

Tolerance and Cooperation in the Religious Life of a Roman-Catholic Community: A Case Study from the Brno- Country District



Strpnost in sodelovanje v verskem življenju
rimskokatoliške skupnosti: raziskava iz okrožja Brno

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to reveal specific aspects of religious life in a Roman-Catholic community situated in the Brno-Country district. For this purpose, the fieldwork was conducted in one parish for a period of one year from 30 November 2022. The data collection was mainly based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews with ten individuals (three women and seven men; mean age: 36.7 years). Both native-born inhabitants and newcomers of diverse professions were intentionally included in the research sample. The content analysis of semi-structured interviews was performed in [Atlas.ti](https://atlas.ti.com/). It was discovered that tolerance and cooperation are among the most important topics discussed by the informants and play a crucial role in their religious life.

KEYWORDS: tolerance, cooperation, religion, local communities, social cohesion

Cilj članka je razkriti specifične vidike verskega življenja v rimskokatoliški lokalni skupnosti iz okrožja Brno - podeželje. S tem namenom je v eni od župnij potekalo enoletno terensko delo, ki se je začelo 30. novembra 2022. Zbiranje podatkov je v glavnem temeljilo na opazovanju z udeležbo in delno strukturiranih intervjujih z desetimi udeleženci (tri ženske in sedem moških; povprečna starost 36,7 leta). V raziskovalni vzorec so bili namerno vključeni tako tam rojeni kot priseljeni prebivalci različnih poklicev. Vsebinska analiza delno strukturiranih intervjujev je bila opravljena s spletnim orodjem [Atlas.ti](https://atlas.ti.com/). Pokazala je, da sta strpnost in sodelovanje med najpomembnejšimi temami, o katerih so govorili udeleženci, ter da imata izjemno pomembno vlogo v njihovem verskem življenju.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: strpnost, sodelovanje, religija, lokalne skupnosti, socialna kohezija

INTRODUCTION

The study of religion is one of the central subjects in social sciences and humanities. Interestingly, in the panorama of religious studies, the scientific study of atheism has received proportionately less coverage than other beliefs. In recent decades, however, the study of atheism, agnosticism, disbelief, and secularisation has increasingly attracted the attention of scholars from various disciplines, theoretical backgrounds, and methodological approaches (e.g. Bubík, Remmel and Václavík 2020; Bubík and Václavík 2020; Lanman 2012; Taylor 2007; Turner 1985). Several studies have pointed to the Czech Republic as a country with a growing number of non-believers, atheists, agnostics, or overall citizens without concrete declared religious affiliations or people who refer to the concept of “believing without belonging” (Davie 1990; Tromp, Pless and Houtman 2020). In this regard, various scholars have alluded to a certain uniqueness of the Czech Republic in Central Europe and the post-socialist countries. On the other hand, Václavík, Hamplová and Nešpor (2018: 100–101) point to the fact that several studies published in recent years challenge the widespread notion of the Czech Republic as “the most atheist country in present-day Europe” (for further discussion, see Bubík, Remmel and Václavík, 2020; Hamplová and Nešpor 2009; Lužný and Nešpor 2008; Nešpor 2010; Václavík 2010).

As Václavík, Hamplová and Nešpor (2018) further argue, comparisons of the religious profiles of the Czech and Slovak Republics within post-communist Central and Eastern Europe are also of particular interest to researchers. From a historical perspective, the contemporary Czech and Slovak Republics are linked by decades of coexistence not only within the socialist bloc but also within federal state systems. In terms of comparison, the Czech Republic tends to be described as a country with a higher number of non-believers compared to the Slovak Republic. In this vein, Slovak sociologist Miroslav Tížik comments on the differences in the religious profile of the two countries during socialism as follows: “In one state with a single legal regime, regulating religion, religious life and the relationship to religion developed in two different ways.” (Tížik 2020: 270). Differences in religious beliefs between

the Czech and Slovak Republics persisted even after the dissolution of the USSR and the creation of two separate republics, and they continue in the present (Bubík and Václavík 2020; Bubík, Remmel and Václavík; Tížík 2011, 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2020; Tížík and Sivák 2019).

Based on an extensive meta-analysis, Václavík, Hamplová and Nešpor identified the following five blank spaces, or clusters of issues, in research on contemporary Czech religion and religiosity. These include: the study of religious communities; the study of compactness, differentiation, and distribution of power of individual religious groups; commitment to religious activity; the study of key strategies of religious groups; and the study of Czech atheism (Václavík, Hamplová and Nešpor 2018: 112–113). This article aims to focus on the first “blank space”, namely the study of a particular religious community, while also considering the other issues mentioned by these authors.

In a narrower sense, the following general empirical research question was constructed: What is the role of religion in a small-scale local community concerning cooperation and religious tolerance? Several anthropological studies have shown that religion, as well as religious rituals and feasts, can promote social cohesion, and increase in-group cooperation and prosociality in general (e.g. Norenzayan 2015; Richerson 2013; Sosis 2003; Sosis and Ruffle 2003; Whitehouse 2021; Xygalatas 2022). The topic of religious tolerance and intolerance has been studied for a substantial amount of time. This phenomenon is multifaceted and complex (Lester and Roberts 2006; Newman 1978; Powell and Clarke 2013; Quinn 2001). Studies that explore religious tolerance in the everyday life of religious communities are particularly intriguing for ethnographic research. These studies highlight the multidimensionality of religious tolerance and intolerance in everyday life (Galbraith, Carlisle and White 2020).

The framework of Schiefer and van der Noll (2017) was followed regarding social cohesion. These authors identified three essential features of social cohesion: the quality of social relations, the identification with a social entity (orientation to a social entity may refer specifically to a religious group, ethnic, national, local, professional, or other group), and orientation towards the common good. Each of the three essential qualities includes other properties (Schiefer and van der Noll 2017: 585). Because of the importance of cooperation and religious tolerance in small-scale local communities, we decided to only focus on these two specific aspects in our study.

In the first section of the paper, we provide an overview of the religious landscape in the Czech Republic within the broader context, and we specifically focus on the region where the research was carried out. This is followed by a description of the research setting, the research participants, the research methods employed, and the data processing and analysis techniques, followed by the interpretation of ethnographic data. In the discussion section, we highlight some of the constraints of the research and suggest potential future directions.

CURRENT SITUATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Currently, the number of Catholics in the world has increased on all continents, except Europe. However, in 2018, there were 39.7 Catholics per 100 inhabitants in Europe. In the

Czech Republic, the Roman Catholic Church represents the largest organised religious group. According to the Czech Bishops' Conference (CBC 2020), the largest accumulation of Catholics is in the regions of South, Central and South-East Moravia.

The Moravian Ecclesiastical Province consists of the Archbishopric of Olomouc, the Bishopric of Brno, and the Bishopric of Ostrava-Opava. In the Diocese of Brno, there are 450 parishes, which are maintained by 332 priests. Table 1 displays the population of the South Moravian Region in 2021 according to religious belief as counted by the Czech Statistical Office (CSA).

	Number			%		
	total	men	women	total	men	women
Inhabitants	1,197,651	589,553	608,098	100	100	100
According to religious beliefs:						
religious – not belonging to any church or religious society	134,443	60,501	73,942	11.2	10.3	12.2
religious – adhering to a church, religious society or movement	230,654	101,734	128,920	19.3	17.3	21.2
of which:				0	0	0
Czechoslovak Hussite Church	3,045	1,236	1,809	0.3	0.2	0.3
Roman Catholic Church	148,598	63,978	84,620	12.4	10.9	13.9
Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren	4,206	1,831	2,375	0.4	0.3	0.4
Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Society	1,034	434	600	0.1	0.1	0.1
Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands	3,636	1,799	1,837	0.3	0.3	0.3
Without religious beliefs	495,772	257,338	238,434	41.4	43.6	39.2
N/A	336,782	169,980	166,802	28.1	28.8	27.4

Table 1: Population of the South Moravian Region in 2021 characterised according to religious belief.

Source: CSA 2021a; own processing.

The largest part of the population in this region, more than two fifths, is without religious faith – 495.8 thousand people, i.e. 41.4 percent of the total. Believers belonging to a particular church or religious society accounted for 19.3 percent of the population in 2021 with a total of 230.7 thousand. The highest number of believers subscribed to the Roman Catholic Church. The statistics on population by gender and religious belief in the districts of the South Moravian Region in 2021 are included in Table 2.

	Population total	Religious – adhering to a church, religious society or movement		Religious – not adhering to a church, religious society or movement		Without religious beliefs		N/A		Percentage of believers (professing+ non-professing) of those listed
		number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%	%
Region total	1,197,651	230,654	19.3	134,443	11.2	495,772	41.4	336,782	28.1	42.4
<i>District:</i>										
Blansko	107,227	23,818	22.2	12,019	11.2	39,876	37.2	31,514	29.4	47.3
Brno- City	398,510	64,817	16.3	47,799	12.0	178,718	44.8	107,176	26.9	38.7
Brno- Country	226,503	42,030	18.6	24,599	10.9	96,325	42.5	63,549	28.1	40.9
Breclav	113,651	22,653	19.9	12,436	10.9	46,609	41.0	31,953	28.1	42.9
Hodonin	147,773	43,839	29.7	17,090	11.6	46,008	31.1	40,836	27.6	57.0
Vyskov	91,578	15,618	17.1	9,033	9.9	39,924	43.6	27,003	29.5	38.2
Znojmo	112,409	17,879	15.9	11,467	10.2	48,312	43.0	34,751	30.9	37.8

Table 2: Population by gender and religious belief in districts of the South Moravian Region in 2021.
Source: CSA 2021b; own processing.

METHODS

Fieldwork

The fieldwork was conducted in a Roman-Catholic community organised in one selected parish in the Brno-Country District, which is dispersed over two municipalities. It was done for a period of one year, starting on 30 November 2022. In the first phase of the research, the results of which are included in this paper, the data collection was mainly based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews with the residents of one municipality only. This village belongs to the oldest and in the past also the largest settlements in the present-day Brno-Country district. The village cadastre includes a church from the 18th century and several wayside shrines and crosses that refer to the “Battle of the Three Emperors”. The world-famous Cairn of Peace Memorial is within sight of the village. The village is next to the famous Bene-

dictine Monastery in Rajhrad, with The Museum of Literature in Moravia, which includes the most distinguished regional writers from the beginning of the 9th century to the present day.

The current mayor of the village as well as the interlocutors gave their consent to the data collection. The data gathered during the participant observation have been stored in the field diary. The interviews were based on a pre-prepared form containing thirty questions focused on the research topic and the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. These semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and later automatically transcribed using [Transkriptor](#), online transcription software that speeds up the transcription process with state-of-the-art artificial intelligence.

Research sample

Ten adult research participants of Czech nationality were included in the research sample. All of them have been permanent residents of the municipality and they have been members of the Roman Catholic Church. The research sample was deliberately selected to have as much heterogeneity as possible concerning the age of the informants, their education and profession. In terms of religion, liberal, conservative, and radical traditionalist believers were included in the research sample (Milbank et al., 1999). Regarding the gender of the research participants, our aim was to contact a similar number of men and women.¹ Both

Pseudonym	Age	Marital status	Highest education attained	Length of residence in years	Profession	Newcomer	Number of children
Romana	49	married	tertiary	22	HR manager	1	3
Ivan	50	married	tertiary	22	deputy director of a higher vocational school	1	3
David	45	married	tertiary	19	head of internal services	1	3
Lenka	48	married	tertiary	19	service dispatcher	1	3
Petr	46	married	secondary	18	service engineer	1	3
Roman	42	married	tertiary	8	academic staff	1	4
Jana	23	single	secondary	23	student	0	0
Pavel	21	single	secondary	21	student	0	0
Jan	20	single	secondary	20	student	0	0
Robin	23	single	secondary	20	student	0	0

Table 3: Research sample. Source: own processing.

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Although the aim was to have a balanced sample, in the end the ratio of men to women settled at seven to three. In the next phases of the research, we will try to balance the research sample in this sense. We believe that this was also due to the researcher conducting the interviews identifying himself as male.

native-born inhabitants and newcomers of diverse professions were intentionally included in the research sample. The names of the respondents mentioned in the text do not correspond to their real names. During ethnographic research, the snowball sampling method was utilised. The snowball sampling method is based on asking a few key informants to recommend someone they know who could be interviewed by the ethnographer (Bernard 2006: 192–193). It is one of the standard methods for finding research participants in ethnographic research (see Table 3).

As is displayed in Table 3, there were three women and seven men included in the sample (mean age: 36.7 years). Six of the ten research participants were married newcomers with three or four children who have lived there on average for 19.2 years. One half of them had completed tertiary, the rest of them secondary level education.

Data analysis

The transcripts of ethnographic interviews (14.1 pages on average) were converted to PDF and then content analysis was performed in Atlas.ti. Open coding was done in Atlas.ti Mobile. This way, nineteen codes were created (see Figure 1). The basic unit of analysis was one

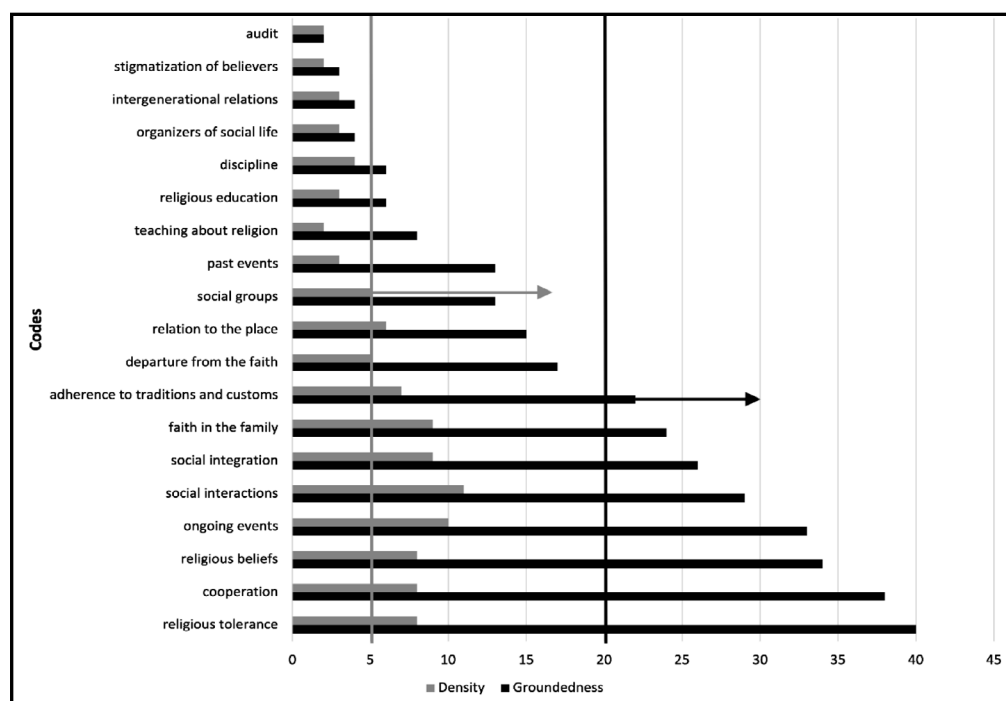


Figure 1: Density and groundedness of codes. Source: own processing.

replica (usually one paragraph in length, which was sometimes split into two pages; in this case, one replica was coded with two codes). Furthermore, the project was exported to a desktop application and there axial and selective coding was implemented considering the density and groundedness of codes. In this context, density reflects links between codes and groundedness serves to confirm the findings. The groundedness represents the number of narratives linked to the code (in other words, the frequency of codes).

Figure 1 displays the codes created during the data analysis. The codes with a density higher than five and groundedness higher than twenty play a significant role in the narratives of the informants. However, in order to focus on the research questions, only religious tolerance and cooperation will be interpreted in the next section.

RESULTS

This section contains two tables including selected quotations that serve as examples of results found out during the data analysis. Table 4 is linked to religious tolerance and Table 5 to cooperation (see below).

I think that maybe as parents they may have a problem with the fact that their child is dating someone who is not a member of the Catholic Church or is just one of those they consider to be from the different group (Jana 1:12 p. 6).

I remember when my cousin, who lives in England, introduced his girlfriend, a Hindu, to my grandmother who was bedridden. She almost had a stroke. I wouldn't have reacted the way that grandma did, but obviously, I'd probably freak out a bit, though (Romana 2:17 p. 8 – 2:18 p. 9).

I think that Evangelicals are much friendlier. Our kids compare it too. They say that our parish is very cold, that nothing is going on here, that they'll go to the Baptists. My daughter went several times to see the Baptists' Church, and I've told her, "Go wherever you want, as long as it's a Christian church" (Lenka 3:16 p. 8).

Unfortunately, in the 9th grade of primary school, when I once said it out loud, I was even spat on, which kind of threw me off at the time, because I was the only believer or the only practitioner in that class. There were more baptised people there, anyway (Jan 4:6 p. 5 – 4:7 p. 6).

I think that we live a very active life here, a very Christian-social life, that here in the village we are not ashamed of being Christians, in my opinion. [...] There is not such a strong base of atheism here; people who would completely reject it. I think we don't define ourselves against each other here and there is such a nice commonality and belonging (Jan 4:10 p. 7 – 4:11 p. 8).

I think it's very much influenced by the tradition and history that exists here. When I see it in other villages nowadays, where that history and tradition is not there, where those roots are not there, it's getting very hot in those friction areas. Here in our region, I would say, there is no such friction (David 5:7 p. 6).

There are absolutely no problems in this regard. I have thought about this before, and it seems to me that there is a great tolerance (Roman 9:12 p. 8).

Well, our community is incredible. I don't think there are many communities like this. Here, believers and non-believers basically live in symbiosis except for the extremes on both sides. It seems to me that it works well here. In Borderlands, where I come from, the Catholics were completely singled out and were absolutely like they were below the line. They were like subhuman (Petr 10:15 p. 8).

I have a lot of friends amongst non-believers and it's not a problem at all. Among my friends I don't distinguish at all whether they are believers or non-believers, and through my work I have many friends among Evangelicals, to whom I am very close in a religious sense (Ivan 6:15 p. 9). I find it's a big plus that it's sort of easier [when friends are of the same religion]. It's something that brings them together and bonds them (Pavel 7:20 p. 12).

One time I was driving with a friend, and she said something that really made me angry. She said that they were at an evangelical mass and that it didn't count [...]. That struck me as completely bizarre, really (Robin 8:16 p. 11).

Table 4: Exemplary quotations related to religious tolerance. Source: own processing.

Religious tolerance represents a broad umbrella category under which qualitatively different attitudes towards different aspects of religious life have been included. In the broadest sense, religious tolerance may be understood not only as a declared positive attitude of the research participants towards other religions and church members but also as a declared, ambivalent, or negative attitude. We are following a similar approach as Galbraith, Carlisle and White (2020: 91–92), whose study on religious tolerance and intolerance focused on the personal viewpoints of religious individuals and was based on qualitative methodology.

One of the categories that belongs here is religious endogamy. According to several research participants, romantic partnerships and marriages between people of different faiths can be problematic. That is, unions with partners of the same religion are preferred. However, the preference for endogamy may relate to religion, the place of birth of the potential partner, or other characteristics such as social or occupational status (Botíková 2006, 2007; Uhrin 2022b).

Respondents also compared members of the Evangelical faith, Baptists, and members of the Catholic faith — i.e. their group of reference — with each other. One respondent, Lenka, directly mentions how her daughter contrasts social life in the Catholic community with social life in other religious communities. She considers the social life in the Catholic community to be not very active and members of the Catholic community to be reserved or withdrawn. This research participant further declared that her daughter also attends activities related to religious life in the Baptist community. In the opinion of the research participant, it is irrelevant which religious community her daughter is inclined to if the community is Christian.

Despite the multiple religious groups living in the research site, Catholic informants in most cases described interrelationships and interactions between these groups favourably. The research participants attribute the existence of positively reflected relations to “shared history and traditions”, which point to the traditional folk culture shared by adherents of different faiths. In this sense, it may be suggested that it is irrelevant whether this set of practices is linked to the specific practices of traditional folk culture or not. Also, according to the respondents, the absence of this “shared set of traditions” can cause conflicts between people of different faiths living in the same area. The very idea of a shared history and traditions, which transcend individual religious denominations and foster interpersonal interactions, is more important than if this set of ideas really exists (for discussion regarding the concept of tradition see Boyer 1990; Bužeková, Jerotijević and Kanovský 2011; Uhrin 2019).

For example, a small part of the documented cooperation relates to carolling during the Christmas holidays. Carol singing is also linked to the feasting of the carol singers and the socialisation of the individual inhabitants and kinship groups from the village. In this sense, it is not possible to talk directly about cooperation but rather about ritualised display behaviour associated with religious life in the village. Nonetheless, such behaviour, which is abundant in folk culture throughout the year, strengthens social cohesion and group identity.

The research participants attributed several positively perceived characteristics to the community of Catholics living in the village. One of these is “to be proud of our faith.” In conjunction with this statement, there is the inclusion of people who underwent religious conversion on the one hand, and the ostracization of non-believers – symbolically buried separately at the local cemetery – on the other. The informants also highlight that atheism, or the idea of rejecting religion as such, does not have a strong presence in the research site compared to the rest of society. However, most of the informants stated during the interviews that among their friends and acquaintances there are also residents of the village with a different religion, as well as residents without religious affiliation. Nevertheless, according to other research participants, sharing the same faith facilitates mutual interactions and strengthens friendship.

Several research projects have confirmed the above-mentioned tendency of people to prefer interaction and cooperation with members of the same faith. These tendencies and preferences can be explained by the fact that members of the same faith share the same, or at least a similar system of norms, and therefore it is easier to predict their behaviour across various domains (Boyd and Richerson 2002, 2005; Henrich and Henrich 2007; Moya and Henrich 2016).

From what has been presented so far, it appears that research participants consider interpersonal relations with residents of other faiths as mostly positive or neutral. They also emphasize positive relationships not only on a personal but also on a group level, i.e. between Roman Catholics, Evangelicals, and non-believers. The positively perceived symbiosis of intergroup relations is contrasted with previous negative life experiences in other cities and villages in the Czech Republic. One respondent, Petr, perceives this contrast in comparison to his previous place of residence, in the border region of the Czech Republic and Austria, where he believes these relations were considerably negative.

However, some statements in the ethnographic interviews also indicate tensions in personal relations. These tensions were apparent, for example, in Jan's statements when he described an incident that took place at primary school. The respondent recalled how, while openly declaring his religious beliefs at school, an unnamed classmate spat at him. He also points out that several witnesses to this incident among his classmates were baptised. Despite this negative experience, he evaluates inter-religious relations in the research area in a broadly positive manner, so it was probably an isolated incident. Moreover, it took place in a group of teenagers in the puberty period between the ages of fourteen and fifteen, so it is unlikely to be indicative of wider trends. However, confirmation of this assumption requires further in-depth research. Another example from the category of isolated antipathy may be seen in the description of an incident in which his friend, also a Roman Catholic, declared that attending an Evangelical service does not count as legitimate participation in a religious ritual for a person of Roman Catholic faith.

I'd say I know a lot of people here who are nice. And just because of the fact that we meet in the parish and during some of the events that are part of the religious life, I'm not afraid to reach out to them and maybe call them for help if needed (Jana 1:22 p. 9).

Of course, like everywhere, there are also interest groups. [...] There has always been a rivalry between Sokol and Orel, and a very big rivalry still exists, but the edges have been worn down a lot (Lenka 3:20 p. 10 – 3:21 p. 10).

Some people here really don't like each other, but I think that's just like everywhere, except you don't really know that about them [...]. I don't think we are like a different village, that we are somehow better or worse (Lenka 3:25 p. 11).

By the way, during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, which was one of the crises and there was a need for help [...], I think that a lot of people, at least at the beginning, came together, just like in the case of the Ukrainian crisis. It always makes me happy that when a crisis comes, we as a community can somehow come together (Jan 4:25 p. 17).

[People here] help each other out with everyday things, like when you are missing an egg for lunch and your neighbour gives it to you, because, of course, you're not going to go to the mall for such triviality. It's all about those little things like when you need to order something, whether it's food or materials, and maybe you and your neighbour share part of it, you have common transport and you shop together in improved conditions. [...] Otherwise, I think it's also true on a cultural level, where, for example, in our street, when it's Christmas, we meet in front of the house and we just wish each other happy holidays, and the same on New Year's Eve (David 5:19 p. 12).

It also happens during the Three Kings collection, when children go around the village. It has a financial dimension as well. On the other hand, there's a kind of cohesiveness related to it. And the same goes for the cancer flowers. That's the oldest humanitarian collection in this country. [...] You go to get money, you go to ask them to give you some of their wealth, in quotation marks, and the people are very happy that you came. They are grateful to you that you gave them the opportunity to help others (David 5:20 p. 13).

Many people here have good relationships and have many friends in the village. Many just greet each other cordially on the street and meet at various events. So, I think that the neighbourly relations in a broader sense are very good here. But of course, there are also neighbourly disputes (Ivan 6:18 p. 13).

I would say that it's within the realm of possibility, but when I think back to the problem with the former pastor, for example, it was kind of [tense]. [...] I'm not hundred percent sure, but from what I've heard, there was a problem that the pastor didn't want one person to be a churchman, and then it went all the way to the church court (Pavel 7:21 p. 13).

Once we were invited by our neighbours to go with them to the fields to pick potatoes. I thought it was like something from another world that was happening here. I know they do things like that with their friends and relatives all the time. Even the slaughtering of farm animals and the subsequent processing of the meat is a communal thing. Families help each other to build houses for their children, either economically or just materially or even physically by helping with work. They just go there and help (Roman 9:15 p 10 – 9:16 p. 10).

Among the central events in the cultural life are the feasts, which sort of brings all groups together, all religions, non-believers, and believers, and it's basically like breathing in the same breath, in synchrony, yeah, which I think is nice (Petr 10:20 p. 11).

We are just on the border of a big city and [there is a trend of people moving here] who are not interested in the village as such, but they want to live here to have peace and quiet and not have to listen to the city buses. [...] They just come here to sleep. I say hello to them, of course, but we don't say much to each other (Petr 10:22 p. 12).

Table 5: Exemplary quotations related to cooperation. Source: own processing.

Cooperation, religion, and social cohesion are areas that are inextricably intertwined in the research in social sciences and humanities. Following the work of Joseph and Natalie Henrich (2007), we define cooperation as a behaviour when an individual inflicts a loss or cost on himself to benefit someone else. Boyd and Richerson (2009) operate with a similar definition of cooperation. They consider it as a costly behaviour performed by an individual that benefits others. Costs or costly behaviours may include money, time, labour, food, services, etc. In small groups and pairs, cooperation can take the form of the following activities: babysitting, lending food to a neighbour, providing help with manual labour, preparing a meal for a sick person, etc. Among large groups, cooperation may include participating in elections or neighbourhood watch, recycling, donating to a church or earthquake victims, sharing a meal, paying taxes, etc. In these cases, a larger group of people receives benefits from the costly actions of individuals. Finally, van Schaik and Kappeler (2006) suggest using the word cooperation in its broader sense as an interaction in which the doer and the receiver have gains, or only the receiver has gains.

The interrelationship between religion and cooperation will be discussed further as it is evident in the statements of research participants. First, it is, however, necessary to

outline the domains in which they most often declare cooperation with the rest of the inhabitants of the research site.

Most informants declare cooperation in the domain of everyday activities. This type of cooperation includes borrowing food, helping neighbours out with physically non-strenuous chores, helping with babysitting, shopping for food or construction materials together in a nearby town, picking up postal packages, assisting with car repairs, etc. This domain of cooperation is characterised by high frequency and relatively low-cost regarding time, money or other expenditures.

Another domain of cooperation, on the other hand, is characterised by lower frequency but higher cost. Cooperation in this domain relates, for example, to assistance in seasonal agricultural work, e.g. informants report helping each other with the potato harvest. Another of the domains in which such cooperation occurs is related to the construction work, specifically the building of houses. Specific construction work is carried out by professionals. However, several activities are carried out by close relatives (siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles, godparents, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, siblings of grandparents), neighbours, as well as close and distant friends. Such cooperation is not exclusively related to help with the work but also to financial contributions to the construction (Hulín 2015; Uhrin 2020, 2022a).

Other activities related to cooperation occur during the rearing and slaughtering of livestock, as well as during the subsequent processing of meat. A few informants even identified the slaughtering of pigs, or farm animals in general, as a community affair. There are locally specific rules related to cooperation and reciprocity related to livestock farming and slaughtering. However, cooperation in this activity is not only related to the material and physical assistance – as it is linked to the strengthening of already existing social relationships or the creation of new ones – but also to the acquisition of strategic information regarding the reputation of local inhabitants (Uhrin 2021).

One of the best illustrations of how religion strengthens social cohesion and thus cooperation can be found in Jana's declaration – the first statement in the table above. Jana directly states that belonging to the same parish creates trust between people. She says openly that she would not hesitate to ask parish members for help in case of emergency. Being a member of the same parish in a small-scale local community often indicates close interpersonal or kinship relationships. These relationships are often based on high-frequency interactions that are characterised by mutual trust.

The village's leisure activities mainly revolve around two sports organisations known as Sokol (2024) and Orel (2024). Orel is a Christian sports organisation, whose ideology and worldview are explicitly connected with the religion. On the other hand, Sokol has no declared link to any religious organisation or affiliation. Based on the description of the research participants, the social groups that form around these associations are close-knit, and there is a great deal of rivalry between them in the village, which partly arises due to differences in religious beliefs.

The residents of the village consider Orel, Sokol, and the parish as three main reference groups. Their members organise cultural and social events throughout the year. Apart

from these groups, there are other smaller groups, both formal and informal, such as volunteer firefighters, hunters, the elderly, fishermen, and football players. Members of these groups often build relationships of trust with each other, which results in cooperation and help among them.

Several social events occur throughout the year, organised either by the parish or the municipality. The religious ones can be divided into two broader groups. The first contains various rituals such as services, baptisms, confirmations, weddings, funerals, schola, and rotaries. The second also included activities somehow related to the religion, but not necessarily of a ritual nature, such as parish café, singing for children, altar boy club and altar boy camp, mothers' prayer fellowship and meetings of the members of the so-called Men's movement.²

Municipal events that are not primarily associated with religion include the Clean Up Czech Republic initiative, Children's Day celebrations, the Mothers' Club, and village feasts. However, it should be noted that although feasts are not explicitly linked to religion, religious services are still an important part of them.

The village feasts represent the most significant cultural and social event of the year in the village. According to several people, they are organised by both believers and non-believers. Petr, one of the informants, described them as activities that bring together people from various religious groups, both newcomers and native-born inhabitants, regardless of their differences. He also mentioned that the atmosphere during the feasts is as if everyone was breathing together in synchrony – see the penultimate quote in the table of research participants' statements above.

The feasts are organised each year in June and then on Monday, the Married People's Feast is held in one of the streets in the central part of the village, which takes the form of a mini festival with brass music, dance performances, competitions, and rich refreshments. The Married People's Feast (i.e. a particular feast intended for the married people from the village) is organised by the largest family of native-born inhabitants.

The next phenomenon related to cooperation is migration to the research site. As mentioned in the introduction, the research site is a small village near the regional city of Brno. In line with broader contemporary social trends, migration of Brno residents to the research site occurs. The migrants, according to the research participants, move from Brno mainly to live away from the hustle and bustle of the big city. Several of them participate in the social life of the village and the organisation of cultural and social events. If that is not the case, it is sometimes perceived negatively. Several studies confirm that the participation of newcomers in such activities can act as a signal of trustworthiness, honesty, adherence to local norms or an intention to become a member of the local community. Their absence can thus be interpreted as a signal of disinterest in becoming a member of the group (Andrews 2011, 2015; Power, 2016, 2017, 2018; Uhrin and Bužeková 2022; Uhrin and Horák 2023).

2

The so-called Men's movement is an informal community of men who are looking for spiritual experience to identify with and live it with their whole being (Chlapi 2024).

In the ethnographic interviews, there may be noted mentions of worldview clashes between the native-born inhabitants and newcomers. These relate to different aspects of life ranging from religion, political preferences, views on partner life or upbringing, etc.

INTERPRETATION, DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

As mentioned by Schiefer and van der Noll (2017), social cohesion has three essential features, and each essential quality includes other features. First, the research participants reflected on the quality of social relations in their descriptions regarding the nature of the interpersonal relationships among the inhabitants of the village. It was also notable that the quality of interpersonal relationships is assessed by them in terms of religion. Religious tolerance and the interfaith relationships associated with it are mainly viewed positively, with isolated cases of minor conflicts at the personal level. Similarly, Galbraith, Carlisle and White also found that religion can be a source of tolerance and acceptance in interactions between members of the same faith and between members of different faiths. Their research also pointed to possible tensions in this sense, i.e. to religion as a source of intolerance (Galbraith, Carlisle and White 2020: 93–101), which did not emerge in our research to such an extent. We believe that this difference may be due to the diverse research contexts. While in our study the sample consisted only of respondents identifying themselves as Christians, their research included Muslims and Hindus in addition to respondents of different Christian denominations.

The second essential feature of social cohesion identified by Schiefer and van der Noll (2017) is identification with social entities. This feature was evident in the statements related to the local community, interest and leisure groups, and most importantly, religious groups. The third is the orientation towards the common good, and it is possible to identify it in the descriptions of the behaviour beneficial to the religious or local group (e.g. public and community work such as cleaning and maintaining the church building, organisation of social events either by the parish or the municipality throughout the year). It is well known that participation in social and cultural activities, community events, and religious life is a way of maintaining and strengthening the social cohesion of religious groups (Norenzayan 2015; Richerson 2013; Sosis 2003; Sosis and Ruffle 2003; Whitehouse 2021; Xygalatas 2022).

Based on the analysis of ethnographic data it may be suggested that religion plays a crucial role in the cooperation and social cohesion of small-scale rural communities. Religious rituals and activities related to religious life described above, on the one hand, represent strong factors that not only indicate social cohesion, but on the other also promote prosociality, cooperation, and adherence to social norms. Therefore, they serve as effective mechanisms contributing to intra-group solidarity (Bahna and Talmont-Kaminski 2022; Henrich and Henrich 2007; Norenzayan 2015; Richerson 2013; Sosis 2003; Sosis and Ruffle 2003; Uhrin and Horák 2023).

The empirical analysis of ethnographic data showed that there is a high degree of social cohesion in the village. The indicators of social cohesion include cooperation with family, kin, friends, and neighbours; conduction of community services; organisation of social and

cultural events; and spending leisure time together with kin and ingroups (Avery, Hermesen and Kuhl 2021; Schiefer and van der Noll 2017; Uhrin and Horák 2023). In this context, it is worth mentioning that socio-economic, population, and historical changes over the past century posed a serious challenge to the vitality of cohesion in rural communities (Andrews 2011).

Research in rural communities in the Slovak Republic showed that social cohesion is undermined by a plethora of factors including changes in kinship relations, labour migration, the arrival of new residents, as well as transformation of subsistence strategies, life trajectories and traditions (Gajdoš and Pašiak 2008; Ondrejkoš and Majerčíková 2006; Rochovská and Majo 2013; Rochovská, Majo and Káčerová 2014; Uhrin and Horák 2023). It can be suggested that the same factors could potentially act as disruptors of social cohesion in the rural areas of the Czech Republic. Even though these aspects of social cohesion are not discussed in this paper, it does not mean that the participants did not mention them. For instance, they talked about the arrival of new residents and the level of their involvement in community and religious life in the village. The investigation of factors that can weaken social cohesion could be a valuable area for future research.

From the methodological perspective, it is necessary to draw attention to two similarly looking codes created during the data analysis: “social integration” and “social interaction”. Both codes are closely related to cooperation and religious tolerance. However, “social integration” refers to how people integrate into social life and overcome culture shock, and “social interaction” is linked to the cooperation and socialisation that occurs between neighbours and friends during leisure activities.

Naturally, with a larger and more diverse research sample, it would be possible to identify other domains of cooperation and aspects of religious tolerance. Nevertheless, ethnographic research in the selected field site is still ongoing, so this may be expected to change in the future. Despite this limitation, new topics for the upcoming phases of the investigation have already been found. These include interactions between native-born inhabitants and newcomers, different forms of religious rituals and signals, religious endogamy, norms related to cooperation, and potential punishments resulting from their violation.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, the role of religion in a small-scale rural community has been examined regarding cooperation and social cohesion. The research was done in the Czech Republic, a country frequently described as having a high number of non-religious citizens. Qualitative methods of participant observation and ethnographic interviewing were used to reveal specific aspects of religious life in a local community.

The results of the study seem to be in line with what Hamplová and Nešpor (2009) and Václavík, Hamplová and Nešpor (2018) suggested in terms of the relationship of Czech society to religion. Despite low levels of membership in religious institutions and low levels of participation in religious activities, Czechs are not indifferent to religious and spiritual phenomena. The data analysis revealed that religion is a vital factor in the life of this Czech

community. We assume that religion plays a similar role in other small rural communities, and not only Czech ones, but this assumption will also need to be confirmed by further research.

Ethnographic research showed that religious tolerance is an essential aspect of religious life. Aspects of religious tolerance are evident in attitudes towards partner and marital relationships in people of different faiths, declarable attitudes towards individuals and groups of other faiths, and cooperation and interactions with persons of other faiths.

Cooperation and religion are two areas that are inextricably intertwined. The residents involved in the research sample engage in cooperation in various domains, including both daily activities and exceptional circumstances. This cooperation encompasses activities related to religion, as well as those that are not explicitly linked to it. While most respondents did not express a clear preference for cooperating with individuals of the same faith, some did so. Further research could thus explore whether and in what contexts research participants prefer to cooperate with individuals of the same faith.

Cooperation among members of the same faith is governed by shared norms. At the group level, cooperation is exhibited through the organisation of both religious and secular events. These data on cooperation, tolerance and religion also hint at potentially high levels of social cohesion. However, confirming high social cohesion levels requires further ethnographic research focused on its indicators.

The relationship of the Czech population to religion does not represent a simple research question. Therefore, there is no comprehensive answer included in this text. In any case, the research has clearly confirmed that despite the widespread perception of the inhabitants of the Czech Republic as being “the most atheist in Europe”, religion plays an important role in their lives.

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POVZETEK

Socialna in kulturna antropologija ter etnologija so prepletene s študijami religij, mitov, magije in ritualov. V panorami študij religij je znanstveno preučevanje ateizma, agnosticizma, nejevere in sekularizacije precej skromno, vendar so ta področja v zadnjih desetletjih deležna vse več pozornosti strokovnjakov različnih disciplin, teoretičnih ozadij in metodoloških pristopov. Medtem ko nekateri namigujejo na nekakšno edinstvenost Češke v Srednji Evropi in med nekdanjimi socialističnimi državami, drugi postavljajo pod vprašaj splošno razširjeno predstavo o Češki kot »najbolj ateistični državi sodobne Evrope«.

Na podlagi obsežne metaanalize so Václavík, Hamplová in Nešpor (2018) identificirali pet praznih prostorov ali skupkov tematskih področij v raziskovanju sodobnih českih religij in verskega prepričanja, in sicer: preučevanje verskih skupnosti; preučevanje zgoščenosti, diferenciacije in porazdelitve vpliva posameznih verskih skupin; predanost verskemu delovanju; preučevanje ključnih strategij verskih skupin; preučevanje ateizma. Članek se osredotoča na prvi »prazen prostor«, preučevanje posamezne verske skupnosti, hkrati pa upošteva tudi preostala štiri področja.

Osrednje empirično raziskovalno vprašanje članka je naslednje: Kakšno vlogo ima religija v manjši skupnosti? Da bi razkrili specifične vidike verskega življenja, so bile uporabljene kvantitativne metode opazovanja z udeležbo in delno strukturirani intervjuji. Analiza podatkov je pokazala, da vera predstavlja bistven dejavnik številnih vidikov življenja v majh-

nih podeželskih skupnostih. Etnografska raziskava je pokazala, da je verska strpnost ključen vidik verskega življenja in da sta sodelovanje in vera področji, ki sta neločljivo povezani.

Člani skupnosti, kjer je potekala raziskava, sodelujejo na različnih področjih, ki obsegajo sodelovanje tako pri vsakodnevnih dejavnostih kot tudi v primeru izjemnih okoliščin. Sodelovanje obsega dejavnosti, ki so povezane z vero, pa tudi tiste, ki niso neposredno povezane z njo. Podatki o sodelovanju, strpnosti in veri nakazujejo tudi potencialno visoko stopnjo socialne kohezije. Kljub razširjenemu mišljenju, da država sodi med najbolj ateistične v Evropi, ima religija, kot je potrdila raziskava, pomembno vlogo v življenju prebivalcev Češke.