree
Overall mean		12.7%	21.1%	63.5%	8.1%	18.5%	72.4%	9.7%	18.0%	69.0%	10.2%	14.1%	73.7%	6.8%	15.7%	75.9%

That is, 75.9% of the respondents who declared themselves unemployed, 73.7% of the respondents who declared themselves pensioners, 72.4% of the respondents NQW, SQW, QV and HQV workers,

69.0% of the respondents are civil servants with SE, CD and UD and 63.5% of respondents who declared that they are farmers by occupation and who answered the questions from all segments of religiosity with “agree”, “regular” and “correct” to the questions.

In the following, we will show the degree of religiosity among the population in the Ohrid-Struga region depending on the number of members in the respondents’ household.

T-8: Household members

		Household members								
		Alone			Up to 5 members			More than 5 members		
Degree of religiosity		Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree
Overall mean		14.9%	18.9%	65.1%	9.0%	16.3%	71.3%	6.4%	14.9%	76.8%

From the answers to the questions in T-8, it can be seen that the percentage of respondents with a high degree of religiosity is higher among respondents who declared that they live in a household with more than five members (76.8%), followed by respondents with a high degree of religiosity who declared that they live in households with up to five members (71.3%), followed by the respondents with a high degree of religiosity who declared that they live alone (65.1%).

That is, 76.8% of the respondents who declared that they live in households with more than five members, 71.3% of the respondents who declared that they live in households with up to five members, as well as 65.1% of the respondents who declared that they live alone in the questions asked by all segments of religiosity responded with “agree”, “regular” and “correct” to the questions asked.

In the following, we will present the degree of religiosity among the population in the Ohrid-Struga region, depending on the social status of the respondents.

T-9: Social status

Social status												
	Poor			Middle class			High class			No answer		
Degree of religiosity	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree	Low degree	Medium degree	High degree
Overall mean	10.8%	18.2%	68.6%	7.8%	16.6%	73.7%	9.5%	17.7%	70.5%	12.1%	18.0%	68.1%

The answers to the questions in T-9 show that the percentage of respondents with a high degree of religiosity is higher among respondents who declared that they belong to the middle class (73.7%), followed by respondents with a high degree of religiosity who declared that they belong to the high class (70.5%), then the respondents with a high degree of religiosity who declared that they belong to the poor stratum (68.6%) and finally the respondents with a high degree of religiosity who did not answer which stratum they belong to according to the total household income (68.1%). That is, 73.7% of the respondents declared that they belonged to the middle class, 70.5% of the respondents who declared that they belonged to the high class, 68.6% of the respondents who declared that they belonged to the poor class, as well as 68.1% of the respondents who did not answer which layer they belong to according to the total income in the household, to the questions asked from all segments of religiosity they answered with “agree”, “regular” and “true” to the questions asked.

Concluding observations

This research started from the assumption that religiosity among the population in the Ohrid-Struga region is unequal in terms of belief, practice, behavior resulting from the moral aspects of religion as well as knowledge of the theological doctrine of one's own religion, depending on socio-demographic features, and the same was confirmed during the research.

As we have already pointed out, the percentage of respondents with a high degree of religiosity is significantly higher (69.6%) compared to respondents with a medium (17.3%) and low degree of religiosity (13.1%). From the obtained results, it can be seen that among respondents with a high degree of religiosity according to socio-demographic features, the most represented respondents are of the Islamic faith, female respondents, over 60 years old, living in the countryside, married, without education, with incomplete primary education and with completed primary education, unemployed, who live in families-households with more than 5 members and who, according to their social status, belong to the poor stratum. Among respondents with an average level of religiosity according to socio-demographic characteristics, the most represented respondents are from the Orthodox faith, male respondents, aged 30-59 years, living in a city, divorced, with secondary school, according to occupation NQW, SQW, QV and HQV workers, who live in families-households of up to 5 members and who according to social status belong to the poor stratum. Among respondents with a low degree of religiosity, according to socio-demographic features, the most represented respondents are from the Orthodox religion, male respondents, aged 18-29, who live in a city, unmarried, with VSS, who according to their occupation are officials, who live alone and who, according to their social status, are persons who did not answer which stratum they belong to.

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