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The role of religion in global sustainability: A study on Catalonia's contribution to Sustainable Development Goals

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Keywords: *Sustainable Development Goals, practical contribution of religious organisations, inter-religious dialogue, Catalonia, case-study.*

Abstract

In September 2015, the United Nations revised the *Millennium Development Goals* and set the global agenda for the next 15 years under a new title: "*Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*". The harmful effects of climate change and other serious environmental problems are directly related to human problems like poverty and malnutrition, making a holistic approach to Sustainable Development (SD) necessary. Religious leaders from around the world have signed statements in favour of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as peace, climate justice or environmental protection. Many efforts have been made by religious institutions around the world to promote these and other aspects related to SD. This paper presents the findings of a case-study to explore the practical contribution of religious organisations to the SDGs in Catalonia (Spain) by means of qualitative and quantitative research. The results of this study show that religions actively contribute to SDGs solving human problems and that it can be a field of inter-religious dialogue.

Introduction

In September 2015, the United Nations (UN) revised the *Millennium Development Goals* and set the global agenda for the next 15 years under a new title: "*Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (UN 2015). The adverse effects of climate change and other serious environmental problems are directly related to human

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problems like poverty reduction, which is why global cooperative efforts are necessary. There are no obvious synergies as of yet between economic, social and environmental progress. However, a clear consensus exists about the fact that those three dimensions need to grow together through SD (Sachs 2012). In order to achieve the SDGs, all the citizens of the world, and not just governments, need to contribute. Encouraging SDGs means that people and social groups with deep-rooted values and motivations of taking action, need to change their behaviour and citizen campaigns. However, these behavioural changes alone are not enough. In order to move towards a more sustainable future, in which the Earth is home to the entire human family, all social entities need to be involved. Over the past decades, increasing concern about environmental degradation has been equalled by the interest in the relation of religion to sustainability. A well-known article by historian Lynn White, “The historical roots of our ecologic crisis” (1967), blames Judeo-Christian religions for environmental degradation. Despite his criticism, White considers a specific cultural-religious contribution to be the solution to environmental degradation. Other authors such as Gardner (2002); Tucker (2008); Wolf and Gjerris (2009); Narayanan (2013); Berry (2014) and Reuter (2015), later coincided in highlighting the contributions of religions to SD and climate change mitigation. The contribution of religions to SD was given unprecedented recognition in 2015 at the COP 21 Climate Change Conference held in Paris from 30 November to 11 December (World Council of Churches 2015).

The responsibility of religions towards healing the planet has not only been present in theory, by means of declarations of intent, but also in actions specifically contributing to SD or integral sustainability. Despite all this, the contributions religions make to integral development are hardly visible. In contrast, videos about terrorist attacks that have a religious connotation have saturated the media over the past few years. An important part of the scientific literature in this field has focused on the relation between religions and the environment (religious environmentalism) and on how religions have inspired this kind of environmental activism (Gardner 2006; Gottlieb 2006 and Tucker 2003). Others have concentrated on the relation between religions and the social and economic aspects of human development, with particular reference to developing countries (Clarke, Jennings, and Shaw 2008; Boehle 2010; Jones and Petersen 2011; Haynes 2013, Tomalin

2015). However, there is a limited amount of literature that considers the relation between religions and the integral concept of SD, including the social, economic and environmental dimensions, as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015) proposes.

When consulting the most used databases in research into social science (Web of Knowledge and Scopus), it was found that there are no empirical studies trying to measure the specific contribution of religious entities to global sustainability. The closest example of a case study carried out in Catalonia is the work of Aguilar i Coscolla (2014), showing the contribution of the Catholic Church to social cohesion.

In a broader sense, the present paper examines the role of religious institutions with regard to sustainability in Catalonia as a case study, working towards the ultimate goal of getting to know more about the contribution of religions to SDGs. The paper is based on an empirical study carried out in 2015, using a mixed method, combining both quantitative and qualitative research as a methodology to study how the twelve religious bodies operating in Catalonia contribute to SDGs. The objective of this case study is to show the contribution of religious institutions to “integral SD”, by making it more visible. Despite having encountered certain difficulties when making generalizations, the study maintains that religions play an important role in the contribution to SDGs.

Background Theories

The concept of Sustainable Development

The Brundtland report (1987) states that SD is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland 1987). This concept of development put an end to the confrontation between human development (Development) and the conservation of natural resources (Environment). It marked a turning point in the concept of human development and made it possible for agreements to be established between economy and ecology. Studying situations in a holistic manner is another innovation associated with the concept of SD. At all the international summits on SD and in their final documents (Rio 1992;

Johannesburg 2002, Río 2012 and New York 2015), the three dimensions of sustainability and their indivisible and integrated nature (UN 2012 and 2015) are mentioned explicitly. The Interfaith Declaration on Climate Change, signed by 154 religious leaders, presented to the UN before the COP 21, also explicitly shows the interconnection between social, ecological and economic aspects of SD. For instance, the concept of “climate justice”, defended in the Interfaith Declaration, shows environmental aspects (climate) are related to social and economic aspects (justice) (World Council of Churches 2015).

Methods

The study of the contribution of religious entities to sustainability in Catalonia was conducted through empirical research, using a mixed -quantitative and qualitative- method of collecting data. On the one hand, the activities religious entities perform related to the indicators corresponding to SDGs (Table 2) were counted. The study is based on the information published in the websites of the religious entities in question. On the other hand, semi-structured in-depth interviews were done with the leaders of each religious community. The interviews were analysed with Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis computer programme, using the grounded theory.

The quantitative research was performed based on the database of religious entities provided by the Directorate-General of Religious Affairs of the Catalan Government (Direcció General d’Afers Religiosos de la Generalitat de Catalunya - DGAR). This database contains information on the entities associated with minority religions. With respect to the Catholic Church, the great number of entities and activities made it impossible to analyse them in such a large-scale research study. According to data from 2013 consulted at the official webpage of the Directorate-General of Religious Affairs of the Catalan Government (DGAR, 2013) there are a total of 7.958 religious centres in Catalonia, 84% of which are Catholic, thus totalling 6.685 Catholic cult centres. Catholic schools, social centres and health care centres should also be included. In order to keep the scope of the research within reasonable limits, a basis of 217 entities, developed by Belzunegui (Belzunegui 2016), was used. His work considers all the Catholic entities in Catalonia. After a rigorous screening process, the 217 most significant entities, the most socially active ones, were used as the basis of our study.

Determining the *items* or indicators used (quantitative analysis)

In order to know the role of religions in global sustainability, the activities and services offered by religious entities included on their websites were classified associating them with the SDGs (UN, 2015).

In order to systematically count the contributions of each religious entity to global sustainability, each activity present on the websites has been linked to the priority areas of each of the dimensions of SD according to the meanings.

In-depth interviews with leaders of religious entities in Catalonia (qualitative analysis)

In order to know the contribution of religious entities to the SDGs, invisible on websites, in-depth interviews (semi-structured focused interviews) were done with leaders of each of the religious organisations present in Catalonia. The representatives of the 12 religious communities based in Catalonia represented the sample object of the study. The qualitative research was based on the analysis and codification of the 18 interviews done with key informants (religious leaders), selecting the 12 religious organisations in Catalonia as a sample.

The content of the interviews was recorded and transcribed onto text documents and later underwent a process of conceptualization using the Atlas.ti programme. The analysis performed with this computer programme consists of coding the answers to the interviews. It provides us with a quantitative content, as it counts the number of times a code appears. Coding involves classifying and arranging the free answers (or fragments of answers) into categories created either before or during the analysis, depending on the methodology used. It gathers ideas, concepts or important topics in accordance with the grounded theory. The codes used in this research are the SDGs.

In order to sort the codes (classified answers), we used Atlas.ti, which enabled creating concept maps, arranging the codes per previously determined families. These families are the three main dimensions of SD: the social, environmental or ecological and economic dimensions.

This technique was used to *map*, which includes families (dimensions) and categories (SDGs) is provided with textual content, using quotes mentioned in the interviews that help clarify what the interviewees understand about the SDGs, associating them with the activities or priorities developed at the religious entities they represent.

The Table 1 contains the recollected interviews with leaders and the websites of religious entities that have been analysed.

Religion	Religious entity	n° of websites	Religious leader interviewed
Catholic Church	Barcelona Pastoral Delegation	217	Josep M. Jubany
	Caritas Catalonia		Carne Borbonès
	Unió de Religiosos in Catalonia		Lluís Serra
Protestant Churches	Evangelical Church	185	Guillem Correa
	Seventh day Adventist Church	9	Escola Urgell representative
Eastern Churches	Orthodox Church under the Serbian Patriarchate	7	Joan García Casanovas
	Coptic Church		Roes Ragai
Islam	Muslim community of Catalonia	10	Mohamed El-Ghaidouni
	Islamic Council of Catalonia		Mohamed Halhoul
Jews	Jewish communities	11	Victor Sorensen
Mormons	Mormons	9	Josep Lluís Hernández i Carne Gutiérrez
Jehovah	Jehovah's Witnesses	1	Josep Martínez
Bahá'í	Bahá'í faith	4	Emilio Egea
Hinduism	Advaita	20	Bhakti Das
	Hare Krishna		Gundicha Das
Sikhism	Sikh community	1	Gagandeep Singh
Buddhism	Buddhists	24	Montse Castellà
Taoism	Taoists	1	Artur Mateu

Table 1. Interviews with number of leaders and websites of religions entities analysed

Results and discussion

The quantitative research was painstaking and was based on the database of entities provided by the Directorate General of Religious Affairs of the Catalan Government in November 2014. The contributions to the SDGs of 11 of the 12 religious organisations established in Catalonia were analysed (no information was found regarding activities performed in Catalonia on the website of the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the last Days). 707 institutional websites and *facebook* pages were analysed (217 catholic ones and 490 belonging to other religious entities) in total. They correspond to religious entities and centres, places of worship and training or social action centres. A

total of 2,478 activities related to the contribution to SDGs were included. The global results are found in Table 2 and Figures 1 and 2.

The activity of a religious community is much more abundant than what can quantitatively be gathered on websites. The findings of the qualitative part of the research provide us with more information about what religious entities do or have the intention to do to promote SDGs than what the digital information, which has often not been updated, offers. The aim of the interviews was to clarify and explain the quantitative data. By analysing the interviews, we wanted to obtain further information on the contributions religious entities make to SDGs that had not been included in research so far. More particularly: 1) provide an opportunity to talk about other activities the entities carry out and that are not visible on the website; 2) find out more about the religious motivations of the activities of the religious entities that contribute to a certain field of sustainability; 3) explain the interests and concerns of religions that have not been materialised in specific activities (especially those related to environmental SDGs, as Goal 13 “Take action to combat climate change and its impacts”; Goal 14 “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”, and Goal 15 “Combat desertification”); 4) explain how carrying out those activities for SDGs may lead to inter-religious dialogue.

As a result of analysing, categorising and coding the interview transcriptions, concept maps were created. The number of codes quantifies and the number of times said term or concept has been mentioned in an interview. The concept maps were obtained from each interview and serve to see the priorities of each religious organisation to the SDGs. Coding enables quantifying the number of times the religious leaders address each of the SDGs. However, due to the limited extension of this article, we are not able to present the content of the conceptual maps.

Sustainable Development Goals	Catholic Church	Protestant Church	Orthodox Church	Muslim community	Jewish communities	Adventist Church	Jehovah Witness	Bahá'i community	Hinduist community	Sikhism	Buddhism	Taoist community	Brahma Kumaris
1. No Poverty	142	49	0	0	7	3	2	2	0	0	2	0	0
2. Zero Hunger	107	61	0	0	6	7	2	0	1	0	1	1	1
3. Good Health and Well-Being	263	29	0	0	7	12	3	2	20	1	23	1	1
4. Quality Education	342	251	14	8	22	22	4	11	20	1	5	0	3
5. Gender Equality	60	19	0	2	3	12	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
6. Clean Water and Sanitation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
7. Affordable and Clean Energy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
8. Decent Work and Economic Growth	23	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
9. Industry, Innovation and Infraestructure	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10. Reduced Inequalities	83	19	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11. Sustainable cities and communities	35	57	0	2	6	8	1	4	20	1	24	1	1
12. Responsible Consumption and Production	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
13. Climate Action	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
14. Life Below Water	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
15. Life on Land	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
16. Peace, Justice and strong Institutions	56	14	0	0	4	2	2	1	60	2	71	2	0
17. Partnerships for the Goals	317	89	0	0	16	26	5	3	0	0	8	0	1

Table 2. Number of activities of religious institutions in Catalonia related to SDGs

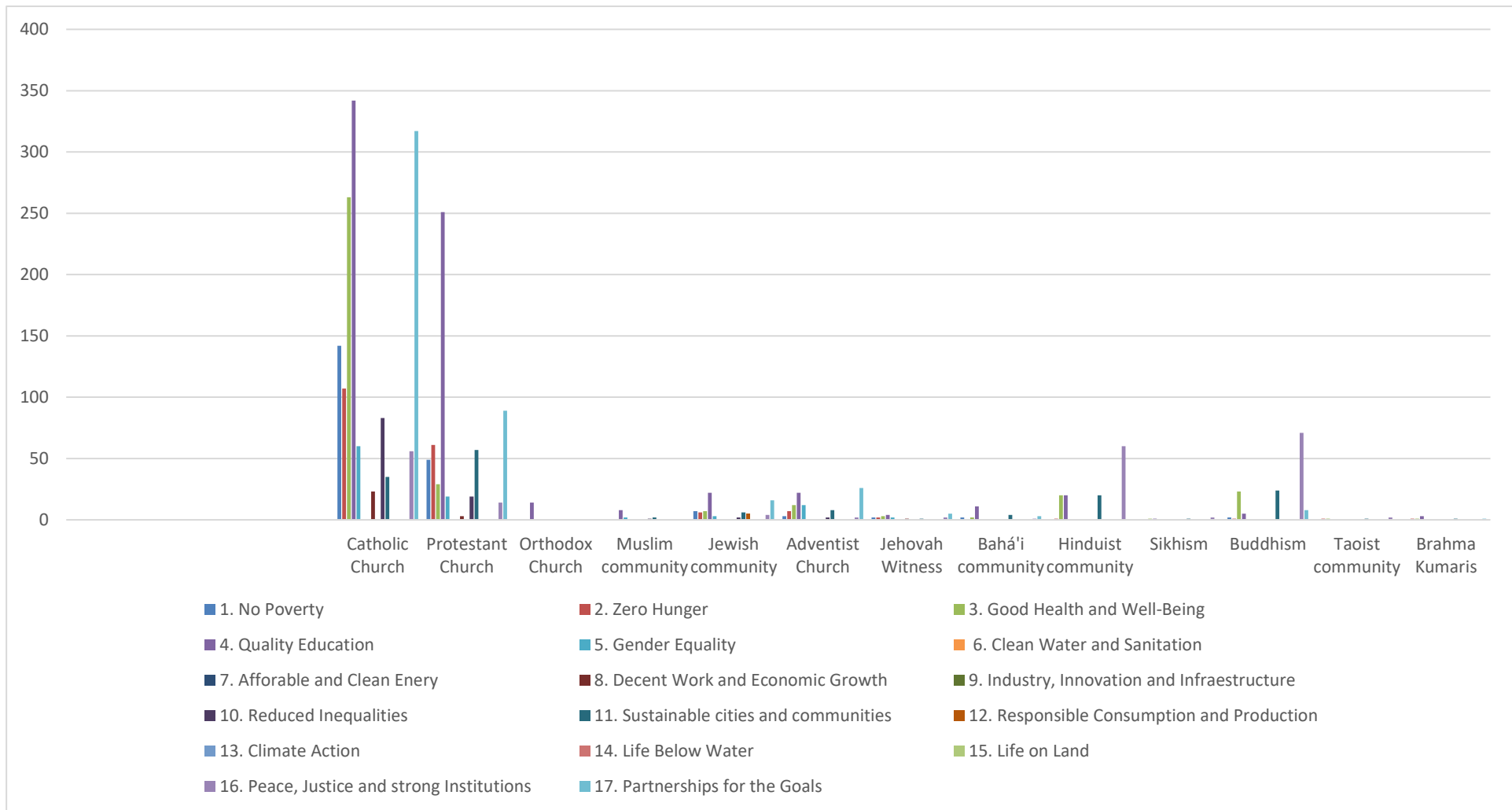


Figure 1. Contribution to SDGs of each religious group

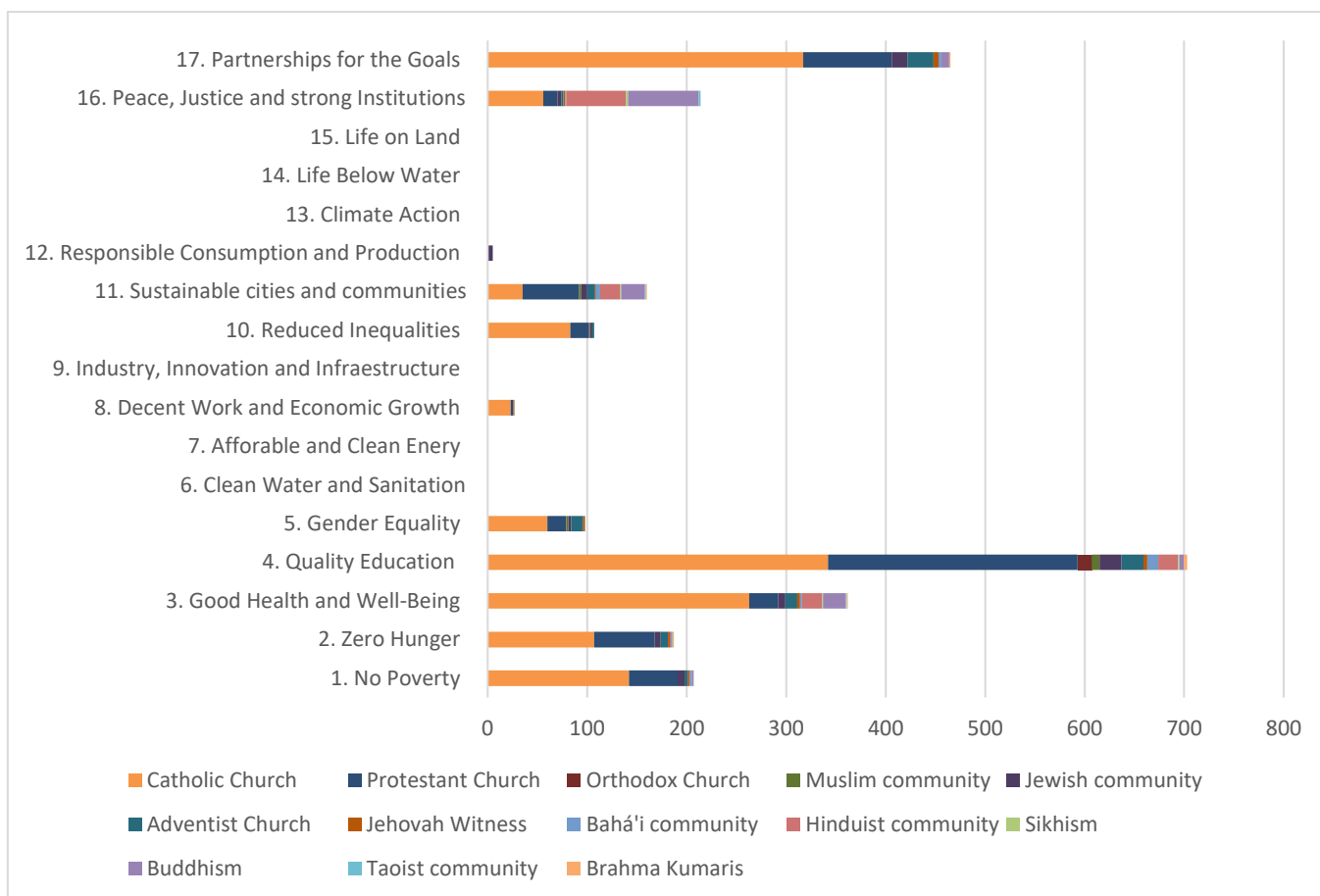


Figure 2. Religious institutions contribution to SDGs

The double analysis of the results provides a considerable amount of processed, classified and quantified information, which enables to understand the role of religions in the Catalan society of the 21st century. The large number of activities associated with SDGs and the beliefs and motivations encountered in the different religions, offers a panoramic view and shows us which the points in common or convergences are that exist between the different religious entities and their work towards the Agenda 2030 (UN, 2015).

With respect to the concept of SD, the importance of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'* needs to be highlighted. It provides an in-depth analysis of this concept from a Christian viewpoint and calls it *integral ecology* (Francis 2015: 137-163) or sustainable integral development (Francis 2015: 13), stressing the interconnection between social, economic and environmental aspects (Catholic leader num. 1). Buddhism, for its part, provides the conceptual reflection of "cosmovision", the perception that "everything is interrelated and interdependent, which helps understand SD (Buddhist leader).

The Christian religions are more inclined towards actions related to the sociocultural dimension of SD, as the interviews with the representatives of the Catholic Church (Catholic leaders num. 2 and 3), the Protestant Church (Protestant leader) and the Orthodox Church (Orthodox leader) show. The representatives of the different branches of Christianity stand out because of the number of times they mention or use textual quotes related to social cohesion. The Catholic Church points out the fact that faith without works (of charity, of helping your neighbours, of solidarity) is a dead faith (Catholic leader num. 1). “The Church teaches us of the moral responsibility towards Creation, the importance of integral human development, and of the importance of subsidiarity in building institutions” (Sachs 2014). Jehovah’s Witnesses stand out for their “true vocation of helping others”, which contains a clear Biblical foundation, the basic principle of which is “the love of God and love of others” (Jehovah’s Witnesses leader). The commandment of Jesus of ‘loving God above all things and loving your neighbour as yourself’ lies at the basis of all Christian social work. Social work is essential “but as a result of feeling the need to help because we love others as Jesus loves them” (Orthodox leader). The Mormons highlight the fact that “when you are good to others, you are good to yourself” in this action of helping others (Mormon leaders).

Regarding the major social challenges, the results obtained through the qualitative analysis are in line with those obtained through quantitative analysis in the major social challenges. The Figures 1 and 2 show that the greater contribution to the SDGs are: “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education” (Goal 4); “ensure healthy lives” (Goal 3); “end poverty in all its forms” (Goal 1) and “promote peaceful and inclusive societies” (Goal 16).

The Catholic Church also underscores “the relation between religion, society and culture”, and valorises the contribution of religions to the cultural heritage of humanity (Catholic leader num. 3).

The Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses, possibly because of their minority position in Catalonia, are more concerned about their relation with the society and the institutions. In other words, they use more textual quotes associated with their relation, connection or perception of social, political and media surroundings than the other religious institutions. It also needs to be mentioned that smaller communities perform actions at a more personal

than social level. This aspect stands out in the interviews held with the representatives of the Taoist community and the Coptic Church. Certain communities, such as the Bahá'í Community, Jehovah's Witnesses or the Jewish communities, put a lot of emphasis on education, given the fact that in their body of doctrine of values and principles, spiritual and doctrinal training occupy a prominent position. The results from the qualitative analysis are in line with those obtained in the quantitative analysis regarding the contribution of the Community of Bahá'í to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education" (Goal 4). To the representative of the Bahá'í Community, "personal and social transformations are parallel processes that are connected" (Bahá'í leader).

In this regard, it is interesting to highlight the entire section Pope Francis dedicates to education for sustainable development in *Laudato si* (Francis, 2015: 202-246). A clear example is the *Laudato* schools, *Scholas Laudato*, where students of rural primary schools and secondary schools do agro-technical work together to raise awareness about and care for our common home. In the Islamic world, there are also concerted efforts underway to systematically incorporate ecology into Islamic education (Reuter 2015).

The concept of promoting human rights and peace shows convergences among almost all Christian religions, Jewish communities, Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses and the Bahá'í, while this aspect does not appear as a priority in Eastern religions (Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism). The Catholic Church reminds us that "Violence cannot be perpetrated in the name of God" and talks about the "the value of each person" (Catholic leader num. 3) in accordance with Pope Francis' words, that no one must use the name of God to commit violence (Francis, 2014).

The Islamic community expresses the need for union between the different religions so as to promote peace and also to "rescue the dignity of human beings and protect it against economic, political and geopolitical interests" (General Secretary of the Islamic Council of Catalonia). The Mormons explicitly highlight the role of the family when it comes to protecting individuals and their rights (Mormon leaders).

Points of convergence were found regarding promoting equality amongst the major religions present in Catalonia. The quantitative analysis only detects activities from Christian beliefs in this area, especially with women in disadvantaged situations (abused women, women forced into prostitution, etc.). The qualitative research highlights the

biblical foundation of equality and non-discrimination, as all humans are created by God and all have the same dignity (Jehovah's Witnesses leader), but also the need to "treat every person equally and fairly, respecting their differences" (Catholic leader num. 3). In this regard, the social integration of immigrants and non-discrimination has been one of the concerns of the religious institutions in Catalonia for many years. The Catholic Church defines itself as "inclusive, not exclusive" (Catholic leader num. 1). The Mormons explicitly mention the aspect of universal brotherhood present in practically all religious sensitivities: "we are all brothers and sisters regardless of race, gender, origin, etc." (Mormon leaders). With regard to Goal 3, "ensure healthy lives", most religious entities promote health in different ways (Figures 1 and 2). Some promote it by caring for the sick and the elderly, providing help to alcoholics or drug addicts (Catholic Church and Protestants) while the spiritual beliefs of Eastern origin promote healthy food and doing relaxing activities, Pilates or yoga. The Christian religions have always considered looking after those who are sick or suffer physical pain as works of mercy recommended by Jesus (Catholic leader num. 1; Protestant leader). Eastern religions encourage a healthy lifestyle. They consider health is closely related to what we eat and healing is based on our diet. They also associate a simple lifestyle with respect for our natural surroundings and this aspect is related to the environmental dimension. This is what the Hare Krishna community highlights (Hare Krishna leader).

Regarding Goal 12 "ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns", most religions promote sustainable consumption through austere behaviours, like avoiding unnecessary material goods and on configuring the relation of economy and ecology for a sustainable future (Tucker and Grim 2001), but in this research we do not find any activity related with this goal. These results do not necessarily mean that religious leaders do not consider this topic in their talks or publications.

The concern about reducing poverty (Goal 1), doing very specific actions, is presented in almost all the religious groups, as they help everybody regardless of their religion. In the quantitative research, this kind of activities is mainly visible in the Catholic Church (totalling 332 different activities) and in the Protestant Church (129 activities). In the qualitative analysis, other religions clearly show this aspect. The Islamic community stresses the advice of "spending as little as possible" and says that "great spiritual works

can be performed using minimum material resources” (Muslim leader num. 1). The Mormons emphasise that in order to reduce poverty people need to be taught how to be self-sufficient (Mormon leaders). The Hare Krishna community follows the commandment of their founder telling them to lead a simple life and to avoid accumulating more than necessary. The Sikhs consider “all souls are equal” (Sikhs leader). The Catholic Church reminds us of the importance of its social doctrine with respect to business ethics and of creating jobs as specific social contributions (Catholic leader num. 3). The authors that have studied the contributions made by religions towards a more sustainable world stress the vision of numerous religious encouraging a simple, non-consumer lifestyle, appreciating the beauty of the planet (Wolf and Gjerris 2009).

The reality that numerous religious organisations are made up of immigrants also became apparent. Their priority is to help newly arrived immigrants of their communities to integrate at all levels. This is clear in the interviews held with the representatives of the Islamic community (Muslim leader num. 1), of the Orthodox Church (Orthodox leader), the Coptic Church (Coptic leader) and the Taoist community, which consists of Chinese people who came to live in Catalonia (Taoist leader). The Christian religions have an immediate awareness of the fact that the beliefs based on the Gospel are the ones that mainly move to action in the field of social cohesion and poverty reduction (Protestant leader). Other religious communities such as Buddhism (Buddhist leader) or Islam (Muslim leader num. 2) highlight the ethical and spiritual aspects of their religions to talk about social cohesion or sustainability. They connect them directly to what characterises their spiritual beliefs or references. Buddhists, Advaita Hinduists and Taoists stress the need of a personal “inner work” of each individual to overcome the crisis in the field of SD (Buddhist leader, Advaita Hinduists leader and Taoist leader), in line with Buddhist practice:

For a conscientious and mindful and compassionate way of life, one could cooperate in stemming the tide of destruction in one’s limited way, living more simply, doing whatever is doable in terms of recycling, reusing things, and taking different steps in protecting ‘the environment’ (Habito 2007).

The Orthodox Church underscores the need of “the inner experience of loving all things created” and “the capacity of human beings to enter into communion with everything that exists”, a skill that needs to be worked on at a personal level (Orthodox leader).

As far as the environmental dimension of sustainability is concerned, the quantitative study shows that religious groups do not have any specific activity directly addressed to promote it (Figure 1 and 2, regarding Goals 6, 7, 9, 13, 14 and 15). However, the qualitative research tells us that almost all the religious institutions make explicit reference to it and have a considerable interest in this particular dimension of sustainability. Religions see the environmental crisis as a phenomenon in which human beings have acted egotistically, destroying ecosystems without taking into account that it puts people's health at risk, "looking out for their own interests without thinking any further" (Orthodox leader). Technical solutions alone will be insufficient to stem the unravelling of the web of life (Tucker and Grim 2001). If the unsustainable situation of the planet is the consequence of a crisis of values (Berry 1999 and Francis 2015), SD will only be achieved providing profound values education and religions play a key role in this task (Narayanan 2013 and Haluza-DeLay 2014). Religions value caring for the environment and are concerned about it. They commit themselves to taking measures that mitigate the effects of climate change, as set out in the declaration of religious leaders at the COP21 Climate Change Summit.

Our religious convictions, social codes and customs tell us about concern for the vulnerable: climate change is leading to unprecedented ecological degradation, affecting in particular the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable populations. It is an irrefutable moral duty (World Council of Churches. 2015).

The starting point of the Judeo-Christian tradition is the creation of the world and caring for the planet is therefore a divine commandment: to Jewish communities the *tikkun olam* commandment is interpreted as the need to repair the world starting by oneself and then spreading its beneficial results to others creating a ripple effect (Jewish leader). The Orthodox Church looks for "the fulfilment of the experience of humans in communion with God and the whole creation", and this necessarily implies respecting and loving nature (Orthodox leader). The world surrounding us is the Creator's work, it is a gift from God to humanity and we have to respect it (Jehovah's Witnesses leader). All the interviews done with Jewish and Christian leaders manifest we should be expressing our gratitude to God for natural resources as a natural good that God makes available for our use and the use of other species and the theological imperative to take care of it (Shaefer 2013). The Buddhist community says "nature contains the elements we are made of"

(Buddhist leader) and according to Hinduism “all kinds of life need to be respected” (Hare Krishna leader) and they recognise “there is interdependence of all living beings” (Advaita Hinduist leader). Islam highlights the fact that “only the necessary means from nature may be used to advance towards God” (Muslim leader num. 1). To the Sikh community the life of any animal is important and that is the reason why they are vegetarians (Sikh leader). To the Taoists, the universe consists of “different forms of the same energy” (Taoist leader). Unfortunately, in Catalonia, this ecological concern related to all religious organisations has not yet been turned into specific actions and activities to improve the environmental dimension of sustainability. Several authors show how religion plays an influential role in promoting sustainable behaviour: “Religion also offers a means of experiencing a sustaining creative force, whether a creator deity, an awe-inspiring presence in nature, or simply the source of all life.” (Gardner 2002). The dialogue between science and religions also promotes greater cooperation to solve our planet's environmental problem (Chuvieco 2016).

The joint work of religions towards SDGs is equally highlighted: In Catalonia, only the Catholic and Protestant Churches have performed a specific task together through Caritas and *Iniciatives Solidàries* (a protestant NGO) so far. It is important for the Jewish communities to show that “the major religions can understand each other and send a message of shared values” (Jewish leader). Most interviewees stressed the task performed by the Stable Workgroup on Religions as an organisation that congregates all the different religions in Catalonia, not so much to talk about their respective beliefs but to help find solutions to daily problems and representing religion in front of society and government authorities (Protestant and Orthodox leaders). The Stable Workgroup on Religions (GTER – Grup de Treball Estable de Religions) encourages a good relation between all the different religious communities in Catalonia. On September 21, 2016, on the occasion of the International Peace Day, the religions present in Catalonia represented by the GTER, signed a manifest to build a culture of peace and coexistence as a commitment to promote the SDGs.

Conclusions

All the religious entities analysed in this study perform activities, which improve human and social conditions towards a fairer and more egalitarian society. According to the mixed –quantitative and qualitative- research carried out, all the entities contribute with actions as promoting human rights in general, values education, promoting peace and security, amongst others. With respect to the economic dimension of sustainability, on the part of Catholic, Protestant, Jews and the Bahá'í, there are contributions to mitigate extreme poverty situations helping with housing, food and/ or clothing. Other religions or spiritual associations, such as Hinduism, undertake social initiatives to help economically disadvantaged people in India, but they lack presence and institutional development to do so in Catalonia.

Our quantitative research shows the contributions of religious entities related to environmental sustainability are not visible. When examining the websites of the entities (quantitative research), no initiatives are found concerning the sustainable use of natural resources or to stopping climate change and its effects.

The revision of the qualitative part of the research revealed that although there is a lack of specific activities announced on the websites, environmental concern exists in practically all the religious organisations and there are no major differences between the level of said concern in Western and Eastern religions. The religions of Eastern origin such as Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Taoism, show great respect for nature, which is considered sacred in a way. How they perceive interdependence between living beings and the abiotic environment is very clear. The Christian, Jewish and Islamic religions have a creationist vision of the world, which invites people to adopt a caring and grateful attitude and to use natural resources, which are considered to be a gift from the Creator, responsibly.

The results of this study shows that the 12 religions of the sample promote activities, which solve human problems like: reducing poverty (Goal 1); ending hunger (Goal 2), ensuring healthy lives (Goal 3), ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education (Goal 4), achieving gender equality (Goal 5), promoting decent work for all (Goal 8), reducing inequality (Goal 10), promoting peaceful and inclusive societies (Goal 16) and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development (Goal 17).

This research not confirm the thesis according to which Eastern religions are more concerned about the environment than Western religions, based on a creationist conception (Sarre 1995). The research does not support Lynn White's well-known thesis (1967) either. According to White's theory, creationist religions have a vision of dominion over the Earth that lies at the root of the current ecologic crisis. From the interviews, it is deduced that, to those religions, the dominion over the Earth does not mean one is allowed to exploit it.

In summary, all the religions based in Catalonia promote respectful attitudes towards the environment, but perhaps no initiatives in this regard have materialised as of yet because other entities, such as schools, NGOs and public authorities are developing them. Religions carry out other kinds of activities, of a social nature, to see to the needs of the most disadvantaged. It needs to be mentioned that the religious entities promote more sustainable attitudes through conferences, for instance, but this kind of activities does not appear on the entities' respective websites.

The activities performed by the different religious entities show a great number of similarities and convergences that contribute to promoting human rights, peace, gender equality, health and social cohesion, as we mentioned in the results section of this report. In many cases, they provide social services, essential in order to reach marginalised people or those at risk of social exclusion. Sharing initiatives and activities promoting a fairer and more inclusive society may be an opportunity for the entities and representatives of the different religions to meet and encourage dialogue. Working in SDGs is an opportunity of convergence between people of different religions and joint reflection on religious worldviews may provide guidance to and shed light on building a fairer, more peaceful and sustainable world.

The study—especially its ethnographic part— shows religious entities are often unaware of the fact they are contributing efficiently to SDGs through the numerous activities they promote. Over the past decades, several authors (Tucker 2008; Narayanan 2013 and Berry 2014) have highlighted the importance of collaboration between civil and religious entities and the endeavour to improve sustainability.

The research carried out corroborates the hypothesis that religious entities do numerous activities to promote peace, social cohesion and sustainability. However, it also confirms

they are hardly visible. Through research –in-depth interviews held with the representatives of different religious organisations – it has been possible to obtain a lot more information than what can be found on institutional websites, which means it is both important and necessary to contribute to making the activities visible.

Limitations of the study and future perspectives

The study on the contribution of religions to SDGs has been possible with a sample of the 12 religions present in Catalonia. The limitations of time and budget have prevented an exhaustive study of the specific contribution of each of the religions to the SDGs. The quantitative analysis has been limited to the information found in a total of 499 websites of the religious entities, in which a total of 2,478 activities linked to the SDGs have been identified. This is also a limitation, since not all religious entities still have complete and updated information about their activity on internet. On the other hand, it has not been possible to analyse all the religious entities that operate in Catalonia, but only those that appear in the registry of the Directorate General of Religious Affairs.

The interest of the study conducted during 2015 consisted in knowing the actions performed by the religious entities in Catalonia to contribute towards SDGs and making those actions more visible. A future research could also make visible best practices of religious organisations regarding sustainability and reflections on the beliefs and values those actions are based on may be shared. The human and environmental benefits of adopting sustainable behaviour may also be analysed. Future research might continue to make this task visible, and to reflect, share and spread the knowledge about the contribution that religions make to each specific goal of the Agenda 2030 (UN, 2015).

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