The ‘contextual setting approach’: a contribution to understanding how young people view and experience religion and education in Europe

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The ‘contextual setting approach’: a contribution to understanding how young people view and experience religion and education in Europe

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This publication focuses on pupils’ attitudes towards religion in school, having specific regard to four key issues of the religious pedagogical debate: the role of religion in school, the content of learning, teachers’ religiosity and learning models. It draws on the results of the qualitative study within the international research project REDCo: ‘Religion in Education. A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries?’ carried out in eight European countries. Based on a European comparison, in terms of the four issues identified above, we aim to interpret the findings by introducing a ‘contextual setting approach’. The assumption is that the similarities and differences among the pupils who contributed to a qualitative study (over 1000) are highly influenced by the particular contextual setting of religious education – that is the way in which religion/religious education is shaped according to national/regional traditions, structures, etc. – and that this is the case, especially in terms of their attitudes towards religion in the school environment.

Keywords: religious education; European comparison; qualitative research; contextual setting approach; REDCo

Introduction: research design and methodology

The qualitative study conducted in the framework of the research project REDCo was dedicated to the subject of ‘youth and religion’ (Knauth et al. 2008), pursuing three main aspects that can be conceived of as concentric circles, expanding the horizon from the individual and the personal importance of religion for young people’s life (Ipgrave and Bertram-Troost 2008), their experiences with religion and religions in their immediate environment and on a societal level (Jozsa and Friederici 2008) as well as their views on religion.
in the school environment. As yet, no direct precedents exist for a qualitative study on a similar scale. Therefore, we will mention some characteristic features of the research design.

The variety of countries and contexts which are involved in the survey
Initially, the difference and variety of the contexts involved in this study need to be mentioned. In Estonia and Russia, for example, religious education in schools is a very new and controversial topic; in Spain, religious education is entirely confessional with some first attempts being made at offering Islamic religious education alongside the traditional Catholic Christian variety; France dispenses with the subject religious education in schools altogether (except for Alsace-Lorraine and the Moselle region), addressing the issue in the context of other school subjects. In Norway, religious education is undergoing a phase of transition transforming itself from mono-perspective Christian approaches into an interreligious and intercultural learning environment.

English community schools promote multireligious learning and an integrated religious education. Germany and the Netherlands both combine settings with confessional and with non-confessional interreligious education. These different contexts shape the image and form of religion in school and public contexts, thereby having an impact on the views of students on the matter. Against this background, we have coined the term ‘contextual settings’ which shape students’ views on the issues of religion at stake.

The variety of perspectives
The sample in the study also mirrors the plurality of religious perspectives of young people in Europe as well as the variety of contexts. All participant research partners agreed to aim for a degree of religious plurality and gender balance in assembling their respective samples. They also let regionally specific research questions inform their selection of the regions and schools studied.

The overall sample (see Table 1) of the study consists of 1011 students. The national samples differ with regard to the number of students included in the survey, ranging from 71 students in the samples of Russia and the Netherlands to 154 students in Norway and 317 students in the overall German sample.

The methodological design of the qualitative study
The study was based on a qualitative questionnaire that was distributed to at least 70 students per country. In order to draw a comprehensive outline of the significance of religion in the overall life of young people, researchers addressed different domains of the individual, societal and scholastic significance of
Table 1. Overall sample table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Germany (317)</th>
<th>Estonia (73)</th>
<th>Russia (71)</th>
<th>Norway (154)</th>
<th>The Netherlands (71)</th>
<th>England (109)</th>
<th>Spain (113)</th>
<th>France (103)</th>
<th>Total (1011)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>70</td>
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<td>155</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>197</td>
</tr>
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<td>–</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>114</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>660</td>
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</table>
religion. Through these questions, the students were encouraged not only to
describe their experiences and existing practices within their schools but to share
their views of what might be possible and what should be aimed for in their
educational context and wider society.

The survey was designed for what we have called a ‘bottom-up’ analysis
consisting of three levels.

The regional analyses are conceptualised as contextual case studies. Depending on the sampling strategies used, it has been possible to draw
conclusions that relate findings to typical features of the local, sometimes even
regional or national, context. But, in general, the studies can be characterised
more as snapshots of a specific contextual setting rather than as national
surveys. They allow for a sharp analytical view of the features of particular
cases. Analysis started with the individual meaning ascriptions and patterns of
young people in specific national contexts. This analysis took into account
both individual and school-specific variables.

At a second level, the data from pairs of countries were compared with
each other. This comparison of salient results was carried out between those
countries that seemed to be closest to each other with regard to features such
as religious diversity and (religious) history. In all cases, the findings of the
regional analyses were interpreted against the background of the legal frame-
work but also taking account of topical debates in the relevant pedagogical,
sociological and theological discussions. As these bilateral analyses are based
on the findings of contextual case studies, it would be misleading to call them
bi-national comparisons. The term ‘bi-contextual analyses’ is more accurate.

In the final analysis, which was at a European level, the common and
divergent traits of individual perspectives, as well as those across countries,
were taken into account in full awareness of contextual factors. It must be
conceded that what is being compared are fundamentally not data on the student
populations of European countries in the abstract but data generated by students
from different religious, cultural, family and individual backgrounds, from
settings that differ not only by country, but also by region and environment.
Nonetheless, they show clear tendencies and afford us a glimpse of the diverse
European perspectives on religion, religious plurality and religion in education.

So, what we finally were able to present as the overall survey can be
regarded as an example of intercultural contextual comparative research.
Coming from regional context analyses, the research proceeds through bi-
national comparisons to a wider European level.

Our focus here is on religion in the school environment. The young
people’s views, positions and arguments on religion in school were studied
using four central questions:

- Should there be a place for religion in school or not?
- If religion is taught at school, what do students think they should learn
  about it?
● Should the teacher have a religious faith or not?
● Should the students be taught together or in separate groups in relation to religion in school?

In the following, the results of this comparative survey will first be presented briefly. An interpretation based on the different contextual settings that define the place of religion in schools in the different participant countries will follow in order to aid reflection on the future place of religion in school in a Europe, defined by religious plurality. Our study is thus guided by the overarching question of how the views and positions of young people can be grasped at a pan-European level. What potential for coexistence and dialogue, and, also, what differences and tensions can be identified? The influence of the institutional and environmental context in different countries is taken into consideration when accounting for both similarities and differences. To explain this central concept, initially theoretically, we start with a short clarification.

Clarification of the ‘contextual setting’ concept in the realm of religious education

The term ‘contextual setting’ takes account of the fact that institutional traditions in the school systems of different European regions predefine the place of religion in their schools to a great degree. They take concrete shape in administrative and curricular regulation and its implementation in the classroom, as well as in ‘softer’ aspects of pedagogical and political traditions that influence the choice of thinkable options. This interaction of structural and administrative facts at the macro-level and the traditions and patterns shaping the decisions and actions of individuals at the meso-level creates the contextual setting. To have an even more differentiated view of the term, conditions at the micro-level of schools and classes, such as the composition of the student body and the place of religion in the school curriculum, must be taken into consideration: these aspects altogether form a contextual framework which predetermines the boundaries of the possible position and rank of religion in school contexts. To put it more directly, the set of normative standards and cultural traditions shapes the way religion can be fitted into education and the school.¹

This framework determines the fundamental importance that can be accorded to religion (is it to be treated openly or remain invisible in school?) as well as the forms in which it can legitimately appear (what religions are allowed to enter the school and how may they be expressed?); and it defines how and to what degree religion can be part of the curriculum and educational goals. These points affect the type of religious education offered (confessional versus non-confessional religious education; separate identity or integration within other subjects), the curricular content and the conceptual approaches (teaching about, introducing into, learning from).² All these, in turn, further shape the contextual setting.
We use this concept of ‘contextual settings’ to acknowledge the fact that the different regional samples of the qualitative survey should not be mistaken as representations of the overall national situation. In any case, we want to avoid the misinterpretation of doing a multi-national comparison. For this reason, we relate to the findings of the regional studies as cases, speaking of the Spanish case, the English case, the Estonian case, etc.

Summary of empirical research results

In the following, the results will be briefly summarised with regard to the central questions named above. We will begin by describing the common structure of the given meanings to religion in school by the pupils and then proceed to elaborate on the differences.

Place for religion in school

There is a clear division between those respondents who think that religion should have a place in school and those who do not regard religion as a topic to be dealt with in school. The pros and cons given for the place of religion in school are dependent on pupils’ previous experiences with this topic.

Looking at the responses to the question of whether religion should have a place in school, we found that a clear majority of respondents supported this view. A relationship between school and religion was viewed positively, though school was mainly understood here as a place of religious education, not a venue for religious practice. The place of religion, in the view of the respondents, is as a subject of study. However, the size of the majority varies between the countries. While most students in some places were in favour of this solution, in other cases the samples were almost evenly split, with arguments both in favour and against being defended forcefully. The arguments in favour can broadly be summarised as follows: young people favoured religion as a subject of study because they considered it important to learn about their own religion, which they understand as a vital part of their life, their education or their cultural and national roots or to learn about other religions, cultures and traditions. At a societal level, they also believed that religious education can instil religious and moral values and contribute to a peaceful coexistence of different religions.

However, some of the respondents argued against dealing with religion as a topic in school. A primary reason for this was that they were generally not interested since they regarded religion as boring, irrelevant, outdated or an unnecessary burden on an already overloaded curriculum. There seems to be a tension between religion and youth culture, which is the reason for religion being regarded as irrelevant. A further reason for the opposition to the inclusion of religion in school is the fear of religious propaganda and proselytising by teachers and fear of conflict between students being generated in the classroom,
the broader school setting or society in general. Such fears underpin the position that religion is a purely private matter and should have no place in school.

The position of respondents is strongly influenced by previous experiences with religious issues being addressed in a school context. As long as students had not had bad experiences (some students in Spanish schools reported bad experiences of indoctrination in Catholic religious education), they were in favour of religion being addressed in school, while those students who had not experienced religion in school, were against it. Whether and how religious topics were addressed in school were, in turn, dependent on the educational policies and traditions of a given country that thus play an important role in shaping the positions of students.

**Lesson contents**

It is widely accepted that teaching religion in school means teaching religions (plural). The majority of answers regarding the content of religion lessons in school focus on acquiring knowledge. As the students wish to learn both about their own and other religions, the range of suggestions includes a dialogical exchange of personal experiences and attitudes. This plea for dialogical learning often relates to previous personal experience with mixed multi-faith education but can also emerge among students who only had confessional religious education.

The answers to the question whether religion has a place in school already showed that the respondents mostly regarded the school as a place for acquiring knowledge, rather than a venue to practise religion. This view became more explicit in the responses to the question asking what they should learn in school about religion. Across all regional settings and cases, the majority of students were in favour of gaining information about religions in school. School and the classroom were widely conceived of as places of knowledge acquisition. However, there is a group of students (they should not be underestimated) for whom the exchange of personal experiences and personal and existential relevance played a decisive role. This is the case in the Hamburg and English schools and to some degree in the Dutch and Norwegian sample. Thus, one can suggest that the entire spectrum entails the perspective of school as a place to learn about and to learn from religions. Numerous concrete suggestions for curricular content were forwarded, which can be divided into two broad groups: on the one hand, young people wanted to learn about their own religion; on the other hand (and this aspect takes precedence for most of them), they wished to learn about other religions. They exhibited a markedly stronger interest in encountering and learning about other religions than has been observed before. Although this applies more strongly for those from a religious background and/or affiliation, even those who accorded religion a low significance in their personal lives in many cases showed an interest in religion as a subject of knowledge. Even many non-religious respondents
favoured addressing religious questions and issues in a school context. Finally, one remarkable observation we were able to make was that a number of respondents, when asked about the content that religious education should include, did not address what, but *how* they should be taught. This once more reflects concerns about unequal treatment and the undue influence of some religions over others. The respondents favoured an open, impartial form of religious education that leaves room for debate and questions.

**Religiosity of the teacher**

The teacher’s religious affiliation is considered important inasmuch as it affects his/her competence as a teacher. Opinion is divided over whether a firm affiliation is an asset or an obstacle in this respect. Respondents agreed that while teachers should be free to have a personal religious affiliation, they must not allow it to affect their impartiality as educators.

The respondents showed remarkable capacity for critical reflection in their answer to the question of whether religious affiliation was desirable in religious education teachers. They were clear on the fact that religious education functions as a school subject to be studied, tested and graded and that teachers have a key function in that process. Their role, influence and educational competence were regarded as key factors and assessed critically. The responses in this matter did not share a fundamental position but rather proffered arguments for and against, centring on the issue of competence. Three main lines of argument predominated. A large proportion of the respondents held that, as long as a teacher is able to address religious content competently and tactfully, religious affiliation is not an issue. However, those respondents who considered personal religiosity to be a fundamental prerequisite for teaching religion favoured religious affiliation on the teacher’s part. But the majority either viewed religious affiliation on the part of the teacher with scepticism or rejected it outright over concerns that it could lead to pressure, proselytism, favouritism or partiality. Teachers may practise a religion personally, but only as long as it does not infringe on the neutrality expected of them in their position as educators. Thus, the position of respondents on the religiosity of teachers was largely rooted in their view of whether such religiosity presents a problem or, conversely, constitutes an essential qualification for a religion teacher.

**Model of religious education: separate or together?**

There is no one model of religious education that respondents favour. Whether a joint or confessionally separated instruction is favoured depends largely on the past experience of respondents. As long as students had not had negative experiences, such as offence to their personal belief, indoctrination or discrimination, they were in favour of the model with which they were already
acquainted. Those respondents without any personal experience were about equally divided between the two approaches.

While preferences regarding the religiosity of the teacher and the contents of religious education seemed to be hardly influenced by contextual setting, their views on whether religious education should take place in mixed or confessionally separated groups were strongly informed by it. There was no one single favoured model, but three different positions predominated: in some cases, a clear majority favoured confessional separation; in others, a mixed class was advocated; in the third case, the respondents were split broadly 50:50 on this issue. Proponents of joint lessons argued from four positions: From a personal perspective, they expressed a wish to (a) learn about other religions and (b) share their views with others and afford them the same opportunity. They further believed that learning together fosters (c) better mutual understanding, which they regarded as (d) vital preparation for life in a modern religiously plural society and a preventative measure against conflicts. Those who proposed confessional instruction in groups separated according to faith or denomination mostly argued that they (1) wished to acquire a thorough understanding of their own religion while they often found others uninteresting or were concerned that introducing differing religious views might confuse them. Separate instruction was also favoured because it (2) led to strengthened religious convictions. Interestingly, they also forwarded arguments similar to those proposed by the opposite position in that they said that (3) separate learning groups ensured a free exchange of views and prevented conflicts. As with positions on the role of the school as a venue for religious education (and experience), the personal experience of the respondents can be shown to have a strong influence here. The majority of students who had experienced religious instruction in heterogeneous groups, as is the case in the Norwegian, the English and the Hamburg samples (and this could, to a degree, also be said of the French case) favoured non-confessional religious education, while those who had been taught in confessional groups (Germany/North Rhine-Westphalia) preferred that model. Those respondents who had not or had only sporadically experienced religious education personally (students from Estonia and from St. Petersburg) were equally divided between both positions. This, too, demonstrates the degree to which the views and positions of young people can be shaped by their contextual settings.

Reflection and interpretation

In the following, we will present an integrated overview of the findings, taking account of the different contextual settings of religion in schools. This is indicated not the least because our analysis of responses has shown that the experiences that young people had, or more importantly did not have, are particularly strong influences on their views, sometimes more pronounced than gender, religious affiliation or migration history. These experiences are,
in turn, particularly liable to be influenced by the contextual setting inside the school environment. Thus, we will now interpret the findings not just in the context of individual variables but also especially with regard to the contextually determined ground rules of addressing religion in the school environment.

The regional and national research reports broadly showed three different types of contextual settings for addressing religion in school:

- **An integrative, plurality-fostering approach.** State policy takes account of and favours religious plurality. This is reflected in educational designs aimed at the integration or cooperation of different religions. Religious plurality is actively fostered, and learning from different religions in a dialogic, experience-centred manner is a curricular goal. The dominant intention of religious education can be defined as ‘learning from religions’; religious education attempts to integrate cognitive and experiential aspects into a comprehensive whole using the teaching content as a tool for personal development. The best example for this is the English case, but the situation as it was described in the setting of Hamburg and (partly) in the Norwegian sample too approaches this type of contextual setting.

- **A plurality conscious, but separate approach.** The extant plurality of religions in modern society is acknowledged, but no attempt is made to integrate what are conceived of as separate, self-contained entities. This separation may also be reflected in schools segregated by confession. Within a school, it is expressed by separate religious instruction for students of different religious affiliation. Religious plurality may be represented in the subject curriculum, but this is only done in terms of factual knowledge. The subject is often understood as confessional religious instruction, aiming to introduce the students to a given religious tradition. The situation in the Spanish case may be regarded as prototypical for this approach, though the schools studied in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia followed a similar pattern. The report on the students in the Christian foundation school in the Netherlands describes a broadly similar situation. The survey took place in a Christian school, and students of a non-Christian background hardly figured in it. While being aware of the fact that this Dutch case should not be generalised as typical for the situation in the Netherlands, one has to recognise that the Dutch post-pillarised educational system still incorporates strong traditions of separation by confession that are mirrored in the case analysed in the qualitative study.

- **A strongly secular, traditionally critical approach to religion. Religious education is not a school subject in its own right.** The contents and expressions of religion tend to remain invisible in the scholastic context. Religion and religious plurality may be the subject of study, but only in a context of a neutral presentation of factual knowledge. The dominant aim is to ‘teach about religions’. This setting has developed from a long
tradition of separation of church and state in the respective national or regional education systems. The most salient example was given in the French case, though both Estonia and Russia also serve as examples for an approach to religion that does not accord it the status of a traditional subject in its own right.

We have to emphasise again that this categorisation does not serve primarily to make distinctions between nations. Of course, national educational and religious policies are strong influences on the contextual setting of any school, but the approaches outlined above do not define national conditions, but typical constellations which were identified in various places in the course of our research and to which the situations in different national or regional studies conformed to a certain degree. It was possible in the case of some countries, such as Germany and France, to identify regionally very different contextual settings. Our assertion remains that these contextual settings function as a formative background for the experiences individual students have of religion in school. With this in mind, we will proceed to interpret some findings and highlight some of the contextual differences they show.

The greatest degree of unanimity among young people throughout Europe was found on the point that religion should have a place in school. This support grows from all three constellations. However, the responses also show a degree of tension. These range between a readiness to embrace religious diversity to a distanced, cautious approach to the perceived dangers of religion. When correlating these poles to the above-mentioned contextual constellations, we find that religion and religious plurality are valued especially in settings where religion is an accepted presence in school settings and personal experience in interfaith dialogue is common, such as in the English sample (Igrave and McKenna 2008, 136f.). A more distanced view towards religion as a subject or area of study is found to emerge from different constellations. It is particularly pronounced in settings where religious education has little traditional presence in the school curriculum and environment; such as Estonia (Schihalejev 2008, 266; 2010) or St Petersburg (Kozyrev 2008, 299). However, it can also be rejected when visible religious differences in the school environment are felt to threaten ideals of equality as in the French case (Béraud, Massignon, and Mathieu 2008, 78).

Similar tension becomes evident in the question of the teaching content desired. We can see a relatively clear fault line between a knowledge-based and an experiential orientation, in didactic terms, the difference between teaching about religions and learning from religions. Here, too, it is evident that the combination of knowledge and experience orientation with the intention of learning from different religious traditions is particularly emphasised in a plurality-fostering, dialogical approach to religion (Igrave and McKenna 2008, 138f.; Knauth 2008, 234f.). It does not come as a surprise that this has a home in a traditionally integrative school subject. A more remarkable fact is
that a desire for knowledge about other religions is strongly evident in traditionally separate or secular contexts of types (b) and (c) as well. Independent of contextual factors, a consensus that school should teach its students about different religions prevails across all European schools we surveyed.

The question of the religious belief of teachers is positioned between the poles of ‘religious’ versus ‘non-religious’, between an emphasis on religious experience and on pedagogic competence. It is interesting to note that the structure of responses is similar in all contextual settings. We believe that this is due to the fact that the respondents most strongly reflected the systemic aspects of school when considering the role of the teacher and thus sought to balance competence and equal treatment. The only exception, at first glance, appears to be the French case with a unanimous plea for the strict neutrality of the teacher (Béraud, Massignon, and Mathieu 2008, 75). But a deeper analysis shows that this neutrality is an indispensable part of the teacher’s competence. In other words, with regard to the question of whether a religious education teacher should be religious, the different religious and ideological positions and contextual factors are superseded by the common role of school student which all respondents experience and interpret similarly.

The question of how religious education should be structured, however, is strongly informed by the contextual setting. Basically, the respondents favoured what they knew, as long as their personal experiences had not been too negative. It is nonetheless worthwhile to look more closely at some regional or national contextual characteristics. Regarding the situation in Spain, we find that the vote for and against confessional religious education follows an interesting religious majority–minority constellation. Muslim students tended to favour separated religious education because they demanded assurances that their religion is represented in a Christian-dominated school context at all and remains visible in a Catholic-dominated society (Dietz, Rosón Lorente, and Ruiz Garzón 2008, 46). The problem in France, conversely, is not the invisibility of Islam in school but its conspicuous visibility that is interpreted as a challenge to a traditionally secular state education system with its strict neutrality requirement in teaching about religious issues (Béraud, Massignon, and Mathieu 2008, 79). The situation as it was described in the St Petersburg case (Kozyrev 2008, 304f.) and in Estonian schools (Schihalejev 2008, 272; 2010), on the other hand, seems to reflect a state of transition in the relatively evenly divided vote on whether religious education should be separate or common. Altogether, these secular settings appear to be characterised by a cautious and distanced approach to the subject: religious education, of whatever kind, is strongly associated with voluntarism. In the Dutch report (ter Avest et al. 2008, 106) and in the Norwegian analysis (von der Lippe 2008, 166f.), as well as for a certain secularised group of German students (Knauth 2008, 238f.), we note, however, that a shared religious education is also valued by young people with a distanced, critical position towards religion. If this group is interested in
religion, the non-confessional model offers them the best opportunity to formulate and explore this personal interest because they rather tend to focus on religion as a phenomenon expressed in numerous different traditions.

Students from settings having an inclusive religious education that integrates them from different backgrounds as in Hamburg (Knauth 2008, 239) and the English community schools (Ipgrave and McKenna 2008, 140) especially had a regard for this approach as a model for the much desired peaceful coexistence of religions in school and society, largely based on their own positive experiences. Yet, they shared this vision with respondents who preferred a separate religious education on the grounds that it would be less likely to generate the kind of conflict that could result from confronting religious differences openly.

Conclusion

Our interpretation of the findings in the light of their contextual settings leads us to conclude the following. The views of the majority of students surveyed point towards an orientation that favours religion and plurality and tolerance in religious matters as part of the school curriculum. Young people from eight European countries, coming from a wide range of social, cultural and religious backgrounds, showed themselves to be strongly aware of the increased importance of religion to their life and society. They want to broaden their knowledge of the religious dimension and of different religious traditions because they take religion seriously as a factor for dialogue and conflict and share a strong desire for people from different backgrounds to live together in peace.3

However: this shared orientation does not extend to unanimity over the place of religion in school. Our analysis indicates that there can be no unitary solution for bringing religion into schools throughout Europe. This is, as a matter of fact, also true for different contexts within countries and regions. Rather, it seems to be advisable to take careful account of the diverse contextual settings. This publication and the REDCo research overall, however, suggests evidence that the development and support of context-sensitive dialogical approaches to religion into school and society could be a promising endeavour because religious plurality is expected to become an issue of increasing importance in future.

Notes

1. A comprehensive description of the different contexts of religions in school in the participating countries is given in Jackson et al. (2007).
2. Compare the differentiation between introducing into, learning about and learning from as it was introduced by Ziebertz (1994), referring to Grimmitt (1994). The first concept ‘introducing into’ conforms to a mono-religious orientation aiming at making the students familiar with the traditions and practices of one particular religion whereas religious plurality is acknowledged. ‘Learning about’ as the second type of religious education complies with a multireligious character by following the idea of providing the students with objective information about different religious traditions in a neutral manner. The third concept ‘learning from’ targets at giving
orientation and life direction to students for what all religions may serve as source of meaning, while, in practice, this concept is likely to root in one particular religion.

3. This general tendency that young people show a positive attitude towards religious pluralism in school and society could be confirmed by the large-scale quantitative study within the REDCo project. School is expected to function as a place for imparting knowledge, learning the ability for (inter-) religious dialogue and understanding the role religion plays in society, whereas the majority do not wish it to be a place for religious socialisation. This also corresponds to the findings of other research studies in the field of religious education. Nonetheless, it became clear that in plural European societies, different requirements will have to be aligned, e.g., the expectations of Muslim students who wish to a much higher degree that school should not only to be a place for knowledge acquisition but also for leading to religious belief (Körs 2009, 270f.).

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