

Nordic Scoping Exercise Report

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The following report includes: 1. Review of surveys on religion/nonreligion. 2. Research areas and axes of analysis. Information about the latter is included in each research area, except representations in the media, which is placed in a separate section. 3. Bibliography. When speaking of organizations, the term worldview community refers here to secular humanist organizations, atheist societies, including organized alternative holism, such as the Holistic Society in Norway. The Nordic group is also engaged in discussions on the term nonreligion, but this is not addressed here.

1. Review of surveys on religion/nonreligion in the Nordic countries

Several quantitative and some qualitative studies exist on nonreligion in the Nordic countries. The most suitable existing surveys 1980s-2019 are:

- a. World Value Survey:
 - i. 1981-1984: Finland and Sweden
 - ii. 1995-1996: Finland, Sweden, Norway
 - iii. 2000-2004: Sweden
 - iv. 2005-2009: Finland, Norway
 - v. 2010-2014: Sweden
- b. European Value Study: all waves contain many items for religion
 - i. 2017 (in collaboration with WVS): Finland (the data available), Sweden (the data available), Norway (the data available), Denmark (available), Iceland (available): Full data release planned for the end of 2019
 - ii. 2008: Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Finland
 - iii. 1999: Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Finland
 - iv. 1990: Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Finland
 - v. 1981-1984: Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Norway
- c. ISSP Religion
 - i. 1991: Norway
 - ii. 2008: Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden
 - iii. 2018: Finland, Norway, others?
- d. Other ISSP waves also include interesting and relevant topics e.g. the following:
 - i. Social networks: 2017, 2001
 - ii. Citizenship: 2014, 2004

- iii. National identity: 2013, 2003, 1995
- iv. Health and healthcare: 2011
- v. Environment 2010, 2000, 1993:
- vi. Social Inequality: 2009, 1999, 1992, 1987
- All of these data include the item of religious affiliation and therefore offer the possibility to compare the non-affiliated to affiliated

To give an overview of the Nordic countries, Table 1 below shows religious identity in this region in 2017. The differences between these countries are not new, but can be detected in older surveys.

Table 1. Religious identity in the Nordic countries in 2017: ‘Do you consider yourself as religious person, non-religious or atheist?’ (European Value Study, EVS 2017)

	Religious person	Not a religious person	Convinced atheist	Total non-religious or atheist
Denmark	60.5	30.2	9.3	39,5
Finland	53.7	38.2	8.1	46,3
Iceland	51.9	33.4	14.7	48,1
Norway	38.1	52.4	9.5	61,9
Sweden	29.8	52.0	18.2	70,2

Several studies have been conducted in all four countries:

Norway

A 2019 survey finds that a relatively high share of members in Church of Norway identify as nonreligious, especially young adults (51%) (KIFO 2019). An ongoing qualitative study of young adult members of Church of Norway shows that many report to have no religious beliefs (Gresaker). Urstad (2018, 2017, 2010) has conducted several studies of nonreligion in Norway, based on ISSP data and qualitative interviews. A mixed methods study of Norwegians also included ISSP data and life story data on gender, generation and nonreligion (Furseth 2006, 2010). In addition to the surveys mentioned above, other relevant surveys are:

Table 2. Relevant surveys on religion/nonreligion in Norway

Data	Variables (of interest)	N =	År	Tema	
Ungdata	Survey of youth – the importance of religion, religious activities, belonging in religious organization; attitudes and practices towards drugs, alcohol, school, violence, health & well being	33	1996, 2006, 2016		Norway
ESS	Membership in religious organization, prior memberships in rel., religious self-identification; political interest, discrimination, media, social trust		2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010,2012, 2014, 2016, 2018		International

GGP	Membership in rel. Organization. Preference for religious rites of passage				International
CoMRel	Self-identification (religious, spiritual, believer, non-religious, doubtful)	1099	2017	Religion and the media	NO/SWE/DK
KIFO	Self-identification, membership, different beliefs, religious and spiritual practices, attitudes towards e.g. environmental issues, gender equality, the role of religion in society		2012, 2019*		

Denmark

Several studies of nonreligion have been conducted in Denmark. Based on EVS 1999, Warmind (2005) found that only 5% of Danes identified as “convinced atheist.” A classic study of nonreligion in Denmark and Sweden is Phil Zuckerman’s book, *Society without God* (2008). To nuance Zuckerman’s argument of the prevalence of nonreligion, Rosen (2009) showed in a smaller, qualitative study that some Danes who identified as atheists also identified as believers. According to Lüchau (2008), the typical atheist, is male, urban, with higher education and is politically active. ESS 2014 shows that 44% of Danes identified as having no religious affiliation (Jensen 2019). Based on different criteria of what atheism is, various studies have made the following estimates of atheists in Denmark:

Table 3. Estimates of the amount of atheists/nonbelievers in the Danish population according to different surveys 2008-2017.

	Assessment of atheists in Denmark. Percent	Year of estimation
Phil Zuckerman in <i>Society Without God</i>	25	2008
<i>The Danish Value Survey</i> ‘Convinced atheist’ 6.8 % + ‘Non-believers’ 20.9 % = 27.7 %	28	2008
<i>The Danish Value Survey</i> ‘Convinced atheist’ 9.2 % + ‘Non-believers’ 29.9 % = 39.1 %	39	2017
<i>TNS Gallup for Berlingske</i>	Approx. 25	2013
<i>Megafon for TV 2 and Politiken</i>	48 - ‘unbelievers’	2017
<i>Masculinity beliefs and attitudes towards equality - especially among minority ethnic men, Als Research / The Ministry of equality</i> ‘Atheists’ and ‘non-believers’ among Danish citizens	Men: nonbelievers: 20 atheists: 13 Women: nonbelievers 14 atheists: 7	2018

Sweden

The EVS (1990 and 2008) and the ISSP surveys (1998 and 2008) showed that the majority of people in Europe are “in between,” i.e. they have blurred beliefs, and low rates of religious behavior (Bréchon, 2017). Based on the Religious and Moral Pluralism study (RAMP) data, Storm (2009) found that the fuzzy middle in Sweden amounted to 44-56% of the population. Later estimates suggested that the fuzzy

middle comprise 70% of Swedes (Willander, 2014). A study based on data from the Swedish SOM surveys 2010 – 2016 showed that the number of Swedes who do not believe in God, grew from about 50 to 60%. Those who are not affiliated to any religious organization make up a little less than 25% of the population (Willander 2019).

Two national representative surveys from 2008 (Lövheim & Bromander 2010) and 2014 (Klingenberg & Lövheim 2019) showed that a majority of young people self-identified as nonreligious. The latter study divided religious self-identification into three: the uninterested (36 %), the believers (26 %) and the neutrals (18 %) (Klingenberg, 2019; Klingenberg & Nordin, 2019; Klingenberg & Jarnkvist, 2019; Löfstedt & Sjöborg, 2019). The slight majority of women among the believers and the neutrals points to the importance of research on gender variations in nonreligion. A narrow focus on ideal atheist dispositions misses out on how women are nonreligious (see Lundmark 2019). Indeed, a qualitative study of the semi-seculars showed that they “combine ideas, practices and identities in ways that defy conventional logic” (Burén, 2015, p. 21).

Finland

The share of Finns who do not belong to any religious community has risen from 6% in 1960 to 28% in 2018. According to Gallup Ecclesiastica surveys, only 6 % of Finns stated that they do not believe in God in 1999, which had increased to 23 % in 2015 (Osallistuva luterilaisuus 2016; Kirkko uudelle vuosituhannelle 2000). At the same, there is a decline of members in the Lutheran majority church, as in the other Nordic countries. Findings from EVS 2017 suggest that the religious, non-religious and convinced atheists differ in the Nordic countries. Only 10% of Danish nonbelievers believe in God, while one-third of Finns and Icelanders in the same category believe in God. In these two countries, more atheists say they believe in God (4-7 %) than in the other Nordic countries (2-3 %).

A recent study of non-religion or atheism in Finland is published in Taira’s (2014) book on the new visibility of atheism (see also Taira 2012). A recent study by Kontala (2016) examines the worldviews of Finnish non-religious group affiliates. Another study focuses on atheist spirituality (Sillfors 2017). According to Taira (2012b), atheist spirituality is an emerging discourse, even if it has not yet replaced the popularity of the New Atheists.

Possible research questions

The overarching research question is: Who are the non-religious in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark and how are they changing over time?

Possible detailed research questions will address:

- Difference in the basic demographics of the non-religious
- The non-religious and their views on the following topics: law, community and civic engagement, health, migration, environment, education

The survey analyses will have a strong focus on change over time and spaces (e.g., in education, healthcare), and relationships (e.g. trust, civil involvement).

2. Review of each of the research areas and axes of research

a. Law

Nordic countries/Norway

Law and religion have long been “intertwined” in the Nordic region, where boundaries between “religion” and the “secular” relate to each other in an ever-shifting and ever-negotiated balance (Christoffersen 2006; Casanova, Wyller and van den Breemer 2013). Several Nordic research projects have examined legal changes on religion and worldview communities (Christoffersen et al. 2010; Kühle et al. 2018; Lind, Lövheim and Zackariasson 2016; Mjaaland 2019; Slotte and Årsheim 2015; Årsheim and Slotte 2017; Årsheim 2017). Nevertheless, research-based knowledge of the boundaries and relationships between law and nonreligion is still limited to scattered studies of the legal status and regulation of humanism (Michalsen 2014), paganism (Hjelm, Mäkelä and Sohlberg 2018), “invented” and “satirical” religions, and other categories of worldviews that do not fit in the “world religions” template (Taira 2017). Findings suggest that “nonreligion” presents the legal system with many of the same challenges as do minority religions: Rules and regulations tailor-made for the beliefs, practices and organizations of majority religions repeatedly come up short when applied to representations of identity, modes of being and belonging that do not fit the set template.

Denmark

A relevant case in Denmark is the 2014 governmental decision to prepare a law regulating religious denominations outside the Church of Denmark. The law-preparing committee submitted a whitepaper in 2017 (*Betænkning 1564*). The law was passed in December 2017 and took effect by 1 January 2018. However, the mandate for the law-preparing committee did not open up for the inclusion of ethical associations under the law, such as Danish Humanist Association (Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2019). In a forthcoming project *From Freethinker to Atheist. An Analysis of Political Debates, Legislation and Public By-laws on Atheism* we will examine how nonreligion has been a contested issue and perceived as a danger to the societal order.

Sweden

The state commission SOU 2018:18 did actualize, but not investigate, the right of nonreligious organizations to receive economic support from the Swedish state. The report was presented March 13 2018 and the consultation process with various stakeholders ended in August 2018. The Humanist Sweden organization argued that support should be given to secular worldview organizations, not just religious ones. There are several publications that show how the construction of religion is modeled by Christianity in Swedish legal regulation (Nilsson & Enqvist 2016; Enqvist & Nilsson 2016; Schenk, Burchardt, Wohlrab-Sahr, 2015).

Finland

Slotte has been written on freedom *from* religion, which highlights the specialties related to the discussion on the freedom of religion from the perspective of the non-religious (Slotte *in press*).

Possible research questions

We know very little about how nonreligion interacts with the law: Do legal provisions developed to protect against religious discrimination also extend to nonreligion? Does the right to the freedom of thought, conscience and belief provide ample protection

for nonreligion? Do nonreligious organizations gain the same legal status as do religious organizations? Is there a shared conception of what nonreligion means across different legal areas? What kinds of sources and expertise do courts rely upon in the cases where they are faced with nonreligion? Do atheists, agnostics and non-believers gain the same level of protection as religious converts in refugee status determination? These issues will be studied by examining legal regulations, court papers, etc.

b. Health

Denmark

There are few studies in Denmark dealing with religion and health, and no studies have specifically focused on nonreligion. La Cour, Avlund and Schultz-Larsen (2006) have studied religious beliefs and behaviour, and health. Hvidt and co-workers (2017) found in a large quantitative study of 3000 young Danish twins that religiosity measures were positively correlated with severe disease. The authors ascribe their findings to the fact that the population investigated scored unusually high on measures of secularity, so if there were a positive effect of religiosity on health, it was drowned by another possible effect called “crisis religiosity.” The critical issue here is, of course, that correlations are not the same as causalities.

Ausker (2015) conducted a qualitative study of cancer patients about their coping with illness and found continuity rather than change regarding the patients’ relation to religion. Another study found that patients in a hospice had been more concerned with existential questions when they were in the hospice, but no major changes in the patients’ religiosity were reported in the study (Moestrup and Hvidt 2016).

Sweden

There is a large body of research on the involvement of religious organizations in healthcare in Sweden, but hardly any known studies of non-religious alternatives (see for example Furseth 2018). There is some research involving the dimension of *space* for existential meaning making from non-religious worldviews, such as rooms of silence at hospitals (Peterson, Sandin & Liljas 2016). The study “Youth and Religion” (Klingenberg & Lövheim 2019) indicated that two categories among the non-religious - the uninterested and the neutrals - are the most likely to engage in what the study defines as risk-taking behavior (Klingenberg 2019c).

Finland

Euthanasia is currently a hotly debated topic in Finland. In 2016, a citizens’ proposal to pass an act legalizing euthanasia was made, but rejected by Parliament in 2018. Several studies show a strong correlation between individual religious views and rejection of euthanasia; non-religious people have the most positive attitudes towards euthanasia (Terkamo-Moisio 2016; Danyliv & O’Neill 2015; Kranidiotis et al. 2015). The Terkamo-Moisio (2016) study of nurses’ attitudes shows that religious practices and the centrality of religion in one’s life negatively affects euthanasia acceptance (Terkamo-Moisio 2016).

Norway

The NOREL project included a section on religion in hospitals, which described the hospital chaplaincies since the late 1980s and their slow development towards diversity (Kühle et al. 2018, 109-110). A study of the accommodation of worldview

minorities in hospitals and nursing homes resulted in a report (Plesner and Døving 2009) and a website that provides information for hospitals and nursing homes on death rituals in different religions and worldviews (Huuse and Døving 2009).

Several studies have focused on nonreligious rites of passage in Norway, which are increasingly popular, such as name-giving ceremonies, confirmations, weddings and burials conducted by the Holistic Association or The Norwegian Humanist Association (Døving 2005; Høeg 2009; van den Breemer 2019).

Possible research questions

We know little about the arrangement with humanist conversation partners in health care institutions. Are patients encouraged to talk with the Lutheran chaplains or do they also inform patients about the possibility to talk to a humanist conversation partner? How is the cooperation between the chaplains and the humanist conversation partners? Ethnographic data would be relevant to study these issues.

Another question pertains to the development of the Nordic humanist associations. Why is the Norwegian Humanist Association so much larger than the other Nordic associations? Is it due to the state funding of all faith and worldview communities in Norway? Or is it related to recruitment through their rites of passage? Historic data, spatial analysis, surveys and ethnographic data would be relevant in such a study.

c. Education

Norway

The NOREL project described the role of religion in public schools (Kühle et al. 2018). Historically, there have been close connections between public schools and the Lutheran majority churches. These churches still cooperate with the public schools regarding different activities, such as school-church programs and end of school term celebrations. At the same time, the Nordic states fund independent, private religious schools. Religious education is taught in public primary schools in all the Nordic countries. In Denmark, Sweden and Norway RE is non-confessional.

Denmark

Jensen and Kjeldsen's (2013) historic overview of RE in Denmark shows that a religious worldview is still used as a standard for the moral development of primary school pupils. In contrast, RE in upper-secondary school is closely linked to the academic study of religions. In Denmark and other European countries, RE on the primary school level still has a confessional core (Jensen 2011).

Sweden

The Swedish humanist association has been actively engaged in state commissions on RE curriculum and in debates on religious independent schools and end of school ceremonies. Some research has been conducted on the role of religion in end of school ceremonies (see Kühle et al 2018), but not particularly on issues of non-religion. Nevertheless, studies of how RE teachers handle religious diversity in the classroom find a prevalent secularist discourse among students and teachers (Löfstedt and Sjöborg 2018, Kittelmann Flensner 2015).

Finland

The Finnish state has developed multicultural policies that aim at fostering cultural identity of people migrating to Finland. Pupils in public schools have the right to

“education in accordance with their own religion”, and ethics is taught pupils who are not members of any religious community. Consequently, several religions and secular ethics are taught in Finnish schools (Sakaranaho 2013). This system is currently contested and there is a growing demand for religious education common for all.

Possible research questions

Few studies have emphasized nonreligion in education. To what degree do the current arrangements favor religious worldviews, in particular Christianity, over nonreligious worldviews? How are nonreligious worldviews portrayed in the curriculum and teaching materials? How does the current arrangements affect secular and holistic students? Research shows that in order to keep the students’ attention, RE teachers tend to use media material that is entertaining or centered on controversies on religion (Lied and Toft 2018). What sources are used and what pedagogic practices characterize the lessons on humanism? Historic data, content analyses of curriculum, discourse analyses of debates on RE, surveys and ethnographic studies are relevant.

d. Migration

Denmark

Non-belief among ethnic minorities has not yet been the subject of research in Denmark, even if a study of religiously passive Muslims has been conducted (Jeldtoft 2011). Some figures on nonreligion have been estimated (Table 5). They suggest that the amount of non-believers and atheists is the same in the majority and minority populations, with the exception of the so-called “non-Western migrants” who have somewhat fewer non-believers and atheists.

Table 5. Estimates of the amount of atheists/non-believers with a migrant background in Denmark 2008-2018

	Assessment of atheists among migrants in Denmark. Percent	Year of estimation
<i>The Danish Value Survey</i> 'Convinced atheist' 14 % + 'Non-believers' 16 % = 30 %	30	2017
<i>Masculinity beliefs and attitudes towards equality - especially among minority ethnic men</i> , Als Research / The Ministry of equality 'Atheists' and 'non-believers' among non-western citizens (includes both naturalized and non-Danish citizens)	Men: Nonbelievers: 10 Atheists: 6 Women: Nonbelievers: 8 Atheists: 4	2018

Sweden

A project on apostasy among Swedish Muslim who are migrants (Iran, Afghanistan, Somalia, Eritrea) has been carried out at Gothenburg University (Enstedt, 2018).

Norway

Surveys from Norway show more diversity among Norwegian Muslims than commonly perceived (Bangstad 2017; Elgvin and Tronstad 2013; Ishaq 2017). The NOREL project mapped the development of secular humanist and atheist

organizations in the Nordic countries since the late 1980s (Furseth et al. 2018). However, their members tend to come from the majority populations. In 2010, LIM (Likestilling, Integrering og Mangfold/Equality, Integration and Diversity) was established in Norway as an organization promoting liberal and secular values. Their members were primarily people with a Muslim background who identified as secular.

There has been a debate on the term “secular Muslim” in Norway, a term that has been used by the Norwegian Humanist Association and LIM. More recently, humanists who have left Islam have argued that they do not want to be called Muslims, since they do not identify as such (Vårt Land 2017).

Possible research questions

What is the nonreligious outlook of migrants and their descendants in the Nordic countries? Who are the people with migration background who identify as secular? What do they believe? What are their views on political issues? Survey data would be relevant to answer these questions.

Also, what does the debate on “secular Muslims” reveal about perceptions of religious identity, and ascribed versus obtained personal identity? Moreover, Christian leaders in the Nordic countries have on numerous occasions criticized the restrictive policy on refugees and asylum seekers (Repstad 2018). Are nonreligious organizations involved in work related to migration and do they participate in public debates on migration related issues? Discourse analyses would be relevant here.

e. Environment

Denmark

There is no research on environment and nonreligion in Denmark. There are a few MA dissertations on the environment and religion. In particular, the Green Church (Grøn Kirke) has been a subject of study, which is an organization under the Danish Church Council with 211 local church affiliates (as of July 2019). The purpose of the Green Church is to motivate consideration for the climate within the ecclesiastical institution and within the individual.

Norway

The 2019 KIFO survey enables an analysis of views on environmental issues among nonreligious and religious Norwegians. There are also several MA theses from University of Norway that have studied participation in environmental organizations with a focus on motivations, climate ideology and climate activism (see Bø Fuglestad 2018; Krange 1996; Røkeberg 1996).

Possible research questions

What are the views on the environment (and migration) among non-religious (and possibly religious – for the sake of comparison) youth? An innovative methodological approach that can be used to study the issues of environment and migration, which has been successful in other projects (see Pedersen and Eriksen 2019), is to collect visual and verbal data through youth’s use of a mobile app (“My gaze”). The app invites young people to take photos of and write a short text on selected issues. We will also consider interviews and focus group interviews to obtain a deeper understanding of their reflections on these issues.

f. Media representations –relevant for all the five key areas

A significant finding in previous research on Nordic newspapers is that religion has become a more contested issue (Lundby et al. 2018, 210; Lundby 2018). Although the coverage of nonreligion is scarce, the media representations of religion are often portrayed from a secular premise (cf. Hjarvard 2012; Døving and Kraft 2013). Religious or theological discourses and argumentations are nearly absent (Døving and Kraft 2013, 218). According to a 2015 survey, the majority of Scandinavians think that the media ought to give space to conflicts about religion and to be critical of problematic aspects of religion (Lövheim et al. 2018, 39). Popular media, however – especially those targeting women – contribute to normalizing spiritual notions and practices by way of integrating them with discourses on self-improvement, self-realization and health (see Gresaker 2018). As such, the division between spiritual self-development and secular versions are fluid (Kraft 2017, 75). More explicit representations of nonreligion can be found on social and in popular media.

Additionally, while atheist comedians more commonly make fun of religion and religious people than of atheism, there are several examples of humor on nonreligion, atheists and humanist rituals (see Botvar, Gresaker and Hovdelien 2019). The Norwegian population also think it is less problematic if the media or a comedian joke about atheists/nonbelievers and the Humanist Association compared to making fun of Christians or religious minorities (Botvar 2019).

Sweden

Longitudinal studies of Nordic daily press show that there is little explicit focus on nonreligion or atheism (Lundby et al 2018). A secularist position towards religion dominates among editorials that discuss religion (Lövheim 2017). From the year 2000, an alternative framing emerges in Swedish media that presents religion as a significant aspect of a modern, democratic society and argues for a rethinking of the secularist position. This framing is based on freedom of religion as a constitutional right that should not only be tolerated, but also protected by society.

Studies of non-religion in digital media in Sweden does not exist, but models of how such studies can be undertaken can be found in LeDrew & Lundmark (2018) and Lundmark (2019). In addition, The Humanist Sweden's involvement in the international "The Atheist bus campaign" 2008-2009 is described in Hedelind (2016).

3. Annotated bibliography on religion/nonreligion

General on nonreligion in the Nordic countries

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