

Language of Hope in Europe

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Abstract

In Europe, the diversity in religions, cultures, languages and historical backgrounds is enormous. World War II and the Soviet Regime have played a large part in this and the flow of refugees from other continents increases the pluralism even more. How can people live together in these countries and how can religious education add to this bridging between differences? The language across all European countries is very different. This is not only literally the case between countries, but also figuratively speaking and inside individual countries. These differences occur in cultural sense and across age groups as well.

Secondary education has the task to form young people to become firmly rooted people who can hold their own in society and contribute to a better world. It is essential that they learn to examine their own core values and their roots during their time at school. A language is needed in which pupils recognise themselves and their values. This should be a main focus of spiritual and religious education. It happens especially in religious education classes in denominational schools. However, these schools are currently accommodating increasing numbers of non-religious pupils. What role do religious values still play in this situation? How do pupils feel about active involvement in religious institutions, and about basing life choices on religious beliefs? Can other, non-religious values be detected which could form the basis for value-oriented personal formation and a language in which this is brought to light

Research of these subjects has been ongoing in the Netherlands for more than twenty years now. This is currently being expanded to two other European countries: the Czech Republic and Germany (former East Germany). These are also secularized countries, where denominational schools are attended by an increasingly diverse population, and yet these countries have a very different history. Will the results here be similar to those of the earlier Dutch studies? Or do the history and context of these countries play a stronger role, and does this show in the values that are important to pupils? A comparative pilot study is being conducted as start of this broadening perspective. This is geared towards greater insight into the values of pupils in various school classes in denominational schools in these three European countries. This information will allow us to detect their language and with this design appropriate new forms of spiritual and religious value-oriented world view education.

Keywords: religious affiliation, religion, belonging and believing, values, religious education

1. Introduction

Three countries were selected and first will be shortly described, where the focus is on their religious and cultural developments in recent history. A flow of secularization has taken place in these three European countries especially which is why we choose to compare the religious values and beliefs of pupils in these countries. We focus on religion and belief in these secularized countries and try to highlight differences based on culture and history more than on religion. Former research on religion, belief and religious values will be presented. Our research questions are based on this and will be presented at the end of this chapter. With answering our questions we hope to add to new forms of religious and worldview education on denominational schools in secularized countries, taken into account the differences in culture and history.

1.1 *Three European secularized countries*

Like many Western European countries, the Netherlands is a pluralistic, multireligious and secularized country. Originally mainly Protestant and Roman Catholic, the Netherlands nowadays has low percentages of religious affiliation: 40 % of the

population call themselves Christians, and 49 % non-affiliated. The expectation is that this decline will continue over the coming years. Hellemans has called this decline the third stage in the development of the main established churches: “far-reaching secularization and increasing marginalization of the main churches without the rise of new churches or groups to fill up the void. (...) these countries are tending towards becoming ‘post-Christian’ in the near future”. (Hellemans 2012 p.3) The place of young people in today’s Dutch society is not very different from that in the rest of Western Europe. Dutch researchers have studied the way young people in Western Europe currently experience faith, and have concluded that for most, faith is oriented towards family, friends, and themselves as individuals, which is defined as ‘immanent faith’. The Czech Republic is among the most secularized countries in Europe when it comes to belief in the basic elements of Christian doctrine. On the other hand, in terms of belief in magic, amulets, and the powers of fortune-tellers, the Czech Republic is almost at the top compared to other European countries. People in the Czech Republic have practically no interest in Eastern philosophical and religious systems (Hamplová, 2013). Closer analysis of sociological data further reveals that when it comes to Christians’ identification with the doctrine of the churches to which they belong, the Czech Republic is not closest to Slovakia, with which it was joined in a federative state for seventy years, but to Austria (Váně – Štípková, 2013).

The position of religiosity and spirituality in the Czech Republic is quite specific. The Czech Republic has approximately 10.5 million inhabitants. According to a 2011 census of persons, houses, and apartments, almost 1.1 million of these inhabitants are members of the Catholic Church. 51,000 people stated that they were members of the second largest church, the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, and 39,000 that they belonged to the third largest church, the national Czechoslovak Hussite Church, which was founded in reaction to anti-modernist tendencies in the Catholic Church after the First World War. By contrast, more than 4.5 million inhabitants did not answer the census question on religious affiliation at all.⁴ 3.6 million stated that they professed no religion, and 708,000 that they were believers but were not members of any church (ČSÚ, 2014). However, people who believe neither in God nor in any other supernatural power or phenomenon form an absolute minority in Czech society. In the 2008 ISSP enquiry, only 6% of the respondents responded in these terms and can thus be labelled real atheists (Hamplová, 2013).

In an extensive study which combines a religious studies approach and a historiographical approach, David Václavík (2010) has convincingly shown that the roots of the contemporary negation of ecclesial forms of Christianity and the associated skepticism with regard to anything formally or manifestly religious grew gradually and continuously in Czech history. Its beginnings must be sought at the latest in 1867 when the Austrian Empire was transformed into the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy. When official opposition politics against the Viennese government began, the Catholic Church, or practicing the Catholic faith, were rejected, since the church was perceived as part of the state and government apparatus, and practicing the Catholic faith as consenting to

⁴ The question was optional and a part of the public manifested its disagreement with the otherwise obligatory census of persons, houses, and apartments by not answering the optional questions. But Christians were generally encouraged by the churches to answer these questions, among other reasons because at that time census results still affected church financing.

the existing order in state and society. The communist regime was thus merely an episode, albeit an important one, in the process of the Czech nation's breakaway from established forms of religiosity. In a way, the social processes of the 19th century, including those at the turn of the 19th and 20th century, and therefore also the massive wave of defections from the Catholic Church after the First World War, appear to have been a greater influence on the Czechs' breaking away from the Christian faith than the forty-year-long period of communist government (Hamplová – Nešpor, 2009). In the 1920s alone, approximately 2.5 million people left the Catholic Church. About half of these entered the national Czechoslovak Hussite Church; the other half remained without any religious affiliation. This movement of defection from the Catholic Church probably has no parallel in world history as to scale and speed. However, a "general religiosity", calling for a renewal of the churches and demanding that religion serve humanity and national development, was already apparent at that time. In addition, alternative religiosity was developing markedly in Bohemia, a phenomenon which only became widespread elsewhere in Europe at the end of the 20th century (Hamplová, 2013).

We may conclude therefore that the proverbial Czech atheism, which is so often quoted, does not exist at all; or, to put it more precisely: "The proverbial 'Czech atheism' is anything but real atheism" (Nešpor, 2010). The present situation of religiosity and spirituality in the Czech Republic and its historical development cannot be interpreted, therefore, as constituting an atheistic society. "Despite all changes that have occurred in the Czech religious scene in the course of the 20th century or even by means of these changes, it is possible to observe a long-term transition from ecclesial forms of religiosity and especially from the established churches to 'alternative forms', to personally experienced and especially in extreme moments utilized transcendent anchoring (Nešpor, 2016)". For the sake of completeness, we should add that belief in traditional Christian elements (God, heaven, hell, miracles) is more widespread and more stable in the Czech Republic than are belief in elements of Eastern religious philosophical systems (nirvana, reincarnation), although a minor decrease can be observed as the above implies (Hamplová, 2013).

Germany, in its turn, also has a peculiar history of its own. Article 4 of the constitution guarantees freedom of religion for the German people: the "Freiheit des Glaubens", the "Gewissens" and the "Freiheit des religiösen und weltanschaulichen Bekenntnisses sind unverletzlich". The separation of church and state was proclaimed in 1919.

In 2002, approximately 34% of the population belonged to the Protestant, mainly Lutheran churches, and another 34% to the Roman Catholic Church; 3.7% belonged to the Islamic faith. In 1995, the Jewish community counted 72 communities with a total of nearly 54,000 members. In 1933, before Hitler came to power, the Jewish population in Germany came to about 530,000. The largest Jewish community is located in Berlin, followed by Frankfurt and Munich. Traditional Jewish communities in Leipzig and Dresden have been actively professing their faith, also since the German reunification. 18 Lutheran and Reformed (*reformierte*) churches in West Germany are united in the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD). In 1991, the EKD was merged with the Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen from the former GDR. The Evangelical churches in Germany belong to the World Council of Churches and there is close collaboration between them and the Roman Catholic Church. Protestant churches organize biennial

national gatherings: the so-called church days.

Up to 1994, the Roman Catholic Church was divided into 23 dioceses, five of which were archdioceses. After a reorganization necessitated by reunification, Germany currently has 20 dioceses and seven archdioceses: Bamberg, Cologne, Freiburg, Munich and Freising, Paderborn, Hamburg (new), and Berlin. The archdiocese of Cologne is the richest in the world, thanks to the German system of church tax ("Kirchensteuer"). The Roman Catholic Church organizes biennial meetings: the so-called Catholics Days (Van der Mark).

The German Democratic Republic (German: Deutsche Demokratische Republik, DDR), often also called East Germany, was a communist country in Europe. It was founded in 1949 in the Soviet-occupied part of defeated Germany. Officially, the GDR existed from 7 October 1949 to 3 October 1990, the day of German reunification. On that day the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany were united, thus forming present-day Germany. Most of the old federal states that had existed before the GDR were restored. More than half of the population in the area of the former GDR and in the northern state of Hamburg have no religion. A huge shift has taken place in East Germany in this regard. There was an ongoing marginalization of the influence of organized religions by the Communist government of East Germany. The great emphasis of the state was on avoiding religion (Kellner).

1.2 Religious thinking and discourse

People in Central and Eastern European countries are not as familiar with open discussion of religion and values as their counterparts in so-called Western European countries are. The main reason for this is that the thesis of the colonial history of Europe does not hold for Central and Eastern Europe. The former Austro-Hungarian Empire and its successor states were never colonial superpowers in the sense that Great Britain, France, Spain, or the Netherlands were. Their experience with overseas countries was always mediated. From the point of view of the colonial history of Europe, the question is rather to what extent individual European countries such as the Czech lands, Croatia, Slovakia, etc., were Austro-Hungarian colonies. But in Central and Eastern Europe, this question is not and cannot be posed in this way, because the relationships between states and nations were ordered differently.

In the past decade, however, a colonial role has been ascribed to the European Union and its leading member states, especially Germany. The EU has also been compared to the Soviet Union and its "colonial" endeavor, even though most Central and Eastern European countries were never part of the Soviet Union. An important conclusion that follows from this is that the mentality that is prevalent in contemporary Central and Eastern Europe is like the mentality of the victims of colonial oppression. This has an important impact on public and political discourse on key issues, as well as on the way current world events are interpreted. As a result, significant segments of society in Central and Eastern European countries a priori reject a focus on the outside world and on concepts such as secularization. The societies of the individual states are polarized between two basic positions. One can be characterized as a position that insulates itself from everything foreign, a priori rejecting social change and the impact of world

developments, rejecting the findings of the humanities and social sciences – e.g. regarding the social construction of reality. The other position is open both to foreign influences and to social change and development, and strives for rational and objective assessment of these, as well as other information. The first position fears “colonization” on the part of the EU, the second points out contemporary Russia’s “colonizing” efforts. This polarization has led to a ideological fight in the whole of society, in discourse, and in political debates.

Older investigations of spirituality and religiosity already confirmed that certain kinds of fear are felt especially in Central and Eastern European societies, regardless of whether these are predominantly Catholic, such as Poland, or secularized, such as the Czech Republic. These fears are associated with the transformation of society, and they arise from a low standard of living and also include existential fears, especially the fear of death, of one’s own futility and uselessness. The American Pew Research Center’s 2017 investigation of religion and national belonging in post-communist Central and Eastern European countries reached similar conclusions. Religion, which helped to form and reinforce, develop and defend identity in Central and Eastern European countries, is becoming an instrument of oppression of everything that is different. A highly secularized country like the Netherlands can, for instance, be seen as representative of a new way of life that must be opposed, and might therefore be seen as a new kind of enemy, or opponent.

Earlier research amongst Dutch pupils (age 15-18) showed that faith related values are not important for them, nor being religious, having faith or belonging to a religious institute (Van Dijk 2015).

1.3 Religion in the three countries

We look first at the figures in the three countries, compared to world figures.

	Netherlands	Czech Republic	Saxony	World
• Christian*	40%	27 %	26 %	33%
• Orthodox	---	1 %	< 1 %	---
• Muslim	5%	< 1 %	---	22%
• Hindu	0.5%	---	---	14%
• Buddhist	0.5%	---	---	7%
• Other religion	5%	---	1 %	12%
• Atheist	---	25 %	---	---
• No religion	49%	46 %	73 %	2%

(*Christian here includes Protestant and Roman Catholic. Data: Netherlands: Schmeets and Van Mensvoort, 2015 p. 4; Czech Republic: Pew Research Center 2017, World Johnson and Grim, 2013 p.12; Saxony: Ergebnis des Zensus 2011)

For East Germany we have chosen the Saxony figures. Some details were not available in the data sets for all countries (---in the list). What is clear is the Christian nature of these countries, and the presence of a large percentage of non-affiliated people. In

Czech republic, the label of non-religious or atheist is often used by fans of alternative spirituality/religiosity, including horoscopes, amulets and so on. Compared to the rest of the world these countries have very few Muslims (the Netherlands tops the list in this respect with 5 %) as well as few Hindu or Buddhist people.

The key findings of the Europe's Young Adults and Religion survey contain the following figures on young people's religiosity:

- The proportion of young adults (16-29) with no religious affiliation ('nones') is as high as 91% in the Czech Republic, 80% in Estonia, and 75% in Sweden.
- 70% of Czech young adults – and 60% of their Spanish, Dutch, British, and Belgian counterparts – 'never' attend religious services.
- Only 2% of Catholic young adults in Belgium, 3% in Hungary and Austria, 5% in Lithuania, and 6% in Germany say they attend Mass weekly. This contrasts sharply with their peers in Poland (47%), Portugal (27%), the Czech Republic (24%), and Ireland (24%).

Source: Stephen Bullivant (2018).

1.4 Research Design

In our research we will focus on these three countries. Especially on denominational schools it is hard to come up with fitting religious education lessons with its highly secularized population. Knowledge about their religion and their belief, and the role it plays in meaning making in life will help to develop RE-lessons. Therefore, we ask pupils on denominational schools questions regarding their religious affiliation, their religious activity, their belonging and believing, their religious and nonreligious values and the sources where they find inspiration in their lives as possible entrance for religious education. We compare these three countries to find out whether, despite their almost equal secularization level, values differ or concur. This might add a purpose for learning in religious education addressing the different worldviews and historical context.

2. Method

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter the variables, respondents and methodological choices will be described. The translation of the questionnaire, the respondents and their characteristics as well as the sampling procedure is presented in the following paragraphs.

2.2 The questionnaires

In this research project we used a questionnaire which was used in the Netherlands for over twenty years to establish the religion, belief, values and worldviews of secondary school pupils (Van Dijk-Groeneboer 2001, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2013). The items were translated by native speakers in Czechic and German language and very slightly

adjusted when necessary for the specific context, for instance the school levels, and expressions as 'Protestant', 'Evangelical', 'Lutheran' and 'Christian', which in all three countries have different pronunciations and meanings. Especially the real, through meaning of certain values remains hard to grasp, as will be elaborated on in our discussion paragraph.

The full original questionnaires are obtainable via the authors.

2.3 Sampling Procedures

To find respondents, a convenience sampling method was used. Especially when religious elements occur in research, many schools decline participation, so finding an entrance into schools is difficult. All three researchers have their contacts in this religious education field with denominational schools through the RE teachers. Therefore, since this is a pilot study, the schools that participated were those with teachers who were known to the researchers. This of course has an effect on the possibilities for generalization of the data, which will be focused on in our discussion paragraph. All pupils could complete the questionnaire digitally using their own devices.

300 Czech pupils, 300 German pupils, and 900 Dutch pupils in denominational secondary schools completed the same questionnaire. In Czech Republic, the pupils came from 59 high schools across the country, 21 of which were founded by political parties, 31 were Catholic, 5 were Protestant, and 2 were Jewish. In the Netherlands, 4 Catholic and 4 Protestant secondary schools participated, and in Saxony three Catholic *Gymnasium (=highest education level)* schools participated.

In the Netherlands 954 questionnaires were send out, 954 returned of which 903 were valid to enter the analysis. In Saxony 307 out of 318 lists were valid and in Czech Republic 292 out of 320. Some of the returned questionnaires were invalid for analysis, primarily due to missing data or flippant and/or inappropriate answers.

2.4 Data management

The survey was conducted for scientific reasons only. The data will be saved and guarded according to the data management rules in scientific research. All data will be kept without any personal details, so that none of the answers can ever be traced back to the respondent. The respondents participated voluntarily. The data will be kept as an original data source at the Faculty for Catholic Theology for ten years, and is open for other researchers to check the reliability of our analyses and conclusions. Approval for the research was given by the data management team of this Faculty and their data management policy is in line with the Fair Information Principles in the GDPR.

3. Results

3.1 Statistics

Descriptive analysis of the data was conducted with SPSS. This yielded in frequencies tables and crosstabs tables. Since this is still a pilot study, the analysis conducted so far is quite basic, but further analyses will be made in the future as well as a more representative sample study as follow up is prepared. In some questions a Likert scale was used where possible answers were ‘totally disagree’, ‘disagree’, ‘neither agree nor disagree’, ‘agree’ and ‘totally agree’. These were assigned numbers 1 to 5 and the weighted mean was used in the data description.

3.2 The data

Our analysis will first answer questions regarding their religious affiliation.

Table 1 Religious affiliation (in %)

	Czech republic	Nether- lands	Saxony
Roman Catholic	37	12	20
Protestant	3	2	28
Christian	23	18	9
Jewish	1	1	0
Muslim	0	3	0
Atheist	7	12	10
Humanist	4	2	1
Non-affiliated	20	43	26

Over a third of respondents in Czech Republic, a fifth in Saxony, and a tenth in the Netherlands call themselves Catholic. Almost a third of German young adults call themselves Protestants, either Evangelical or Free Evangelical, i.e. belonging to the “Evangelische Freikirchen”. 18 % of the Dutch respondents and 23 % of Czech respondents call themselves Christians. Almost half of Dutch young adults are non-affiliated, as are a quarter of their Eastern German, and a fifth of their Czech peers.

Table 2 Religiosity and religious activities (in %)

	DISAGREE			AGREE		
	SA	CZ	NL	SA	CZ	NL
I call myself religious	37	28	61	59	63	32
I know exactly what I believe	23	31	43	65	61	46
I want to believe but somehow I cannot	77	82	79	9	6	15
If I marry, I will do that in church	27	22	56	56	58	27
If I get kids, I will baptize them	40	30	69	39	54	15
I would like to have a religious funeral	27	21	62	50	60	24

Statements on religiosity and possible involvement with the church for future life events were presented and pupils were again asked to express their level of agreement. Czech and Saxonian pupils call themselves religious far more often than their Dutch peers, and more of them know exactly what to believe. Life events like marriage, the birth of a child, or a funeral are much more associated with religion for Czech or German young people than for Dutch pupils.

We furthermore asked the pupils what they think it means to be faithful with regard to religious affiliation and attending church services (believing and belonging). In all three countries, about 50 % of the respondents say that “when you believe you do not need a religion, nor do you need to attend services”.

Table 3 Believing and belonging (in %)

	Czech Republic	Saxony	Netherlands
Actively religious, strong belonging to one religious organization	37	27	6
Actively religious, feeling connected with different religious organizations	13	15	4
Actively religious, not connected to any religious organization	27	18	10
Not actively religious, belonging to one religious organization	8	16	24

Not actively religious, not connected

to any religious organization 15 24 55

This table shows Dutch pupils are hardly feeling belonging to a religious organization and more than half of them is not actively religious. Most of the Czechian pupils are actively religious as well as half of the Saxonian pupils.

The survey tries to identify the values upon which the respondents base their identity formation. A list with 23 variables was presented to the pupils, and they could then mark whether they regarded each of these values as very unimportant, unimportant, neutral, important, or highly important (ranking 1 to 5). In the list were three faith-related values, which produced the following results (the percentage that agreed or strongly agreed that this is an important value).

Table 4 Faith-related values (in %)

	CZ	NL	SA
Having a life guided by God, Allah or a Higher power	32	13	22
Having trust in God, Allah, or a Higher power	52	15	40
Having faith	67	21	47

Furthermore, we present the three values that were most often chosen in each country (the values that had the highest weighted mean, marked with *), and we have placed these beside the figures of the other countries for comparative purposes, as the following overview shows.

Table 5 Values ranked high (weighted means)

	Netherlands	Czech Republic	Saxony
Being free and independent	4.37 *	4.10	4.42
Being happy with yourself	4.49 *	4.60 *	4.63 *
Living for your family	3.48	4.49 *	4.22
Enjoying life	4.53 *	4.32	4.53 *
Having a happy relationship	4.23	4.55 *	4.47 *

One of these values was among the highest in all three countries, “Being happy with yourself”. Saxonian and Dutch pupils value “Enjoying life” very high and Czechian and Saxonian pupils value “Having a happy relationship” very high.

Finally we describe the respondents’ religious and mystical experiences in music, sports, and nature. Pupils were asked to select whether they believed that the following statement applied to themselves or not. The ‘agree’ figures (adding up “agree” and “totally agree”) are shown here in percentages.

Table 6 Inspiration in music, sports and countryside (in %)

	CZ	NL	SA
Music is important, because it helps me when I am sad	75	57	79
Sports are important, when I do sports I can really feel happy sometimes	27	37	43
I like going into the countryside, it makes me feel at ease and I experience unity	53	23	46

4 Discussion

In our data we find indications that confirm our hypothesis that the values of the pupils in the three secularized countries differ. Religious affiliation and religious activities, religious and nonreligious values, as well as the relationship between believing and belonging to a religious institute are different in these countries. For religious education in all countries however, the entrance might be found through music and by entering into a dialogue about the meaning of religious experiences in this music, as well as in sports or in going to the country.

Doing comparative research in different countries with different languages is very difficult. Especially doing quantitative research, since the real meaning the respondent attaches to certain concepts cannot be checked, as is often the case in surveys. This is especially problematic with religious and value-oriented questions, because the concepts themselves have everything to do with the real, true meaning of words. Unfortunately, this cannot be avoided and we are aware of it. Nevertheless, this research gives some direction in which pupils in these countries differ from each other on certain values and this enhances further thinking on their language and what religious education can add to bring these core values into dialogue in the classroom.

Some remarks are to be made concerning possible bias in our data. The questionnaire was spread during RE classes, so pupils might have been tempted to answer 'more religiously' than usual because their expectations in this setting turn more towards religion. Moreover, the lists were spread amongst denominational schools that were also known to the researchers, so generalization to all Catholic or to all denominational schools in the country or towards non-public schools in general are hard to make. Thirdly, it is important to point out that the results of these pupils on denominational schools are also likely to be much more 'religious' than the average figures for young people in these countries, as believing and religiously active families are more likely to choose these denominational schools that have been founded by churches (in all three countries) and by local authorities (Czech Republic) than to choose public schools. The representativeness of the figures is therefore somewhat uncertain; we would like to emphasize that this is only a pilot study to obtain first insights and ideas on young people and their religion in these three countries.

18 % of the Dutch respondents and 23 % of the Czech respondents call themselves Christians, which is interesting in itself. Are they just Christians 'in general', as in: 'good citizens'? Or are they in fact Protestant or Catholic, but without using this more precise definition due to their religious illiteracy? The latter is most likely the case at least for the Dutch respondents. The percentage of pupils calling themselves atheist is worth further elaborating on, taken into account the remark of Nešpor whether atheism in Czech Republic is real atheism. However, with these quantitative data unfortunately there is not much more to conclude on this point.

Looking into the results on believing and belonging to religious institutions, there is a wide tendency to be skeptical about institutions, which have lost their importance, as

other research has confirmed. In Czech Republic, over a third of respondents stated that they belonged to and believed in one specific religious institution. This was a little less than a third in Saxony, whereas hardly any Dutch pupils at all shared this statement. Another interesting fact is that almost a third of the pupils in Czech Republic said they were actively religious but did not feel connected to any religious institution, whereas about a fifth of the Dutch and Saxonian respondents said that they were not religiously active but did feel connected to one religious institution. This appears to be more a case of having an old feeling of belonging to a specific religious institution, which however the respondents in question attend only at Christmas and for life-changing events. These different types of belonging and believing can be connected to earlier research outcomes (Riegel, Van Dijk-Groeneboer & Ziebertz).

The results show insight in the values pupils give meaning. The religious oriented values are only found important by Czech pupils, especially having faith and having trust in God, Allah or a Higher Power. In the Netherlands, the values that scored highest were all individually oriented, whereas in Saxony and Czech Republic, two out of the three highest ranking values were family- and relationship-oriented. This might have something to do with the history of these countries. A good relationship and good family life is important especially for Christian and Catholic people, as they live lives that are not promoted by the state itself and, even more importantly, have been opposed for many years by the communist regime. As a result, faith was opposed and became a private matter. Many Czech people feel religious bonds across borders and say that religion is important in life, but do not feel proud to be a citizen of their country. This alienation or feeling of loneliness among Christians is a known phenomenon in Czech Republic and to a lesser degree in Saxony (Ökumenismus der dritter Art).

Different values are appreciated differently in these three countries, partly because of their diverging histories and the deeply rooted cultures these have evoked. Religious Education can enhance the creation of meaning for pupils in secularized countries. Value-oriented religious education is needed to form young people in a realistic worldview, especially now they are loose from religions in this secularized context, and in recognizing a horizon towards which they can steer their lives. But this is easier said than done, especially with regard to young adults in these three countries. Religion and religious traditions have been pushed to the background; narrative discussions are therefore needed in the classroom to re-open the search for pupils' roots and values. According to our research results, music, nature, and sports might be interesting points of departure to begin these value-oriented educational activities.

After analyzing the quantitative data, the final step will be to search for the words young people use themselves when they describe what they think is important in their lives in the field of religion, meaning and purpose in life, and of their philosophy of life. The qualitative part of this comparative research will yield information about the language that secondary school pupils use in these three countries. The analysis is currently being carried out and it will be finished around spring 2020. It takes much effort to identify the real, underlying meaning of concepts that are used in each country, but this

can contribute significantly to getting to know young people, their language, and their core values. This means it will be possible to develop better educational practices to form them (Kienstra, Van Dijk & Boelens 2016, 2017). These activating and reflective educational tools will help to create brave, strong young people, who are open and aware of their own values in today's world.

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