

V. Summary of the Results – Perspectives and Challenges for the Future

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1. Introduction

This book holds the results of one of the largest studies on youth and religion in Europe. The focus of the study was on Protestant youth and confirmation work in nine European countries. The study is the second study of its kind. The first one was carried out in 2007/2008. The study analyses confirmation work and the role of religion, faith and the church from various perspectives among the confirmands, volunteers and employed workers. In the following, an overview on the main results concerning the present situation of confirmation work in Europe as well as of the changes that have taken place between the first and the second international study will be described. Furthermore, this chapter identifies challenges for the future, based on the results presented in this study. Moreover, the results also indicate the need for further research which will be discussed at least in a number of respects. The multiple and multi-faceted results of the study as well as the many interpretations presented in the different chapters of the book do not allow for simple conclusions. Nevertheless, the following description can at least recapitulate some of the major findings and indicate major challenges for confirmation work in the future.

Confirmation work does not take place in a vacuum but is tightly linked to general developments in society and to changes in the role of church and religion. The present research is focused on youth, religion and confirmation work in very different contexts. First of all, the study took place in contexts where the Protestant Churches operate in a clear majority position but where the share of members among the population has been declining (the Lutheran Churches in the Nordic countries). Secondly, the study took place in contexts where the Protestant Churches roughly have an equal number of members as the Catholic Church but where the situation varies greatly in different parts of the country (EKD in Germany and Reformed Church in Switzerland). Thirdly, the study took place in contexts where Protestant Christianity is in a minority position. This applies to the Lutheran and Reformed Churches in Austria and Hungary, the Methodists in Germany and the Lutherans in Poland. Fourthly, regardless of the general position of the Churches, the popularity of confirmation work can differ considerably between the contexts. There are contexts where almost all

young Protestants are confirmed (for example, Finland, Denmark, Germany), and contexts where confirmation work only reaches a minority, even though the Church is in a majority position (Sweden). The results of the study show that the context and the general situation of church and religion are an important factor explaining differences between the countries and Churches.

2. The Confirmands

The results show that the most important motive for attending confirmation time is linked to one's own will. Most confirmands attend simply because they want it themselves. Only a minority feel obliged to take part. Other motives for attending confirmation time are linked to tradition, fun and friendship, celebration and faith, in this order. For most confirmands, confirmation time itself is mostly about faith and fun. Most confirmands (72 %) feel that during their confirmation time they have learned more about God and faith, and almost as many (69 %) felt that they had lot of fun during confirmation time. The results show that confirmation time can have a positive influence on developing a religious identity, and that it can make a difference for those who had not had the chance to get in touch with religious contents and practices before confirmation time. Apart from learning about God and faith, two thirds of the confirmands also felt that they were able to come to a decision about their faith, and more than half of the confirmands felt that they were strengthened in their faith.

Confirmation time also tends to strengthen confirmands' relationship to church membership. The key issues explaining the change in their attitudes towards church membership were related to the extent to which they felt welcome and accepted in their parish and to the extent to which their own questions concerning faith were addressed. However, the results are different concerning the question of the confirmands' willingness to have their future children baptised. The share of those planning to do so, tended to decline during confirmation time. This is a critical message to those planning and developing confirmation work in the Churches.

The results also show that the adolescents are not very interested in forms of individualised religiosity characterised by the option of »believing without belonging« or »belonging without believing«. For them, believing and belonging are tightly linked. If there is a measurable religious identity, it goes along with a positive attitude towards the church in general or, at least to some degree, it is linked to the willingness to belong, although it also has to be said that the positive image of the church does not always imply an equally positive rating of

one's own belonging to it. In any case, the results concerning believing and belonging do not lend themselves to interpretations based on simple formulas.

Even though the focus of confirmation work is on learning from one's own religion, a third of the confirmands felt that they also learned more about other religions during confirmation time. More than half of the confirmands stated that they learned to respect other religions during confirmation time. This means that confirmation work also contributes to interreligious knowledge and understanding, although the efforts in this respect should and could be expanded in the future, as already shown by the first study. According to the confirmands' views, confirmation work fosters tolerance and respect for other religions but the increase of knowledge is more limited.

Identity development is an important issue for adolescents in confirmation time. The results of the study show that confirmation time may strengthen not only religious identity development but also the development of personal identity in a broader sense. During confirmation time, an increasing interest in both identity and religious identity can be noted.

In terms of satisfaction, confirmation work can be rated as a very successful form of non-formal education. More than two thirds of the confirmands expressed satisfaction with the confirmation time as a whole. The young people were especially satisfied with the camp period during confirmation time (if available) and the people working with them: the ministers, other teachers and volunteers. The results also show that in groups with team leadership, the satisfaction rates of the adolescents are typically higher.

Confirmation time obviously entails many positive experiences for dealing with faith- and life-issues important in adolescence. The results also make clear the connection between these experiences and satisfaction with confirmation work. The results of the study also confirm the importance of community: significant effects of experiencing good community in the confirmation group and feeling accepted in the parish underline this positive relationship in almost all of the participating countries. This sense of community seems to be reached most easily in camp-settings, as the results of the first study already showed. The results also show that by focusing on communal experiences, ethical commitment and, in particular, volunteerism, confirmation clearly contributes to preparing young people for active participation in civil society in important respects. However, in spite of the confirmands' high satisfaction, the perceived relevance of confirmation work for daily life was often rather low. This means that young people enjoy confirmation time but they do not always find it meaningful in relationship to their daily life. Yet there also are noticeable exceptions from this general tendency. In Poland, Hungary and among the Methodists in Germany, the most dominant attitude pattern is constituted by confirmands who take a positive view both on overall satisfaction and daily life

relevance. This concerns contexts where the Church operates in a minority position, and contexts where the values for believing and a positive view of the role of the Church were already high among the confirmands in the beginning of confirmation time. This implies that especially those adolescents who feel distant to church and faith in the beginning of confirmation time, more rarely experience a daily life relevance of confirmation time.

The cultural position of confirmation work is strongly connected to the meta-developments and meta-narratives of religion in postmodern societies. Even if the secularisation thesis probably has to be relativised, the influence of religious pluralisation within the European countries participating in this study can hardly be overestimated. It is also visible in the plural views of the young people when it comes to their views concerning religion and faith. At the same time, the changes in society in general are tightly linked to changes in the family. As the results of the study show at many levels, socialisation in the family is closely linked to the role of religion in the lives of young Europeans. Family background is one of the key factors explaining the confirmands' experience of confirmation time. This means that the experience of confirmation time does not take place in a vacuum at the individual level as well, but is linked to earlier experiences. The results show that, in many respects, those young people who had a religious upbringing at home and who had prior experiences with the church, benefit most from confirmation time. The connection between previous experiences and religious attitudes at the beginning and at the end of confirmation time is very strong. Results concerning Christian belief are higher for the group with regular evening prayer in childhood than for the group without contact to the church before confirmation time. These findings underline that a positive experience of confirmation time in general and, for example, positive experiences related to worship are to a large extent related to how much one is an insider or outsider – those who are familiar with the »tribal codes« of the church are much more likely to have a positive experience. Religion-related cultural capital and prior experiences with the church play a significant role for the confirmation time experience in general and for confirmands' experience of worship, giving those familiar with the codes a head start. The relevance and central importance background factors for the success of confirmation work can hardly be overlooked.

Also, gender matters. Female confirmands tend to be more religious than male confirmands, and their attitudes towards the church are also more positive. Girls seem to benefit more from confirmation time. The impact of confirmation work is stronger with girls than with boys, concerning their faith as well as their attitudes towards the Church. Furthermore, they have, for example, a better social experience than boys, they have experienced more worship adequate for young people, have met more nice people in the services, they liked

singing old church hymns more than the boys, they enjoyed modern church hymns a lot more, they felt more secure in the group, and they enjoyed the worship community more. Yet at the same time, gender differences in confirmation work in general are not as big as one might expect.

Confirmands belonging to a minority Church differ in many respects from those belonging to a majority Church. For example, confirmands belonging to a minority Church score higher on Christian belief items and are more strongly committed to church membership than confirmands from countries where Lutherans or other Protestants constitute a large proportion or the majority of the population. Minority situations obviously go along with thorough reflection of faith-related issues and a conscious decision about church membership. Protestants in minority situations often have to explain their peculiarities and distinct church traditions more frequently than those in majority situations.

The results also show that the educational level of the family has an influence. Families with a stronger educational background are more likely to transmit religion to their children, and young people from such families also have stronger faith-related motives and stronger experiences of growth in faith and are more satisfied in general.

Moreover, the region in which confirmation time takes place has an influence, and urban and rural confirmands also differ concerning their motives as well as their experience of confirmation work itself. The rural confirmands tend to emphasise traditional motives, such as being baptised, or because it has always been like that in their family, or because it is an important step in growing up. The urban confirmands are motivated more by having their faith strengthened, learning more about God, experiencing community or coming to their own decision. The general satisfaction and the experience in general are also more positive among the urban confirmands. This is partly linked to wider resources in urban parishes and to the possibility to organise groups with longer camps. Also in general, the results show that there is a better match between the expectations and experiences for the urban confirmands than for the rural. One of the reasons for this is obviously linked to different attendance rates. The participation rate is lower in many of the urban areas, which may mean that the group itself is pre-selected from the very start. Furthermore, the results show that the cities might have become spaces of post-secular reflection – at least among the adolescents who sign up for confirmation. The urban adolescents are more motivated by personal religious factors than the confirmands in rural areas.

However, regardless of the importance of various background factors, the experience of confirmation time itself is of most importance in explaining satisfaction. In spite of the relevance of educational background and religious experience in childhood, the experience of the confirmation time itself plays

an important role. For example, experiences related to involvement and participation and the experience of growth in faith at the end of confirmation time are much more meaningful in explaining satisfaction than, for example, gender or religious socialisation in childhood.

Expectations and experiences are also tightly linked. For example, confirmands who wished to have fun during confirmation time and perceived that this expectation was met, were not only more satisfied with the confirmation time as a whole but also find the learning experiences during this period more meaningful. Conversely, there is a dramatic decline in both satisfaction and perceived relevance among those confirmands whose expectations were not met.

3. The Workers

It is one of the remarkable developments highlighted in the first study that voluntary workers have come to play a decisive role for confirmation work in most of the countries participating in the study. Opposed to the traditional model of confirmation training or instruction in which the minister was seen as the one person in charge of the program, confirmation work now is most often done in teams, although there still are countries or churches and also individual situations for which this does not apply. According to the study, the largest group of workers are the volunteers (54%). Confirmation work meanwhile often means teamwork. 56% of the main responsible persons stated that there was confirmation work in teams. In connection to the share of the voluntary workers there also seems to be a gender effect. While 64% of the ministers were male and 36% female, within the group of the volunteers the distribution was almost the other way round; 37% of the volunteers were male and 63% female.

Altogether, the number of volunteers participating in confirmation work throughout the European countries involved in the study is higher than the number of »professionals«, be it ministers, deacons or other full-or part-time workers. It was not possible to calculate the number of volunteers for all of the countries. In Germany, however, the data allowed for a reliable extrapolation. According to this calculation, there were 62 000 volunteers actively involved in the confirmation year 2012/2013. This is an impressive figure in itself. It means that there was one volunteer per approximately 3.6 confirmands. Moreover, compared to the first study, the number of volunteers went up by 2000 workers in Germany, although the number of confirmands declined by 25 000 over the five years between the two studies. In Finland, there are proportionately even more volunteers: about one volunteer per 3.0 confirmands. Another important

aspect concerning the importance of the voluntary workers is related to their age. Many of them are adolescents themselves, which means that the confirmands can view them as somewhat older peers and, through that, most likely, also as role models. In any case, the confirmands greatly appreciate the participation of voluntary workers in confirmation time.

While the involvement of volunteers, then, is quite remarkable, it should not make one forget the importance of the full-time workers. Most of them appreciate doing confirmation work. They are satisfied with this field of work, and the confirmands respond to them with a high rate of approval as well.

The main aim of the workers in the different countries is obviously not a certain missionary form of confirmation work but rather the attempt to develop a livable and workable balance of questions and topics that are related to faith, life and adolescence. Their choices show a certain preference for topics that are clearly related to the Christian tradition. But the list of their most preferred topics also includes some ethical questions, like justice and responsibility, and existential questions, like the meaning of life.

Underneath the common tendencies and international averages, there is a considerable amount of variation between the countries, at least with some of the topics. In this respect, national and regional traditions seem to play a role. Moreover, the difference between the main responsible workers who often are ministers, and the volunteers comes into play here. Generally speaking, the voluntary workers' interests seem to be closer to those of the confirmands than to those expressed by the ministers. This observation is important because it shows the ability of the volunteers to make confirmation work more interesting for the confirmands. To put it differently: listening to the volunteers' ideas can help the full-time workers to make confirmation work more meaningful and relevant for the confirmands.

Comparing the two studies from 2007/2008 and 2012/2013, there are a number of changes in the workers' preferences. On the whole, traditional topics of the Christian faith, although still at a very high level, have lost some of their standing while topics closer to the lifeworld of the confirmands have gained in interest. This may be an indication of the attempt to get closer to the interests of the confirmands, although, at least in some countries, it is the confirmands themselves who expect to learn more about God and the Christian faith.

Looking at the motives for doing confirmation work, the aims related to personal growth and belonging were regarded as most important aims, both by workers and volunteers. The results show that the workers put a lot of energy and heartblood into confirmation work. The results indicate that most of the workers are well aware of the specific challenges of adolescence and try to relate to them in a very active and almost passionate sense. They intend to respond to these challenges in most productive and creative ways.

4. Confirmation Work

At least in some ways, the decisive question for the present study refers to the situation of confirmation work as a program offered to young people. What does it entail? How is it structured? What tendencies can be discerned?

One of the core findings of the previous study (2007/2008) referred to the changing nature of confirmation work. In ways that are markedly different from the traditional catechetical instruction of the past, confirmation work has taken on a new shape that makes it attractive to the young people of today. In the following, this shape will be described from a number of different perspectives. Before that, however, it must be emphasised that the different countries and Churches play an important role in this respect. It is not possible to identify something like a European standard model that, with few variations, could be found in all of the participating countries. Instead, it is more appropriate to speak of general tendencies that are similar in at least most of these countries, and many variations at the level of the actual practice. These variations and the varieties of the practice of confirmation work can not be captured in this summary chapter but may be found in the reports from the different countries (cf. above; for more details, also see Schweitzer et al. 2010).

Traditional confirmation instruction as it was called in the past, was based on the model of the school of earlier times. It entailed school-type 60 or 45 minutes-long lessons every week. While such lessons still exist as part of confirmation work, their number is clearly declining (during the five years between the first and the second study alone from 47 to 43 hours). Instead, the number of meetings with larger timeframes is growing (special days, etc.) which allows for more flexible and creative ways of working together. Moreover, the confirmation time has come to include outings and camps as well as internships, for example, in the parish or with social projects run by the church.

In terms of the teaching and learning methods used, similar observations can be made. Traditional methods like lecturing continue to play a role but the most popular methods are discussion and group work. Although used less frequently than these two, creative methods based, for example, on visual art and drama, playing together and listening to stories or to music, encountering experts, etc. also have come to be part of confirmation work.

Another perspective is related to the workers involved in confirmation work. Most clearly, it is no longer just the minister who is in charge of confirmation work. The minister still plays an important role and he or she may well be the main responsible person. Yet in most of the participating countries, there also is a whole team of workers which typically has turned confirmation work into a teamwork enterprise. It is of special interest and far-reaching importance that

these teams include a growing number of volunteers who often are older adolescents. To say it again, these volunteers are especially valued by the confirmands and they can serve as role models for them. Moreover, since more and more, there are, for example, special training programs offered for young volunteers, *the teamwork setting of confirmation work implies a type of youth work geared to older adolescents*. In other words, young volunteers are important as workers but it is also important to realise that voluntary work includes new possibilities for making church-related activities attractive for older adolescents who otherwise might not be interested in the church.

If one element in the new design of confirmation work deserves to be especially highlighted, it is most likely the camps where, in some of the countries, a considerable part of the confirmation time takes place. This is not only true in a temporal sense, i. e., because camps can sometimes last for a whole week or even longer; it is even more true because the time spent at camp is of special value and importance for confirmands as well as for the workers. In addition to this, it could be shown that camps can create a learning space that implies the use of a broad spectrum of youth-oriented activating learning methods.

However, the findings also indicate that regardless of the setting, certain methods seem to be more powerful than others. The narrow use of teaching methods is linked to lower satisfaction rates and lower experiences of growth in faith as well as to the weakest experiences concerning church services. According to the results, especially the use of music and meditation has many positive influences on the confirmands' experience. At the same time, using the method of lecturing to a high degree goes along with lower satisfaction and lower levels of involvement. This means that working towards a more meaningful experience of confirmation time does not necessarily require more camp days – and therefore more money. Strengthening the teaching abilities among the confirmation workers is of high importance as well.

In general, then, there is a clear over-all tendency away from a school-type paradigm to youth-work-type confirmation work that has deeply changed this program in many places. The new type is obviously attractive for the adolescents because it meets their interests and needs. In addition to this, a comparison between the results from the two studies from 2007/2008 and 2012/2013 shows that the transition to the new type has made further progress during the five years between the studies. This is a very encouraging result.

Yet not all results concerning confirmation work can be called encouraging to the same degree. One of the concerns raised by the first study was related to the experiences with worship services during confirmation time. Although about half of the confirmands said that they were satisfied with these services, this was not considered satisfactory, given the theological importance of the worship service as a central part in the life of a Protestant Church. It is encoura-

ging that the satisfaction rate has gone up in this respect as well with the 2012/2013 study. Yet it must also be said that every other confirmand considered worship services boring in the beginning of confirmation time and that the number of those who thought so, went up during confirmation time. It remains important for the future to involve confirmands more actively with worship services and to give them more chances to contribute their own ideas in the planning of these services.

Another problematic aspect has to do with the contents taken up in confirmation work. While most of the confirmands stated that they are quite content with their confirmation time, they also felt that what they could learn there was of little relevance for their everyday life. This corresponds with the feeling also expressed by many of the adolescents that their questions were not really addressed by the workers. Consequently, it can be no surprise that the number of those who think that the »church does not have answers to the questions that are important« to them did not decline during confirmation time but, in fact, increased slightly. This result indicates that confirmation work is not successful or at least, not sufficiently successful in terms of one of its aims that often is even considered the main aim of this program. It does not, or at least not sufficiently, make accessible the meaning of the Christian faith and of the biblical tradition in relationship to today's world.

5. Developments Between the First and the Second Study

One of the main aims of the study was to explore longterm developments in confirmation work in Europe. The question of continuity and change is consistently addressed both in the comparative chapters and the country reports, by comparing the findings of the present study from 2012/2013 with those of the first study that was conducted five years earlier (2007/2008).

Given the rather short time span of five years, it may not be surprising that the impression of overall stability prevails. Interestingly, this is particularly the case with regard to the confirmands. On the whole, there are no rapid changes in the expectations and experiences of the confirmands or in their attitudes toward religion, faith and church. This overall stability is quite remarkable because both, theorists and practitioners in the field of confirmation work often assume a declining religiosity among the young people attending confirmation work. The findings of this study do not support such a negative view. In fact, the data do not reveal any general tendencies in the sense of decline – or increase – on an overall level. On a national level, however, more significant changes can be noticed, for example, in Austria and Finland (see the respective country reports).

Nevertheless, it still is interesting to see where larger changes occurred. The following identically worded items of the two surveys show an increase or decrease by 5 percent points or more:

- KK26: During the time of my confirmation training, I temporarily worked in programs of the church (e. g., in an internship). (+ 11)
- KE08: Faith in God helps me in difficult situations. (+ 10)
- CE08: Faith in God helps me in difficult situations. (+ 8)
- KK44: I have experienced that my commitment to other people is important. (+ 8)
- KN10: Satisfied with church services. (+ 7)
- KK11: During the time of my confirmation training, my questions concerning faith were addressed. (+ 5)
- KK37: In our parish I feel welcome and accepted. (+ 5)
- KG03: If I have children, I want to have them baptised. (- 6)
- CL08: Interest in »Justice and responsibility for others«. (- 5)
- CL09: Interest in »Friendship«. (- 5)
- KE04: Jesus has risen from the dead. (- 5)

What stands out most, is the heterogeneity of these items. There is no clear pattern connected to them. Obviously, there was a clear shift towards projects and methods that actively involve young people with the programs of the church. More puzzling is the massive rise in the conviction of the confirmands that God helps them in difficult situations, both in the beginning and in the end of confirmation time. At the same time, significantly fewer confirmands believe that Jesus has risen from the dead.

The comparison of the results from the two studies also indicates that confirmation work now contributes more effectively to the ethical and social commitment of the young people involved. About half of the confirmands stated in 2013 that they experienced that their commitment to other people is important – 8 percent points more than in 2008. Interestingly, two of the four items that show a clear decline actually support this view: The confirmands interest in »justice and responsibility for others« and »friendship« is in 2012/13 significantly lower at the beginning of confirmation time than five years before. At the end of the confirmation time, the rate of approval is in both cases identical with that in 2007/2008.

From the point of view of the Churches, it is worrisome that 6 percent points fewer confirmands express the intention to have their future children baptised. But there are some particularly encouraging developments as well. In 2013, 5 percent points more confirmands felt welcome and accepted in their parish than in 2008. With regard to church services, the rise in satisfaction during is even higher. Finally, if it holds true that good confirmation work successfully

addresses the faith-related questions of the confirmands, then confirmation work clearly improved during the time between 2007/2008 and 2012/2013. In almost all of the countries that participated in the first study, significantly more confirmands stated in 2013 that their questions about their faith were addressed during their confirmation time – the only exception is Sweden where the values were very high in this respect in the first study.

Interestingly, the workers' survey shows a slightly different picture. In the following, again only differences between the first and the second study that exceed 5 percent points, are rendered:

- VC06: The confirmands got to know what programs of youth work the church offers to them. (+ 7)
- VC10: The confirmands experienced forms of meditation or prayer. (+ 7)
- WD02: Confirmation work should be used as missionary chance for winning people for the Christian faith. (+ 5)
- WE07: I want to be a role model for younger people. (+ 5)
- VC05: The confirmands got to know our parish better. (+ 5)
- WD05: I want to have at least one personal conversation with each confirmand. (- 17)
- WC11: During their confirmation training, the confirmands should learn to live their everyday life in relationship to God. (- 8)
- WE08: Faith in God is important for me. (- 8)
- WC10: During their confirmation training, the confirmands should be strengthened in their faith. (- 6)
- WA15: Important topic: Baptism. (- 5)
- VC12: The confirmands were enabled to make their own decision about faith. (- 5)
- VD05: I had at least one personal conversation with each confirmand during confirmation time. (- 5)

Contrary to the confirmands' survey, the table reveals at least one clear tendency. The approval of faith-related attitudes and aims is considerably lower in 2012/13 than it was five years before, at least in most cases. Compared to the first study, significantly fewer workers take the view that confirmands should learn to live their everyday life in relationship to God or that they should be strengthened in their faith during confirmation time. At the end of confirmation time, the number of workers who stated that the confirmands were enabled to make their own decision about faith is 5 percent points lower than it was in 2008. This decline seems to be mirrored in the attitudes of the workers. In the second study, 82% ascribed personal importance to faith in God at the beginning of confirmation time – that was 8 percent points less than among the workers five years before.

6. International Comparisons

Any international research project aims at additional insights that can not be achieved on a national level alone. It is easy to see throughout this volume that the cooperation of researchers across national borders has been very enriching – in terms of personal encounters, the continued exchange of ideas and, last but not least, the multiple international co-authorships in preparing this book. From the very beginning of the first study carried out in 2007/2008, the importance of this kind of cooperation made itself felt, for example, in the joint creation of an innovative research design that goes way beyond the standard one-time surveys, or in identifying research questions together that exceed the taken for granted state of the art in the different countries.

International cooperation also is the basis for international research that promises new results. As described in the introduction to this volume (p. 19 ff.) as well as in earlier publications in more detail (cf. Schweitzer et al. 2010, 207-211), there are a number of questions that can not be answered or even adequately addressed as long as only one Church or one country is in view. This holds especially true for questions concerning not only individual elements like, for example, certain teaching methods and materials but that refer to the effectiveness of whole systems. Often, there is only one system in use in a particular country, for example, in terms of the duration of confirmation work, the workers involved and the content covered. Consequently, it is impossible to evaluate this system based on national data alone because these data do not allow for the comparison of different systems. This is one of the main reasons why international-comparative research has become increasingly attractive in the field of religious education, just like in other fields of education.

The results from the present study can be read as additional evidence for the meaning and value of international research in religious education. Moreover and maybe even more importantly, given the still prevailing dominance of school-related international studies, these results show that such research can also be successfully done in the field of non-formal education and that it can in fact yield meaningful results.

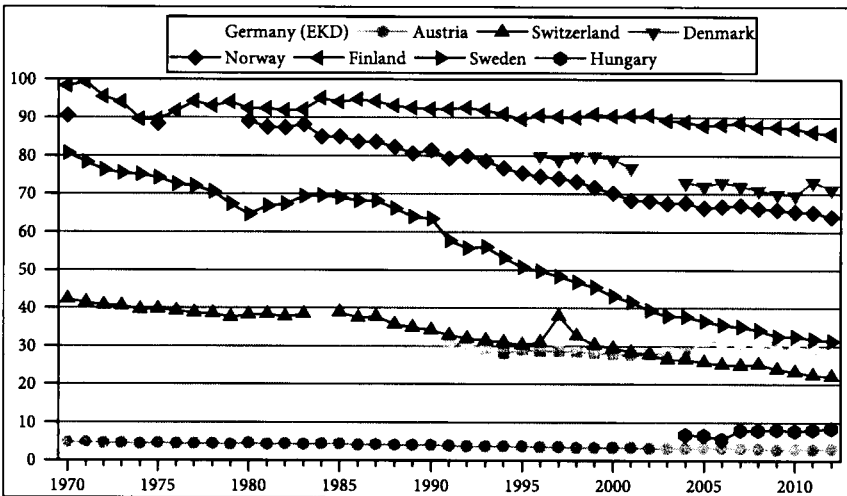
For a number of reasons described elsewhere in this book (p. 21 ff.), the study included a certain set of countries and a number of questions that refer to international comparisons. In the following, some of the comparisons made possible by the study will be pointed out. Each comparative aspect, however, would deserve a chapter of its own. In other words, it is not the intention of the present description to go into the details of comparative interpretations. Most of the comparative perspectives were taken up in different parts of the present book. At this point, a concentrated account on possible comparisons may be

useful as a guide for readers looking for such possibilities. Another intention refers to the identification of comparative perspectives that could be taken up in later research, with the data from the present study or with additional data. With the question of changes over time, one such perspective has already been addressed above. Such changes can be analysed in more meaningful ways on an international level.

6.1 Participation Rates in Different Countries

Since there is no special chapter in this book on participation rates, this question deserves treatment beyond a summary. Figure 60 presents the participation rates in terms of percentages of the whole population of the age group in the respective country.

Figure 60: Participation rates in confirmation work in percent of the whole population of the age group in the respective country



The information for Poland was not available.

As Figure 60 shows, the participation rates greatly vary between the countries. First of all, this variation corresponds to the different membership rates in the countries. In Germany, for example, about 30% of the population are Protestants. So a participation rate of 30% in confirmation work means that basically all Protestants at the age of 13 or 14 years participate. Other variations can be explained by the fact that not all Protestant adolescents take part in confirmation work (for details, cf. the reports from the different countries). What is

most striking, however, is the decline in participation over time in some of the countries while the rate remains rather stable in other countries. The clearest cases of declining participation rates are found in Sweden and Norway.

Such developments indicate that confirmation work may be a stable institution in some of the countries. Yet its future existence and stability can not be taken for granted. Instead, given the international data, it makes more sense to speak of a fragility of this field (cf. Schweitzer et al. 2010, 216). This insight is most worrisome for the Churches. In fact, one reason for their willingness to contribute financially to the present study can be seen in their worries about the future.

It is important to note that the decline, for example, in Sweden can not be explained by the dissatisfaction of the confirmands there. As shown above (p. 245 ff.), Swedish confirmands are satisfied and affirm the high quality of the conformation work they experienced. The explanation of the decline obviously raises complex question that require more research.

6.2 Comparing Different Regions in Europe

One major step connected to the present study was to go beyond the countries that had participated in the first study from 2007/2008. In terms of countries, this meant that Hungary and Poland joined the study. Consequently, the study now allows for insights into the situation of confirmation work in two post-Socialist countries. The results from these two countries clearly are not identical, yet they show a number of similarities that might be characteristic of the post-Socialist situation in general.

Moreover, these two central eastern European countries can be compared to other groups of countries, for example, the German speaking countries or the Nordic countries. It is often said that the Nordic countries have come to share a common Nordic identity. Yet the results from the study do not always support the assumption of such similarity. Although in different ways, this also holds true for the German speaking countries which by no means are alike in all respects. It would be very interesting to evaluate the data in detail concerning the homogeneity of certain groups of countries as well as concerning the differences between these groups.

In many respects, the data presented in this book indicate that national and regional traditions also play a role. The data from each country obviously present a country-specific profile that points to such influences below national groupings. This is one of the reasons why the book contains so-called country reports that make the individual countries the main object of description.

6.3 Comparing Minority and Majority Situations

The study comprises countries in which the Protestants either have or had a majority position or at least a dominant position, but also countries in which Protestants are, and also have been for a long time, a small minority. Moreover, the German Methodists (EmK) have always been a small minority in this country. The differences between the countries and Churches allow for comparisons concerning the implications of minority and majority situations of Protestantism in particular countries. They also include the possibility of comparisons between different majority situations (Germany and Finland, for example) and different minority situations (Austria and Poland, for example).

It should not be overlooked, however, that in the field of confirmation work the question of majority and minority situations entails another dimension which is also of interest in terms of comparison. There are countries like Sweden with a Protestant majority but with only a minority of adolescents taking part in confirmation work. In this respect, comparisons between the presuppositions and implications of different participation rates are possible.

6.4 The Influence of Different Educational Structures

Confirmation work is a program of its own that, according to the results of the study, clearly deserves to be viewed in its own right. Yet it must also be understood in the context of a wider educational ecology that comprises the family and the school as well as other programs offered by the Churches in the participating countries. In many respects the study shows the strong lasting effects of religious education or nurture in the family during childhood, often in connection with children's participation in other programs offered by the Church. Confirmation work is strongly influenced by such presuppositions.

Another question of comparative interest concerns the influence of the school and of Religious Education as a school subject. The present study does not include results on this influence but it raises a number of questions in this respect. Given the comparatively low and obviously decreasing affirmation of faith in creation in many of the countries under study, for example, one may wonder if the confirmands experience a tension between creation faith on the one hand, and natural science on the other. How is this tension dealt with in the Religious Education classes that most confirmands attended before confirmation time? Are there differences between the countries in this respect? Can the different rates of affirmation of this faith (for example, much lower rates in Sweden than in Germany) be explained by taking different effects of Religious Education into account, i. e., the »objective« approach guiding Reli-

gious Education in Sweden and the denominational Religious Education in Germany?

The two countries with the strongest decline in participation in confirmation work in the study are Sweden and Norway. These countries have experienced a far-reaching move towards a kind of Religious Education at school that is no longer related to the Church or to theology. Is there a connection between the decline in participation rates and the type of Religious Education in these countries?

In some of the countries, especially in Norway and in Switzerland (canton Zurich), the Churches decided to develop comprehensive educational programs that aim at compensating the lack of religious education now prevailing in schools as well as in many families. Since these programs have been put into practice a number of years ago, the question can be asked if there are effects to be observed in the data from confirmation work that can be attributed to these programs. In this case, comparisons between the 2007/2008 and the 2012/2013 study could be telling, as well as comparisons between different regions with and without such programs. Moreover, comparisons can also be directed at different countries that are pursuing different approaches in this respect.

6.5 Effects of Different Church Structures

With the German Methodists (EmK), a Church took part in the study that, contrary to the other Churches in the study, has never been defined by a geographical reference. As a so-called »free church« (cf. p. 280 ff.), it depends on membership by personal choice. This particular structure opens up possibilities for all kinds of comparisons. Concerning all of the results it can be asked, be it with religious attitudes, views of the church, or church membership itself, how different church structures might influence the corresponding attitudes.

6.6 Comparative Study of Elements of Confirmation Work

A decisive advantage of international-comparative studies can be seen in the possibility of investigating research questions from different angles. This applies to most of the topics presented in this book, for the confirmands' and the workers' expectations and experiences as well as for the methods used in confirmation work, to mention just a few examples. In addition to this, more general aspects like the influence of gender or of educational background can be studied comparatively. Generally speaking, as becomes clear throughout the book, more possibilities for comparisons allow for a richer understanding. It

is especially easy to see the promise of comparative interpretation with the two topics that play a special role in the present study: worship services during confirmation time and the multiple relationships between voluntary work and confirmation work.

7. Conclusions and Challenges for the Future

Considering these results presented above, it has to be asked what this means for possible or even necessary improvements of confirmation work in the future.

The overall results depict confirmation work as a specific social setting in which young people develop a certain knowledge and understanding of faith, strengthen their »sense of community« and, to some degree, come to identify with the church. If it is true that positive experiences of such connectedness are an important resource both of individual well-being and of caring societies, then confirmation work obviously contributes to this and does it well. Or to put it the other way round: this kind of non-formal education is definitely not experiencing a crisis, neither in the confirmands' nor the workers' view.

Nevertheless, the results also show that this educational program and its attractiveness must not be taken for granted. And not to forget: the increase in satisfaction rates captured by the study may, at least in part, be due to the shrinking milieu which is still addressed and reached by an institution like the church, and to how people within this milieu respond to church programs. Therefore it would also be important to capture the discontent or lack of interest of those who do not join confirmation time any more, although this task is beyond the possibilities of the present study.

In any case, certain improvements are not just »nice to have« but rather can be viewed as a precondition for the future success and plausibility of confirmation work.

7.1 Confirmands' Needs and Potentials

Concerning the relevance of confirmation work, the results clearly indicate that the confirmands will only grasp at least an idea of the deeper meaning of the Christian tradition if their personal and existential questions are really addressed. The main aim of confirmation work must therefore be to build bridges between the confirmands' potentials of individual life orientation and the communication of the Gospel. In other words, it is all a question of successful and

credible relations. For a better knowledge of the Christian faith and more identification with the church, stronger connections between the confirmands and the parish during confirmation time are needed. Concerning the services a strong increase in active participation and contribution of the young generation is necessary.

The contribution of confirmation work to voluntary commitment and therefore to civil society is clearly visible but there is still a lot of individual and institutional potential that is not yet sufficiently used in confirmation work. There is a need for personal relations after confirmation that can be taken up, for example, by turning the confirmand group into a youth group or by providing youth with a mentor. Therefore, it is important to learn to see confirmation not as the end of religious education but as the beginning of youth work.

7.2 Forms and Competences of Teaching

Concerning the forms of teaching, it is important that the methods and topics of teaching correspond to the confirmands' personal needs, both in terms of participation and of individual identity questions. Confirmation work has to prepare confirmands for other forms and ideals of Christian fellowship than the ones the present generation of adult workers grew up with. From this point of view, confirmation work does not only mean teaching the basics of the Christian faith and tradition but giving space to the adolescents' personal reflection of their spiritual quest. Curricula which allow for active participation in the church by volunteering and service involvement, will help to make use of the confirmands' potentials and make the program more engaging and relevant, in terms of values, faith and knowledge.

Concerning the importance of credible workers and teams, the results also indicate the need for further improvements, be it for a clearer pedagogical connection between faith-, life- and youth-related issues, the team-building-factor or the continuous improvement of the individual pedagogical and theological competences required in confirmation work. Thus, further improvement of the workers' training is needed and more involvement of peer-oriented teams would be helpful as well. The need for multi-methodical confirmation work can only be fulfilled by a substantial team of employed workers and volunteers. This implies that a wider and more diverse methodological training is needed as well as personality development. The training of pastors and youth leaders should include preparation for leadership that encompasses the training and support of volunteers. The improvement and expansion of courses for the workers could support the development of a confirmation work that is adequate for youth and also can do justice to the Christian tradition.

7.3 The Importance of Religious Socialisation

It is obvious that positive experiences with confirmation work, the feeling of community and being involved in parish activities are important for young people's relation to parish and church. But they are not enough to keep the young people as members of the church or to support their willingness to have their future children baptised. This insight is also based on considerations of the wider ecology of religious education. In many European countries, Denominational Religious Education as a school subject faces severe threats or has already come to an end. Consequently, as can be seen from the results of the present study, religious socialisation has become tenuous. It will be a key question for the future of confirmation work, how it can contribute to religious socialisation. This implies that, more than ever before, confirmation work has to be seen as part of a comprehensive educational program to be offered by the Churches and parishes. If confirmation time is actually the first experience of young people with the church and its traditions, it is definitely too late.

7.4 Learning From Minority Situations

At first sight, the results of the study concerning Churches in minority situations may appear to be literally marginal. But in fact, one has to ask whether this minority situation might not be something that all Churches – even the very established ones – can and have to learn from. In a possibly not too far future, they could find themselves in a similar situation. As can be seen from the study, belonging to a minority Church requires that the young people are informed and articulate in order for them to be able to talk to their peers about their religious »homeland«, including the main similarities and differences concerning other denominations. Confirmation work in these Churches obviously equips them with the ability to point out the advantage of their specific Church and at the same time to speak out for diversity and plurality. These experiences should also be taken into consideration by Churches that (still) are in a more comfortable and privileged position.

Beyond this, in smaller units the need for individual acceptance, participation and involvement can be fulfilled more easily. In a familiar atmosphere of small Churches, the confirmands seem to experience deep personal contact and friendly reception while being encouraged to proceed in their individual development, including faith. The attitudes towards the home parish and the church services are clearly influenced by this experience. Why should the majority Churches not learn from the fact that more intense forms of commitment to

believing and belonging can lead to a stronger identification with church and faith?

7.5 Concerning Future Research

The need for future research is addressed in most of the chapters of the present book. Most of the questions discussed there are in need of further clarification that can not be reached without additional data. Moreover, the results of the study can be used as a basis for developing informed research questions, and they can also function as encouragement for doing more research in the still under-researched field.

Rather than trying to bring together the various research impulses from the individual chapters, it may be more meaningful to at least mention an additional aspect that may be important for future work. Although the impact of social structures is outside the scope of the results presented here, the reference to such structure might hold some explanatory value for understanding why confirmation rates decline although the confirmands are satisfied with confirmation work. Future research should include the analysis of social structures such as the conditions for belief in a »secular age«. Moreover, changes in migration patterns should also be included. Taking contextual factors into consideration might also be a relief for the workers because it allows them to realise that the responsibility for the weal and woe of confirmation work can never be seen exclusively with individual persons and their commitment but is also the result of many external influences.

7.6 Conclusion

Besides exploring and experiencing fun, etc., it is important for the adolescents during confirmation time to find a place in the church where they feel comfortable, are taken seriously with their needs and their search for identity and get supported and inspired in their individual and collective processes of life-orientation. Taking into consideration this subject-orientation and the relevance of faith-issues requires forms of sensitive and dialogical religious communication.

In today's Europe with its pluralising societies, fostering awareness and tolerance of religious difference is widely regarded as one of the most important tasks of religious education. Thus, the confirmands' knowledge and understanding of other religions is also a highly important contribution of confirmation work.

Although confirmation work in general is doing well for most of the confirmands, it can not be ignored that there is a significant gap between the satisfied and the dissatisfied confirmands in most of the participating countries. Even more challenging is the fact that the religious and family background is of high importance for the question of overall satisfaction. Consequently, the motivation, integration and inclusion of young people who feel a severe distance to the church, is one of the major challenges of future confirmation work. The general appeal of confirmation work and confirmation beyond the »insiders«, i. e., the adolescents with a strong church affiliation from childhood on, is vital to its existence. In other words, more efforts are needed to give more to those who need it most.