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LOHERVISION  
VERLAGSEINER  
HAUSNEUENWELT



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erforschen und gestalten

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# CONFIRMATION, FAITH, AND VOLUNTEERISM

A Longitudinal Study on Protestant Adolescents  
in the Transition towards Adulthood  
European Perspectives

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LOHERVISION  
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# Introduction

# I. Introduction

FRIEDRICH SCHWEITZER, THOMAS SCHLAG, HENRIK SIMOJOKI, KATI TERVO-NIEMELÄ AND WOLFGANG ILG

## 1. Protestant Adolescents in the Transition towards Adulthood: The Relationship between Confirmation Work, Faith, Church and Volunteerism

Many who are active in confirmation work tell the same story. After confirmation, most Protestant youth will not be seen in church anymore, at least not for a long time. That the adolescents, at least in most cases, seem to have enjoyed their confirmation time, does not appear to change the picture. After confirmation, the impressions and experiences seem to wear off rather soon. For the majority of the young people, the positive experiences with confirmation time do not seem to contribute to any kind of enduring relationship to the church. Yet there are also different tendencies to be observed. In some of the countries participating in the study presented in this volume, becoming a volunteer after confirmation has become a widespread option for many youth. Often they become involved with confirmation work, no longer as participants but as young voluntary workers.

Confirmation work, faith, church, and volunteerism are connected in many ways. This is one of the main findings of the study presented in this book which, at the same time, builds on earlier research on confirmation work also from the present project (cf. Pettersson/Simojoki 2010; Porkka et al. 2015). In fact, confirmation work that is carried out with 13 to 16 year old adolescents, often seems to be an important entry to voluntary work in general. In many cases, the motives for becoming a volunteer have a religious background or even are explicitly religious. Moreover, the participation of volunteers has become a vital part of confirmation work in most of the countries participating in the study.

The research on confirmation work conducted over the last 10 years (for an overview, see p. 233 ff.) offered a unique opportunity for an innovative type of study that has rarely been carried out, at least in the field of religion in adolescence. The present study has been designed longitudinally so that it will be possible to follow young people's expectations and experiences over time, from the age of approximately 13 or 14 to the age of approximately 16 or 17 years. Consequently the results promise clearer information concerning what comes after confirmation and, of special interest to church leaders, how the adolescents' relationship to the church changes after confirmation and in the transi-

tion towards adulthood. Moreover, the study entails new insights into religious change over several years, not only at a group level but for every individual adolescent taking part in the study. Such results have not been available before, especially not for a larger sample and at an international level, and certainly not in the field of research on youth and religion.

Finally, the study can be considered further evidence of the pressing need for knowing more about religion in middle and late adolescence. Traditionally, it was the transition from childhood to adolescence that received most attention in the psychology of religion, for example, by asking about the impact of adolescence on beliefs acquired during childhood (cf., for example, Erikson 1980; Fowler 1981; for an overview cf. Schweitzer 2016). Many studies from the sociology of religion have shown no special interest in differentiating between different segments or phases of adolescence (cf., for example, Shell Deutschland Holding 2015; EKD 2014). With its focus on the time between 13 and 16 or 17 years, the present study can offer new insights in this respect as well. These are very important years when young people typically experience major changes in respect to social relationships and to cognitive development. During these years young people often make first choices related to their future professional career, sometimes have first experiences with work life, etc.

### 1.1 The Challenge of Coming of Age Religiously in Contemporary Western Societies

There are many indicators from previous research that the second decade of life is of special importance for many religious biographies (to only mention some classics, Erikson 1980; Fowler 1981; Oser/Gmünder 1984). Sociological surveys as well as psychological accounts describe the growing distance that adolescents tend to develop in relationship to the religious beliefs acquired during childhood and that their distance to the church is increasing in that time of life (cf. Smith 2009; Shell Deutschland Holding 2015; Maschke et al. 2013). Critical thinking directed against, for example, faith in God the creator often plays an important role in this context, and often the issue of theodicy comes into play (why does God allow bad things to happen?). Most of all, however, it is the church as an institution that adolescents find less and less attractive the older they are. Even if older adolescents, what often seems to be the case, find religion to be of interest to them, they often do not cherish the church and do not participate in programs offered by the church.

At present, only the studies carried out by Christian Smith and his team in the United States offer detailed and reliable longitudinal accounts of the religious change occurring during later adolescence (Smith 2005; Smith 2009).

Smith identified some kind of moralistic and therapeutic deism to be the most widespread orientation of American adolescents today. Moreover, his results indicate that there are major changes in religious outlook in later adolescence. In the United States, the age of leaving for college seems to mark a major transition and often the point where religious biographies take new turns, in many cases away from the church one has been part of during childhood. The findings from the United States certainly are of interest for European readers as well, although one has to keep in mind the differences between Churches in Europe and in the United States.

Smith's results are so impressive and convincing because he was able to follow the religious trajectories of adolescents longitudinally. So far, there are very few European studies that make use of a longitudinal design in the field of religion. One of these studies was conducted by one of the authors of the present text, Kati Tervo-Niemelä who followed former confirmands into their third decade in Tampere/Finland (Niemelä 2015; cf. also Niemelä 2008). Her findings also show that there were major changes in later years, especially after the age of 20 years. In the present context, it is of special interest that her results indicate that there are indeed long-term effects of confirmation work and of how it was experienced by the confirmands. Such experiences seem to exert a lasting influence on their relationship to the church, positively as well as negatively.

The present study promises an important improvement in terms of valid results by offering truly longitudinal data based on an international sample. In most cases, comparisons in earlier research concerning different age groups and their relationship to the church, for example, after confirmation, are based on surveys that work with a one-time questionnaire. The most recent study on church membership in Germany, for example, reports that older people remember more intensive forms of religious socialisation and more closeness to the church than younger people (EKD 2014). The conclusion offered by the authors of this study is that one must assume an alarming decline of religious affiliation and interest the younger the age group in question is. The problem with such comparisons is that they must assume that what people say about their past, is really accurate. Yet as is well known, human memory is deceptive. This is why longitudinal data are needed for such comparisons. Only longitudinal data allow for reliable results on how religion develops over the years. It is obvious that the results will be far more reliable with a truly longitudinal design that follows the same individuals over a longer period of time.

The present study does not cover the whole age range that would have to be considered for understanding the process of coming of age religiously. To follow adolescents over a period of ten or even more years would have been the task of a long-term research project that, aside from Tervo-Niemelä's results for Finland and the study conducted by Smith and his team mentioned above, will

have to wait for the future. The present study only covers three years, from the beginning of confirmation time to two years after confirmation which, depending on the country, means from the age of 13 years to 16 or 17 years. Yet according to the data reported in this book, exactly these years may be of special interest. They are the years right after the last educational program which the Protestant Churches foresee and offer for the whole age group. All later programs are more informal, not only today but from their whole history and format. Christian youth work, for example, goes back to individual initiatives that started during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and sometimes even later (cf., for a summary account, Deresch 1984). In most cases, such programs may be very important to the participants but, for example in Germany where respective data are available, they only reach a small part of the Protestant adolescents, especially in later adolescence (Ilg et al. 2014; Fauser et al. 2006). This is one of the reasons why it is so important to ask what comes after confirmation – the last church-related biographical marker event in which most Protestant adolescents take part in most countries of the study.

## 1.2 What Comes after Confirmation? An Open Question in the Context of Christian Youth Work

As mentioned above, the question what comes after confirmation, often is posed ironically and with a sense of open frustration. It then refers to the experience that for many youth, confirmation is not the starting point for further or even more intense participation in the church. Instead, many adolescents seem to turn their backs to the church. If one views the years following confirmation as a formative period in the process of developing into adulthood such observations become even more frustrating and, for the Churches, quite alarming.

Yet what is really known about the age group of the 14 to 16 (or 17 and 18) year old adolescents? Many studies on youth or on church membership tend to group them together with older adolescents, thus making statements about 14 to 25 year old adolescents (cf. Shell Germany Holding 2015, EKD 2014). The samples used in such studies rarely allow for more detailed observations or special results concerning adolescents of a certain age as a distinct group. Taking into consideration that most adolescents at the age of 16 are still living at home with their parents and have not moved away for purposes of further education or professional training, it is clear from the beginning that it makes little sense to neglect the differences between them and adolescents at the age of 18 years or even young adults who will have a very different life-style and probably different outlooks as well. Moreover, the fact that most 16 year old adolescents still are living in the neighborhood of the parishes where they were confirmed

implies that, at least theoretically, they are still comparatively easy to reach for the Churches.

With its focus on the years from the beginning of confirmation time to two years after confirmation, the present study offers research results and insights that can be very important for new initiatives from Christian youth work and the Churches. As it turns out in this study, these adolescents are quite open for such initiatives, provided that they meet their interests and fit their needs. One example of successful work with youth after confirmation certainly deserves much more attention – voluntary work especially in the context of confirmation work – a topic which is therefore given special consideration in the present study.

### 1.3 Young Volunteers and Religion: A Neglected Field of Research

Becoming a volunteer in confirmation work is one of the answers to the question what comes after confirmation. At present, this is most likely the most promising answer in many of the countries participating in the study. In Finland, it is almost one third of the confirmands who become volunteers after confirmation. Germany has an especially high number of volunteers active in confirmation work – with 60 000 volunteers in this field per year.

It is easy to see that such developments are not only of interest to the Churches; they are also important for society at large. With the increased appreciation of civil society, volunteerism has become a general interest in many societies (cf. the foundational view of Cohen/Arato 1992; for the context of confirmation work see Pettersson/Simojoki 2010; Porkka et al. 2015). It is considered part of vital democracies and their self-understanding, and is considered indispensable for the flourishing of societies. Many tasks could not be fulfilled without the continued commitment of volunteers as, for example, the refugee situation has shown most recently in a number of European countries. Consequently, voluntary work and especially the motives of the volunteers have become a topic of research in many places, including the role of religion and the Churches (cf., for example, Gensicke/Geiss 2010; Hustinx et al. 2015; international-comparative Arnesen et al. 2013). The main emphasis on this research, however, has been on older adults who, often after their retirement, become active with new tasks that can benefit from their expertise. Adolescents have rarely been the focus of research in this context, although it has been shown that the experiences during adolescence also are important in terms of voluntary commitment (cf. Dux et al. 2008).

According to the results of the present study volunteerism begins early in life, at least in some cases and possibly exactly for those who remain active as



volunteers over many years in later life. Moreover, becoming acquainted with volunteerism through one's parents or friends of the family seems to be an influential factor with those who become volunteers. It is hard to understand why the beginnings of voluntary commitment have not received more attention in the past. It is well known that many young people are in fact active as volunteers, not only in Finland where this is especially well known. Yet very little research has become available concerning the pathways into voluntary work in adolescence.

The present study also is of special interest in another related respect. It includes responses from many adolescents who are not active as volunteers. What are their reasons for not becoming volunteers? The answers to this question may hold another key for productively working with this age group.

Finally, the study sheds more light on the role of confirmation work in relationship to becoming interested in voluntary work – a topic that has been discussed before on the basis of data from the confirmands (cf. Pettersson/Simojoki 2010; Porkka et al. 2015) and which can now be taken up again with the adolescents' responses two years after confirmation. This question will be taken up in the next section, together with other aspects.

#### 1.4 The Role of Confirmation Work for Faith, Church Membership and Volunteerism

With its longitudinal approach, the present study offers a number of possibilities and perspectives for gaining insights into the meaning and the role of confirmation work beyond the experience of confirmation time itself. Saying this, it is important to keep in mind that it would not be legitimate, neither educationally nor theologically, to functionalise confirmation work for purposes other than this program itself. Confirmation work must be offered for the sake of the confirmands, not for the sake of the Church or of society's needs. Yet it is easy to see that this point of view can also become one-sided. Not to be willing to look beyond the time of confirmation would imply that the future life of the confirmands should not matter. Yet it must indeed be kept in mind that whatever confirmation work may have to contribute to faith in later adolescence and to the adolescents' relationship to the Church or to voluntary commitment must always be viewed and evaluated not just in terms of external demands on youth but from their own perspective and in relationship to their own needs. This was one of the reasons why it was so important for the present study to ask the young people themselves about their own views, rather than just doing a study with ministers or other experts in the field.

Concerning the Christian faith, the first question to be asked in a study with

adolescents two years after confirmation will be how they, in retrospect, evaluate their confirmation time as well as the celebration on the day of confirmation. Has it stayed important to them or have the experiences connected to it lost their importance? Very little is known about such questions. Consequently, it is of special interest to consider the results of the present study which included a number of questions about looking back to one's confirmation time, as well as to the day of confirmation (see p. 30 ff.). It will probably be encouraging to many who are active with confirmation work to learn how important especially the day of confirmation has remained to many of the adolescents in the present study as well as the lasting appreciation which again many of the adolescents express for their confirmation time.

The next question must be about the adolescents' faith which the study addressed with a number of items relating to religious attitudes, for example, faith in God, faith in creation or in an afterlife. From the earlier studies it is clear that the adolescents tended to indicate more assent to these beliefs at the end of confirmation time than in the beginning (Niemelä 2010; Christensen et al. 2015). Yet what happens after confirmation in this respect? Did the values drop, maybe even to a level below the time when they first joined confirmation work? Both, the psychology as well as the sociology of religion support the expectation that there will be a clear decline concerning adolescents' relationship to the Christian faith (cf., for example, Fowler 1981; Shell Deutschland 2015). On the whole, this general expectation also holds true for the adolescents in the present study. Yet this study goes beyond earlier quantitative research in that it included a whole series of items related to religious attitudes and also differentiated between adolescents' relationship to the church on the one hand and to the Christian faith on the other. In this way the study allows for a more differentiated and a more adequate understanding of what faith may mean for older adolescents (see p. 46 ff.). There are faith-related items concerning, for example, faith in creation that indicate a clear – some would say, an alarming – decline after confirmation. Yet there are other items, most of all the belief in an afterlife, that become more important after confirmation. Interestingly, there are also beliefs that become especially important during confirmation time but tend to lose this importance after confirmation. It seems quite obvious that these results will be of special interest, both for designing programs that may be attractive for adolescents after confirmation, as well as for reconsidering what topics should be addressed during confirmation time and in what manner.

One of the possibly most surprising results of the studies with the confirmands was the very positive views of the church that were found with an overwhelming majority of them (from the earlier studies of this project cf. Niemelä 2010; Niemelä et al. 2015). Shortly before confirmation, 73 % of the respondents of the second study showed themselves convinced that the »church does

a lot of good things for the people». Although the respective values were high even at the beginning of confirmation time, they still increased considerably during confirmation time. However, the positive image of the church was not paralleled by an equally positive view of one's own church membership. With the adolescents in the survey two years after confirmation, the results were similar, although on a lower level (cf. p. 61 ff.). It is difficult to say what confirmation work contributes to the adolescents' relationship to the church after confirmation. Strictly speaking, one would need to have a control group in order to measure this influence. What is obvious, however, is the lasting influence of positive – and consequently also of negative – experiences with confirmation work (cf. p. 121 ff.).

In any case, the studies on confirmation work and on the time after confirmation clearly show that confirmation work contributes to adolescents' interest and motivation in relationship to volunteerism. The data reveal a clear increase in many of the confirmands' interest in becoming a volunteer (Pettersson/Simojoki 2010; Porkka et al. 2015). Not all of those who had indicated a respective interest at the time of their confirmation had actually become volunteers when they responded two years after confirmation (cf. p. 102 ff.). Yet the number of those who actually had, was also considerable. The data show that additional efforts must be made if adolescents are to be won for voluntary work. In the first place, and most naturally, voluntary work must be attractive to young people in terms of how it is organised and what it offers to young volunteers. Important aspects in this respect are the availability of respective opportunities in the parishes, experiences in the group of volunteers as well as chances for having responsibilities of one's own. Moreover, there is a clear need to actually ask adolescents after confirmation if they are willing to become volunteers. This need must be emphasised because many of the adolescents in the study reported that no one ever asked them if they wanted to become involved. This is just one of the results which show that becoming a volunteer after confirmation is an important answer to the question what comes after confirmation, but that much more should and could be done to make this option even more attractive in the future. Given the ethical and political importance of voluntary work there are many reasons for giving more emphasis to this task in the future.

### 1.5 Establishing a European Horizon in Researching Religious Education and Christian Youth Work

The present study is part of a larger enterprise that started about 10 years ago, when the first international study on confirmation work in Europe began (Schweitzer et al. 2010). Five years later, the second study was launched

(Schweitzer et al. 2015a). The present volume holds the results of the final step of this second study which goes beyond confirmation time itself in order to include adolescents two years after confirmation. The studies on confirmation work should also be understood as part of the attempt to establish international research and cooperation on a European level in a field in which such work is still quite unusual and innovative. It is probably fair to say that this is the first study of its kind, not only in relation to confirmation work but also concerning educational programs offered by the Churches in Europe.

International and European cooperation in research on youth and religion is clearly becoming more important. Even thirty years ago, researchers from the sociology of religion and from theology started to bring their results together and to investigate possibilities for comparative interpretation (for example, Nembach 1987). Considerable efforts have been made since then to develop international schemes for studying youth and religion in Europe (Ziebertz/Kay 2005 and 2006; Ziebertz et al. 2009). International research in religious education has also made progress but it is still most often related – and limited – to schools and to teaching religion there (Jackson et al. 2007; Ziebertz/Riegel 2009). Compared to these studies, educational programs related to the Church and taking place in connection to the parishes or Christian youth work have received very little international attention.

Against this background, the studies on confirmation work, including the present study with older adolescents, acquire additional meaning. They demonstrate that research in this field is both possible and meaningful. Moreover, one of the most important experiences for the group of researchers behind the studies on confirmation work certainly was a new kind of ecumenical exchange and cooperation – what could be called practical *ecumene* and which can be appreciated by the Churches and by theology as an important motive for this kind of international research. *Ecumene* in this case referred to international cooperation between Churches in different countries. It also referred to inter-denominational cooperation in that Lutheran and Reformed Churches as well as the German Methodists took part in the study. It should also be mentioned in this context that conversations with Roman Catholic colleagues played a role at various stages and that the studies on confirmation work found a parallel in a study on First Communion (cf. Forschungsgruppe »Religion und Gesellschaft« 2015).

An overview of the central findings of the different studies on confirmation work conducted over the last ten years is given at the end of this book (p. 233 ff.).

## 2. Research Questions and Research Approach

Against the background described so far, the research questions resulting from it had to be formulated in ways that fit with an empirical study. This was done in conversation with an international group of experts from within and beyond the project as well as on the basis of the findings of the preceding studies on confirmation work.

The following main questions were chosen for guiding the research:

- How do adolescents retrospectively view and evaluate confirmation work and the day of confirmation two years after confirmation?
- What experiences with the Church after confirmation are reported by the adolescents?
- What changes can be found in the religious attitudes of the adolescents between the ages of roughly 13 and 17 years (depending on the country)?
- What is the influence of religious socialisation during childhood?
- How does the relationship to the Church and the commitment to the Church develop after confirmation?
- How can the pathways into voluntary work, especially in confirmation work itself, be described? What reasons can be identified for becoming or not becoming a volunteer?
- What are the adolescents' experiences with voluntary work?
- What reasons can be found behind different developmental patterns among Protestant adolescents in relationship to beliefs, church and volunteerism?

Each of these questions is of interest in itself. Moreover, possible connections between the different questions and the respective results will be important. Most likely it is such connections that will be of special importance for the practice of confirmation work as well as for programs offered to adolescents after confirmation.

All these questions will be treated in a longitudinal perspective, with responses at the beginning and at the end of confirmation time as well as two years after confirmation. This can be considered the special strength of the present study. The longitudinal approach corresponds to longstanding demands of social-scientific research. Truly longitudinal data offer the only reliable access to insights referring to change, for example, in adolescence. Most of the existing studies on youth or on church membership only allow for such insights in a very general and preliminary sense. They are most often based on a single questionnaire administered at a certain time which implies that the data produced are not suitable to reliably trace change. Comparisons based on results from different studies remain helpful and were also used with the studies on confir-

mation work (cf. Schweitzer et al. 2010; Schweitzer et al. 2015a). Yet more and more the approach to changes over time should be based on truly longitudinal data. It is in this sense that the present study can be considered a decisive step ahead.

Another advantage of the data from the present study comes from its dual reference to both changes at the group level as well as to changes at an individual level. The study was planned and carried out such that each confirmand could be followed and his or her responses from the beginning and the end of confirmation time could be connected to the responses two years after confirmation. Again, this can be appreciated as further supporting the validity of the results. Moreover, the dual approach adds a whole new dimension to the analysis and interpretation of the data. As will be shown in the different chapters of the book, the changes at the individual level did not always correspond to those at the group level. Instead, it often turned out that there were numerous changes at the individual level that followed a different pattern or direction than the changes at the group level. This result is of special importance for education which always has to refer to individual people and not to abstract averages. The changes at the individual level can be interpreted as evidence of educational influences or, at least, as evidence of the possibility of such influences. Tendencies at the group level obviously do not determine individual development, at least not for each individual. At the same time, individual change can also refer to special challenges in that they show that working with adolescents does not mean working with a homogenous group but with individuals with different needs, different interests, etc.

The longitudinal approach chosen for the present study is connected to another important point that must be kept in mind concerning the research questions described above. While the earlier studies on confirmation work aimed for representative data, the present study does not. Representative data are necessary when one wants to generalise the results to a certain population – with confirmation work, this population would be the confirmands in the different countries. A longitudinal study has its focus on individual paths of development or change. The longitudinal results and insights are not important because they would be representative but because they are valid on a group level as well as on an individual level. For research on youth and religion, this implies the so far unique chance to go beyond data based on one-time surveys. For Europe, this is a new approach that follows the model of the studies carried out by Christian Smith in the United States (Smith 2005; 2009). Smith has shown how longitudinal studies can lead to new and deeper insights into adolescents' religious orientations and adherences.

Finally, any long-term approach to youth and religion must also have an eye on the influences of childhood religious socialisation. For this reason, the

present study makes constant reference to religious upbringing by the parents and also to contacts with Christian youth work and other programs offered by the Churches before confirmation time. In this sense, of what the adolescents remember and report, experiences during childhood could be included, although not in a truly longitudinal manner. As the results clearly show, experiences from childhood continue to exert an important influence, during confirmation time as well as beyond. Yet it is also evident that later experiences before and after confirmation also play a role, in part by further strengthening earlier effects, in part by giving the adolescents new impulses.

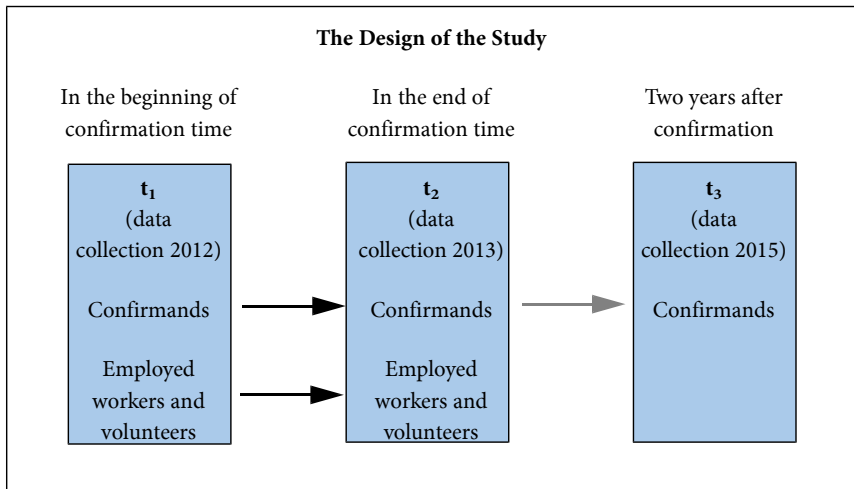
### 3. The Design of the Study

The study is based on a longitudinal design that aimed at capturing the expectations and experiences of Protestant adolescents between the ages of approximately 13 and 16 or 17 years, depending on the country. From an institutional point of view this means that responses were gathered first from confirmands at the beginning ( $t_1$ , 2012) and at the end of confirmation time ( $t_2$ , 2013) and then two years after confirmation ( $t_3$ , 2015). This design builds upon the earlier study on confirmation work (Schweitzer et al. 2015a) in that the confirmands included in this study were asked if they were willing to also participate in the study two years after their confirmation. Figure 1 gives an overview on the different parts of the study.

The study was based on written questionnaires, in part in pencil and paper form, in part using digital versions of the questionnaires. The questionnaires included a standard form used for all participants, although with a different ending. Respondents who indicated that they were active as volunteers or who had been volunteers after confirmation but had already stopped before the time of the  $t_3$ -study, were given another questionnaire with additional questions referring to their experiences with voluntary work. Those who had never been volunteers, were asked to answer questions relating to what spoke or speaks against them becoming volunteers. The appendix (p. 262 ff.) holds additional information about how the study was carried out (for more details on the research in the different countries see the respective reports, pp. 130 ff.).

The study was carried out in seven European countries, Germany (Protestant Church in Germany/DE EKD), Austria (AT), Switzerland (CH), Denmark (DK), Finland (FI), Norway (NO), Sweden (SE). Moreover, the Methodist Church in Germany (DE EmK) also took part. Compared to the earlier study on confirmation work which included nine countries, this means that Hungary and Poland only took part in the  $t_1/t_2$ -study but not in the  $t_3$ -study two years

Figure 1: Design of the study



after confirmation. These two countries were not able to collect the necessary data, mostly for organisational and financial reasons.

The sample comprises respondents from all seven countries but in different proportions. Table 1 gives an overview on the total sample and its composition.

The samples in the different countries correspond to the emphasis on longitudinal change. Since the samples in the different countries are not representative, international comparisons in a strict sense are not possible (this was different with the earlier studies on confirmation work). Correspondingly, data analysis and interpretation will be on longitudinal aspects throughout the book. Nevertheless, the international composition of the sample provides a broader basis for the results. Occasionally, the differences between the countries can be interpreted as indications of different tendencies, without making claims to representative comparisons.

#### 4. How the Study Developed

Concerning the group of researchers who were responsible for the present study, the description given in an earlier book can be repeated:

»The group of researchers, who carried out the study [...] has worked together for almost ten years. Many of the group members first came together in 2006, and many meetings in all of the participating countries followed. Early on, the group decided to form its own network, the International Network for Research and Development



Table 1: The total sample and its composition

	Total <sup>a</sup>	DE EKD	AT	CH	DK	FI	NO	SE	DE EmK
t <sub>1</sub>	26842	10191	495	7217	2024	2436	2337	1381	761
t <sub>2</sub>	23347	9096	463	6437	1507	2298	2166	779	628
t <sub>3</sub>	5373	2588	82	1229	334	154	189	570	227
t <sub>1</sub> -t <sub>2</sub> -t <sub>3</sub>	3149	1937	82	662	83	83	115	x <sup>b</sup>	187
Valid questionnaires from volunteers within the t <sub>1</sub> -t <sub>2</sub> -t <sub>3</sub> - sample	493	354	10	91	–	24	14	x <sup>b</sup>	–

<sup>a</sup> In this case, the total includes the German Methodists while it does not in other cases, due to the special structure of this Church (see p. 204 ff.).

<sup>b</sup> The sampling in Sweden was different from the other countries so that no figure is given here.

of Confirmation and Christian Youth Work« founded in 2007. It was the shared interest in doing empirical research on confirmation work and to make possible international exchange and comparison that brought this group together.

In addition to electronic means of communication that played an important role for this group of researchers, a number of meetings took place in most of the participating countries. These meetings gave the group a chance to get at least a glimpse of the different situations in the countries where the meetings took place. The meetings were supported and facilitated by the local Churches in very generous ways. We are very grateful for this generosity that was extended to the researchers in a truly ecumenical spirit.« (Niemelä et al. 2015, 26)

In addition to the researchers who are the authors of the present book, a number of additional colleagues must be mentioned as well as several institutions that supported the study and acted as sponsors, financially but also in many other ways. In the following, the teams and sponsors are listed in the order of how the countries are presented in this volume. Marianne Martin (Tübingen) was responsible for the language editing.

More information about the authors of this study can be found in the appendix.

#### *Germany:*

Team: Friedrich Schweitzer, Georg Hardecker, Christoph Maaß, Wolfgang Ilg, Henrik Simojoki, Katja Lißmann, supported by a team of student workers (especially Mirjam Rutkowski), GESIS (Mannheim), in cooperation with the Comenius-Institute.

Sponsors: the Regional Churches, EKD, Comenius-Institute, University of Tübingen.

*Switzerland:*

Team: Thomas Schlag, Muriel Koch, Christoph Maaß, Jonas Stutz, Silvio Liesch.

Sponsors: Cantonal Churches, Conference of the German-Swiss Churches (Deutschweizerische Kirchenkonferenz [KIKO]), Faculty of Theology, University of Zurich.

*Austria:*

Team: Stefan Grauwald, Dagmar Lagger, Karl Schiefermair.

Sponsors: Evangelische Kirche A.B. (Lutheran Church) and Evangelische Kirche H.B. (Reformed Church), University College of Teacher Education of Christian Churches Vienna/Krems, Austria (Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule Wien/Krems).

*Denmark:*

Team: Leise Christensen, Henrik Reintoft Christensen, Birthe Jakobsen, Helle Sangild Qvist, Church of Denmark-Center for Further Education of Research, Eberhard Harbsmeier (Loegumkloster), Hans Vium Mikkelsen.

*Finland:*

Team: Kati Tervo-Niemelä, Jouko Porkka.

Sponsors: Church Research Institute, Tampere, The Church Council, Helsinki.

*Norway:*

Team: Ida Marie Høeg, Bernd Krupka.

Sponsors: KIFO, Institute for Church, Religion, and Worldview Research and KUN, Northern Norway Educational Centre of Practical Theology.

*Sweden:*

Team: Erika Willander, Jonas Bromander, Peter Brandberg, Andreas Sandberg.  
Sponsors: Unit for Analysis, located at the Archbishop and General Secretary of the Church of Sweden.

*Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche in Deutschland (German Methodists):*

Team: Tobias Beißwenger, Achim Härtner.

Sponsors: Theologische Hochschule Reutlingen (Reutlingen School of Theology), Kinder- und Jugendwerk der Süddeutschen Jährlichen Konferenz der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche (Department for Children and Youth

Work of the Southern Annual Conference, United Methodist Church in Germany).

## 5. Explanation of the Terminology

For most of the items, the answers were measured by a scale of 1 to 7, with wordings given in the questionnaire like 1 = »not applicable at all« and 7 = »totally applicable«. In order to reduce the complexity of the tables in this publication, the answering levels 1, 2 and 3 are summarised as »No«, 4 »Middle« and 5, 6 and 7 as »Yes«. In computing the data (e. g., for correlations), the original answering levels have been kept. When reporting results, usually »percentages yes« are reported which is easier to understand than mean values.

The following statistical abbreviations will be used throughout the book:

- *Items* are the questions within a questionnaire.
- *Percentages (%)* refer to valid percent. The number of missing answers is usually about 1-4% of all answers and will not be stated for every item. Rounding accounts for deviations of percentage sums not equaling 100 %.
- *Percent points* indicate the differences between percentages.
- The *scale level* of the Likert-scales (rating scales) is metric.
- *Sample size (N)* stands for the number of valid answers to a certain item.
- *Mean value (M)* is the average of all answers for a certain item.
- *Standard deviation (SD)* indicates the spread of the answers to a certain item.
- *Level of significance (p)*: In this book a level of 5 % (\* =  $p < 0.05$ ) or 1 % (\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ ) or 0.1 % (\*\*\*) =  $p < 0.001$ ) is used. Due to the sometimes large number of questionnaires, not all significant differences can be considered relevant. As the sensitivity of significance test is connected to sample size, even small differences become statistically significant in countries with large sample sizes. All differences reported are significant at least on a 0.05-level. Statistical details (F-values, degrees of freedom, etc.) are mostly not reported in order to make the book more accessible to readers without statistical training.
- *Correlation coefficient (r)* states the degree of interdependence of two variables. It ranges from -1 to +1. The closer it is to 0, the smaller the interdependence between the variables.
- *Cronbach Alpha ( $\alpha$ )* measures the degree of internal consistency of the items in an index.

- When presenting data, the following order of countries is used, which is no more than a technical convention: Germany (DE), Austria (AT), Switzerland (CH), Denmark (DK), Finland (FI), Norway (NO), Sweden (SE). The data from the German Methodists (EmK) are presented last and generally are set off with a double line because of the different structure of this Church.

**From the Beginning of Confirmation  
Time to Two Years after Confirmation:  
Longitudinal Perspectives**

## II. From the Beginning of Confirmation Time to Two Years after Confirmation: Longitudinal Perspectives

### 1. Confirmands Looking Back to Their Day of Confirmation

LEISE CHRISTENSEN AND BERND KRUPKA

#### 1.1 Introduction

Traditionally, confirmation time has carried many features of a rite de passage, marking the transition from adolescent to adult. In some countries involved in the study, important civil rights – and even economical rights – were connected to the status of being confirmed, and the dress code of young persons could include markers of confirmation status. In many countries, Protestant confirmation has been linked to the end of compulsory education and the beginning of work life, and has been compulsory itself.

In all the participating countries, confirmation has lost most, but not all, of its implications for the civil status of adolescents, both within and outside the church. It has also lost its role as a marker of the end of compulsory education. However, the celebration of confirmation is still an event covering a substantial part of the age group, thus achieving a high degree of public visibility and importance. To varying degrees, it has retained several other informal markers of a passage to adulthood. It is still quite common in the participating countries, for example, that a boy confirmand will get his first suit for confirmation day, in some countries it marks the families' consent to participation in adult celebration habits, for example, the consumption of alcohol. Confirmation presents traditionally have adult life as their horizon, both in the type of present, but also in terms of monetary value, and confirmation plays an important role as a family gathering. Each year at confirmation season, newspaper articles and readers' comments refer to the material aspects of confirmation in the form of expensive presents, clothes and ways of celebration, and question its moral validity. All this adds up to the impression that in some countries, confirmation day still has some kind of ritual momentum of its own that does not translate into purely theological understandings of confirmation.

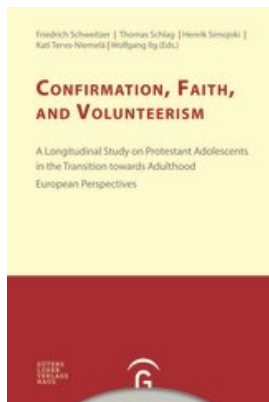
In order to describe this ›ritual momentum‹, this article will analyse the data provided by the t<sub>3</sub>-survey on three aspects of confirmation day as a rite: the experiential-formative aspect, the social and the material aspect.

Church youth workers sometimes experience a certain tension between con-

firmation time and confirmation day. In school type confirmation work (Krupka/Innanen 2010, 224-225), there was a duality of formative confirmation class and the ritual experience of confirmation day. The concept of confirmation *work*, along with the emphasis on confirmation *time* as a whole that can be found in some curricula, underlines the intention to present confirmation time and day as an integrated experience. Workers often underline the importance of *the whole* confirmation work as a time of religious education (Hardecker et al. 2015), while the families' focus and also the adolescents focus can be directed to the day of confirmation at an early stage in confirmation work (on confirmands motives for attending, see Høeg 2010), focussing on the ritual aspect of confirmation (sometimes calling the church office about details on confirmation day months in advance). The religious scientist Danièle Hervieu-Léger (2000) describes religious learning as a »chain of memory« consisting of religious practice loosely interlinked with its religious discourse of interpretation. While a renewed understanding of religious practice is necessary to keep up with societal changes, the claim is that the momentum of religious learning and tradition lies with the ritual practice. This distinction sheds light on the tension between confirmation time as a learning discourse which teaches the meaning of the rite, and confirmation day as ritual practice. This article will therefore investigate the momentum of confirmation day compared to the importance of confirmation time.

Is there a formative side to confirmation day, too? How does confirmation day as ritual practice contribute to religious formation? The religious scientist Harvey Whitehouse (Whitehouse 2004, 70-74, 105-118) describes a specific type of religious learning related to rituals characterised by a once-in-a-lifetime status, high visibility and involvement of the religious community. Whitehouse describes such rituals as religion in the imagistic mode. Religious learning in this mode is cognitively based on an intense sensual experience of participating in a ritual, with the rite de passage being the original example of such a rite. Even though confirmation does not, and never has shown the sensual atrocities of the rites de passage that Whitehouse uses as examples (even taking into account that confirmands sometimes faint during confirmation service), the history of confirmation clearly includes the characteristics of a passage rite, as described above. The rite has also retained a high visibility within the local community in most of the countries participating in the study, and in the extended family network. It also functions as a focal point for other church youth work. Many churches offer programs for mini- or junior-confirmation for the age group between 9 and 12 years. It is also quite common that older adolescents revisit the confirmation experience as young volunteers participating in confirmation work, some of them for several years. To explore the experiential-formative aspect of confirmation day further, this article will therefore investi-

## UNVERKÄUFLICHE LESEPROBE



Friedrich Schweitzer, Thomas Schlag, Henrik Simojoki,  
Kati Tervo-Niemelä, Wolfgang Ilg

**Confirmation, Faith, and Volunteerism**

A Longitudinal Study on Protestant Adolescents in the  
Transition towards Adulthood. European Perspectives

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### Jugendliche nach der Konfirmation - eine internationale Studie

Was kommt nach der Konfirmation? Jugendliche in sieben europäischen Ländern wurden zwei Jahre nach ihrer Konfirmation befragt. Dabei wurde insbesondere untersucht, wie sie den Konfirmationstag wahrgenommen haben und wie sich ihr Verhältnis zu Glaube und Kirche nach der Konfirmation entwickelt hat. Ein weiterer Schwerpunkt liegt beim ehrenamtlichen Engagement, besonders in der Kirche und im Kontext der Konfirmandenarbeit. Da es sich um eine Längsschnittstudie handelt, die auf den früheren Untersuchungen mit Konfirmandinnen und Konfirmanden während der Konfi-Zeit aufbaut, ist es hier erstmals möglich, die religiösen Entwicklungspfade Jugendlicher über drei Jahre hinweg zu verfolgen, auf Gruppen- ebenso wie auf Individualebene. Damit bietet die Studie zahlreiche neue Einsichten, die wichtige Impulse für die Praxis der Konfirmandenarbeit, aber auch für ihr theologisches Verständnis einschließen.



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