

4. Developing a (Religious) Identity during Confirmation Time

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4.1 Introduction

Confirmation time takes place in a phase of the adolescents' life which is characterised by their search for and development of individual identity. In terms of personal life orientation, adolescence is a period of intense transition.

In terms of faith and religiosity, important transformations take place, e. g., the demythologisation of »childhood faith« and a possible further development towards more mature faith. Such transitional processes occur not only in a narrow perspective on faith issues but also regarding the whole complexity of finding out »Who am I?«, »What is the goal of my life?«, etc. Thus, religion can be seen as one of many systems of reference that lead to certain orientating answers on life-related questions in a broader sense (Saroglou 2012).

Consequently, confirmation time is one of many »systems« which can support and influence confirmands in developing their identity. According to a Protestant theological understanding, the act of confirmation is understood as a ritual of transition through which the adolescents become conscious members of their church as a faith community. Therefore, this ritual can on the one side be combined with the development of religious identity, on the other side confirmands can experience this ritual in a more family-tradition-oriented way without connecting it – at least explicitly – to religious development.

Grace Davie refers to this openness concerning the motivation for confirmation and notes that nowadays the meaning of confirmation has changed. It is no longer understood as a *rite de passage* in the sense of an expression of growing up, but the aspect of experience has become more important (Davie 2006). These experiences are probably, compared to the ritual in a classical institutional sense, more meaningful for the adolescents because they can connect to them in a personal way. What changes probably most for the confirmands is their status in the church. They may well be aware of the fact that their position after confirmation is different in the sense of being full and responsible members of the church. But it is not clear whether this status change also has an influence on their religious identity. In general, it has to be asked whether confirmation time does make a difference compared to other identity-shaping fun- and peer-community experiences in an adolescent's life.

This article will analyse whether confirmation work contributes or is linked in any sense to the development of personal (faith- and church-related) religious identity – bearing in mind that the results of the present study indicate a

high level of satisfaction with experiences like fun, good community, etc. in all the examined European countries. This question is particularly important since in many countries, confirmation time is the last mandatory »offer« by the churches concerning religious education. After confirmation time, the adolescents are independent and responsible themselves for their further church- and religious practice. So does confirmation work use this last chance?

4.2 Identity and Religious Identity

Individual religious identity is the result of a larger process of building and rebuilding identity. This process contains different experiences related to the self and other(s). With the increasing ability of a more complex perception of reality, adolescents realise some discontinuity and inconsistency between their own images, views and – so to say – the world around them. Following the thesis of Saroglou (2012), these questions can be located in a religious horizon. This does not necessarily imply that religious identity must be the result, but it means that religion gives some insight to questions about the self.

Just as important is the ability to understand one's own personality as part of a development process, which forms itself consistently from experiences of the past and anticipations of the future in the present (Keupp 1991). Reasons for this thinking of the adolescents that encompasses different times, are questions about the conduct of life, meaning of life, connections to certain important persons and – concerning religious identity – the ability to link these questions to the dimension of religious orientation. Finally, religious socialisation within one's own family or experiences with the church (e.g., baptism) also shapes religious identity.

For a closer examination it is helpful to differentiate more clearly between religious orientation and religious identity:

Religious orientation consists of religious practice, the personal development of religious attitudes and reflection of religious contents.

Once such religious orientation is realised by a person, it can lead to a person-related religious identity (in the sense of believing) and to an institution-related identity (in the sense of belonging), which together builds one's own religious identity.

Religious identity therefore consists of two different aspects:

- 1) Personal experience of the importance of faith for one's own life, which expresses itself in the self-orientating practice of faith, e.g., prayer, belief in God, self-description as a religious person, etc.

- 2) Institutional faith experience, in which church rituals like baptism, confirmation, etc., play a bigger role and the question of belonging to the church is positively rated and also connected to a form of personal commitment.

Both aspects are important for the following analysis.

Davie's description of today's religiosity shows a programmatic difference between believing and belonging. According to her distinction, personal faith and institutional commitment are not necessarily connected to each other. That is, the combination »belonging without really believing in Christian contents« is quite widespread. This leads her to the assumption that individual faith and the identification with the institutional church can widely diverge. But whether this is true for the phase of developing a (religious) identity in adolescence, has to be further explored. According to Erikson (1980), the adolescent search for identity is to be characterised mainly by exploration and commitment. Critical thinking about established ideologies or beliefs on the one hand, and at the same time, the strong wish to find a or *the* place to fit in and be committed are often combined.

Thus, the leading research questions are:

- Does confirmation time have a positive influence on the development of religious identity?
- Is it customary for today's confirmands to distinguish between a personal self-orientation (in the sense of believing) and the institutional identification (belonging)?
- Is confirmation time especially important for (religious) identity development processes among adolescents who are already religiously nurtured and – in terms of education – well brought up, whereas it leaves the others unaffected?

4.3 Analysis

Possible Development of a Religious Identity

For observing and detecting the possible development of a (religious) identity during confirmation time several items referring to personal faith experience, institutional belonging to the church and about the interest in questions about the meaning of life are relevant. In this respect the t_1 and t_2 items are used to map the possible changes during that time. The selection of items corresponds to the working definition of religious identity mentioned above. Therefore, according to Davies' distinction one must differentiate between believing and belonging. In addition to that, a third perspective referring to interest in life orientation without believing and / or belonging is used. Behind this third

perspective »life orientation« stands the conviction that adolescents in any case have and use the potential to orientate themselves for their conduct of life. So this term does not mean that religious identity is not related to life-orientation, but that life-orientation can well go without religious identity!

The selection of items for this approach is narrow with only 3 items for the reason of focused and distinct insights. From there five basic patterns of potential identity-development, whether religious or not are identified.

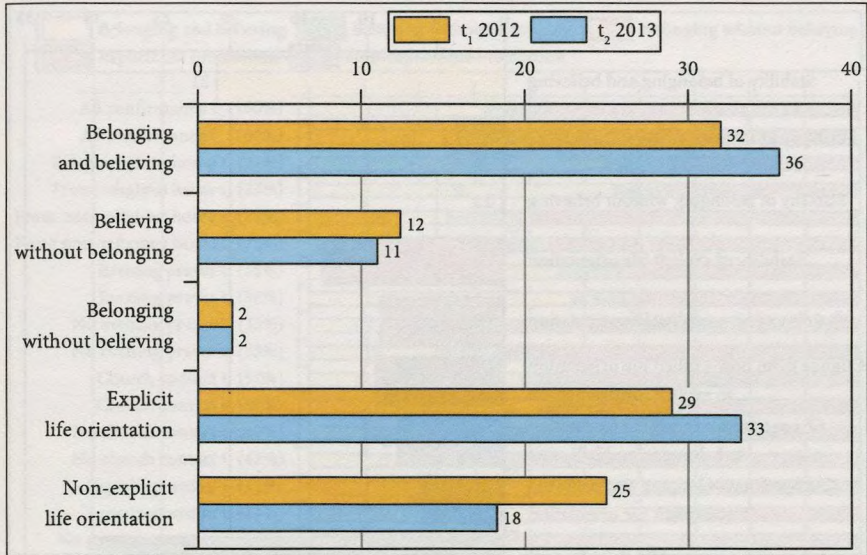
- (1) Believing and belonging: In this positive combination confirmands respond to both aspects, the one concerning personal faith (CE/KE09) and the other concerning the attitude towards the institutional church (CG/KG01) positively.
- (2) Believing without belonging: Confirmands following this pattern, react to the question about personal faith (CE/KE09) positively, whereas their attitude towards the institutional church (CG/KG01) is negative.
- (3) Belonging without believing: This pattern is characterised by those confirmands who react positively to questions about their current attitude towards the Protestant Church (CG/KG01) and the importance of belonging to the church, but more negatively to the question about their faith in God (CE/KE09).
- (4) Explicit life orientation (interest in life orientation without believing and/or belonging): Confirmands who are counted to this pattern do not show any specific personal or institutional religious identity-development. But nevertheless they show an explicit interest in the question concerning life orientation, in this case about »meaning of life« (CL/KL11), so one can assume that these confirmands are involved in processes of identity-development – probably in a more secular sense.
- (5) Non-explicit life orientation: In this pattern confirmands show no specific positive and/or negative interest in either personal and/or institutional faith – it could well be named a mild agnosticism. One can call this »non-explicit« instead of »no life-orientation« for the simple reason that one should be very hesitant to say that any adolescent could just not be interested in life-orientation questions or not being able to cope with these questions!

4.4 Results

General Attitude towards (Religious) Identity

First findings lead to a picture that allows the mapping of the confirmands according to these five patterns about (religious) identity and the developments in respect of changes between t_1 and t_2 .

Figure 26: Five identity patterns in the beginning (t_1) and in the end (t_2) of confirmation time (%)



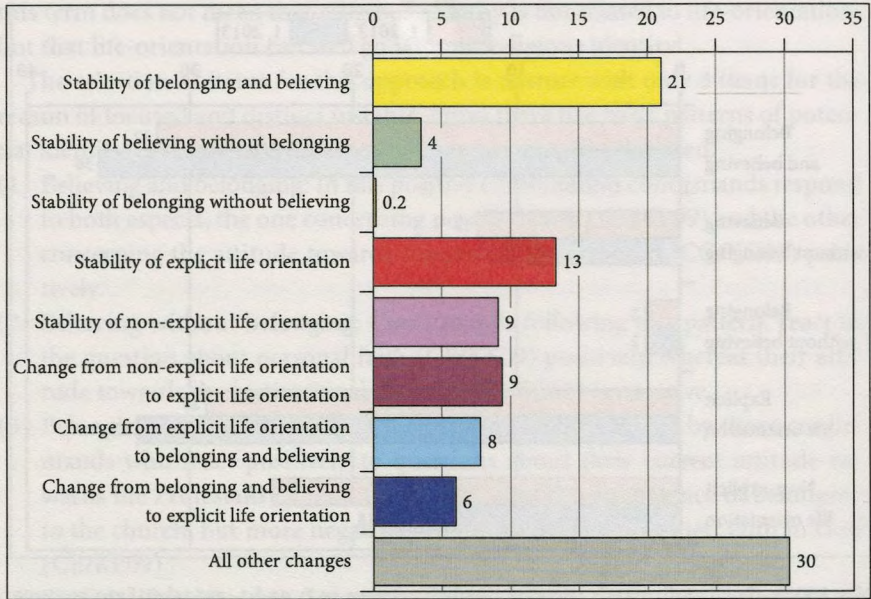
$N = 16065$. Only confirmands showing identity patterns in t_1 and t_2 are taken into account. Reading note: 32% of the confirmands exhibit a pronounced religious identity (»believing and belonging«) in t_1 and 36% in t_2 .

Two patterns show a higher similarity than others: pattern 1, including those confirmands who correspond to the terms of believing and belonging, shows 32% (t_1) and 36% (t_2) and contains those confirmands with a pronounced religious identity. Pattern 4 shows the confirmands with a measurable interest in identity-issues without a religious attitude. As in pattern 1, there are 4% more in t_2 in this pattern. Pattern 5 also shows a remarkable percentage with 25% (t_1) respectively 18% (t_2), but differently to pattern 1 and 4 not increasing but decreasing by 7% during confirmation time.

Patterns 2 and 3 show a certain religious identity, but it appears as if the individualised religiosity, that implies believing without belonging or even more distinctly belonging without believing, is less common among confirmands. This is an important finding, because it relativises Davies' thesis about the supposed current tendencies to divide between membership and faith. For adolescents like the confirmands believing and belonging seem to correspond. This makes sense, if we remember Erikson's thesis about the importance for the youth not only of exploring, but also of finding the place to commit to.

Counting those confirmands with a religious identity at t_2 (patterns 1-3) makes 49%, those with an interest in identity-questions without a specific reli-

Figure 27: Stability of identity patterns and changes between identity patterns during confirmation time (from t_1 to t_2) (%)



$N = 16065$. Only confirmands showing identity patterns in t_1 and t_2 are taken into account. Only changes referring to at least 5% of the confirmands are reported, all other changes are subsumed under »all other changes«.

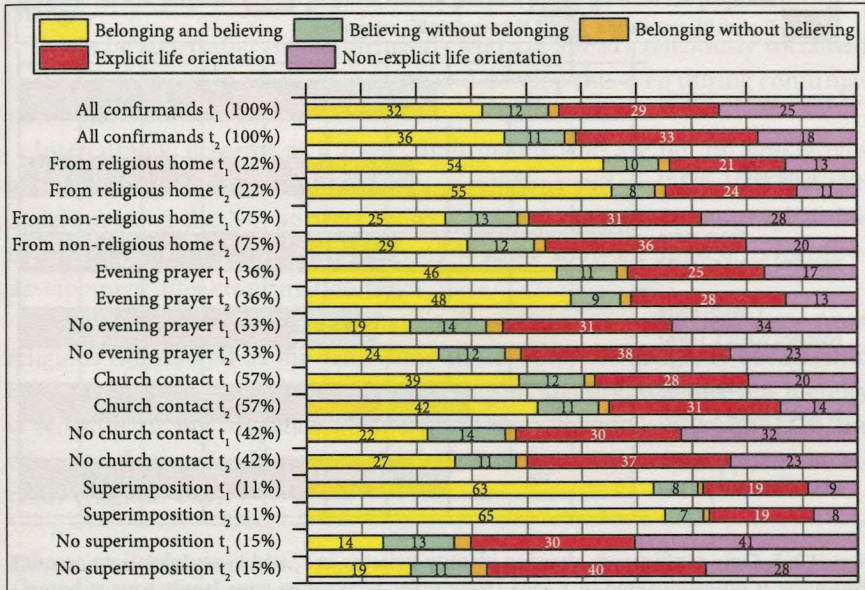
gious orientation are 33% and those without measurable interest in identity are 18%. Therefore it can be said that identity-issues are an important subject to confirmands, whether they refer to them in a religious or in a non-religious way.

It seems that confirmation time positively influences the development of religious identity and identity in general as both patterns are increasing during the year.

Taking a closer look at the change from one pattern to the other allows for a more precise picture. Altogether, for 47% of the confirmands stability of identity during confirmation time can be identified and for 53% a change – so to say – from one identity pattern to the other. So more than half of the adolescents were obviously motivated to change (even if they did so unconsciously) from their »original« viewpoint to a different position.

Stability is the highest among those with a religious identity and those with an explicit life-orientation identity. On the other hand, the processes of transition and change are slightly higher among those with non-explicit life orientation towards explicit life orientation than from those with a religious identity towards explicit life orientation.

Figure 28: The relationship between indicators of religious socialisation and identity patterns (%)



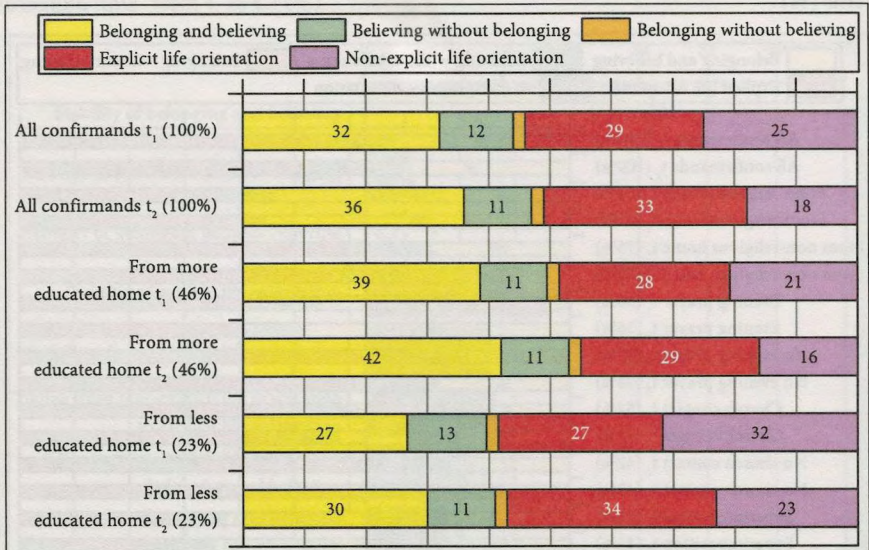
N = 16065. Only confirmands showing identity patterns in t₁ and t₂ are taken into account. Items referring to religious socialisation: CJ01 (Interest of parents in religion), CJ02 (parents say an evening prayer in childhood) and a combination of CM11 and CM12 reflecting contacts with the church before confirmation time. Positive responses to these indicators: A positive response (YES) to CJ01 is assumed when the parents of the confirmands are at least quite interested in religion. YES to CJ02 is assumed when parents said an evening prayer at least sometimes. YES to CM11 or CM12 is assumed when the confirmands had contact with the church before confirmation time. A negative response (NO) to CJ01 is assumed when the parents are only somewhat or not interested at all in religion. NO to CJ02 is assumed when parents did not say an evening prayer. NO to CM11 and CM12 is assumed when there was no contact to the church or no memory of such a contact.

Of course, it can not be said in a monocausal sense that transition from non-religious to religious identity is a result of confirmation time. But it can clearly be said that confirmation time takes part in a stage of life in which the adolescents encounter many changes and do a lot of orientation work, which can lead them on very different paths in searching for religious identity as a consequence of confirmation time.

Background Factors

As is known from other approaches and results of this European study, it is worthwhile to integrate some background factors for better understanding

Figure 29: The relationship between education and identity patterns (%)



$N = 16065$. Only confirmants showing identity patterns in t_1 and t_2 are taken into account. Education is operationalised by CM04 (How many books does your family have at home?). Confirmants whose families had none-50 books at home are regarded as coming from a less educated home; confirmants whose families had 101-500 books at home are regarded as coming from a more educated home.

and interpreting of the respective findings. This is also true for the question of religious identity.

Gender

Looking at the question of the relation of gender and religious identity shows that identity seems to be an issue of adolescents to which slightly more girls are open to than boys. For both sexes, pattern 5 is decreasing by 7% during confirmation time. On the other hand, one can say that religious identity (patterns 1-3) is found slightly more often among male than female confirmants. The girls show instead a higher rate in pattern 4 (non-religious identity).

Religious Socialisation

22% of the confirmants taking part in t_1 and t_2 22% come from a rather religious home or show interest in religion. During confirmation time a slight increase of religious identity within this group from 54% to 56% can be identified.

Superimposing the indices of religious socialisation, which means focusing on those coming from a religious background at all levels explored, 63% (t_1) /

65% (t_2) show a pronounced religious identity, a stable percentage of 19% (t_1/t_2) keep the non-religious identity. The other patterns show less than 10% change.

It can be stated that the confirmands who are already religiously socialised show a higher rate in religious identity and develop this even during confirmation time.

Interestingly, it seems as if those confirmands who are not or weakly religiously socialised show larger changes in religious and non-religious identity. Superimposing the NO-answers shows a massive decrease in non-explicit life orientation among the confirmands, 12% more show an interest in identity-development after confirmation time.

This leads to the assumption that confirmation time influences those from religious homes and at the same time those from non-religious background both positively in the meaning of developing an identity. Whether this identity is religious or not, depends obviously on the religious background. On the other hand, one should not say that confirmation time only supports the already religious ones.

Educational Background

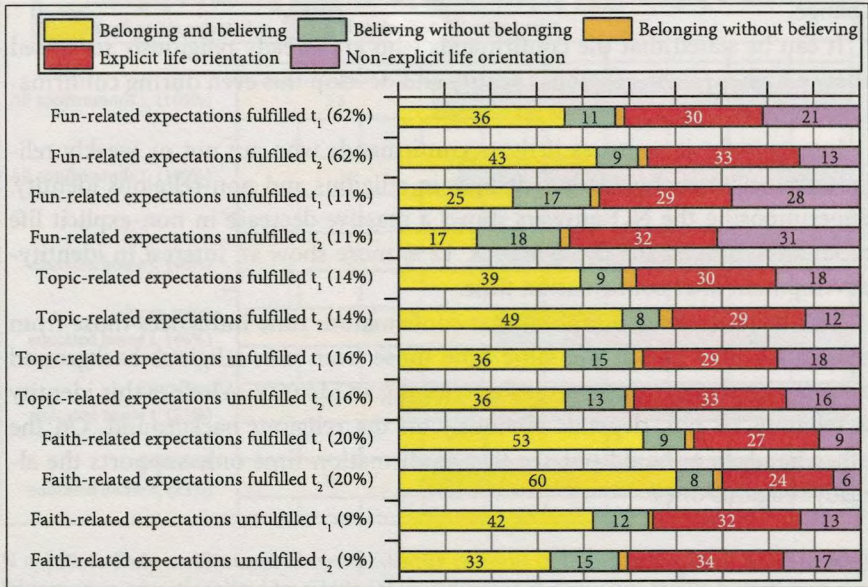
Regarding the educational background of the confirmands a rather unsurprising picture is revealed. Confirmands from more educated homes show a higher percentage in religious and non-religious identity while confirmands from less educated homes make the largest share in pattern 5 with non-explicit life orientation. But focusing on the development-aspect in comparing t_1 and t_2 , confirmands from less educated backgrounds show a higher development in religious and non-religious identity. Also the group of non-explicit life orientation (pattern 5) decreases among the adolescents from less educated homes by 9 percent points.

Those confirmands with a stronger educational background seem to already bring a certain level of reflection to confirmation time and show development during the year, but those confirmands starting with a weaker premise develop much more.

Satisfaction and the Development of a Religious Identity

As is known from the overall results of the participating countries, having fun during confirmation time is rather important for confirmands throughout the different contexts. One can divide the confirmands in those with expectation of fulfilment of their expectations and those without these expectations in the beginning (t_1). The expectations may be fun-related, topic-related and faith-related. Identity-development shows differently among those two groups and leads to different kinds of satisfaction in t_2 , as the following Figure 30 shows.

Figure 30: The relationship between satisfaction in confirmation time and identity patterns (%)



$N = 16065$. Only confirmands showing identity patterns in t_1 and t_2 are taken into account. Obviously, expectations were not fulfilled in t_1 . The short-hand description in the figure means that t_1 -results are shown for confirmands who said in t_2 that their expectations were fulfilled. Items: CK05 (fun related expectations), CK04 (topic-related expectations), CK11 (faith-related expectations), KK05 (fulfillment of fun-related expectations), KK04 (fulfillment of topic-related expectations) and KK11 (fulfillment of faith-related expectations). Reading note: 73% (62% + 11%) of all confirmands taking part in t_1 and t_2 express an expectation of »having fun« (CK05) in t_1 . 62% of all confirmands experienced that their fun-related expectations were fulfilled in confirmation time. 36% of those confirmands have a pronounced religious identity (»belonging and believing«) in t_1 and 43% have such an identity in t_2 .

Lacking satisfaction concerning the experience of fun has the largest negative impact on the identity development (religious/non-religious). For the religious identity (pattern 1-3) most important is satisfaction concerning the upcoming of faith-related topics and issues. The development of a religious identity (pattern 1) between t_1 and t_2 is most negatively affected by lacking satisfaction in faith-related topics and fun-related aspects. Surprisingly, topic-related dissatisfaction barely influences the pattern 1, but very positively influences it in case of satisfaction. On the other hand, the largest decrease in pattern 1 happens when confirmands' satisfaction concerning faith-related needs is missing. Religious identity (pattern 1-3) is higher among those confirmands who are satisfied in all three areas.

Summarising the positive effects concerning satisfaction for the development

of a religious identity one can say that dissatisfaction concerning the topics leads to no bigger damage, while when faith-related needs are unsatisfied or fun in general is missing, religious identity decreases. So increasing religious identity is clearly supported by a positive experience of interesting topics (+ 10%), faith-related issues (+ 7%) and fun in general (+ 7%).

4.5 Conclusion

Several interesting findings can be summarised from the approach to the question of the contribution of confirmation work for (religious) identity development.

From the perspective of the institutional church, it can be stated that adolescents seem to have a very low interest in such forms of individualised religiosity where they either face the option »believing without belonging« or »belonging without believing«. If there is a measurable religious identity, it comes along with a positive attitude towards the church in general.

This corresponds also with Saroglou's (2012) findings that at the age of confirmation time the youth is looking more for a place to commit to than to explore various religious offers independently of the institutional offers.

Thus, it can be said that identity-development is an important issue for adolescents in confirmation time. During confirmation time we see an increasing interest in both identity and religious identity. Half of the confirmands seem to change during confirmation time in their approach to religion. This leads to the assumption that confirmation time in any case, no matter if it affects directly and positively the development of a religious identity or not, contributes in a supporting and continuous way to identity-issues of adolescents.

Having the background of the confirmands in mind, it can be stated that a religious home and a higher educational level of the family strengthen religious identity. But also less socialised and educated confirmands seem to not get lost concerning their life orientation needs and potentials during confirmation time.

From the perspective of this educational field of the Protestant Churches, it can be pointed out that confirmation time can have a positive influence on developing a religious identity and it might make a difference for those who have not yet had the chance to get in touch with religious contents and practices.

Last but not least, the question about identity-development is close to the one about the confirmands general satisfaction. Satisfied confirmands tend to have a religious identity and/or higher interest in identity. So besides exploring and experiencing fun etc., it is important for the adolescents during confirma-

tion time to find a place in the church where they feel comfortable, are taken seriously in their needs and search for identity and to be supported and inspired in their individual and collective processes of life-orientation.