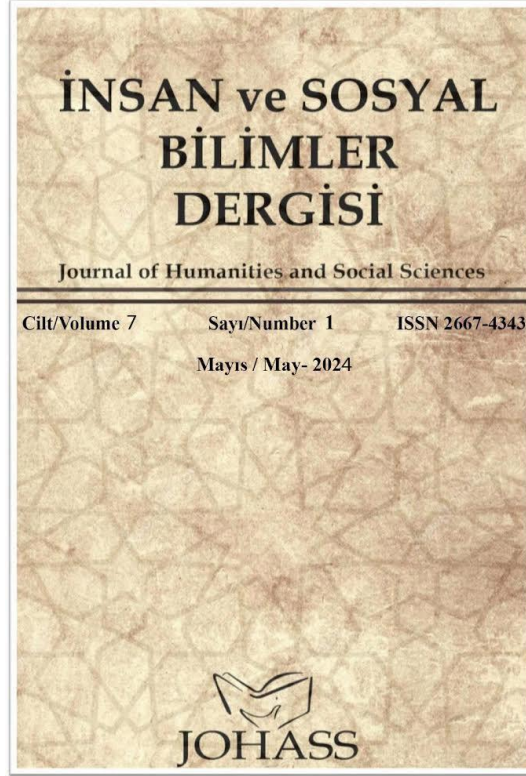# JOURNAL OF HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (JOHASS)

New Age Beliefs in Türkiye[*]

[*]Based on the doctoral dissertation "Search for Meaning, Alternative Sacraments, Beliefs Adapted to Needs: New Age Beliefs and Practices in Türkiye."

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Citation: Doğan Koçak, B. (2024). New age beliefs in Türkiye. *Journal of Human and Social Sciences*, 7(1), 139-166.

New Age Beliefs in Türkiye[*]

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Abstract	Research Article

This study aims to analyze institutions in Türkiye that offer training and practices based on New Age beliefs and understand the main reasons leading individuals to join these institutions. This research was conducted using qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and participant observation techniques. The field research began in August 2022 and lasted over a year. During this time, more than 15 training sessions were attended, over 250 people were met, and in-depth interviews were conducted with 76 participants. In addition to studying institutions, this research also aims to comprehend the personal approaches and feedback from participants and trainers to shed light on the overall perspective of these institutions as a "community." The results indicated that most participants were between the ages of 35-45, had middle to upper-income levels, were well-educated, and women outnumbered men. Participants were seeking meaning in their lives, searching for answers to their questions, and looking for solutions to their problems to achieve spiritual and material benefits. On the other hand, group participation allowed individuals to socialize and be a part of a circle where they could express themselves open-heartedly. When considering institutions promoting New Age beliefs, many of them had commercial aspects, with a corporate identity and management approach like. With an increasing number of institutions and participants, New Age Beliefs seem to be a part of the contemporary world. Thus, resarches with the perspective of different disciplines should be conducted to understand all the aspects of the concept thoroughly.

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Introduction

The concept of "New Age Beliefs[2]" is a comprehensive definition that combines ancient and modern teachings, spiritual, mystical, esoteric, occult elements as well as scientific knowledge, traditions, and religious discourses without clear boundaries (Acar, 2019). Both social scientists and NAB practitioners find it challenging to define the term due to its easily changeable and adaptable structure. The literature on the field, indicates that various definitions such as: *alternative sacredness, the descent of the sacred to earth, secularization movements, personalized belief forms, patchwork beliefs, new wave spiritualities, new spiritualities, global spiritualism, spiritualism without religion, secular spirituality, neopaganism* have been used. In NAB it is emphasized that achieving spiritual and physical peace, finding answers to questions, having a "meaningful" life, reaching both material and spiritual abundance are possible with the correct teachings and practices (Özkan, 2014, p.32). New age is considered as a time of change, of awakening (Albasan, 2006), as well as a process of spiritual development (Sjoberg and Wahlberg, 2002). In NAB, psychological approaches that aim to help individuals reveal their potential, raise their awareness are frequently included (Hanegraff, 1996, p.522) by focusing on the individual, highlighting personal experience and well-being.

In NAB, a pluralistic approach has been adopted. It has been emphasized that diversity creates great richness, the lines between divine and profane have blurred, thus all kinds of different knowledge, beliefs, and approaches should be embraced and synthesized. The notion of "either this or that" has been replaced by "and" (Bauman, 2018, p.18) with a syncretic attitude. Instead of making choices, it has become preferable to unite several options.

In the 21st century, often referred to as the "Information Age", a perspective has emerged that highlights the shared resources of humanity, emphasizing not only scientific but also intuitive knowledge. The postmodern approach, which promotes relativity and states that there is not a single truth and therefore not a single correct path to follow, has created an environment suitable for these movements generally referred to as "beliefs of the postmodern era". Love, peace, tolerance, a holistic approach, anti-oppression, and the unity of people, beliefs, and religions have started to be emphasized frequently. Thus, this era, by encompassing scientific, sacred, spiritual, worldly, and many different elements, offers methods that appeal to both the mind and soul of modern individuals with beliefs, teachings,

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[2] The abbreviatin NAB will be used from now on

and practices that cater to all kinds of different needs and where everyone can find something suitable for themselves.

It is evident that the origins of the Information Age can be traced back to the views of the Enlightenment Era. During this era, there has been a shift in how life has been perceived, the idea of individuality emerged, and human reason was emphasized. Anything that could not be understood by human senses or filtered through reason was deemed superstition, leading to a rejection of traditional teachings and religious constraints. Science, knowledge, and research gained importance, leading to new discoveries and inventions. The emphasis on using one's own mind and having the courage to trust it became the motto of the era. While Weber (2012) believed that rationalization broke the enchantment of the world, Beck (1992) argued that beliefs and traditions lost their charm in the twentieth century as science and technology became revered. Adorno and Horkheimer (2014, p.48) asserted that reason and science replaced the blind faith once given to religion after the Enlightenment, turning it into a myth.

Humans who are captivated by their own reason, capacity, and the magic of the technology they are developing have started to perceive the world completely rationally; they have pursued rationality until it turns into "a complete irrationality" (Fromm, 2023). The Industrial Revolution, along with scientific and technological advancements, has brought unprecedented levels of prosperity, abundance, health, and longevity, but this process has also brought disappointments. With the rapid advancement of technology during World War II, the battlefields have become more destructive than ever (Adorno, 2009, p.4). This situation has paved the way for the emergence of deep existential voids[3] in individuals' lives, the rise of ontological anxieties (Giddens, 2010), and the search for peace in the spiritual world that has been left idle[4] . The contemporary individual dealing with chronic problems brought about by the benefits of modern life (Aydın, 2005, p.15) seems to be a candidate for the "emergency solution" proposals of New Age Beliefs. New Age Beliefs, which attract intense interest in many parts of the world; are frequently featured in the media, films, television programs,

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[3] The concept was used by Victor E. Frankl in 1955. The main reason why people seek psychiatrists is the feeling of meaninglessness, emptiness, or the problems created by the feeling of "existential void". It is indicated that this feeling is increasing and becoming more widespread (Frankl, 1985).

[4] In their 2018 study, Ritchie and Roser stated that individuals worldwide are experiencing a decline in their physical, mental, and social health, losing balance in their lives in the chaotic world order, turning towards excessive consumption, and engaging in stressful and meaningless communications. Similarly, the World Health Organization is also seeking solutions to this fundamental problem, drawing attention to the disconnection from the inner dimension inherent in individuals burdened with the anxiety of keeping up with the speed of modern life.

YouTube channels, social media, and in the extensive sections of bookstores[5] , with "the desire to do more" and the magic and power of the word "now" (Roubal, 2014), offering "guiding" discourse on how to live a better life.

The influence of these movements is also evident in Türkiye, as well as around the world. In our country, interest in metaphysical subjects began after the Republican Era, but gained momentum in the 1960s. The concept of NAB, which has become a prominent topic, started to impact society in various aspects of life after the 2000s. Recently, we have noticed that these discussions have become part of everyday language in Turkish society. Terms such as energy, frequency, living in the moment, power of thought, affirmation, and imagination have become common in our daily lives.

New Religious Movements (NRM) and New Age Beliefs (NAB)

In literature, all New Age beliefs are viewed as part of the New Religious Movements, predominantly as a sub-category. Thus firstly the emergence of NRM will be explained, followed by the development and spread of New Age beliefs. The term "new religious movements" is generally viewed as a subject for theological research. But it is affected by economic, technological, political, and cultural changes, and emerges as a force that influences some parts of the society. Despite often centering on spiritual matters, these movements see themselves as religious, philosophical, or scientific entities (Possamai, 2019). NRM emerged as a "global phenomenon" in industrialized societies in Europe after 1950 and began to spread worldwide after 1970. The purpose of NRM is to provide religious and philosophical views to its members, to find answers to significant questions like; the meaning of life, introduce a "new way of living", promise transcendental knowledge, peace, spiritual satisfaction, and discuss mystical experiences liken ever done before. This explains the terms "new" and "religious" (Kirman, 2010, p.64). On the other hand, it can also be considered "new" due to its coverage of a relatively new social layer when we consider the history of the middle class with better education and an open world view, to which it mostly appeals (Arweck, 2006, p.30-31). According to Bryan Wilson's work "*An Analysis of Sect Development*" (1979), movements can be examined in three categories: those that "reject the world", those that "approve the world", and those that "compromise with the world" (Wallis, 1984, p.48). Movements that reject the world are more religious than others; loyalty and

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[5] Today, there are sections in bookstores around the world related to New Age, and they cover the widest area (Davie, 2005, p.181). Similarly, in online book sales, Amazon.com has 4 out of the top 10 best-selling books in the categories of spiritual, spiritual, personal development, in short, topics related to New Age (Pınarbaşı, 2021, p.66).

obedience to charismatic personalities believed to be a leader, guru, or prophet are essential. They engage in missionary work to increase their number of members. It is believed that this world is temporary; preparation is made for the afterlife by staying away from material, worldly elements. Individuals are expected to become part of their new families by cutting off all connections with their current lives and social environments; they are expected to dedicate all their time, effort, and material resources to this new group (Köse, 2011, p.181). In the approach of approving the world, a theology or moral system developed is not prominent, the connection with worldly life continues, societal norms are accepted, and techniques aimed at revealing all kinds of potential in individuals are taught (Wallis, 1984, p.36-58). Here, individual beliefs are dominant. The basic approach of groups that compromise with the world is that there is a void in people's spiritual world.

As a result of these approaches, they suggest that individuals should live in a more religious environment and often offer new interpretations by critiquing existing institutional religions in Western countries (Köse, 2011, p.22). Additionally, two theoretical approaches that guide individuals towards NRM are discussed. The first one is "ideological deprivation," which is used to describe individuals who are dissatisfied with their lives, worldview, and belief system, and are seeking something new. The second is "social network theory," which refers to group members connecting with others to involve them in the community (Köse, 2011, p.19-20). According to the social network theory, relationships and friendships formed with others in the community make these environments appealing to individuals.

NAB, which is considered a continuation of NRM in the literature, is a concept that is very difficult to define. Especially since it started to come to the agenda in the 1960's, a definition that can be agreed upon has not been established (Aydın, 2008). NAB has been approached by various academics with different perspectives such as religion, philosophy, belief system, thought structure, worldview, teachings, spiritual beliefs, and spiritual way of life (Başkaya, 2006). It can be evaluated as a form of sacredness created by placing the individual at the center instead of a transcendent sacred place. It can be observed that various philosophies and beliefs such as Eastern mysticism, Western occultism, neopaganism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shamanism, along with many teachings found in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, are intertwined with each other. There are various features that distinguish NAB from NRM. In NAB a specific leader is not followed even if there is a founder most of the time, many different views and teachings can be easily applied together, individuals can combine pieces of beliefs, practices, and teachings according to themselves, there is no obligation, condition, or attachment, they can be followed and practiced individually as well

as with various groups, participants can specialize and make a profession after developing themselves in any field, their beliefs do not contradict with those who feel belonging to institutional religions, personal well-being is placed at the center, they exhibit an integrative approach rather than a divisive one, they do not consider any belief or teaching superior to another, and there is no sacred book or similar considered as holy. All of these differ from NRM.

NAB, based on scientific concepts to ensure its legitimacy, also incorporates ancient esoteric knowledge from the past. Therefore, it can be said that even though the concept is new, its foundations are ancient and deeply rooted (Hanegraaf, 2000, p.301). NAB, introduced to contemporary societies in a new form with the transformation of beliefs, rituals, ancient teachings, as well as spiritual and mystical phenomena (Paker, 2011, p.65), is the collective term for various movements inspired by classical spiritual beliefs that emerged towards the end of the 20th century. Encompassing diverse sub-teachings and groups, it explores topics related to science, ecology, psychology, and spirituality, providing individuals with the opportunity to select interpretations that suit their needs (Garnoussi, 2013, p.63). While in the West, New Age ideas are categorized as esoteric, new gnostic worldviews/religions, or psycho-organizations, in Turkiye they are generally referred to as movements, groups, schools, trends, sects, cults, and denominations (Kirman, 2010, p.49). Contrary to common belief, the NAB is not irrational or unscientific. Instead, it utilizes the advancements of modernity and science as a means to navigate the challenges of the modern world (Kozanoğlu, 1997, p.36).

During periods of significant changes in society, people typically seek ways to find comfort, security, and peace, as well as to help make sense of their experiences. This situation often leads to the rise of NAB, alternative spiritualities, and various mystical movements. Schüle (2008, p.57) echoed this sentiment by stating: "*At critical historical junctures where paradigms shift and individuals must reassess their values, mystical movements come to the forefront*." The necessity for integrative mechanisms during times of crisis, coupled with individuals turning to alternative belief systems when traditional institutions fail to provide support, has fostered a fertile environment for the emergence of alternative spiritualities.

According to Berger (2002, p.23), the origins of all spiritual and religious practices should be sought in the concept of "search for meaning." NRM and NAB can be seen as a compensatory tool in overcoming the spiritual void problems through a search for meaning for contemporary individuals who are experiencing difficulties in experiencing spirituality, struggling with empty spaces in their spiritual world, suffering from "ontological constriction"

and "spiritual alienation depression" (Merter, 2012, p.282). In other words, it can be said that NRM and NAB appeal to those who want to escape from the social and economic problems of the modern world.

Literature on New Age Beliefs

In many studies related to New Religious Movements and New Age Beliefs, it is observed that foreign literature is translated into Turkish and transferred under the title of sociology of religion or within the structure of theology faculties. As mentioned above, new age practices, which can be evaluated from sociological, anthropological, psychological, political, religious, and economic perspectives and can be understood in a wider spectrum with the approach of different disciplines, are positioned according to the researcher's perspective. The studies aim to define various movements within a historical framework while providing descriptive information about the beliefs, approaches, views, and organizational forms of some movements seen in Turkiye at the local level.

Kirman's work "*Sociology of New Religious Movements*" (2010), Köse's "*Millennium Orders*" (2011) and "*Return of the Sacred*" (2014), Günay's "*New Age Beliefs in Turkiye*" (2011), Özkan's (2014) work titled "*Doomsday Orders*" provide enlightening information about the formation, development, spread, and characteristics of new religious movements worldwide. Kurt, in his work "*Sociology of Religion*" (2012), emphasizes that NRMs emerge not in the extremes of society but right in the center. Kurt explains the social factors in the formation of NRMs; individuals who are turned away from individualism and loneliness offer solutions to their search for "community and collectivism" by providing them with "alternative family units" and summarizes that the appeal of rational, eclectic, and syncretic formations in religious preferences becomes attractive (Kurt, 2012, pp.294-301). Several articles and theses have been written shedding light on the understanding of NRMs and New Age movements, revealing the demographic profile targeted, and explaining the reasons and motivations of people from which sectors direct themselves towards these areas. In several master's theses, the origins of New Age movements have been explored, focusing on their spread in Europe and the USA, as well as their reflections in Turkiye. Some theses introduce what New Age is, while others share the results derived from examples of teachings, practices, or applications within New Age. Researches made in Türkiye generally indicates that people having a tendency to practice NAB are non religious people with high education and income levels and women outnumber men. Examples for these theses include Uğurlu (2011), Uysal (2015), Develi (2019), Acar (2019), and Aydin (2008). Additionally, Başkaya

(2006) evaluates New Age movements as a practice in constructing a new sacredness; Mashael (2020) emphasizes that the interest in the New Age is higher among women, conducting interviews with 12 women aged between 30-52 and examining the healing aspects of the "feminine" qualities in a society still holding patriarchal characteristics. These theses generally aim to introduce New Age and provide information about the concepts, practices, teachings, and philosophies within the movement. There are various articles written with similar aims. Arslan (2006), Bodur (2000), and Soyubol (2021) discuss the formation and effects of spiritual movements in Turkiye.

Mirza's (2014) work, which was turned into a book titled "*New Trends in Religiosity and Spiritual Quests*" from her doctoral thesis, attempts to evaluate the reasons for individuals' spiritual quests and the position of religion and secularism in these quests. She stated that the data he obtained from the research is "*directly related to modernity and the living conditions brought about by modernity, rather than the concepts of religion and belief*" (Mirza, 2014, p.67). Utilizing data from the research conducted in various cities of Turkiye between 2018-2020 within the scope of the "Spiritual Quests in Turkiye" project supported by the TÜBİTAK 1001 program, Cengiz et al. prepared a work titled "*Spiritual Quests in Turkey: Deism, Yoga, Buddhism, Meditation, Reiki, etc.*" (2021). The study examines Turkiye's economic and political dimensions from a macro perspective, concluding that the segment defining itself as secular is interested in this field and that 72% of the participants do not "like" institutional religions. It is emphasized that individuals interested in NAB have grown up in secular families distant from religious education and, therefore, have turned to alternative spiritual quests due to the lack of the spiritual feelings and collectivity provided by religion. It is expressed in their own words that a "headscarf-wearing" participant did not receive "very tolerant" treatment at a training they attended, and it is pointed out that the concept of tolerance emphasized in the trainings may not always be reciprocated. Various practices are not analyzed in the work, the researchers' experiences are shared. Evaluations are made based on the connections between gender and ecology. Although the majority of participants are women, it is mentioned that trainers are generally men, and somehow the patriarchal social order can be read in this hierarchical structure. As we will see in the following parts of this research, these findings do not correspond with what we have obtained.

In his 2015 doctoral dissertation titled "*The Relationship between Human Search for Meaning and New Age Beliefs*", Aydın investigated the connection between these two concepts. In the study, a scale consisting of 20 questions called the "New Age Beliefs Scale" (Aydın, 2015) was used to understand individuals' religious beliefs in the form of NAB.

According to the results he obtained in his study, individuals between the ages of 31-45, married, with a high level of education, and males are more likely to find their lives meaningful. The obtained data shows a correlation between those who experience a lack of meaning in their lives and their orientation towards New Age beliefs.

Method

Model

The aim of the research is to comprehend the popularity of NAB in our country and determine which social segment it is more popular in, based on the social and demographic characteristics of the participants. The study also seeks to understand how participants define themselves in terms of religion, secularism, belief, etc., in their own words. As well as the reasons, motivations, areas of interest, and benefits that drive their involvement.

The research does not seek to understand society's general attitude towards NAB or include evaluations from individuals who are casually interested in them as a hobby. As the target audience consists of individuals who have been engaged in educational centers for at least one year, specific questions have been formulated to cater to the participants' interests in the field. Questions that are not relevant to this purpose have been deemed unnecessary.

The study was conducted using the qualitative method which is based on understanding and interpreting, rather than explaining. This method allows for detailed data collection on group dynamics, meanings created through interpersonal interactions, and more subjective aspects such as individuals' attitudes, behaviors, values, emotions, and experiences. The study employed "in-depth interviews" and "participant observation" as data collection techniques to gather detailed information with purposive sampling, which aimed to create a group that was fully representative, homogeneous, non-random, and relevant to the purpose (Kümbetoğlu, 2019, p.97). The population of the study includes individuals who are interested in NAB and are currently attending training centers either as trainers or participants, with the goal of becoming educators in the field of NAB in Istanbul.

Study Group

In this study, a group with the full representation capability, homogeneous, non-random, and purposeful sampling technique has been utilized (Kümbetoğlu, 2019, p.97). Initially, individuals who had a personal acquaintance with the researcher were contacted. Using criteria determined with the snowball technique, the group of participants for the study

was expanded until data saturation was reached. To maintain neutrality, data from individuals personally acquainted with the researcher were excluded from the study. The research universe consists of individuals interested in NAB, who attend training centers as trainers or participants and aim to become an NAB instructor. Individuals with less than one year of interest to a certain branch of NAB or follow the methods without attending a center are not included in the research scope.

Data Collecting Techniques and Analysis

In this research, in order to access detailed data related to the research topic, "in-depth interviews" and "participant observation" techniques were used. With these techniques, instead of defining the researched community from the outside, the opportunity to evaluate from an "inside" perspective is obtained. By asking open-ended questions, it is possible to understand the subject from all aspects. These techniques allow the researcher to notice meanings, intentions, and attitudes that may not be directly understood, and enable to understand how participants interpret situations, events, and phenomena both within themselves and in their surroundings (Kümbetoğlu, 2019, pp.71-72). With the in-depth interview technique, it is possible to cover all aspects of the researched topic, delve into the essence of a social phenomena, establish face-to-face and one-on-one relationships with participants to provide detailed data (Tekin, 2006, p.101). Another purpose for choosing this technique is to enable the researcher to be directly involved in the research process, guide the interviews in a purposeful manner, ask more detailed questions when necessary, provide explanations, and allow for a comprehensive understanding of participants' perceptions and understandings related to the research topic. Since a community can only be understood by being a part of their lives, by joining the same environment as participants and spending time with them, it was thought that the participant observation technique would be beneficial for making a multidimensional and detailed presentation of the research (Sönmez and Alacapınar, 2011, p.106). With a semi-structured question guide, open-ended questions were asked to understand participants' evaluations in depth. Throughout the study, more than 250 individuals were interviewed, and in-depth interviews were conducted with 76 of them, where data saturation has been reached.

Data Analysis

In this study, a descriptive method was used in data analysis. In-depth interviews conducted throughout the research were detailed through interviews and analyzed using the

content analysis method, one of the qualitative data analysis methods. With the content analysis method, the data were classified, summarized, and categorized under verbal data to be compiled into tables. These sections, which form a meaningful whole, were named and coded by the researcher (Neuman, 2012, p.668). After examining the concepts and revealing their relationships, codes were combined by finding common aspects and these relationships were explained with a more comprehensive overarching theme (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016, p.237). Themes, patterns, and relationships were identified by placing data with similar meanings under the same codes (Akarsu and Akarsu, 2019). Common themes and relationships were identified by comparing recurring words and phrases. In the final step, the results of data analysis were summarized by summarizing the codes and themes obtained. The findings were compared and interpreted with the findings obtained in similar literature reviews within the scope of the research.

Ethical Committee Approval

This research has been ethically approved by Beykent University Ethical committee at 02.08.2022 with the number 74966756- - 250 and code E-45778635-050.99-64524.

Findings

Throughout the research, it is possible to mention that there are common grounds that bring together all participants who are inclined towards NAB trainings for different reasons and with different purposes, and that trainers also possess similar characteristics within themselves. On the other hand, it can be observed that trainings organized on different topics repeat a common pattern within themselves. Goffman's (2009) analysis of self-presentation, group interaction and communication, likening them to a theater play through Dramaturgy theory, clearly reflects the concepts of performance, actor, stage, and showcase in all these training centers. The expectation of participation in NAB-related trainings for at least a year, which I had decided before the research process began, reveals that individuals, when they spend a certain time in a certain environment, start to speak with a certain "language" as emphasized by Bourdieu (1996), their word choices, body language, and ways of expressing themselves demonstrate their habitus. Participants, as Bourdieu expressed, enter into a game with various personal benefit expectations, knowing and accepting its rules, which corresponds to illusio. While the fact that many of the people I interviewed have taken various trainings together and have formed friendships can be interpreted as the formation of social

capital in the field, it can be stated that the certificates given at the end of the trainings provide symbolic capital. Based on the findings obtained through in-depth interviews and participatory observations during the research period, the most popular NAB topics in Turkiye are coaching, mindfulness, breath therapy, Theta Healing, Access Bars, EFT, Reiki, Bioenergy, NLP, family constellations, regression, and Sufi teachings.

According to the in-depth interviews conducted with 76 people, the majority of individuals interested in NAB (54 people) are women. While the age range varies according to the trainings, the 35-45 age group constitutes the largest segment. 52 participants described themselves as having a middle income level, while 24 participants described themselves as having an upper-middle income level. 69 participants have received university education or higher. In terms of marital status, married participants are the majority with 45 people, followed by single (17) and divorced (14) individuals. When the literature on NAB is reviewed, it is mentioned that the high proportion of female participants and the interest of individuals with a good education and middle/upper-middle income level align with our research, while the claim that young people and singles are more inclined towards the field is not supported by our research. Tucker (2002, p.50) expresses that individuals interested in NAB in Western societies are mostly women, while Yates and Chandler (2000, p.383) have shown that men are more hesitant towards NAB compared to women and there is a significant difference when compared to the number of female participants. According to the research conducted in the UK, 80% of those interested in NAB are women (Flanagan and Jupp 2007, p.115). Mashael's master's thesis conducted in our country highlighted that women are more involved in NAB practices as both participants and practitioners compared to men. In accordance with our research, Beatrice Hendrich emphasized in her study "*Beyond State Islam: Religiosity and Spirituality in Contemporary Turkey*" (2011) that middle-class women aged 30-50 in Turkey show more interest in spiritual quests compared to other groups.

The marital status obtained in this research contradicts Schnell's (2009) research, which found that most existential crises are experienced by individuals living with a partner without marriage (9%), divorced individuals (9%), and single individuals (11%); while among married couples, this rate is only 3%. Similarly, Aydın (2015) found in his doctoral thesis that singles have a higher interest in NAB than married individuals. Consistent with the results of our research, Arslan, in his work "*Turkish Popular Religiosity*" in 2004, found a higher participation rate in NAB among married individuals (Arslan, 2004, p.213-214). Throughout the interviews conducted during the research, it is noteworthy that the lowest education level is high school, with a considerable number of individuals who have completed their

postgraduate and doctoral degrees aside from university education, which confirms Aydın's statement (2015, p.139) that *"the belief levels in the New Age of individuals with high education levels are higher compared to those with low education levels."* Similarly, in the USA, Fuller (2001, p.103) defines the demographic profile of individuals interested in the New Age as "*relatively highly educated, with a high income level, aged between 25-49, non-black, generally university graduates, working in a white-collar job.*" Roof's research in 2009 also indicates that a vast majority of those interested in the New Age movement are well-educated individuals who have achieved certain successes in their professional lives (Roof, 2009, p.58-59). According to Giddens (2010, p.227), dealing with these teachings and trainings obviously carries a class privilege as it requires money and time. Naisbitt and Abordene (1990) have defined individuals interested in NAB as those who have received university education and have financial means, stating that "*There are very few new age workers from the working class.*" This approach is consistent with the discourse participants use to describe their economic situations. It is quite possible to say that it is unlikely for people who do not have financial means to suddenly quit their job and career like participant 7 who has quoted:

"I woke up one morning and quit my job, I thought that I needed a new path. I had enough with the constant pursuit of having more and more…I had a big house, a good car… and so what I wasn't happy."

This situation is in line with the statement that those interested in NAB, which is frequently encountered in the literature, have high education and financial resources.

In the literature, it has been stated that the majority of people interested in NAB (spiritual counseling and guidance) are individuals who do not have a connection to institutional religions, and even have a distant and critical approach to them. In our study, 40 participants[6] identified themselves as religious/conservative, 22 individuals[7] stated that they are believers and spiritual even though they do not always live according to the "rules and principles" of religion, and only 4 individuals mentioned that they do not feel connected to any institutional religion but believe in "an energy". There was no participant who defined themselves as completely faithless, without any belief, or not valuing spirituality. This situation suggests that spirituality is a need for every individual regardless of the era, culture, or geography they live in, and that spirituality can be evaluated and experienced independently of the teachings of institutional religions (Harris, 2014). The fact that veiled

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[6] Islam being mentioned
[7] 20 of them have mentioned İslam the other two refers to Christianity

participants make up about one-fifth of the female participants supports these views. Unlike previous studies conducted in our country, neither veiled participants feel uncomfortable in these environments nor do "other" individuals approach veiled participants with any prejudice. While 72 participants believe that NAB is compatible with their own religion, the same individuals stated that they could practice practices belonging to other beliefs without any problem. None of the participants categorized NAB under the title of belief/religion, with the highest rate being in the form of "doctrine-practice" definitions. This was followed by those who defined it as "philosophy" and "a way of thinking". Based on these findings, it can be seen that NAB cannot be evaluated as a religion, a religion-like formation, or a pseudo-religion (Arslan, 2006, p.9), and that individuals do not have an attitude of distancing themselves from or critically approaching institutional religions. With the explanations of the participants, NAB can be translated as "movements without religious discourse", it seems more accurate to define NRM as "non-religious movements" (Enroth, 2005).

Participant 17's words form a good example about the approach to religious people who also benefit from NAB: "*I am a very religious person…Knowledge does not only come from religion or Islam, it comes from everywhere. What does the Quran say: Go seek knowledge even if it is in China? I pray five times a day as my religion tells me to do, I wish I had the opportunity to go to Tibet and receive education there from the monks. I think we are all made of energy, that's why I am in this bioenergy training know…last year I attended REIKI sessions which helped me a lot…Any place with a spiritual roof gives me happiness and I accept them all.*"

It does not seem correct to attribute the increasing interest in NAB to the decreasing importance of religion in contemporary life, as often emphasized in the literature on the subject. In their study, Cengiz et al. (2021) found that 72% of participants did not "like" corporate religions. This result does not correspond to our research. Studies conducted in our country generally report that educated participants with middle to high income levels, who do not describe themselves as religious/conservative, are predominant. Examples of these studies include Uğurlu (2011), Uysal (2015), Develi (2019), Acar (2019), Aydın (2008).

Nowadays, it is possible to say that religion, beliefs, and faiths have not disappeared, but have only transformed in the way individuals need in their lives, offering new formations and support mechanisms that provide different ways to find the answers they seek, due to increasing knowledge and opportunities. Individuals interested in NAB generally show interest in teachings that are compatible with their own culture and geography, which are

more "familiar" to them, and tend to blend and harmonize these teachings with the institutional beliefs they feel they belong to.

All the educators I interviewed in depth are over 45 years old and at least university graduates, with 10 out of 12 educators stating that they served as senior executives in corporate companies before becoming educators. Currently, they all make a living by organizing training, courses, seminars, and sessions in the field of NAB after leaving their previous professions. The majority of educators, 8 out of 12, are women. All educators, as Goffman (2009, p.33) pointed out, demonstrate effective performances, paying attention to their tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language. Educators use a language and form their expressions that are suitable for the general profile of the participants. The details such as decoration and refreshments in the venues where the training and activities are organized create an atmosphere suitable for the field, forming appropriate showcases for the performance (Goffman, 2009, p.35).

It is possible to say that participants in all NAB trainings exhibit common characteristics in their ways of expressing themselves, the words they choose, their perspectives on life, and their clothing styles. Especially in Sufi education, the common language and behavior patterns created by individuals become very concrete. Here, Bourdieu's concept of habitus is very clearly reflected. The formation and continuity of fields are ensured as a result of the common experiences shared by individuals with the same habitus. People in the same field behave according to the rules of that field by accepting them. In order for a field to continue, there must be individuals with habitus who want to be in that field, who attribute importance and value to that field (Bourdieu, 2016), and it is possible to talk about the existence of this in these centers. Individuals participate in NAB trainings with the aim of benefiting themselves and fulfill the requirements of the trainings for this purpose. This situation can be explained with Bourdieu's analogy of the game. The concept of illusio also seems appropriate for individuals who want to become professionals in the NAB field, as well as those who want to develop themselves physically, mentally, and spiritually. It is possible to observe that applications in all trainings are interconnected, support and complement each other. For example, in bioenergy training, color therapy is also applied, a day of coaching training is dedicated to NLP, breathing techniques are used in mindfulness training, specific points in the body stand out in EFT and Access Bars, the power of thought, the importance of staying in the moment, the impact of spoken words in our lives, the subconscious, energy, divine source, and the unity of all living beings are frequently mentioned in all of them. In today's rapidly changing world where all kinds of changes are

happening quickly, especially with the uncertainty and lack of trust environment that emerged after the pandemic, it is expected that different types of knowledge will not separate with rigid lines but rather merge flexibly, complementing each other to meet the different needs of individuals. At this point, it becomes necessary to read NAB and the teachings it contains as "being good for the individual", along with the impossibility of evaluating it as right or wrong. Throughout the trainings, the ease and success of the methods are frequently emphasized by the trainers, as well as detailed descriptions of the "miraculous" changes and transformations in the lives of individuals who apply the method.

Scientific concepts are frequently included in the trainings, sharing data on energy, frequency, vibration, as well as the functioning of the human brain, the workings of internal organs, and psychology. Phrases like "according to research conducted, data obtained" are commonly used. Religious concepts and statements are also included, with trainers' speeches emphasizing either religious or scientific statements depending on the participant profile. Here, it should be noted that the education provided in the field does not contradict with religion, science, ancient teachings, but on the contrary, it complements each other in harmony, as an effort to eliminate any question marks in the participants' minds. When participants were asked about how they economically evaluate the areas related to NAB whether they see it as a market, most of them evaluated it as a sector, but they were not complaining about the expenses they made and considered the figures given to be reasonable. The trainers, on the other hand, were understood to see the fee they received as a compensation for their efforts and time, and evaluated it as a "balance of give and take". Therefore, it is revealed that neither the trainers nor the participants have any discomfort with the money paid. On the other hand, all education centers appear in a hierarchical structure like a corporate company, from their websites to their secretariats, administrative affairs, and trainers. Based on the participatory observations and in-depth interviews I conducted throughout all the trainings I attended, it is possible to say that almost all participants have a profession, so they do not attend these trainings with the aim of pursuing a hobby or "filling free time", but with specific goals and purposes in mind.

They all make a specific effort, especially allocating time and money, to adjust their schedules and daily tasks according to the dates and times of their education programs. Accordingly, participant profiles are as follows:

i. Those who seek meaning by thinking that there is a lack of meaning in their lives. People who set out in search of meaning are generally those who live in material prosperity. Therefore, it is possible to say that none of them have any financial concerns, but they have

reactions to what life brings, people's constant rushing, the necessity to always move forward, and constant consumption. While some move towards a goal, it can be observed that some enjoy this process, the state of search; it can be said that they add a "meaning" to their lives while striving for this search, based on their own statements. The participants' statements highlight the feeling of "something missing despite having everything". The words of participant 7 are:

"I am very anxious, worried, always feeling tired, feeling like I can't keep up with anything, feeling like I am always running late, feeling like I am constantly rushing and not resting, feeling like I am unable to control my life, feeling like I am on autopilot, enjoying very few things or pretending to enjoy them. Sometimes I want to leave everything behind, but work, responsibilities, children - how will they be? I feel like I am living someone else's life. I wake up in the morning and start rushing. The constant need to consume more, buy the latest model car, have a bigger house, make sure the children attend all the courses, let's compete with each other for expensive brands, etc. It's always about more and more, a never-ending process that is never enough."

At this point, it can be mentioned that there is a search for adding more meaningful elements to their lives, as well as an effort to give meaning to what they experience, the negative situations and events they see around them, illnesses, disasters. According to Wilson and Dobbelare, people who participate in these kinds of movements are individuals who, in our study, are attending educational centers and seeking vibrant, warm, cheerful, open, "welcoming" environments due to boredom or weariness of the daily monotony or dullness of life (2004, p.119).

ii. Those who want to make changes in their physical, mental, and spiritual characteristics that they do not like: Here, especially desired characteristics such as losing excess weight, getting rid of bad habits and stress, as well as being more positive, cheerful, relaxed, calm, and flexible stand out. In particular, techniques such as Theta Healing, Access Bars, Bioenergy, Reiki, NLP, and yoga not only contribute to individuals' physical, spiritual, and mental well-being, but also often emphasize vitality, youthfulness, and a healthy body. It is also possible to mention that there are many discourses and efforts aimed at reversing the graying of hair, stopping and even eliminating wrinkles on the face, having a slimmer body, and "getting rid of the traces created by years". In all of these discourses, the emphasis on a young and healthy body, especially in capitalist societies, and directing people towards consumption to achieve this, come to light. In addition to being happy and joyful in life and conforming to the established model of the spiritual world, the necessity for the body to

always be young and fit is emphasized, and the body is turning into a cult (Özbolat, 2017, p.269). As a result of considering aging as a flaw and a situation to be avoided, these discourses find a response and can be seen as a desire to challenge the realities of life and create their own realities with a "challenge" against the aging process. It is possible to see the emphasis on individuality, walking on the path chosen by oneself in the way chosen by oneself, resisting aging and illness, and being responsible for everything in one's life.

iii. A new search for identity/self: Some participants have repeated phrases such as "a new self" and have been observed to be aiming to create a new identity beyond the "person" they have been up to a certain age. The common motivation among most participants, "to change and transform themselves", can be evaluated as a reflection of seeing their identities as something that can be constructed and changed, rather than given. They aim to liberate themselves from any kind of imposition coming from the past, their childhood, or their families, and to create their own destinies, futures, and values. In this way, they aim to create a new identity, a new self; to constantly surpass themselves by revealing their potentials and reaching their best "versions", and to live their lives to the fullest. It can also be said that the history of modernity is in a way the history of a certain type of self (Bauman and Raud, 2018, 14). Being modern is perceived as living in a world not bound by traditions, customs, habits, rituals, expectations, and beliefs. In this process, which can also be considered as the effort of contemporary individuals to create a self, an identity for themselves, individuals intend to find themselves, develop themselves, recreate themselves, "reformat" their personalities, reach the qualities they idealize and leave behind what they do not like, and get rid of emotions, thoughts, memories, and traumas that do not serve them.

Just like a sculptor creating a work of art, it is possible to talk about a change, differentiation, inner structuring, an "inner aesthetic" process in the person's inner world, spiritual realm. Nowadays, people have become obsessed with "creating themselves" (Funk, 2013, 63). Participants thus embark on a path to adapt to what they consider to be "appropriate" ways of thinking and feeling, lifestyle, and characteristics befitting the people of this age. Today, no one is willing to accept what is given or imposed; everyone puts their own freedom, choices, and preferences to the forefront. Therefore, individuals aim to change even the characteristics they inherit from their family, environment, and even genes, and to recreate and organize them according to their own taste. A sense of "weariness" and a search for renewal can be observed in individuals in all these trainings and groups. What individuals want to achieve as a result of their search is not an investment in the afterlife; it is based on

living in a way that suits their preferences in this world, finding peace, and achieving abundance and prosperity. –

iv. Those who want to acquire a new profession: The vast majority of participants (59 out of 64) have expressed their desire to specialize in the fields they have received education in and turn these educations into a profession professionally, while 5 of them have expressed their warm feelings towards this situation by saying "maybe in the future", only 4 people have stated that they do not intend to turn the field they have received education in into a profession. Currently, some of them are already providing counseling/training services in a field within NAB outside the field they have received education in.

The expectation of the majority of participants to have a profession in this field also reveals their expectation of providing them with a financial benefit. At this point, the importance of the certificates and documents obtained after completing the trainings becomes apparent. Especially in coaching training, it is understood that participants research the educational institution and prefer it because it has an internationally recognized certificate. As we can see from the words of participant 9 who is a psychologist:

"*Honestly, I want to make a lot of money from this job… Of course, it is very important to help people but I want to have many clients, make a name for myself, and have a nice office. Since I have a psychology education, coaching seems very close to me, and nowadays coaching seems warmer to people than being a psychologist…thus I value the certificate that I will obtain from here and plus it has an international accreditation.*"

The interest that arises in individuals in these approaches is considered appropriate for Bourdieu's concept of "illusio". This concept refers to things that lead individuals to the field, convincing them to participate in the "game" (Bourdieu, 1996).

v. Those seeking social environment and sense of belonging: Individuals carry a desire to be free and autonomous on one hand, while on the other hand, they want to belong to a community, to be understood, to share common values and views. Participants often mention how good the environment they received education in is for them, how they can express themselves comfortably there, and how they form "spiritual families". It is possible to say that in all educational centers, there is a warm, friendly atmosphere where individuals can express themselves comfortably and do not face any criticism. Phrases like "*we are in a safe and strong circle, we can open up*" are repeated frequently throughout the trainings, allowing everyone to express themselves freely. Thus, it can be said that participants take a break from the "outside world" and find the security, understanding, communication, interaction, and tolerance they cannot find there in the "suspension communities" (Bauman, 2016, p.22) where

they can suspend their fears and concerns, and in the "warm circles"[8] (Rosenberg, 2000) created. When it is assumed that every human community is an "attempt to create a world" (Berger, 2011, p.51), these centers based on volunteerism seem to provide socialization and a sense of belonging by taking on the roles that were previously fulfilled by family, village, neighborhood, or community members (Hervieu-Leger, 2006, p.54) to their participants.

On the other hand, in contrast to the feelings of isolation and alienation experienced by contemporary individuals, formations that gain appeal with a sense of belonging strengthened by solidarity, common emotions, and thoughts also provide their members with "social capital" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2014) through personal relationships formed among individuals within the centers. In NAB trainings, individuals feel safe, accepted, and supported in these centers (Roof, 2009, p.57-58). It is observed that participants in these trainings carry both the desire for "self-discovery" and the desire for "belonging and being part of a team" (Funk, 2009, p.12). It can be said that it is quite attractive and appealing for individuals who cannot find what they are looking for in their social life, have a limited social circle, cannot socialize due to a busy work life, or differ from their existing social circle in terms of views and thoughts. As a result, individuals can experience a much more "accelerated" process of evolving from acquaintanceship to friendship after encounters in the outside world. After a short chat outside, when someone says "let's have a coffee", this offer, which may not be very appropriate, is generally perceived as natural and ordinary in these environments and is generally positively received. Behaviors that are seen as unusual in other situations begin to be accepted as ordinary behaviors in certain areas (Bourdieu, 2006, p. 341). Individuals can share any topic they want in these centers as they wish, and they believe that others listen to them "really" without criticizing and can express themselves very comfortably. They can openly express the situations, events, traumas, sorrows, and pains that affect their lives. They cry together, laugh together with other participants, and experience moments that they may not even share with their closest ones in their private lives. These sharing opportunities also allow the development of intense emotions between individuals, the formation of emotional bonds, and feeling safe. When the trainings end, it can be seen as natural for people with limited social circles and limited occupations to desire to continue

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[8] Göran Rosenberg used the concept of a "warm circle" in an article published in "La Nouvelle Lettre Internationale" in 2000 to describe the pure state of togetherness that people are in. While once common, it has become rare in today's modern society. The commitments offered and actually expected within the warm circle are not derived from external social logic or an economic cost-benefit analysis. This is exactly what makes the circle warm. There is no need for the conformity and cold calculations that the surrounding society presents as distant and unappealingly "reasonable". Those within the warm circle will not need to prove anything, and no matter what they do, they can expect understanding and help.

with different trainings, as they may fall into a void. These feelings cas be seen in participant 11's words: *"Socialization is really happening in these trainings. The best part is that everyone is very open, no one pretends and expresses themselves as they truly are. In which other environment will you experience this? I feel like I really know these people and can really be myself and I know that I am accepted and loved…"*

Many participants attend various trainings without limiting themselves to a single subject or field. Throughout the trainings, it has been observed that many people who have become friends by meeting in previous trainings decide to take many trainings together and often come together in their social lives.

vi. Those who seek healing: Participants do not oppose conventional medicine, they all advocate consulting expert medical doctors as a priority when they have a physical, mental, or spiritual ailment. They see energy healing and other methods as complementary and supportive elements.

vi.i. Physical Healing: Those who aim to find healing for their own and their loved ones' physical ailments are included in this group. Migraines, stomach problems, heart conditions, tics, and cancer diseases have been mentioned by the participants. Additionally, those who want to have a healthier, fitter, younger body are also included under the physical healing category.

vi.ii. Mental-Spiritual Healing: The issues that participants particularly emphasized are anxiety, panic attacks, worry, depression, moodiness, and unhappiness.

vi.iii. Seeking Healing in Relationships: Transforming, repairing, and improving relationships with spouses/partners, parents, family members, children, and relationships in their work lives are highlighted.

vii. Those who want to bring abundance and prosperity into their lives: Those who especially desire more than what they currently have in terms of material matters can be included in this group.

viii. Those who come out of curiosity, influenced by their surroundings/media/popularity: In this category, it is possible to see the reflections of popular culture and the influence of social media posts.

According to the findings obtained in this research, NAB seems to have established itself in the Turkish society with its eclectic and syncretic structure, open nature to change, development, and different interpretation styles. It is possible to talk about a NAB field where people from different social and cultural backgrounds, various beliefs can turn to according to their own needs. Therefore, there is a NAB that can respond to all kinds of requests that can

be multiplied, such as searching for answers to big questions in their lives, adding meaning to their lives, trying to solve a physical, mental, or psychological problem, attracting abundance, correct relationships, acquiring a new profession, or supporting their current profession, and providing benefits in the desired direction to the individual. It seems possible to say that there is no such thing as "failure" in NAB. If desires do not come true, it may be due to reasons such as the individual not wanting enough, not applying the practices correctly, not being able to adjust their subconscious, frequency correctly, not being ready yet, as well as the existence of a divine and/or universal "better plan", which may result in wishes not coming true. Thus, individuals continue to try constantly, and they can easily switch to a different practice that they think will be more "suitable" for them.

Results and Discussion

It can be said that the interest in the field and the number of participants in the trainings will continue to increase, considering that all participants have stated that their processes related to NAB will continue in the future, 60 people have mentioned their intentions to attend different trainings, 76 people have recommended and directed 70 of their own circles to attend NAB trainings, and no participant has a skeptical, questioning, or critical attitude towards NAB and the trainings. In the increasing number of NAB centers, participants share topics and events that may be extremely personal and "secret" in their lives with people they have never met before. This situation shows on one hand how much individuals need to "really" trust someone, while on the other hand it may appear to be of a nature that could create a security issue. It seems necessary to monitor the reliability of educational institutions, trainers, the information provided, and the practices carried out. It should be considered that practices and information conveyed can be effective and beneficial, but also susceptible to abuse, leading to different problems.

The importance of the supervision of expert physicians, especially in some mental and physical illnesses, should not be overlooked. It would not be wrong to say that there is a significant oversight in this regard. Considering the wide range of fields, it is necessary to conduct comparative research from different disciplines. It is possible to develop different perspectives and approaches on the subject by examining many areas influenced by holistic and organic nutrition, homeopathy, Ayurveda, physical healing fields, medicine, various sub-branches of sociology (health sociology, religion sociology, etc.), psychology, theology, tourism, TV series and cinema, literature, social media, consumption, etc. In addition, it is

thought that conducting comparative studies between Turkiye and other countries can be enlightening in understanding how the field is perceived in different societies. Therefore, conducting detailed studies on the subject seems important in order to understand both individual and societal change and transformation processes.

Ethical Committee Approval

This research has been ethically approved by Beykent University Ethical committee at 02.08.2022 with the number 74966756- - 250 and code E-45778635-050.99-64524.

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