RELIGIOSITY AND SOCIAL IMAGE OF SILESIANS

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Abstract

Silesia is a typical 'borderland region', where the awareness of social distinctness is clear, and the regional cultural frame is the result of many years of interpenetration of numerous cultures and traditions. Presently, this may reinforce the clear feeling that Silesians are treated as an alien group, with distinct categories of a specific otherness applied. The paper presents a study in which the differentiator of the social image of Silesians is sought in the religiosity of the citizens. Two essential directions can be found in the literature of the potential influence of religion on the social attitudes of individuals. The first one is based on the possibility of fostering pro-civic and community-centred processes. The second one, opposite to the first one, suggests that religion makes citizens closed and less tolerant towards other groups and identities, not directly related to the religious group. The conducted research results support the first direction of exploration, showing that Silesians in other parts of Poland are perceived rather in terms of a positive stereotype and religiousness supports positive attitudes.

Keywords: religiosity, Silesians, social image, stereotypes

1. Introduction

Silesia is a particular place, and the distinct culture and identity of its inhabitants are determined by its complex history. Compared to other parts of the current Polish territory, it is characterised by the longest period of lack of political connection, which generated a weakening of cultural ties with Poland. For several hundred years from the 14th century, the inhabitants of Silesia remained outside the Polish cultural and spiritual community [1]. Their functioning within the Czech, then the Austrian, and later the Prussian state exposed them to the impact of different cultures and political systems. One of the most important effects of these influences was that no Polish elite was formed in Silesia, as inclusion into the German-speaking cultural milieu became the fundamental condition for social advancement [2]. Historically speaking, therefore, Silesians were most often a group subordinated to other national cultures. Thus, Silesia is a typical 'borderland region', where the awareness of

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social distinctness is clear and the regional cultural frame is the result of many years of interpenetration of numerous cultures and traditions [3]. Presently, this may reinforce the clear feeling that Silesians are treated as an alien group, with distinct categories of a specific otherness applied [4]. Although after 1922, a part of Upper Silesia returned to Polish jurisdiction until World War Two, the Silesian Voivodeship enjoyed broad political and economic autonomy with respect to the political centre. The cultural patterns in Silesia became to some extent more uniform in the period of the Polish People's Republic, in which the government's policy focused on eliminating any identity differences. Since the early 1990s, processes have been observed of strengthening of the Silesian identity by placing the interests of Silesians within the frameworks of programmes and goals of action of emerging social and political organisations. Their activity initiated a public discussion on the identity of the inhabitants of Silesia and their national identification. In the 21st century, Silesian nationality became an important topic in the public space in Poland.

This paper presents a study in which the differentiator of the social image of Silesians is sought in the religiosity of the citizens. Religiosity in Poland has a particular nature related to the history of Church and state ties spanning more than 1,000 years, but also to contemporary events [5], such as: (1) the almost fifty-year period of communism in the twentieth-century history of Poland, with the USSR imposing a totalitarian political system, eliminating religion from the public space; (2) the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as pope; (3) the system transformation, in whose processes the Catholic Church played a special role, supporting democratic opposition circles and actively mediating in the process of determining the consecutive stages and the development of democratisation processes. These and other historical events, within the framework of which the influences of the Catholic Church and of the central political government interpenetrated in an integral manner, resulted in the formation of a quite specific national-religious identity among the citizens of Poland.

There are two important reasons justifying the study of the significance of religiosity on the reception of Silesians in Poland. Firstly, the particular role played by religion in the Polish society, which is declaratively homogeneous, but internally displays many inconsistencies related to the fundamental canons of faith [6]. The specific nature of religiousness in Poland is additionally enhanced by its ludic character and by the absence - in comparison to many European countries - of particularly intense secularisation processes [7, 8]. The ludic nature of religion means that it is dominated by extra-liturgical manifestations. Ludic religiosity, despite its often emphasised immaturity, provides individuals with a sense of meaning and shapes their identity. In Poland, its fundamental features are its mass nature (intensity of religious practices) and festive character (manifestation of holidays and customs). One expression of folk religiosity is its very close connection to local customs and traditions of the region. It is embedded within a particular community, and it is not individual in its nature.

As shown by the research carried out by the Public Opinion Research Centre, the percentage of people declaring themselves as believers has continued to exceed 90% since the beginning of the 1990s, although it has been slowly but systematically decreasing over the last dozen or so years [9]. Secondly, two essential directions can be found in the literature of the potential influence of religion on the social attitudes of individuals. The first one is based on the possibility of fostering pro-civic and community-centred processes. The second one, opposite to the first one, suggests that religion makes citizens closed and less tolerant towards other groups and identities, not directly related to the religious group. In this approach, religion is in a way a tool appropriating the activity and positive attitudes of citizens, activating them only at the level of the religious group. Research has also shown that religiosity can simultaneously generate opposing attitudes, triggered in different directions. It is therefore interesting to see whether any attitudes are triggered towards Silesians and if so, what their direction is, depending on the degree of religiosity, which is what the paper reflects on.

2. The Silesian identity

The interpenetration of influences of other nationalities and cultures, mostly Czech, German and Polish, generated a specific Silesian identity of some of the region's inhabitants [10]. Some researchers studying the Silesian identity point out that it represents a mixture of different cultures and that its core has become significantly impoverished through the various historical influences. In spite of that, there is a general consent among researchers about the three main pillars of Silesian identity: family, religion and work. The origin of the cult of work and professional commitment can be sought in the process of industrialisation and in the historical determinants related to the fact that Silesia belonged to Germany [11]. This process took place within the German cultural milieu and the German work ethic. It resulted primarily from the presence of hard coal deposits in Silesia and the growing demand for its mining. The specific nature of work in the mining industry was associated with a system of values shaped in professionally homogeneous local communities, which was a factor integrating the population and organising life around work. Family ties remain in a stable relationship with the occupational structure shaped in this manner. One could say that this proximity was in a way necessary, given the difficult working conditions in the mining and metallurgical professions and the living conditions in workers' housing estates. A characteristic feature of Silesian families was the clear separation of female and male roles. The role of men was to work outside the home in industry, mainly in mining or metallurgy. For women, family, marriage and raising children constituted the primary values [12]. An important value for Silesians is also the Catholic religion. The origins of its strength can be traced back to the role which the Catholic Church played during industrialisation. Religion used to integrate, strengthen and promote culture. Importantly, the role of the three values indicated above, work, family and

religion, continues to be significant, although the impacts of globalisation processes, cultural trends coming from the West and unification within the Polish society have negatively influenced the preservation of traditional values, including Silesian ones [11, 13]. One can talk about periods of erosion or evolution of the main values Silesians share, but they still continue to form the core of their identity.

What triggers the strongest controversies, however, is the question of the national identification of Silesians and their identification priorities. This was noticed for the first time clearly in the National Census conducted in 2002 in Poland. At that time, almost 173 thousand people declared Silesian nationality, including 148.5 thousand inhabitants of the Silesian Voivodeship and 24.2 thousand people in the Opole Voivodeship. The subsequent census showed an intensification of the phenomenon. At that time, 362 thousand people declared Silesian nationality as their only nationality, and at the same time 415 thousand people declared both Silesian and Polish nationality, which accounts for 21.2% of the population of the Silesian Voivodeship. These numbers show the scale of the activated processes of strengthening of the Silesian identity and of deepening of Silesians' awareness of their own distinctness [14]. These processes were simultaneously clearly reinforced by the emergence of many social actors and political parties in Silesia over the last two decades and the intensification of the debate on Silesian nationality in the Polish media.

As a consequence of the aforementioned processes, an unsuccessful attempt to legalise Silesian nationality was made in December 2013 by the Association of People of Silesian Nationality. The Association was registered in 2011, but after a cassation appeal filed by the public prosecutor's office, the Supreme Court referred the case for rehearing, as a result of which deregistration of the Association was ordered on the grounds that its registration would have suggested the existence of a Silesian nation, which was factually inaccurate. The decision sparked debates in the region, often emotional in their nature. It also revealed a lack of interest in this problem on the part of the state [15]. Interestingly, according to the findings of the majority of Polish researchers, no Silesian nation exists [16-18]. Nevertheless, Silesians are an ethnic group, with an awareness of their own cultural, historical and linguistic distinctiveness [19].

The above mentioned processes generated a number of discussions among the general public across Poland, addressing the legitimacy of the Silesians' struggle for separate rights and regional autonomy. Many of these discussions constituted themes in electoral campaigns at the regional level, or even contributed to the establishment of groupings of this nature (e.g., Silesian Autonomy Movement, Silesian Regional Party). On the other hand, Poland-wide political parties included the issue of Silesian identity in their programmes, often doing so in an instrumental way. One statement that gained much publicity was that of the leader of the Law and Justice party, who called the autonomous political movements a 'hidden German option'.

3. The role of religion in the shaping of social attitudes

The role of religion in shaping social attitudes and behaviours has continued to an important topic in research for many years now. Nevertheless, researchers do not agree on the direction of religion's impact on social attitudes and behaviours [20]. It turns out in fact that with regard to the American society, faith-based communities are valuable resources building social capital and positive social relationships [21]. However, the example of Europe shows that social capital is strongest in the Scandinavian countries, which are Protestant like the United States, but have nevertheless become very strongly secularised over the recent decades. In turn, in countries such as Poland or Italy, where the percentage of citizens declaring themselves as believers is high, the degree of civic involvement is relatively low [22]. Putnam points to three main factors that make up social capital: trust, norms and connections [23]. With regard to Poland, frequent participation in religious practices is associated with greater trust in social relations (although even in this group it is very low - only slightly over a third of Poles declare it), higher readiness to help others and the belief in the sense of cooperating with others, having in one's social circle people who do unpaid voluntary work, as well as participating in civic organisations [24].

Religiousness, including in particular active participation in the religious community expressed through participation in religious rituals, is strongly associated with prosocial behaviours such as volunteering [25, 26] or donating to charity [27]. Research indicates that individuals who declare religion to be an important value for them are more inclined towards altruistic behaviour than 'non-religious' individuals [28]. However, depending on the degree of religiosity, as well as on the normative openness of the religion followed, prosocial behaviours can take different forms. While religious exclusiveness promotes volunteering only in religious areas, religious inclusiveness promotes both religious and secular volunteering. In addition, followers of religions that are open to other faiths also display, more often, prosocial behaviours toward alien groups [29].

The research findings in the context of the relationships between religion and social prejudices are also ambiguous. Some studies indicate a positive relationship between participation in religious practices and prejudice against certain groups [30, 31]. There are also studies showing that religiosity may weaken prejudice. To fully understand the relationship between religion and prejudice, it is necessary to take into account the specificity of the alien group against which prejudice is directed, as well as the multifaceted nature of religiosity [32]. As far as the target of the prejudice is concerned, some prejudices may be condemned in religious communities, while others may be seen as promoted by religious communities [33]. It is also worth emphasising that many analyses demonstrate a curvilinear relationship between religiosity and prejudice. Individuals characterised by the highest degree of piety (very frequent attendance of religious services, frequently receiving communion) scored lower on the ethnocentrism scale than those practising less often [34].

Although, as it has already been indicated, religiosity can generate prosocial attitudes, in many cases this may only apply to members of one's own group. This is due to the well-established mechanism of prejudice being formed against alien groups. Also in relation to religion, intergroup social comparisons are made, on the basis of which people strive for positive social identification [35]. Thus, one will favour members of their own group and direct altruistic behaviour at them, at the same time behaving aggressively towards others, especially those that really or symbolically threaten religious and moral values [36].

4. Research model

The above directions of impact of religiosity on social attitudes inspired a reflection on the relationships between religiousness and the social image of Silesians in other regions of Poland. Many social and psychological theoretical approaches show mechanisms that can significantly influence an increasingly positive perception of one's own religious group, while reinforcing a negative attitude towards other groups at the same time. An example is the social identity theory [37], according to which the motive of self-valorisation is realised through identification with a group with a perceived high status. This group is then judged positively, while other groups are deprecated. Another example is the terror management theory [38], according to which strongly felt group identity may be the result of the group members' awareness of their mortality, and the process of coping with negative emotions experienced will result in greater attachment to one's own group and a negative attitude towards other groups. In this context, religiosity may be a factor that strongly defines one's own group and generates negative attitudes towards other groups defined not only through the prism of religiosity. However, as indicated above, religiosity itself can be a universal factor building positive social relations, concerning not only one's own community. In this context, behaviours will be shaped by norms of concern for others, helpfulness, kindness, conformism, humility, and respect [39].

Silesians are a particular social group in Poland, stirring diverse emotions. The identity-related expectations it formulates, based on historical and cultural determinants, quite often meet with critical judgments in other areas of Poland. The aim of this study is to diagnose the role of religiosity in the shaping of attitudes towards Silesians. The directions of potential impact of religiosity on social attitudes outlined above give rise to the formulation of two opposing hypotheses. The first line of analyses provides grounds to assume that a higher degree of religiosity will be associated with a positive perception of Silesians. According to the second one, religiosity will be such a strong bonding aspect that any group defined through the prism of different values and norms will be seen as 'alien' and generate more negative attitudes.

5. Methods

The research was conducted between 23 November and 5 December 2020 using the CAWI method on a nationwide sample of adult Poles, through the company BioStat. The study involved 879 respondents from outside the Silesian Voivodeship, including 462 women and 418 men. The research covered each of the 15 voivodeships of Poland, proportionally to their population. The largest group of respondents came from large cities with a population of over 100 thousand (39.5%), a quarter of the respondents were inhabitants of medium-sized cities with a population of 30 to 100 thousand (25.5%), while small towns had the smallest representation in the sample (15.8%). Nearly a quarter of all study participants came from rural areas (19.2%). Among the participants of the study, the largest number were aged 35-44 (37.2%), there were slightly fewer respondents from the oldest group, aged over 65 (22.2%), while there was a similar representation of the 45-54 age bracket (15.3%) and of the 55-64 one (16.4%), with the smallest percentage representing the youngest respondents, aged under 24 (9.0%).

The final respondent group consisted of people living outside the current Silesian Voivodeship. We are aware at the same time that historically speaking, Silesian lands also include areas currently included in different voivodeships (mainly the Opole Voivodeship and the Lower Silesian Voivodeship). However, we recognise the fact that nowhere else did the identity-forming processes studied occur on a scale similar to that of the Silesian Voivodeship, which has been pointed out in many contemporary studies and analyses [11, 40].

The research was conducted using a survey questionnaire. The tool was composed of three parts. The first one was the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS) [41, 42] in the Polish adaptation by Beata Zarzycka [43]. This version consists of 15 statements on which respondents are asked to take a position using a 5-point scale (1 = 'never', 5 = 'very often'), and assesses five core dimensions of religiosity: Intellect (i.e. 'How often do you keep yourself informed about religious questions through radio, television, newspapers, or books?'), Ideology (i.e. 'To what extent do you believe in an afterlife?'), Public Practice (i.e. 'How important is it for you to be connected to a religious community?'), Private Practice (i.e. 'How often do you pray?') and Experience (i.e. 'How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God is present?'). The CRS is a widely used measure of religiosity. In the current study, internal consistency of the scale was high (Cronbach's alphas: overall 0.96, intellect 0.90, ideology 0.91, private practice 0.96, public practice 0.92, experience 0.95).

The second part consisted of a battery of adjectives. The respective traits were selected on the basis of a pilot study (N = 128) among Political science and Sociology students. The students were asked to write down a list of traits they associated with Silesians - ones they would identify themselves or ones they had heard from others. In the verification process, insulting traits were discarded, while recurring ones were accumulated. Finally, 30 traits were included in the research tool. In the actual survey, the respondents were asked to indicate using

a five-point scale the extent to which the individual traits were characteristic of Silesians (where 1 meaning 'definitely uncharacteristic', and 5 - 'very characteristic').

The last part of the questionnaire concerned demographics and included data such as gender, level of education, age, permanent place of residence (voivodeship of Poland, rural/urban area) as well as subjectively perceived financial situation.

6. Results

In the first stage of the study, exploratory factor analysis was conducted on a group of traits to establish their structure (Table 1).

Table 1. Results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis on a battery of features defining Silesians.

Traits	1st factor	2nd factor	3rd factor
Unyielding	**0.734**	-0.040	0.065
Brave	**0.708**	-0.003	0.024
Family-loving	**0.660**	0.094	-0.042
Hard-working	**0.647**	0.200	-0.133
Resolute	**0.635**	0.125	0.047
Proud	**0.576**	-0.027	0.110
Consistent	**0.574**	0.269	0.014
Responsible	**0.566**	0.397	-0.111
Ambitious	**0.507**	0.388	0.000
Conciliatory	-0.056	**0.740**	-0.073
Compliant	-0.227	**0.684**	-0.033
Tolerant	0.135	**0.617**	-0.179
Selfless	0.213	**0.564**	-0.124
Versatile	0.296	**0.545**	0.071
Creative	0.313	**0.517**	0.019
Truthful	0.385	**0.514**	-0.081
Helpful	0.308	**0.500**	-0.174
Quarrelsome	-0.001	-0.075	**0.650**
Quarrelsome	0.006	-0.272	**0.641**
Narrow-minded	-0.163	-0.003	**0.632**
Claiming	0.045	-0.119	**0.600**
Aggressive	-0.105	-0.251	**0.595**
Fanatical	0.052	0.137	**0.513**

Factor loadings in bold indicate in which factor the item was included.

The principal component analysis was used to determine the number of factors. The screen test showed that the three-factor solution fits the data best. Finally, principal axis analysis with Varimax rotation was performed with three factors to extract. The model explained about 42% of the variance in the traits. The items with factor loadings above 0.5 were used to create indices. The first factor consisted of nine traits (unyielding, brave, family-loving, hard-working,

resolute, proud, consistent, responsible, ambitious; α = 0.86). The second factor, contained eight traits (conciliatory, compliant, tolerant, selfless, versatile, creative, truthful, helpful, kind; α = 0.82). The third factor had six traits (arrogant, quarrelsome, narrow-minded, claiming, aggressive, fanatical; α = 0.77). Thus, the first factor concentrates in itself most of the positive traits. The second factor brings together features that generally tend to put Silesians in an amicable position. The third factor consists of negative traits. An internal analysis of the contents of the factors obtained made it possible to name them. Thus, the first factor was identified as *orderly diligence*, the second one as *submissive integrity*, and the third one as *claiming stubbornness*.

The Silesians were rated by participants relatively higher on *orderly diligence* (M = 3.89, Mo = 4). It means that the participants 'rather agree' that the Silesians as a group revealed such traits as being unyielding, brave, family-loving, or hard-working. For the traits forming factors *submissive integrity* (M = 3.12, Mo = 3.0) and *claiming stubbornness (*M = 3.06, Mo = 3.0), the sample means and modes indicate that participants preferred the answer 'difficult to say'. Thus, these two groups of traits seem rather neutral in relation to Silesians' stereotypical portrait in our sample.

There were significant differences between women and men in evaluations of Silesians on *orderly diligence* (F = 9.57, p = 0.002) and *submissive integrity* (F = 9.61, p = 0.002) dimensions: women's ratings were higher (i.e. more favourable) than men's ratings. There were also differences in evaluations between the groups which differed with respect to the level of education - the persons with higher education rated *orderly diligence* (H = 12.9, p = 0.012) traits higher than those with vocational education, age - the older participants rated *orderly diligence* (H = 23.8, p < 0.001) traits higher than the younger ones, the area of living - inhabitants from large cities rated *submissive integrity* traits (H = 8.71, p = 0.033) lower and *claiming stubbornness* traits (F = 13.64, p = 0.003) higher than people from the countryside, and economic situation - persons with poorer economic situation rated *orderly diligence* (H = 10.84, p = 0.028) traits lower than those with average and good economic situation.

At the subsequent stage of the analysis, we sought associations between religiousness and judgments concerning traits of Silesians, separately for each of the three factors. In relation to the fact that the dimensions of religiosity displayed significant intercorrelations, we decided to use simple regression analysis (Table 2). The dimensions of religiosity were predictor variables and the scores on three factors were outcome variables.

The study results demonstrated clearly the significant relationships between religiosity and two factors through which Silesians are perceived, namely *orderly diligence* and *submissive integrity.* It should be emphasised that these two factors contain traits that are commonly viewed as virtues (e.g. brave or selfless). In turn, *claiming stubbornness* contains traits which can be judged more negative, i.e. as vices (e.g., quarrelsome or aggressive). This means that religiosity rather supports the positive stereotype of Silesians.

Table 2. Results of simple regression analysis using a single variable model: relationships between the dimensions of religiosity and evaluations of Silesians on three groups of traits.

Predictors	Orderly diligence (F1)	Submissive integrity (F2)	Claiming stubbornness (F3)
Intellect	0.146***	0.215***	0.019
Ideology	0.191***	0.163***	0.009
Pray	0.147***	0.248***	-0.005
Experience	0.093**	0.306***	0.016
Public Practice	0.117**	0.331***	-0.042
Overall religiosity	0.158***	0.286***	-0.002

Significance codes: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$

7. Discussion

Religiosity has long been recognised as an important factor in the shaping of social attitudes and behaviours. Research over the years has shown that different dimensions of religiosity can be significant for the direction and intensity of individuals' attitudes and behaviours. Consequently, we based our study on the Centrality of Religiosity Scale, reducing religiosity to five areas: Intellect, Public Practice, Private Practice, Ideology, and Experience. The aim of our research was to explore whether these dimensions were significantly related to the social perception of Silesians. Although our attitudes, including social ones, are determined by numerous factors (e.g. socialisation, prejudice, personal experience of the individual), the research we conducted proved religiosity to be significantly related to the factors through the prism of which Silesians are perceived in other parts of Poland.

The results support the hypothesis that religiosity is linked to positive attitudes towards Silesians. The study demonstrated positive associations between each of the religiosity dimensions distinguished and two of the factors obtained that can be described as positive, namely *orderly diligence* and *submissive integrity*. At the same time, religiosity turned out to be an insignificant predictor for *claiming stubbornness,* expressing negative traits. The communal and individual experience of prayer and faith, the bond with the community and the sheer importance of participating in religious services for individuals may result not only in them having a more positive attitude in their interactions with others, but also, as our study demonstrates, in expressing more benign opinions concerning an alien group. Therefore, universal mechanisms shaping positive attitudes towards other individuals can be sought in religiosity as such. However, the specific nature of the analysed group, i.e. Silesians, also suggests particular lines of interpretation of the result obtained. For example, the perception of Silesians as 'kindred spirits' in relation to the similarity in terms of experiencing faith. As it has already been pointed out, religion is one of the pillars of the Silesian identity. It is associated not only with religious practices, but also with the widespread veneration of saints in Silesia and the communal nature of experiencing religious rituals (e.g. the pilgrimage movement, the

worship of Saint Barbara). A positive attitude towards Silesians can also be explained on the basis of research into the relation between the degree of religiosity and reported prejudices - individuals who practice more often are less prejudiced towards others.

Through the lens of *submissive integrity*, Silesians are described as conformist and compliant. Emphasising the communal nature of this factor, one can see the diagnosed relationship in it. Religious communality in a way requires submissiveness and subordination within the hierarchical structure of the Church. In fact, any community, including the Church, needs an efficient organisational structure in which superiors and obedience to them play an important role. It can be assumed that in the cognitive field of religious people it was precisely this area of religiosity that was perceived more strongly in Silesians. In the Experience dimension, this submissiveness may refer not so much to the structure of the Church, but to subordination to God whose perceptible presence in the individual's life is diagnosed by this factor. The guiding principle of the Church is obedience to Christ and to the word of God, which are the highest authority. In the Catholic Church, obedience also has a symbolic aspect. Humanity's quandaries started with the temptation to disobey, and the first sin that humans committed involved disobedience to God in Paradise.

It is interesting to see how the judgments differ in the groups distinguished on the basis of sociodemographic variables. The positive evaluations of Silesians occurred more often among women comparing to men, which may be due to the social expectations placed on women from a very early age, according to which they are supposed to be more emotional than men, this being associated with their greater politeness and gentleness in judging others [44, 45]. The evaluations on *Orderly diligence* were higher in older and better educated respondents, as well as in those declaring a better financial situation. These results are congruent with other studies. Age can be indirectly linked with religiosity. Older people declare much more often a higher degree of religiosity and confirm it more often with religious practices, i.e. participation in religious services and praying [46]. Research confirms that education demonstrates a linear relationship with regard to attitude towards other people. The higher the level of education, the more positive one's attitude towards groups of others [47]. Individuals who are better off financially also more often have positive feelings towards others [47].

The third factor, *claiming stubbornness* expresses the negative reception of Silesians, manifested in perceiving them as a conceited, quarrelsome group with a claiming attitude was not associated with religiosity. It can be assumed that factor is shaped to a larger extent by historical and cultural references than by religious ones. As indicated by other explorations, the negative image of Silesians may be rooted among inhabitants of Poland living outside the Silesian Voivodeship due to the economic policy pursued in the era of socialism, focused on the development of heavy industry and mining. Silesian workers and miners gained privileges in the form of higher salaries or access to scarce goods,

unavailable to residents of other voivodeships. Silesians were also considered to have been among those to blame for the later economic crisis [48, 49]. This explanation is also interesting with regard to the obtained associations with sociodemographic variables. In fact, it was found in the study that residents of large cities were more inclined towards negative reception within the claiming stubbornness factor while the inhabitants of rural areas 'competed' less with Silesians for jobs or certain goods during the time of the Polish People's Republic [48, 49]. The image of Silesians as people with a claiming attitude has also been strengthened by the need for energy transition and the related plans to restructure the mining industry. The gradual closing down of mines and reduction of employment has been in fact connected with regular protests of mining trade unions, covered in nationwide media. However, it is worth noting that in our participants' evaluations this negative part of the stereotype was not clearly pronounced.

It is important to keep in mind that the results of the study may have been affected by the time when it was conducted. The COVID-19 pandemic strongly affected not only the media image of Silesia, compared in the first phase of the pandemic to Bergamo in Italy, but also the fear of the inhabitants of the Silesian Voivodeship, manifested for instance in the refusal to provide accommodation services to them or in tire slashing [50]. The changing social reality and the transformations connected with the energy transition will probably contribute to a different perception of Silesians. Thus, it seems legitimate to conduct similar analyses in the future to diagnose whether they will weaken or strengthen the influence of history and culture on the factors that were distinguished.

8. Conclusion

Religiosity has long been recognised as an important factor in the shaping of social attitudes and behaviours. Research over the years has shown that different dimensions of religiosity can be significant for the direction and intensity of individuals' attitudes and behaviours. Consequently, we based our study on the Centrality of Religiosity Scale, reducing religiosity to five areas: Intellect, Public Practice, Private Practice, Ideology, and Experience. The aim of our research was to explore whether these dimensions were significantly related to the social perception of Silesians. Although our attitudes, including social ones, are determined by numerous factors (e.g. socialisation, prejudice, personal experience of the individual), the research we conducted proved religiosity to be significantly related to the factors through the prism of which Silesians are perceived in other parts of Poland.

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