From Alternative Lifestyles to Conspiracy Theories

A Study among Healthy-Living Enthusiasts in Hradec Králové

Petr Macek, Veronika Hujacová

https://doi.org/10.46585/cargo.2026.1.195

Abstract: *The research focuses on the phenomenon of conspirituality and its manifestations in the Czech context, with a probe into the specific context of healthy-living enthusiasts. It strives to reconstruct the categories respondents use to explain their healthy optimal lifestyle and trace possible elements of conspiracy thinking in it. The research sample consists of adherents of alternative nutrition, alternative spirituality, alternative medicine, and conspiracy narratives from Hradec Králové, a regional centre in East Bohemia, a university and industrial city with a population of roughly 100,000 inhabitants. The first part of the article consists of two key themes essential to the research: the relationship between alternative worldviews and conspiracy theories, and the concept of conspirituality. The central section presents the research methodology, followed by an analysis of the categories derived from the grounded theory approach. These categories form a continuum ranging from alternative lifestyles to conspiracy theories.*

Keywords: *conspiracy theories, conspirituality, alternative lifestyle, alternative medicine, healthy-living, Czech Republic.*

Introduction

The research focuses on the phenomenon of conspirituality and its manifestations in the Czech context, with a probe into the specific context of healthy-living enthusiasts. It strives to reconstruct the categories respondents use to explain their healthy, optimal lifestyle and trace possible elements of conspiracy thinking in it. The research sample consists of adherents of alternative nutrition, alternative spirituality, alternative medicine, and conspiracy narratives from Hradec Králové, a regional centre in East Bohemia, a university and industrial city with a population of roughly 100,000 inhabitants. Each participant engages with these topics to varying degrees and in different ways. The focus on those interested in healthy and alternative eating habits was determined through participant observation in a health food store, where products related to healthy nutrition are combined with those of alternative medicine and spirituality.[1]

The aim of the research is to identify the fundamental elements of the worldview of its participants and interpret them either as a striving for an alternative lifestyle or as a pattern of conspiracy thinking. The research specifically deals with the topics of artificial and chemical substances, media use, mental health, distrust of institutions, and personal autonomy. The research questions were organised into five thematic areas: healthy eating, alternative medicine, information gathering and processing, spirituality, and transcultural dialogue with the aim of exploring the value anchoring of respondents and their perspective on current social and cultural challenges. The study is qualitative in nature. The cognitive categories on which respondents base their lifestyles are made explicit to the reader using methodology derived from grounded theory (Charmaz 2013; Glaser and Strauss 2006), based on coding of interview data and participant observation.

Engaging with the topic of conspirituality is essential. Even within the contemporary Czech milieu, we observe a pronounced polarisation of society. It is therefore necessary to highlight and examine the "grey zones" that blur rigid categorisation and binary thinking. Crucial questions include: Who inhabits these blind spots? How do people situated along the continuum from alternative lifestyles to conspiracy theories perceive the world?[2]

---

1 For the sake of maintaining respondents' anonymity, the names of the shops are not disclosed.

2 The title of the book by Daniel Prokop *Slepé skvrny* (This term usually refers to the spots on the retina at the optic nerve) symbolizes the stereotypes present in Czech society. Some things we take for granted are, in light of the data, much more complex (Prokop 2020: 12).

To avoid reductionist or condemnatory judgments, it is vital to open dialogue and provide space for those who are overlooked or immediately dismissed by the majority society. In discussions on world religions, it is equally important to include topics of alternative spirituality, which are popular in the Czech context and respond to the existential and social needs of people in the modern world (Kostićová 2023: 45).

The first part of the article consists of two key themes essential to the research: the relationship between alternative worldviews and conspiracy theories, and the concept of conspirituality. The central section presents the research methodology, followed by an analysis of the categories describing the participants' worldview, interpreted either as a striving for an alternative lifestyle or as a pattern of conspiracy thinking.

The Relationship between Alternative Worldviews and Conspiracy Theories

It is first necessary to define what constitutes a conspiracy theory. A conspiracy is a secret, illegal, and immoral act—an organised plan carried out by a group of people who, through covert activities, seek to harm others or to gain power and wealth. A conspiracy theory is a structured belief in such a plot, whether real or imagined (Shermer 2022: 23). Barkun (2003: 3-4) argues that the essence of conspiracy theories lies in identifying and explaining evil. He identifies three attributes inherent to all conspiracy theories: nothing happens by accident, nothing is as it seems, and everything is connected. Furthermore, he distinguishes three types of conspiracy theories: event conspiracies, which relate to a specific event or series of events; systemic conspiracies, which aim to gain control over a particular territory, state, or even the entire world; and superconspiracies, which are complex constructs in which several conspiracy theories are hierarchically interconnected (Barkun 2003: 6).

The reasons why people believe in conspiracy theories are the subject of extensive debate. Cassam (2020: 49) offers a psychological perspective on this "belief" in conspiracy theories and identifies three forms of cognitive bias that may contribute to trust in conspiracy narratives: intentionality bias, the assumption that events do not occur by chance but as a result of someone's intention; confirmation bias, the tendency to take into account only evidence that supports one's existing convictions while ignoring contradictory information; and proportionality bias, the inclination to assign causes to events that correspond to their perceived significance and scale.

Belief in conspiracy theories is also associated with a certain sense of empowerment or enlightenment (Heřmanová 2022). A person facing a difficult life situation, or one who has long-term or lifelong experience of socio-economic hardship, may be more vulnerable and susceptible. Belief in conspiracy theories can offer such a person a sense of meaning—they perceive themselves as seeing beneath the surface, beyond the curtain, and thus as being one step ahead. They also become part of a group that has likewise "awakened" (Lednický et al. 2021). A crucial factor in this process is distrust in state institutions (Cassam 2020:61).

"Conspiracy theories are stories. Good conspiracy theories can be as engaging and captivating as detective fiction (Cassam 2020:61)." Conspiracy theories are appealing partly because they allow individuals to discover the Truth for themselves, often leading them into the so-called "rabbit hole" of the online world. People may become members of certain communities, comment on and upload various videos, or attend spiritual retreats organised by their favourite influencers. Although conspiracy theories have existed for many years, with the advent of the internet, diverse web platforms, and social media, the development of this phenomenon has become highly dynamic. Individuals now co-create content and constantly search for new information.[3] From the perspective of religious studies, conspiracy narratives can also be viewed as modern myths. These myths reveal something fundamental about our society: they express collective identity, address boundaries and internal tensions, and reflect the contradictions inherent in social structures. The hierarchical framework of society generates certain tensions that lead to cultural repression, and myths function as a mechanism for coping with this condition (Chlup 2024).

Conspiracy theories thus represent a complex phenomenon that exposes social criticism of contemporary society and reflects the needs of individuals within it. They are closely related to alternative lifestyles—a relationship rooted in the rise of counterculture in the 1960s in Western societies, which emerged as a form of resistance to modern technocratic civilisation (Roszak 2015: 45-46). The loss of authenticity, nature, emotional expression, and spiritual needs led to the emergence of alternative ways of life, accompanied by a general distrust of institutional systems. The wave of alternative culture reached Czechoslovakia as well, where it became popular.

One layer of this alternative sphere includes alternative media, which participate in disseminating various forms of disinformation or supporting specific conspiracy narratives. Yet determining what constitutes an "alternative lifestyle"

[3] From this, it follows that people who believe in conspiracy narratives do not necessarily suffer from a lack of information or a deficit in critical thinking (Vojtíšek 2016: 50).

today is a complex and context-dependent question, influenced by the social bubble in which one resides. Generally speaking, however, the often-repeated claim that people in the Czech Republic are predominantly atheists is inaccurate. "Statistics indicate that adherents of alternative spirituality are nearly twice as numerous as followers of traditional religions (approximately 40–50% compared to around 25%)" (Kostićová 2023: 45).

According to respondents, alternative practices are increasingly becoming part of the mainstream. Meditation enjoys wide popularity, foods associated with alternative diets such as vegetarianism and veganism are available in major retail chains, and healers, traditional Chinese medicine, and chakra therapy are commonly practiced.

Conspirituality

"Conspiracy theories fulfill the spiritual needs of some individuals" (Cassam 2020: 64).

The term *conspirituality* was first introduced by sociologist of religion David Voas and independent researcher Charlotte Ward in their 2011 scholarly study *The Emergence of Conspirituality*, based on ethnographic research of American and British websites (Ward and Voas 2011: 110).[4] For the first time, they connect conspiracy theories with New Age spirituality. Barkun defines three principles that can be found in almost every conspiracy theory: (a) nothing happens by accident, (b) nothing is as it seems, and (c) everything is connected. Similar principles form the foundations of thought in New Age and alternative spirituality (Ward and Voas 2011). Conspirituality is a political and spiritual philosophy rooted in two core beliefs: (1) that there exists a group of people secretly seeking to control—or already controlling—the political and social order, and (2) that humanity is undergoing a transformation of consciousness, an "awakening," or a paradigm shift. Through this transformation, individuals become aware of the existence of a hidden elite allegedly ruling the world. "Conspirituality appears to temper political cynicism with spiritual optimism" (Ward and Voas 2011: 108). It has its roots primarily in the online sphere.[5] This makes it highly adapt-

[4] Specifically, they mention David Icke and his website, which receives a high number of visits (https://davidicke.com/). In his 20 books, he blends conspiracy theories with spirituality. They also draw attention to authors like David Wilcock (https://divinecosmos.com/) and Steven Greer.

[5] Currently, manifestations of conspirituality are increasingly reflected in people's lives. This is observed both within the research sample, whose respondents tend to isolate themselves

able, rapidly spreading, and capable of connecting people across continents. It is shaped by the eclecticism that is strongly present within alternative spirituality.[6] This spirituality, however, is guided by a certain universal doctrine, namely holism, encompassing the concepts of soul, consciousness, and energy. Holism, as a concept of universality, is presented in alternative spirituality as non-binary, although binary distinctions are strongly present. It establishes dualities with an emphasis on their balance, which is perceived as good, while imbalance signifies a threatening, dangerous state potentially leading to illness. Another formulation of holism is the trinitarian mind–body–soul model, which is present in some approaches to alternative medicine.

With the rise of the New Age in the 1960s and 1970s, a market began to emerge offering various products, seminars, spiritual events, workshops, and energy exercises. Facilities focused on alternative medicine and other spiritual practices appeared, alongside festivals and retreats. In the 1990s, New Age centers (e.g., Čajovna u Džoudyho) and festivals (e.g., *Miluj svůj život*) began to appear in Czechoslovakia. A crucial factor in the development of alternative spirituality has been the advent of the internet and social media. Today, people can share their spiritual journeys, explore different healing methods, create birth charts, and form communities where they can safely share their spiritual interests (Kostićová 2023: 43-44).[7] A key feature of contemporary alternative spirituality is the concept of energy, the idea that an impersonal energy flows through the world (and all its parallel realities), giving life and animating it. This flow of energy affects everyone and can originate from various sources, such as sacred objects, sacred sites, plants, and animals. The human body's energy is concentrated in energy points,

in smaller communities and are predominantly passive social media users—e.g., they do not contribute to comment sections—and among more publicly visible figures, such as the QAnon shaman Jake Angeli, who led the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

6 New Age began gaining popularity in the 1960s and 1970s. It derives from an older stream of Western esotericism. In Czech, the colloquial term *Ezo* is used, which is primarily pejorative and inaccurately applied to contemporary alternative spirituality. Over time, the term New Age began to give way to the concept of (non-religious) spirituality. During the 1980s and 1990s, a process of mainstreaming occurred, referred to as the "seminar spirituality" (Kostićová 2023: 43-44).

7 A birth chart, or natal chart, is a diagram that depicts the positions of various celestial bodies at the moment of a person's birth. It requires knowledge of the exact time, date, and place of birth. This chart is intended to help individuals gain a deeper understanding of themselves, their traits, and their character. It also serves to provide more precise horoscope predictions. Tutorials on creating a birth chart are available on YouTube, various spiritual development apps offer this feature, and it can also be generated on online platforms, e.g.: "Birth chart," Cafe Astrology (https://astro.cafeastrology.com/natal.php).

the seven chakras, which extend from the crown chakra at the top of the head along the spine to the root chakra located in the pelvic area; this concept has its roots in Eastern religions. Various influences—illness, polluted air, or adverse psychological states—can disrupt this energy flow, potentially blocking the chakras. Such blockages manifest negatively, and restoration is possible through various healing methods, including Reiki, acupuncture, AV diagnostics, and Feng Shui (energetic harmonisation of the surrounding environment) (Kostićová 2025).

"New Age spirituality focuses on the subjective psychological state, integration, authenticity, and self-expression. This spirituality can be characterised as an individual spirituality separate from religious institutions. In New Age spirituality, people pursue their spiritual goals along their own personal path" (Ernst 2008: 71). Alternative spirituality, including conspirituality, is a defining feature of the current state of society. It addresses people's needs for orientation in both online and offline spaces, for sharing, and for finding common interests and values. Therefore, it is important to examine and uncover what is often referred to pejoratively in colloquial terms as "Ezo." This is particularly relevant considering that alternative spirituality has now become the predominant form of religion in the Czech Republic, with its adherents numbering nearly twice as many as those of traditional religions. A significant shift from religion toward spirituality is observed (Halík 2006: 228).

A survey conducted by the STEM Institute for Empirical Research in March 2021 indicates that 40% of Czechs believe in several or numerous conspiracy theories related to COVID-19 (STEM 2021). This survey was specifically focused on the pandemic situation. Nevertheless, the figure is relatively high. It is therefore necessary to study the phenomenon of conspiracy theories from all possible perspectives and to recognize its diversity and multi-layered nature. One such layer is the spiritual dimension of conspiracy theories.

Research Objective

The aim of the research is, based on participants' responses, participant observation, visits to relevant stores, and scholarly sources, to define and determine the structure of a scale ranging from alternative lifestyles to conspiracy theories. The study seeks to identify the key reference points on this scale and locate where participants position themselves. These points are established through the grounded theory method, which defines categories that determine the scale's markers. Additional objectives include analysing participants' orientation within today's information society, the role of conspirituality in this context, their worldview, and their needs. Examining this phenomenon is essential for understanding

the needs of people in contemporary Czech society. At the same time, uncovering these societal structures and individual experiences mitigates the impulse toward simplistic categorisation and labelling. The research does not aim to evaluate participants' attitudes and opinions, their lifestyles, or to determine whether any alternative approach is superior or inferior to a more traditional one.[8]

Type of Research

For this study, which focuses on the subjective experiences of participants, a qualitative research design was chosen. This approach allows for a deeper exploration of specific topics and provides a better understanding of participants' attitudes, identities, lifestyles, how they navigate the relevant subjects, and how they define key concepts (Hendl 2023, 56-57). Data obtained from quantitative research reveal only a partial view of the lives of people living in the Czech Republic and may not always reflect reality (Prokop 2020: 216). It is therefore essential to complement quantitative research with qualitative studies, which allow for a deeper understanding of the people around us and reveal what lies behind the percentages presented in statistics. For the qualitative investigation, a semi-structured interview method was chosen to maintain the necessary interview structure while allowing for the exploration of certain topics and follow-up on additional relevant information.

Participant observation is also part of this research. The semi-structured interviews were relatively extensive to ensure a thorough understanding of respondents and a proper interpretation of the topics discussed. The study comprises ten interviews and one instance of participant observation. One interview (Romana, 43 years old, conducted on August 30, 2023) is incomplete due to time constraints and a certain level of communication noise that occurred during the interview.[9] Due to the limited availability of courses in Hradec Králové, the observation was conducted in Pardubice, another regional center of East Bohemia with the same characteristics, during the course *Herbs from Roots to Fruits*, which took place on September 22, 2023, from 14:00 to 19:00.

The research was preceded by a pilot study involving two female participants aged 23 and 31. Both women have experience working in health food and have

[8] By "more traditional," reference is made, for example, to visiting a doctor at a clinic or hospital.

[9] Further contact with Romana took place via the WhatsApp application. She consented to the use of the unfinished interview for the research. Communication continued in an attempt to complete the interview. Romana intended to finalize it but was under time constraints; it was not therefore completed.

an interest in healthy lifestyle topics and alternative spirituality. The semi-structured interview with the 23-year-old participant, Anna, was further included in the main study, as it appropriately addressed relevant topics and produced useful data. In contrast, the interview with the 31-year-old participant, Martina, raised different themes, such as the connection between veganism, metal subculture, and Satanism; therefore, it was not included in the main study.

Participant Observation

The research includes participant observation, which took place in Pardubice during the course *Herbs from Roots to Fruits*. Thirteen people attended the course, including three men, ten women, and the course organiser. Participants were observed in their natural setting while engaging in activities throughout the course (Hendl 2023: 191-193). Part of the course took place in the garden, where participants made incense for cleansing negative energies. Additionally, there was a demonstration of various plants suitable for consumption, healing, and other uses. Inside the building, participants prepared comfrey ointment, lavender and sage wine, herbal mouthwash, and herbal pesto. During the course, participants spontaneously began discussing topics addressed in the research questions. The subjects covered included negative and positive energies, masculine and feminine energies, individuality, alternative medicine, vaccination, dependence on the system, news, the determination of good and evil, COVID-19, and conspiracy theories.

A topic that attracted a lot of attention among the course participants was the relationship between conspiracy theories and the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants showed a great distrust of official sources of information. However, the course leader did not want to devote too much attention to this sensitive topic during the course at the expense of other subjects. Participant observation helped to better understand important categories in the participants' worldview, such as misapprehension by society, voluntary isolation, protection of positive energy, and a problematic categorization of good and evil. This information helped complete the picture obtained from semi-structured interviews.

Research Sample

The research sample consists of 10 participants, including 2 men and 8 women, aged between 23 and 64 years. Participants were selected based on their interest in an alternative lifestyle, including alternative medicine, alternative spirituality, healthy nutrition, alternative sources of information, and conspiracy theories. All

participants reside in Hradec Králové. Attempts to contact potential participants via email or phone were unsuccessful. The sensitive nature of the research topic was evident throughout the research process.[10] Some participants carefully considered their words and expressed concern about how they might be perceived or judged due to their opinions and lifestyle. Seven respondents have worked or currently work in the health food sector. One respondent practices therapy in the field of alternative medicine, and one respondent works in a store selling tools for alternative spirituality. Participants differ in the depth of their interest in specific topics and how this influences their way of life. For most, engagement with an alternative lifestyle was influenced by their family background. Some were more forthcoming and elaborated on topics, while others were relatively reserved in their responses. The difficulty in recruiting participants may have been influenced by the fact that later in the research, within the scale from alternative lifestyle to conspiracy theories, the issue of voluntarily distancing oneself from people with opposing views emerged, alongside uncertainty about how they would be received and a certain fear of being ridiculed.[11] From the interviews, it was evident that the respondents participate in communities where topics related to alternative lifestyles are regarded as relatively mainstream.[12]

Research Questions

The research questions are organised into five thematic areas: healthy eating, alternative medicine, information gathering and processing, spirituality, and transcultural dialogue. The final area is integrated across the preceding areas because the topic of transcultural dialogue builds on the first four, complementing the questions and contributing to a more natural flow of the interview. At the outset of the study, the questions underwent adjustments, with the pilot study significantly contributing to improving their formulation. In total, forty main questions were included. This number was necessary to obtain the required data, as it was important to structure the questions into multiple, interconnected, and overlapping areas.

---

10 Eliška, November 13, 2023, 4th question block – Spirituality: "This section will be difficult for me; I don't like talking about it, it makes me feel uncomfortable."

11 A clear difference was observed in the case of the respondent Romana, who perceived the interview as an opportunity to educate the researcher about the Truth and about what is really happening in Czech society and in the world.

12 Interview with Beáta, October 9, 2023:
Researcher: "What do you consider to be an alternative?"
Beáta: "Well, that's a strange question, because what is generally considered to be alternative is normal for me, so for me it's not an alternative."

The first area, healthy eating, includes questions regarding respondents' attitudes toward diets, their understanding of healthy or alternative nutrition, and the family context from which their eating habits originate. An important aspect is whether their dietary practices are linked to their spiritual experiences. The second area, alternative medicine, examines respondents' perceptions of alternative medical practices, their trust in conventional medical professionals, and the significance of healers or self-healing methods (such as tinctures, healing stones, chakra balancing, and other approaches) for their spiritual experience.

The third area, information gathering and processing, addresses respondents' trust in different sources of information, the influences affecting their selection of information, and which types of information they consider important. The fourth area focuses on spirituality, exploring how respondents perceive their own spiritual practices, which traditions they follow, their familial context regarding spirituality, their attitudes toward traditional religious institutions, and the role spirituality plays in their lives. The fifth area is partially integrated with the preceding areas, emphasizing the traditions from which respondents draw inspiration, their perceptions of people with different cultural backgrounds in the Czech Republic, their openness toward these groups, and the perceived positive and negative aspects of such interactions.

Research Ethics

The primary ethical concern throughout the study was the sensitivity of the research topics. The subjects under investigation are relatively delicate, requiring careful and respectful handling. The research questions addressed highly personal experiences related to respondents' spiritual practices and health. Ensuring the comfort and well-being of participants was therefore essential.

Respondents were fully informed about the research procedures, and all their questions were answered. To maintain anonymity, participants' names were changed, and certain identifying details were omitted to prevent traceability. Ensuring participants' emotional safety was a priority; interviews were conducted in locations chosen by the respondents. No pressure was applied to answer questions. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and were given space for necessary emotional expression and support if needed.

Scale from Alternative Lifestyle to Conspiracy Theories

This section presents specific research findings. It outlines categories generated using the grounded theory method. Each category represents themes that were strongly present, recurrent, and interwoven across participant interviews. These categories illustrate a spectrum ranging from alternative lifestyle practices to engagement with conspiracy theories.

Natural State vs. Chemicals – Toxic Era

This category addresses participants' relationships with nature and artificial substances. The research indicates a general distrust of chemical or synthetic products. Some participants focus on the environmental impact of these substances. For others, chemicals are perceived as interfering with connection to higher consciousness and maintaining a "high vibe" state, which is believed to bring harmony and enhance intuition.

Some participants grew up in family homes with gardens and livestock, where respect for nature and sustainable practices was instilled. Livestock were treated with care, and nothing was wasted. These participants developed a sensitivity to ecology and living in accordance with natural cycles.

Participants who did not grow up in such environments often developed an interest in ecological and healthy lifestyles later, during university or after leaving home. Certain participants were influenced by maternal dietary practices and experimented with phases of vegetarianism or veganism. Diets based on blood type and various forms of fasting (including lunar-cycle-based fasting) were also mentioned. For example, one participant, Romana, has multiple digestive issues, requiring a highly restricted diet free of gluten, lactose, and other specific foods.

The theme of chemicals and chemical exposure was highly prevalent in the interviews. Chemicals are perceived as a threat because they interfere with intuition, the ability to access higher vibrational states, and self-healing practices using herbs, natural remedies, or healthy food. Participants also identified antibiotics, pharmaceuticals, industrially processed foods, household chemicals, and environmental pollution as potentially harmful.[13] Some mentioned the connection of healthy eating with a certain spiritual experience and perception of energies.[14]

[13] Romana: "We are poisoning ourselves, we are poisoning nature, we just don't realise it."
[14] Martin: "When a person eats something lighter, the mind remains somehow more open, sharper, and able to perceive the subtler energies."

Various rituals are also associated with this. Respondents Diana and Beáta put crystals in their water (crystal, rose quartz, amethyst, the symbol of the flower of life on a carafe of water). Diana also communicates with water.[15] These rituals are intended to enrich the water with certain magical and healing properties, from which a person then benefits healthily and spiritually. These practices help respondents achieve their autonomy. With the help of various affirmations and natural materials, they are able to heal themselves and thus aim for a state of spiritual harmony, i.e., harmony with nature and the universe.

Ethics as the Law of the Universe

This category reveals the theme of energy, which is central for the respondents. They perceive energy as a kind of magnet that attracts negative or positive situations into their lives, depending on their thoughts, focus, and behaviour. Negative thoughts can lead to various illnesses, adverse situations, and a life trajectory that turns in a negative direction. Lenka states, "I believe in these energies," referring to her own prana, which enables her to connect with these energies. Beáta discovered the law of the universe, namely the law of attraction: "When I realised that everything—literally everything in life—is the law of attraction," everything began to make sense to her, "why this happens to that person, because it is simply the fundamental law of the universe as such, and it works."

Some respondents spoke about how fear can paralyse them. They prefer not to engage with negative topics. When confronted with a negative event, they try not to think about it. In this, they express a certain understanding of Jaroslav Dušek, one of the most popular public personalities in the Czech Republic, who might be situated on the border between alternative lifestyle and conspiracy theories. In his statements regarding cancer, Dušek claims that people may bring cancer upon themselves through their way of thinking.

---

15 Masaru Emoto (born 1943, founder of IHM Corporation; in 1992, he received a certificate of 'Doctor of Alternative Medicine' from the Open International University) conducted experiments with water molecules. He documented the shapes of frozen water crystals and claimed that their form reflected the emotional content directed toward the water. Emoto carried out many experiments in which he spoke to water, purified it, prayed over it, played music to it, or placed different symbols on its container. Depending on the treatment, he reported that the water formed either beautiful, symmetrical crystals or irregular, unattractive shapes. His first book on the subject, *The Message from Water* (2000), became a global bestseller.
Masaru Emoto is generally regarded as a pseudoscientist. The scientific community criticises his work for methodological flaws, and no empirical evidence supports the claim that water can respond to human emotions or verbal expressions (Novella 2017).

Respondents do not want to devote attention or energy to negative topics. They feel a certain threat to their positive energy and believe that focusing on such news could attract misfortune to themselves. Most respondents belong to groups oriented toward alternative lifestyles. Attention to negative topics is minimal, and some reject them entirely. A more radical stance was taken by Romana, who spoke about conspiracy theories concerning the world being controlled by the powerful, mentioning, for example, Bill Gates and his Rainforest Foundation, as well as the control of humans through microchips in COVID-19 vaccines.[16] This reality points to a perceived threat to the purity of a person's "natural" state. Some respondents reflect that people outside their social bubble may perceive them as eccentric or irrational.

Rejection of Certain Information and Divergent Opinions

This category reveals respondents' dismissive attitudes toward particular types of information and certain institutions. Politics is perceived as an inherently negative topic. Within the research questions focused on information-seeking, respondents strongly distanced themselves from politics. Zuzana stated: "I've completely cut politics out. Once you've realised how much fear tightens and even paralyses you, you really don't want to be in that kind of energy."

Respondents do not follow mainstream television news such as *ČT24*. Instead, they trust experts and practitioners with experience in their areas of interest, such as Margit Slimáková, Petr Klíma, and Jan Vojáček.[17] Romana draws on information from Anna Strunecká, "Dr. Strunecká is the kind of person who has education and evidence-based knowledge." Respondents feel overwhelmed by news coverage and avoid negative topics. Their primary sources of information are online platforms and social media.

Martin and Alice also follow global events and prefer media such as *Czech Radio*, *Deník N*, *Seznam Zprávy*, and *BBC*. Some respondents emphasised the importance of fact-checking, while Romana considers even unverified information meaningful. Others seek out mainly positive news related to their personal interests. Popular sources include public discussions with Jaroslav Dušek.

When asked about conspiracy theories, Beáta remarked: "As Dušek says, what's the difference between the truth and a conspiracy theory? Six months. These

[16] Romana "When some people are kind and become ill, they are not entirely kind, because they must have harbored negative thoughts in order to fall sick."

[17] Margit Slimáková, Petr Klíma, Jan Vojáček, and Anna Strunecká are Czech authors and healthy lifestyle experts.

days, it's even faster. I think what they want us to believe are conspiracy theories is, in fact, the truth." For Eliška, conspiracy theories are mostly curiosities—she is interested in topics such as 9/11, J.F.K., and UFOs. Kristián perceives them as somewhat extreme but adds, "there's a grain of truth in every rumour."

Importance of Mental Health

This category is linked to the theme of positive and negative energy. Respondents express concern about becoming trapped in negative thinking, which they believe can lead to illness and attract various unpleasant situations. Romana explains, "When a person's psyche starts to fail, first the soul becomes ill, and then it affects the body. And when some people are kind and fall ill, it means they weren't entirely kind, because they must have had bad thoughts to get sick. As a friend says, where you place your attention, that is what grows." Zuzana adds, "It reflects on the body. One realizes that fear really constricts and even paralyzes." Respondents enjoy trying or practicing various exercises to calm and clear the mind. Positive thinking thus serves as a guiding principle in their lives. These findings show that followers of alternative lifestyles are not just passive consumers of conspiracy narratives, but try to actively shape their lives, albeit outside the majority and institutional social framework. They thus point in the same direction as current research in this field (Fox et al. 2025).

Distrust in Institutional Systems

This category focuses on respondents' distrust of institutional systems, which they perceive as inhumane tools for control and manipulation. Higher-ranking officials within these institutions are seen as using such manipulation to gain power and profit. In interviews, respondents express distrust toward the political sphere, public media, and healthcare systems. Diana states, "I don't trust anyone in politics. I don't follow it at all; I have no connection to it."

Respondents consciously avoid news that provokes negative emotions, seeing such information as carriers of negative energy. They emphasise the importance of verifying sources and cross-checking information. Some feel overwhelmed and describe personal strategies for managing information. Martin notes, "Nowadays information can be misleading or accurate, so on the edge of alternative knowledge, one must carefully consider whether to fully absorb the information."

Respondents indicated trust in certain experts, including Margit Slimáková, Vojáček, and Petr Klíma. Romana cites Anna Strunecká and refers to her book

Doba jedová, saying, "Dr. Strunecká is a person with education and well-supported information."[18] Respondents primarily seek information of a positive nature, focusing on areas aligned with their interests. A particularly popular figure among them is Jaroslav Dušek. Zuzana explains, "Dušek is, for me, a free spirit. He is unafraid, works on himself, and educates himself. There's also humour in his work. During his interviews, you genuinely laugh. Above all, he is authentic."

Healthcare systems are considered untrustworthy by respondents. Most report negative experiences with doctors, describing them as lax, uninterested, treating only symptoms, and quick to prescribe antibiotics. They emphasise the importance of a doctor having a humane approach, considering both the physical and psychological aspects of the patient. Respondents note that herbs and the tinctures made from them do not produce side effects like antibiotics and are less taxing on the liver and the body overall.

Specifically, they favour traditional Chinese medicine, herbal remedies and tinctures, acupuncture, homoeopathy, chakra healing, Ayurveda, and phytotherapy. Among respondents, methods such as AVS, Supertronic – EAV technique, and Bicom measurement are also relatively popular.[19]

Respondents also express distrust toward religious institutions, which they see as manipulative and restrictive. They describe church structures as tools for controlling people. What they value instead is personal spiritual experience, while they hold negative attitudes toward organised religious practices. None identify with a specific religious tradition. What matters to them is the inner

[18] However, as this article suggests, the reality of her scientific research might point otherwise: Sisyfos 2017.

[19] AVS (psycho-walkman) – an audio-visual stimulation device. It uses light and sound to influence brainwave frequencies, allegedly helping to alleviate a wide range of psychological and physical issues such as sleep disorders, depression and anxiety, stress, fatigue, and to maintain mental fitness.
EAV (Electroacupuncture according to Dr. Voll) – a diagnostic method used to measure the energetic state of acupuncture meridians linked to internal organs and related tissues. Based on the readings, the practitioner claims to identify whether organs or tissues are irritated, inflamed, or in a degenerative state.
Bicom – a bioresonance method. The bioresonance device is said to restore communication between cells by releasing and eliminating burdening substances (bacteria, viruses, electromagnetic smog, chemicals, allergens, dental materials, etc.).
The websites describing these methods list various issues (stress, depression, fatigue, health problems, anxiety, negative thinking) that they claim to alleviate or cure. Emphasis is placed on connection with nature, mental well-being, a holistic view of the human being, and references to negative environmental influences (chemical additives in food and water, environmental toxins, radiation exposure, and chemical substances).

experience achieved individually—through meditation, clean eating, care for body and mind, or visiting places in nature. Most believe in some higher power, described variously as the universe, energy, prana, or something ineffable and beyond comprehension. Klaudie says she believes in herself and her ability to handle whatever life brings.

Overall, distrust of the institutional system is strongly linked with the need for greater personal autonomy. Respondents are mindful about what they consume, care for their bodies through healthy eating and movement, and tend to their psychological balance. This ties to their spirituality: they believe that through proper care of body and mind, they can connect to a higher vibrational energy in harmony with the universe.

Attitude toward difference

This category shows respondents' approach to difference—both cultural and ideological. They see encounters with foreigners as interesting and enriching. Lenka notes: "For me, a person is valuable as such, whether foreign or not, but certainly an inspiration in some perspective that hadn't occurred to me before—perhaps precisely because of the different conditions in which they grew up." Eastern traditions influence many of them, particularly in diet, alternative medicine, and spiritual practice.

Beyond concerns about social criticism of their lifestyle, some respondents express fears related to Islam. They mention worries about violence, fanaticism, and attitudes toward women. A few also view Roma people as problematic, citing personal experiences and perceived abuse of welfare. About half emphasise the need for foreigners to adapt to Czech society and culture. Klaudie states: "If a foreigner doesn't harm anyone and wants to integrate into the system, then yes. But if they come just to steal or live off social benefits, that bothers me. I think there are more deserving groups." Again, these findings are confirmed by other research that shows a link between exposure to conspiratorial narratives and distrust of members of groups of foreigners (Jolley et al. 2019).

Conclusion

"To understand the otherness of another as a potential source of enrichment requires relinquishing the a priori claim to the universal validity of one's own worldview (Halík 2014: 20)."

Conspirituality reveals a human need to cope with the challenges of the contemporary information age, which brings with it many forms of distress. Distrust

is one of the defining themes of this epoch. "The society of distrust"[20] aptly characterises the current state of our world. Among the respondents, there is a notable distrust toward traditional institutional structures, which are perceived as manipulative and driven by the pursuit of profit and power—values that respondents explicitly reject. For most participants, it is essential not to focus excessively on negative topics, as these are believed to influence one's life through "low-vibe" energy vibrations. In making sense of the complexity of the world, respondents commonly believe that nothing happens by chance; everything is determined by fate, which is seen as preordained.

Respondents follow a path of autonomy, with most turning to "more traditional" institutions only in situations of necessity. Their pursuit of autonomy involves self-healing, energy-based therapies, healthy nutrition, and a lifestyle free from synthetic substances. These practices are understood as means of refining intuition and connecting more deeply with "high-vibe" states—believed to attract positive experiences into one's life.

These findings align with the conceptual presuppositions of the theory of conspirituality. Among our respondents, this suggests a connection between conscious search for a healthy lifestyle with the element of distrust towards the official institutional framework of society and strong elements of individualistic non-institutional spirituality. Traces of conspiracy narratives that might be found in the interviews with respondents do not necessarily mean a total collapse of the rational worldview or do not necessarily lead to efforts to disrupt of even destroy the existing social and political system. Rather, it represents striving to create a meaningful life framework that would allow respondents to disconnect from the majority narrative and fulfil not only their physiological and psychological, but also their spiritual needs. We could observe the pattern suggested in the theoretical literature on conspirituality, namely the connection of traces of conspiracy thinking with New Age spirituality, which leads to bringing to the participants a sense of empowerment and meaningfulness of their existence (Ward and Voas 2011).

This research thus offers a modest contribution to understanding the phenomenon of conspirituality. It calls for alternative spirituality to be viewed without disdain and to be included in dialogue with other religious traditions. If it is not recognised as a legitimate and equal dialogue partner, the gap of mistrust, contempt, and misunderstanding will continue to widen.

---

[20] This expression is taken from a major sociological survey undertaken by the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, https://www.soc.cas.cz/cz/aktuality/z-medii/aktualita-spolecnost-neduvery-unikatni-projekt-rozkryva-mapu-konspiraci-v-cesku.

References

Barkun, Michael. 2003. *A culture of conspiracy: apocalyptic visions in contemporary America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cassam, Quassim. 2020. *Konspirační teorie*. Praha: Filosofia.

Charmaz, Kathy. 2014. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. London: Sage.

Emoto, Masaru. 2000. *The Message from Water*. Tokyo: Hado.

Ernst, Edzard. 2008. *Healing, Hype or Harm? A critical Analysis of Complementary or Alternative Medicine*. Societas Imprint Academics.

Fox, Nick, Matt Williams, Stephen Hill. Do Stress, Depression, and Anxiety Lead to Beliefs in Conspiracy Theories. *Clinical Psychological Science* 14 (3), https://doi.org/10.1177/21677026251370092.

Glaser, Barney, Anselm Strauss. 2006. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New Jersey: Aldine Transaction.

Halík, Tomáš. 2006. *Prolínání světů: ze života světových náboženství*. Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny.

Halík, Tomáš. 2014. *Žít v dialogu: podměty k promýšlení víry*. Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny.

Hendl, Jan. 2023. *Kvalitativní výzkum: základní teorie, metody a aplikace*. Praha: Portál, 2023.

Heřmanová, Marie. 2022. "We are in control": Instagram Influencers and the Proliferation of Conspiracy Narratives in Digital Spaces. *Slovenský národopis* 70 (2): 349–368, https://doi.org/10.31577/SN.2022.3.29.

Chlup, Radek. 2024. Conspiracy Narratives as a Type of Social Myth. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 37: 219–241, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-023-09454-1.

Jolley, Daniel, Rose Meleady, Karen Douglas. 2019. Exposure to Intergroup Conspiracy Theories Promotes Prejudice which Spreads Across Groups. *British Journal of Psychology*. 111 (1): 17–35, doi: 10.1111/bjop.12385.

Kostićová, Zuzana Marie. 2023. New Age, „Ezo", alternativní spiritualita. *Dingir* 26 (2): 7–10.

Kostićová, Zuzana Marie. 2025. Posvátné energie. *Dingir* 28 (1): 10–13.

Lednický, Matyáš, Tereza Malá, Abraham Maurer, Jan A. Kozák. 2021. "Do I Believe?": Three Aspects of "Belief" in Conspiracy Theories. *Central European Journal for Contemporary Religion* 5 (1): 99–116.

Novella, Steven. 2017. "The Pseudoscience of Masaru Emoto." *Neurologica blog*, November 28. https://theness.com/neurologicablog/the-pseudoscience-of-masaru-emoto/.

Prokop, Daniel. 2020. *Slepé skvrny: o chudobě, vzdělávání, populismu a dalších výzvách české společnosti*. Brno: Host.

Roszak, Theodore. 2015. *Zrod kontrakultury: úvahy o technokratické společnosti mládeži v opozici*. Praha: Malvern.

Shermer, Michael. 2022. *Conspiracy: Why the Rational Believe the Irrational*. Baltimore: Hopkins University Press.

Sisyfos. 2017. "Výroční diamantový bludný balvan v kategorii jednotlivců za rok 2017 – Prof. RNDr. Anna Strunecká, DrSc. Za mimořádný celoživotní přínos pseudovědě." *Sisyfos,* český *klub skeptiků*, March 3. https://www.sisyfos.cz/clanek/784-vyrocni-diamantovy-bludny-balvan-v-kategorii-jednotlivcu-za-rok-2017-prof-rndr-anna-strunecka-drsc-za-mimoradny-celozivotni-prinos-pseudovede.

STEM. 2021. "Studie: Covid-19 a šiřitelé konspiračních teorií." January 15. https://www.stem.cz/studie-covid-19-a-siritele-konspiracnich-teorii/.

Vojtíšek, Zdeněk. 2016. Konspirátoři a konspiracisté. *Dingir* 19 (2): 49–51.

Ward, Charlotte, David Voas. 2011. The Emergence of Conspirituality. Journal of Contemporary Religion, 26 (1): 103–121, https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2011.539846.

Petr Macek
University of Hradec Králové
petr.macek@uhk.cz

Veronika Hujacová
University of Hradec Králové
veronikahujacova@seznam.cz