

## **The Changing Concept of New Age: A Case Study of Spiritual Transformation of the Slovenian President**

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*The changing nature of New Age is explored in a case study, examining the utilisation of New Age discourse by the former President of the Republic of Slovenia, Dr Janez Drnovšek (1950-2008). Examples from Drnovšek's publications and websites illustrate the transformation of his reputation for political and economic mastery, to someone at home with more spiritual pronouncements, and a new sense of international mission. A historical understanding of New Age may suggest that the unusual case of Dr Drnovšek reflects a shift in New Age from the margins to the centre of contemporary Western societies.*

New Age appeared as a mass movement in the second half of the 1960s in a specific socio-cultural context of a (at that time) thriving counterculture. The term New Age itself is older: its origins go back to at least the turn of the century when it was employed by the Theosophical Society. But as a broader movement it entered Western culture later with the hippies, although practitioners and others started to explicitly use the label New Age to describe this movement only a decade or so later. During the complex and intensive processes of its dissemination within the West many social changes occurred, which also affected the New Age itself. It is hard to overlook that from its beginnings until the present day, the meaning and public perception of the concept of New Age has changed considerably.

This paper presents one very concrete and recent example of the employment of New Age ideas in Slovenian public life.<sup>1</sup> On the basis of this example, the paper analyses the development of the concept of New Age and (re)thinks the changes it has undergone in recent decades.

### **The New Age President**

Let us start with one recent quotation from a Slovenian website ([www.gibanje.org](http://www.gibanje.org)):

What to do if we are unhappy?

...Live today, this is all that exists. Everything else is the product of our mind: all worries, fears and hopes. And from that derives the suffering. If we're calm and focused in every moment, if we are aware that it's special, we shall not lose it. In it we can feel the connection with creation, with the whole existence, with nature and the cosmos. With eternity. And this gives us a sense of bliss. ... If you are not too attached to your Self, money, success, recognition, if you're ready to lose it all in any time, then you will create the proper conditions for your happiness.

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When you are ready to lose all then you can have everything. Without worries, fears, without any fright for the future. You will be able to enjoy the here, the now, connected with the whole creation, with all living beings ... You give yourself up to the inner voice which will always direct you in accordance with the laws of creation. You will not have bad feelings, feelings of guilt, you will not be unhappy. You will act neither against creation nor against yourself. You'll be only a drop in the sea of the cosmic consciousness. Alone it dries quickly, but in the cosmic sea it remains forever.<sup>2</sup>

It would be difficult to avoid the conclusion that this is rather typical New Age discourse: all the problems are the product of one's mind; they can be solved easily if you follow your inner voice and recognize the true Self, which would lead to blissful connection with the cosmic consciousness. Similar ideas, based on the motto "change yourself and you will change the world", are nothing unusual – on the contrary: they are becoming quite common in our everyday life. The only unusual thing about the idea quoted above is its author – the former President of the Republic of Slovenia, Dr Janez Drnovšek.<sup>3</sup>

It is extremely rare that a politician of the highest (presidential) rank would use such discourse. Occasionally some politicians adopt a single idea or practice (or a set of ideas or practices), like for example Al Gore's ecological activism, or let us recall speculations and rumours about Cherie Blair's New Age consultants or Ronald Reagan's connection with an astrologer.<sup>4</sup> But from the end of 2005 the Slovenian President constantly talked and wrote about raising consciousness, positive thinking and inner balance as a precondition for successful action in the world. He called attention to global ecological problems, promoted vegetarianism, talked about *ayurveda* and used and promoted alternative/complementary medicine.

Dr Drnovšek was a most experienced and very successful politician. His political career started in the times of socialist Yugoslavia, where in 1989 he somewhat surprisingly became a President of the collective presidency of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – in the first free elections he competed for the post against an old and influential communist cadre member who was expected to win. He earned his image of a strong charismatic politician with his role in the processes of the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

Soon after Slovenian independence in 1991 he became Prime Minister, and led the government for more than a decade (with just a 6 month break) until 2002, when he resigned from the post of Prime Minister and chose to compete for the much more comfortable and less demanding post of President of the Republic (which is also less influential, but allows more freedom and space for individuality) – which he relatively easily won. He also moved out of the capital, to a small village not far from Ljubljana, but somehow hidden in the hills.

At the time the public already knew (although the information was limited) about his severe illness – cancer,<sup>5</sup> which most probably was the reason for his personal transformation and an obvious turning point in his *modus operandi*. Namely, for

about two years we witnessed his transformation from a technocratic and bureaucratic type of pragmatic politician to one with a mission. Previously he was well known for his radically pragmatic actions, which were almost always hidden from the public. His political charisma was unusual – since he rarely acted in and communicated with the public – and was based on his reputed mastery of political and economic skills.

And then, in an extremely short time, he became a totally different politician, who not only changed his views on many subjects (his strict political and economic emphasis gave way to very clear social and ecological endeavour), but also his way of acting. Where previously he had been reluctant to appear in public, now all of a sudden he was regularly visiting various public events and had substantial contacts with common people. From 2006 he even answered the questions of readers of *Jana*, the oldest women's magazine, on a monthly basis!

Furthermore, the Slovenian President suddenly began to demonstrate unusually intensive international activity. Within a few months in 2006, we witnessed his proposal for solving the Kosovo problem, a peace mission to Darfur (to intervene for a peace agreement among the rebels he sent a special envoy to Darfur; he also publicly critiqued the “well paid but inefficient bureaucrats of international institutions”), brief interventions in the Sri Lankan and Palestinian conflicts; extensive correspondence with presidents and prime ministers of numerous countries and several high officials of international organizations.

In this period, Drnovšek constantly appeared in public – not only did he give interviews for the major Slovenian and several international media (among others for BBC and CNN),<sup>6</sup> but he also wrote articles (with predominantly social concerns) for the *Financial Times* and the *International Herald Tribune* newspapers. In February 2006, he attended a meditation for peace organised in Bangalore by the Art of Living Foundation led by Indian guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. There he gave a speech to a crowd of three million in which he emphasised that:

the future of humankind is in the awareness of an individual that it is not material wealth which brings happiness, but only help to fellow men – with which we also help ourselves.<sup>7</sup>

Drnovšek's transformation could not be overlooked at the end of January 2006, when he announced that he would establish the Movement for Justice and Development, and on 22 February its website appeared on the internet ([www.gibanje.org](http://www.gibanje.org)). There we could read the 10 basic principles of the movement, among them “Respect the truth”, “Respect life in every form”, “Do not do to others what you would not want others to do to you” and “Respect Nature”; and most importantly the last, tenth principle, which we quote in full:

The movement for Justice and Development is the last hope of Humanity. It strives to stop the current downfall. It strives to stop the demolition of the climate of the earth. It strives to stop the growing of religious and social

tensions in the world. It strives to stop the arrogance of those who today have the power but do nothing to stop the downfall of humanity.

THE MOVEMENT IS THE LIGHT, WHICH IS FIGHTING THE DARKNESS.

In spite of the fact that the whole website was removed the next day, to reappear only a few days later without these basic principles, the quoted list (and especially the last point) is extremely important for understanding the intention behind the movement. On the same website, from February 2006 Drnovšek published his “Thought of the Day”, and at the end of May a collection of these thoughts came out in a book entitled, *Thoughts on Life and Awareness* (2006a). The first edition of 8,000 copies sold out in a matter of weeks, and by the end of the year some 20,000 copies were sold, which is an unmatched success by Slovenian standards (with a population of two million).

During an interview on national television on the occasion of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Slovenian independent state on 26 June 2006, the President was asked whether he sees himself as a spiritual leader, and he answered in the affirmative: “Yes, I do. That’s why I wrote the book. And another one might follow. My other activities are also leading in this direction.” A Croatian translation of the book appeared in the autumn. And as early as November 2006 Drnovšek actually presented a new book at the Vienna Book Fair, which was first published in German under the title *Vom Wesen der Welt*. A short time later – conveniently coinciding with the December shopping euphoria – it appeared in Slovenian under the title *Bistvo sveta* [*The Essence of the World*] (2006b). When, in June 2007, after several months it finally disappeared from the top of the bestseller charts, President Drnovšek published a new book entitled *Pogovori* [*Conversations*] (2007), consisting of 12 fictitious conversations on different topics: on life, death, spiritual existence, eternity and its voice, on good, on evil, on awareness, and so on.

In these books<sup>8</sup> Drnovšek offers typical New Age notions of human existence:

There is a cosmic energy as cosmic consciousness. Energy transforms into matter and matter transforms into energy. Energy transforms into life, and life transforms back into energy. Life is followed by death and death is followed by life. In between there is no time. Time is only in life. Only on Earth. Otherwise there is eternity, where there is no time. In death there is no time, but there are energy and consciousness. Consciousness can be higher or lower, as well as energy. Lower energy leads to life with lower consciousness, to discontent and ill-fortune. Higher or positive energy leads to life with higher consciousness, leads to content. Cosmic consciousness leads to high energy, immortality and infinity. To new life on a higher level of consciousness. This is the goal of physical existence in this world. Physical life recurs until it reaches the cosmic consciousness. Human mind recurs until it merges with the cosmic consciousness. (Drnovšek 2006a: 115)

We are entrapped in the material world with the cycle of reincarnations, until we transform (by raising our consciousness) to a higher level of existence and merge with the cosmic consciousness – and thus fulfil the goal of our this-worldly existence. In this typical New Age notion, which mostly derives from Indian tradition, there is no omnipresent and omnipotent God creator; its place is taken by impersonal force. Or as Drnovšek tells us in an interview for the main Slovenian daily newspaper when asked, “What is your God like?” he answered, “Universal consciousness. Universal energy.”<sup>9</sup> By such a notion humans are not sinful beings, but just the opposite: the human being is in its true essence a spiritual and therefore a sacred, divine being.

The ultimate goal is the recognition of the individual’s true, authentic nature, his/her true Self, which is hidden behind the socialised self, the ego, the intellect. This is well in line with the common New Age emphasis on self-spirituality as the highest goal and most important psychological need of every human being (see Heelas 1996: 18-38).<sup>10</sup> In this manner, the source of personal health is also located within, and not outside of an individual:

Your inner voice will lead you to health, just listen to it. Trust it; it is in touch with your most profound essence. It knows everything about you, what is best for you. Nobody else can know this. If you don’t hear your inner voice you have lost touch with yourself. (Drnovšek 2006a: 86)

Such notions do not deny or exclude traditional religious notions. According to the mainstream New Age every religion contains some true essence. Even more, all religions are in their deepest, ‘true’ level the same – a kind of all-encompassing New Age ecumenism, which we also find in Drnovšek’s writing:

All religions carry the same or very similar messages. They aim to elevate the man, raise our consciousness, and create a more just world. The form of their messages was adapted to the times in which they emerged, and the capabilities of understanding of the people of those days. Therefore the religions differ, but only on the outside, because the messages they carry are universal, cosmic and unchangeable. They have been changed by people, who did not understand them and interpreted them wrongly. (Drnovšek 2006a: 100)

But New Age is generally much more critical towards the established traditional religious institutions: they supposedly transformed (whether because of their misunderstanding or as a result of intentional manipulations) originally genuine and valuable religious teachings into something completely different. Such a notion is also present in Drnovšek’s understanding of Christianity:

Christ taught that people should be good and respect and love their fellow-men. He showed us a way out of the abyss of evil, lust, low passions, hatred, greed ... [But] humans did not live according to his teaching; not even many of those who were spreading and explaining it to others. The Church became

a big institution with a complex hierarchy and might, and therefore often lost contact with Christ's teaching. Christ did not teach about privileges and high positions. Secular authorities should follow his teaching and in their activity take into consideration God's laws. But it happened that Church authorities – of course not all of its representatives – started to live according to secular laws and forgot about the essence of Christ's teaching. (Drnovšek 2006a: 32-37)

Certainly, the New Age is even more critical towards the general state of the modern world. As Drnovšek puts it:

We cannot proceed in such a manner. Let's step out of the speeding bus. We do not like the world as it is. The bus will turn over, the world will explode. On the one side splendour, on the other misery, hunger, violence, illness. Who can convince me that such life is good and that I must even pay taxes? I would rather step out. What should I wait for? The next war, which will come as certainly as destiny? Unemployment? Illness and medical treatment, which may deprive me of the quality of life left by the illness? That the air and the water will be so polluted that I will not be able to breathe nor to quench my thirst? (Drnovšek 2006a: 74-75)

The transformation of this world could be achieved by personal engagement, with spiritual activity, raising the consciousness and individual self-realisation.

The world will not change with violent revolution, as they falsely believed and tried in time past, but with the gradual realisation of the people, who will become more and more aware of their interconnections and interdependence with every being, and will adjust their ambitions and activities. (Drnovšek 2006a: 27)

And what will follow is some new, essentially different era, a new age, in which genuine spirituality will have the central position, violent conflicts will gradually cease, and humankind will again coexist harmonically with nature. In New Age doctrines this passage can be understood in different ways: sometimes it is described as a gradual, peaceful and often hardly noticeable process; but others talk about great, radical and swift, sometimes apocalyptic changes. These are also quite obvious in Drnovšek's writing:

We run to another world, a world of higher consciousness and harmony. A nicer world. ... We will have to jump into it. The energy of the Earth is growing. The changes will occur, also the catastrophes. The leap will be hard. The Earth will shake and will be flooded. The Earth will dislocate. Those who will achieve a satisfactory spiritual level will survive and continue with the Earth. A new world will be established. ... The development will be fast but this time balanced. ... Solidarity systems will be developed; people will help each other. ... Humanity will again develop culture, but it will be higher, as well as the level of technological progress. ... There will be no more wars or

crime, because people will be conscious enough. They will elect their representatives but the struggle for power in today's sense will disappear. ... The institution of the first among equals will prevail. ... The countries will cooperate. ... The United Nations will revive in cooperation and exchange for progress, common-problem-solving and warranty of a peaceful and safe life for every individual of the planet. People will grow and eat vegetable food. ... Numerous civilizations' illnesses that trouble humankind today will disappear. ... Man will again, and this time for good, become an equal part of the Universe. (Drnovšek 2006a: 123-26)

Unsurprisingly, such paradigmatically New Age discourse provoked various reactions. The media offered all sorts of explanations and speculations. The political sphere reacted with restraint and some amount of unease, but the broad public showed much more sympathy. Drnovšek was, in spite of his closed and conservative way of acting, always a very popular politician; before his New Age transformation surveys showed that he had very high public support. But at the end of 2005 and throughout 2006, when his change of discourse was most obvious, his ratings remained the same.

When he established his Movement for Justice and Development, 67% of the population supported this act, and up to summer 2007 (when this article was written) he was still among the three most popular Slovenian politicians, his average public evaluation after his transformation ranging between 3.5 and 4 (on a scale of 1 – 5).<sup>11</sup> According to a Politbarometer survey conducted quarterly by the Public Opinion Centre at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana,<sup>12</sup> in 2007 25% to 28% of the respondents would have voted for Drnovšek's (potential) party if he were to have competed in the next parliamentary elections (which he explicitly rejected several times) – this would put his (in reality non-existent) party to the top of the Slovenian political landscape. This indicates that the Slovenian President obviously remained, in spite of – or even because of – his shift to New Age discourse, very popular among the people. Could this be an indicator of how perception and, even more, the meaning of the concept of New Age has changed?

### **Evolution and changes of the concept of New Age**

The concept of New Age arose some 100 years ago within Theosophy; most probably it was widely popularised by Alice Bailey. But the usage was limited to a narrow circle of intellectuals and artists. It remained so until the late 1960s, when it found a new life within the very special social and cultural context of the counterculture. The counterculture offered not only a political and cultural revolt of the young generation against the prevailing culture. Along with its demands for civil rights, equality of women, and ecological justice, it expressed the need for a spirituality which would be different from the one offered by the existing religious institutions of the West. In this new context, New Age became widely accepted, and its numerous practices were for the first time used by the masses.

The complex reasons for the emergence of the New Age movement could be located within dissatisfaction with the development of the socio-political system and the whole of Western culture. It could also be placed within the first serious crisis of science from the beginning of the modern era – it became clear that the development of science and technology has its limits; the myth of endless economic growth was faced with its limits in ecological concern. And nonetheless it should be located within massive dissatisfaction with the official religious institutions of the West, which in the opinion of many fail to provide answers to the ultimate questions of existence in modern societies and serve more ideological and political ends. So we could suggest that the New Age is a reaction to: (1) negative consequences of functional differentiation of modern societies at the global level, (2) bureaucratisation of traditional religious institutions at organisational level, and (3) the strictly formalised attitude of the modern believer to the sacred.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1960s and 1970s the concept of New Age was characterized by at least two distinctive elements:

1. Critical protest against the contemporary situation (political, economic, religious, ecological), with a clear subversive element and strong countercultural dimension.
2. An unquestioned positive connotation and relatively broad appeal (mostly to members of the counterculture).

At that time it seemed that the concept had considerable influence on contemporary culture and even society as a whole. But later, with the gradual disintegration of the counterculture, the position and role of New Age ideas and its many practices gradually changed. They did not disappear, but lost the connection with certain social groups and also lost the countercultural dimension. Somehow the New Age dissolved in the dominant culture. We could say that in most of the Western world by the end of the 1980s New Age had become a legitimate part of contemporary Western culture.<sup>14</sup> It seems that today a lot of people are talking about karma, energies, aura, reincarnation etc According to the European Value Survey at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century 15–40 % of Westerners believed in reincarnation (see Basanez et al 1998). Numerous people regularly practise yoga, different kinds of meditation, tai chi, etc Alternative/complementary medicine has become widespread and perceived as something ‘normal’ in everyday life. In best-selling popular magazines you can find instructions how to set your house or office according to Feng Shui principles.

And at the same time, during the process of transformation from the original counterculture to becoming a part of the dominant culture, it seems that New Age lost most of its critical attitude – instead of the original protest against an unacceptable social and political system today New Age often serves to legitimate the system; many New Age practices are not carried out so much with the intention of changing the world as for easier and more efficient functioning within it<sup>15</sup> (this is well in accordance with both the prevailing ideology of health and youth and constant demand for high productivity).

Surprisingly, it also seems that at the same time as New Age was becoming a part of dominant culture it also lost its positive and optimistic connotation – not its diverse ideas and practices, but the concept itself. Today, certain New Age ideas and practices prosper among very different social groups and the circle of ‘users’ of New Age concepts and methods is extremely broad – but it seems that the concept does not serve as identification: nobody wants to be a New Ager any more. Even such paradigmatic New Ager as Marko Pogačnik, if we use another Slovenian example, does not identify with New Age. He is an internationally renowned geomanticist and healer of the earth (for this purpose he developed a unique technique called lithopuncture), author of numerous books in Slovenian and English, who in the early 1970s spent some time at the famous Findhorn Community in Scotland, and immediately after that established a small commune in Slovenia. He is also the vice-president of Drnovšek’s Movement for Justice and Development, and, unknown to many Slovenians, the designer of the national coat of arms which came into being at the very beginning of Slovenian independence in 1991 and has found its place on the national flag.

In spring 2003, Marko Pogačnik reacted to an interview I gave to one Slovenian daily newspaper,<sup>16</sup> in which I mentioned him as a leading New Age figure; in his response in a letter to the editor he passionately argued that what he does might be called spirituality, but has nothing to do with New Age. It seems that the concept itself is today often believed to be connected with instant, non-genuine spirituality and therefore carries a negative connotation.<sup>17</sup> But at the same time numerous New Age ideas and practices flourish across the very different segments of Western societies and have become a ‘normal’ part of our everyday life.

### **So what is going on?**

Drnovšek’s transformation is a kind of indicator of the shift of New Age from the margins to the centre of contemporary Western societies. Several decades ago it would probably have been unimaginable that the president of any Western country would publicly use such explicit New Age discourse. But the case of the former Slovenian President indicates that today the public does not refuse this any more, and that New Age ideas have become something generally acceptable.

Let us for the conclusion of this brief analysis of the changed position and perception of New Age spirituality in our societies quote two thoughts:

Does it make any sense what we do: try to raise the consciousness of people and with this improve the world? Does anybody know a better way? I don’t believe so. There must be many doubters among us. They will not be disturbed in their way of life, in their perception of the world. They will not raise consciousness. They will not create positive energy. They will get stuck where they are: in their selfish and limited patterns of thinking and acting. We will not move them. For them the world beyond their own Self does not have a meaning. (Drnovšek 2006: 108)

The author of this rather critical observation on our fellow-citizens is the former President of the Republic of Slovenia. But the second thought is written by another person, in a context not directly connected to him:

The chosen ones are not here to set a hierarchy, but to help to raise the followers. But be aware: it is never useful to teach the crowd! The smaller the number, the higher the quality (of the teaching), and the quality matters most... If everybody with higher consciousness started to spread the idea with the intention of raising all others, they would in the current situation see you as crazy, as some new religion, a cult. You would actually harm yourself and others.<sup>18</sup>

This was written by Sara Poje, 22-year-old spiritual leader of 'The Sacred Family', known as Vésuel by her Slovenian and international followers. She announced in her early teenage years that she would give birth to a new Christ, and claims to have direct communication with God and other spiritual beings (one of whom supposedly dictated the above thought).

So is this not a clear indicator that something has happened to the concept of New Age, when a politician of the highest rank is passionately spreading New Age ideas (which obviously does not bother ordinary people – on the contrary, many seem to support it), and on the other hand a paradigmatic New Ager warns against such activities and calls for caution? Or is it something else – that maybe something radical has already happened to our societies and we are just not aware of it (yet)?

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The topic analysed in this article was previously presented and discussed at several international conferences: "Development of the New Spirituality in the Monocultural and Pluralistic Societies" (Krakow, 9-11 June 2006), "Religion on the Borders" (Stockholm, 19-22 April 2007), "Plurality and Representation: Religion in Education, Culture and Society" (EASR conference, Bremen, 23-27 September 2007), and "Twenty Years and More: Research into Minority Religions, New Religious Movements and 'the New Spirituality'" (CESNUR/INFORM conference, London, 16-20 April, 2008; the author would like to thank the British Academy for the financial support which enabled him to participate in this conference).

<sup>2</sup> All quotations in this paper are translated from Slovenian by the author.

<sup>3</sup> After this article was written, the presidential term of Janez Drnovšek came to an end, and in December 2007 he was replaced by Danilo Türk. Drnovšek died on 23 February 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Reagan's relationship with astrologers in the 1980s is most famous. It operated through his wife Nancy, and some believe that no important decision was made without consulting the San Francisco astrologer Joan Quiley: she advised the US president on his private matters, like health issues (for example the date of his cancer operation), but also on public and political matters – some believe that she influenced the nuclear arms treaty with USSR president Mikhail Gorbachev. Some other public figures also tend to have connections with New Age: e.g. Norwegian princess Martha Louise, psychotherapist and youth writer, who also studied at the academy for holistic medicine, in 2007 announced plans to open a school for communication with angels.

<sup>5</sup> In 1999 the doctors discovered a kidney cancer and surgically removed one kidney; later they also discovered metastases on the lungs and liver.

<sup>6</sup> In May 2007, Al Jazeera English showed a two-part documentary on Drnovšek and his new endeavours.

<sup>7</sup> *Mladina*, 20 March 2006, p61.

<sup>8</sup> Here we refer to Drnovšek's last three books, and not the first book (1996), which was strictly political in scope. It was also published in German (*Meine Wahrheit: Der Jugoslawien-Krieg*, Kilchberg: SmartBooks, 1998) and Spanish (*El laberinto de los Balcanes*, Barcelona; Ediciones B, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> *Delo*, 21 January 2006.

<sup>10</sup> The key characteristic of New Age spirituality is its mystical, experimental dimension; it offers personal insight and contact with the sacred. This is where it radically differs from the methods and activities of most of the big, established, traditional religious institutions, but also from most of the hierarchically structured sects and cults. Individual spiritual experience (practice) is the most important, much more than belief and mediated participation. Therefore New Age spirituality is structurally characterized by individualism, a predominantly informal network structure, and also a consumerist market orientation.

<sup>11</sup> We used the only publicly accessible survey data on long-term public evaluation of Slovenian politicians, see [www.ninamedia.si](http://www.ninamedia.si).

<sup>12</sup> See [www.cjm.si/PB\\_rezultati](http://www.cjm.si/PB_rezultati).

<sup>13</sup> The structural reasons for these processes were explained as much as four decades ago by Thomas Luckmann (1967). He convincingly demonstrated that since in modern societies institutionally specialised religion changes much slower than the 'objective' social circumstances, which define the individual systems of 'ultimate meanings', it is challenged by more individualised and privatised forms of religion. In every pluralistic society the employability and efficiency of the 'official' religious model is seriously challenged, since individuals increasingly enter the culture as consumers. When religion becomes a private matter every individual is free to choose from an almost infinite supply of 'ultimate meanings' (guided only by his/her preferences, which derive from his/her social biography). Therefore we could argue that the religious/spiritual market is a more efficient metaphor for the description of contemporary religion and spirituality than the sacred canopy (Berger 1967).

<sup>14</sup> Due to special socio-historical reasons this happened in Central and Eastern Europe with a certain delay.

<sup>15</sup> Big corporations are paying for New Age courses for their managers because they expect that their investment will be returned through higher productivity of their staff.

<sup>16</sup> *Večer*, 15 February 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Not only do the practitioners not use the term New Age any more; recently we can notice that the term is becoming somehow obsolete within academia too: new terms are emerging to describe what was for at least two decades known as New Age, such as 'Alternative Spirituality' (Sutcliffe 2002), 'Nonformative Spirituality' (Wood 2003), 'Expressive Spirituality' (Heelas 2000), 'Spiritual Market' (van Hove 1999), 'New Spirituality Movements and Culture' (Shimanozo 1999), 'Spiritual Revolution' (Heelas and Woodhead 2005), etc. The question is whether it is sensible or even justifiable for scholars to abandon a term just because the practitioners refuse to use it. The term New Age has some obvious shortcomings: it is vague and for scientific use maybe not precise enough; therefore we might agree with the need for a new,

better term. But do the proposed ones really serve better for research and scientific purposes? Or is this situation somehow similar to another that sociology of religion went through decades ago, when we gradually replaced the terms ‘cult’ and ‘sect’ with the less precise and in some ways more problematic term ‘new religious movements’ only because the previous terms carried a negative, pejorative connotation in their everyday use?

<sup>18</sup> Gregor Lesjak, research notes, transcript of interview with Sara Poje.