Pilgrimage as a Source of Peacebuilding and Resource of Religious Education
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The poster I will present at the REA focuses on a pilot project that aims to unravel how the praxis of pilgrimage can be seen and used as a resource for religious education. The pilot project is embedded into the educational project “SpiRiTex” that will be carried out in the department of Catholic Theology at the University of Bonn and addresses especially teacher students in religious education. “SpiRiTex” “aims “to create powerful learning environments with student teachers in religious education (RE) in order to discover the spiritual capital of Europe. Through specific field work experiences they can learn to perceive, understand and communicate the importance of sacred spaces, texts and rituals for the spiritual well-being of children and young people in schools in Europe tomorrow. The basic assumption of the project is that these three spiritual sources can become vital re-sources, when they are re-created, re-defined and re-appropriated in the very act of learning. New patterns of meaning and behavior can arise out of the confrontation with these sources” (Roebben 2018:1).

Main Issue:
The poster shows three thematic complexes that build on one another:
[1] The first section will provide an overview about the present social situation in which the research is embedded: Contemporary Europe is characterized not only by religious and cultural diversity— which has increased even further as a result of rising numbers of immigration from primarily Muslim countries in recent years—, but also by a breaching with tradition in the sense of a turn away from Christianity by those members of society whose roots lie in Europe. Despite considerable efforts, handling this diversity is not always productive and in fact tends to result in overstraining and prejudices that frequently culminate in power asymmetries, xenophobia and discrimination of minorities. The individual it seems, is overwhelmed in his/her identity search by the variety of opportunities and the hitherto unfamiliar influences. Correspondingly, it is not seldom that the definition of one’s own identity is derived from a differentiation to the “strange other” instead of a productive confrontation with the “new other”. Only the one who deliberately seeks confrontation and discussion with the (religious) other has a chance to get to know him/her along with his/her religion and traditions, while simultaneously granting insight into one’s own perspective. This is not about giving up one’s own position. Rather, taking perspective in the face of the religious other, allows for a critical articulation, definition and reflection thereof. It is through this mutual respectful confrontation only, that a (religious) identity shaped by tolerance can be formed, one that empowers to resist tensions and grant others participation in one’s position without appropriation, while at the same time allowing oneself to get to know the other without adapting him/her to one’s own position. Providing educational support for the development of such a stable personal identity is perhaps one of the biggest societal challenges of our time. Given the essential role of religion in this process, religious education has a fundamental responsibility to create room for encounter and time for reflection on one’s own position. The present research project ties into this responsibility by investigating the potential of the pilgrimage to support the construction of a stable religious identity.
[2] Through the second part I will paint a picture of the pilot project in which we tried to get first ideas about the potential of pilgrimage based on data taken from a qualitative empirical study, that can be situated within the tradition of ethnographic field research. The focus of this project was on religious place and its transformations into sacred space. Together with a research team from the University of Bonn I accompanied a group of theology and RE students from Bonn and Dortmund (G), Dublin (IRL), Riga (LV) and Tielt (B), Vienna (A) on a pilgrimage in Flanders (Belgium) in May 2018. During a timeframe of five days we visited different spiritual places and in intensive conversations we reflected together about the question weather or not this places are spiritual, religious or even sacred spaces. On the poster I will give an overview about this places as well as an insight into the thoughts of the participants.
[3] Consequently the third section will be used to provide research based answers regarding to the following research questions:
What potential does the encounter with spiritual and sacred spaces offers in the context of a pilgrimage? How do encounters and exchanges between pilgrims influence the identity search process of the individual? How can the identity-forming potential of pilgrimage be used fruitfully in the context of religious education? To what extent is an interreligious implementation conceivable?

The tendencies of the pilot project can be understood as an empirical foundation for the ongoing development of the “SpiRiTex”-Project.

**Methodology:**
The data gathered in the described ethnographic field research are collected by a research team that took part in the pilgrimage as participating observers. They chose qualitative observation sheets and logbooks/research diaries as survey instruments.

**Primary Sources:**
-Roebben, B. (2018): Sacred Spaces, Rituals and Texts in European Teacher Education. The Rationale behind the SpiRiTex-Project. In: Greek Journal of Religious Education. Accepted for publication.