

## Conclusions

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The present volume is the first international publication with a clear focus on research concerning non-formal religious education. While not excluding other methodologies, the emphasis is on empirical approaches to this field of work. The volume offers a forum for summarising the state of the art of research on non-formal religious education in eight European countries and provides a critical review of existing research as well as of current research projects.

The fields covered in the different chapters are the following: Christian youth work (cf. Ilg; Wolking), Catholic religious education with an emphasis on youth work and altar service (cf. Könemann and Sajak), First Communion Catechesis (Altmeyer and Boschki), kindergarten (Wörn et al.; Rothgangel and Jäggle), Sunday School (Danilovich; Schreiner), confirmation work and young volunteers (cf. Christensen; Simojoki; Tervo-Niemelä; Petterson; Schweitzer). The breadth of these fields shows the rich variety of non-formal religious education. More general reports come from different national contexts or non-Christian perspectives (Leganger-Krogstad on Norway; Schlag and Voirol-Sturzenegger on Switzerland; Danilovich on Belarus; Ulfat on Islamic contexts).

In many of the chapters the three types of education – formal, non-formal and informal – are discussed with an emphasis on how they differ but also with an eye on overlapping concerns and common challenges. Furthermore, the authors describe the research methods used in different projects and suggest perspectives for future research in the non-formal field. In doing so, they bring together insights on educating, teaching and learning in religious education that might be valid beyond particular national contexts. In this respect, there also is a comparative dimension which plays a role in most of the chapters, referring to already existing comparative research but also stressing the need to further develop comparative approaches in new ways.

The main aim of the volume is to bring together experiences and results of empirical research in the field of non-formal religious education in different European countries. There also is the hope that this endeavor can help to generate new research projects which could be carried out in international cooperation. In this concluding chapter the articles and insights will be discussed in light of four questions:

- What do the results say about the meaning and functioning of non-formal learning in the religious sphere?
- Which methodological approaches seem to be promising for this kind of educational settings?

- What are the implications of the central results of the different studies concerning the future development of non-formal religious education?
- What directions can be derived from these studies for future research?

## 1. Formal, non-formal and informal learning: A critical review

### 1.1 Definitions, distinctions, overlaps

Most chapters include a definition or at least an approach to what non-formal (religious) education means and how it differs from formal and informal education or learning. At the end of the volume it appears helpful to review the different definitions and concepts of non-formal education.

First of all, in most cases the understanding of non-formal education is based on its distinction from informal and formal education. Consequently, the definition of non-formal education presupposes a clear understanding of formal and informal education. Concerning the field of *formal (religious) education* there is much agreement among the authors of the different chapters. This concept refers to institutionalized forms of education that follow a syllabus and provide formal qualification and exams. Moreover, formal education especially in the context of school is compulsory, although in many cases pupils are allowed to decide if they want to participate in Religious Education or not. (Religious Education with capital letters refers to the school subject that exists in most European countries, in different forms and based on different organizational models, sometimes related to churches or other religious bodies; in some cases Religious Education currently is subject to fundamental changes as the reports from Norway and Switzerland show; cf. Leganger-Krogstad; Schlag and Voirol-Sturzenegger in this volume). Several chapters in this volume include an analysis or evaluation of the relationship between formal religious education on the one hand and non-formal religious education as well as informal religious education on the other. These different forms of education should not be viewed in isolation from each other but as complementary modes of education and learning. Moreover, the different forms of education clearly seem to influence each other at various levels by shaping the presuppositions for the respective other forms of education. Religious education or nurture in the family, for example, appears to remain influential in formal and non-formal educational contexts even in adolescence and adulthood.

There also is far-reaching agreement between the authors of the different chapters in this volume concerning the delineation of non-formal education in relationship to formal education. Accordingly, non-formal (religious) education can be characterized by the following aspects (cf. Simojoki in this volume).

*Non-formal religious education:*

- is non-compulsory,
- takes place outside the formal educational system in schools, training institutions and universities, in a broad range of learning fields from sports activities to education in churches,
- is not related to scholastic certificates,
- is situated in experience-oriented (sometimes outdoor) learning environments which are less restricted in time and space than school, providing opportunities for participatory learning based on activating teaching methods,
- is less professionalized in a formal sense and open for voluntary activities,
- is particular and partial, i.e. non-formal education often pursues particular programmatic aims (e.g. in the case of environmental associations or human rights groups) and specific interests (e.g. in the case of sport activities) or is connected to a particular ethos (e.g. in the case of Christian youth work).

The third form of education, i.e. *informal religious education* is a topic which would deserve further analysis as well. There is a similar lack of research concerning the informal sector, just like in the case of non-formal religious education. Yet it has not been the intention of the present volume to cover research on informal religious education. The different chapters only address the informal sector in its relationship to non-formal religious education, in order to reach a clearer understanding of the meaning of the different concepts. In this perspective, non-formal religious education is distinguished from informal forms which are:

- unplanned,
- exclusively part of everyday life,
- not connected to any educational setting,
- unpredictable and spontaneous,
- without defined aims.

Although some educational processes, for example in youth work, are rather similar to informal learning, especially an institutional setting and defined educational aims are typical attributes of non-formal learning which distinguish it from informal educational processes.

This attempt of summarising the different definitions provided in the chapters of this volume should not lead to the misunderstanding that the three concepts or the aspects and sectors they refer to are clearly separate. In many ways, the understanding of the different forms of education also depends on the perspective chosen. When the perspective of the active role of the learner, for example, is made the starting point, it can be argued that formal education should also include non-formal and informal elements because they are important for both, the needs of individuals as well as of society. Another aspect concerning the interplay between the different forms of education has been highlighted, for example, by Rauschenbach (Rauschenbach 2009): Young people's success in the formal realm of education,

especially in school, depends to a high degree on competences which can be acquired in non-formal educational settings. This is especially true for the field of personal and social competences, like team-work, time-planning or the ability for self-directed work. Thus non-formal learning may be organized independently from formal learning but it nevertheless can prepare young people for succeeding in terms of formal education.

As shown by many of the chapters from the different countries in this volume, there also is much overlap between the programs used for formal and non-formal religious education. Only rarely do these programs correspond to the ideal-type distinctions offered in the literature. Instead, in many cases the characteristics of all three forms of education seem to apply at the same time. Participation in confirmation, for example, is of course voluntary but it is nevertheless the presupposition for certain rights within some churches. Participation in early childhood religious education programs is not compulsory but in some cases, admission to confirmation is based on it. Attending kindergarten or not is a decision which parents are allowed to make but once the decision has been made, the consequences in terms of expected presence are similar to school attendance. In such and similar cases one could almost speak of a continuum between the different forms of education. Moreover, as already described in a number of respects, there often is an interplay between the different forms of education which again speaks against viewing the distinctions between the three forms of education as set in stone.

In the end it makes most sense to understand the three forms of religious education and the concepts related to them as different perspectives which allow for different points of view. This implies that they are less useful for clearly delineating different sectors than discussing different needs in education. Thus the emphasis on non-formal and informal education is important to avoid the ever-threatening educational monopoly of school and to strengthen programs outside of school which are still suffering from not being valued as truly educational in many places. The emphasis on non-formal education can also be critically directed against state-sponsored education as the only type of education available. Non-formal education usually does not rely on the state as its sponsor but on associations and institutions which are part of civil society. In this sense, non-formal education is based on democratic principles in society at large. Most of all, however, non-formal education should be appreciated as an opportunity for young people to assume responsibilities of their own and to independently plan educational opportunities, for themselves or for others, instead of just passively adapting to the parameters of education at school. This understanding also is the reason why the actual awareness of the importance of non-formal education in different countries must be addressed.

## **1.2 Growing awareness for non-formal education in the different countries**

Based on the reports from the different countries represented in this volume there seems to be a general tendency towards growing awareness of the importance of non-formal education in general as well as of non-formal religious education in particular. At the same time, there also appears to be a need to further strengthen this awareness.

The growing awareness for educational fields outside the formalized sector is also confirmed by contemporary political debates. The concept of non-formal education receives political validation and recognition especially from European institutions, mainly as part of the concept of lifelong learning where different ways of learning and education are recognized on an equal level. An early example is the final Declaration of the 5th Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth within the Council of Europe from 1998. Here the ministers encouraged the member states to promote equal opportunities by recognising training and skills acquired by young people through non-formal education/learning, and by identifying various ways to certify experiences and qualifications acquired in this framework.

Furthermore, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe addressed in a Recommendation on non-formal education in 2000 all those who shape educational policies, and promotes the following perspective: “Non-formal education is an integral part of a lifelong learning concept that allows young people and adults to acquire and maintain the skills, abilities and outlook needed to adapt to a continuously changing environment. [...] An important part of non-formal education is carried out by non-governmental organisations involved in community and youth work.” (Council of Europe 2000)

This was also confirmed in the European Qualifications Framework EQF (2008) as a tool for making the national education systems and the respective required qualifications more understandable and comparable across the different countries and systems. The EQF promotes equal recognition of formal and non-formal education as well as of informal education (cf. Schreiner 2012, 252–255). As a further step a recommendation on validating non-formal and informal learning was launched in 2012 (cf. Cedefop 2015). For example, universities are now obliged to acknowledge competences that students have acquired outside the academic institutions and to recognize them in terms of credit points for their university studies. In practice this can mean that a person who has worked as a youth leader on a voluntary basis can have certain requirements waived in the course of his or her studies.

## **1.3 Questions concerning principles for successful non-formal education**

What are the presuppositions for successful non-formal education? And which criteria should be applied in evaluating this success? Once the importance of non-for-

mal religious education has been established, such questions must also be addressed in more detail. Judging from the chapters in this volume it seems fair to say that the discussion on these questions has just begun. The empirical results reported from the different countries can be interpreted as first steps in this direction but much work still remains to be done.

For example, a number of characteristics of non-formal (religious) education are mentioned in a number of the chapters which can be understood as hypotheses concerning successful non-formal education. In sum, they emphasize:

- voluntary and self-organized forms of learning,
- intrinsic motivation of participants,
- close connection to young people's aspirations and interests,
- participatory and learner-centered approaches,
- open character and structure of respective programs,
- transparency and flexibility of curricular guidelines,
- evaluation of success and failure in a collective process and without judgement on individual success or failure (the 'right to make mistakes'),
- supportive learning environment,
- chances for voluntary commitment (also fostering the idea of learning in teams),
- preparation and staging of activities with a professional attitude, regardless of whether the activity is run by professionals or voluntary workers,
- sharing of results with the interested public and a planned follow up.

The identification of these principles is mostly derived from self-reports of practitioners who have been asked to describe their experiences with non-formal education from an actor perspective. This implies that the expertise behind these principles is most of all practical. It may also be informed by theoretical work but there is no empirical evidence concerning non-formal religious education in relationship to the effects of applying these principles. As far as the principles have been tested in other fields, it may be assumed that the respective results also apply to religious education. Yet such assumptions should be tested in further research.

## **2. Methodologies and research approaches**

One of the main questions guiding this volume from the beginning has been if it is possible to do serious research in the non-formal sector or if the open structure of this field excludes reliable research designs and valid results. The different research projects described in this volume may be taken as evidence that it is indeed possible to do this kind of research and that reliable results can in fact be achieved. Sampling remains more of a challenge in the non-formal sector than in formal contexts. Yet many of the research projects actually worked with robust samples and plausible research designs.

The contributions document a rich picture of methodologies and research approaches. In most of the projects a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used. The quantitative methods provide reliable statistical data mainly using questionnaires, whereas the qualitative methods provide findings on the basis of interviews and case studies. In both respects, advanced procedures were applied in the different research projects.

## 2.1 Qualitative research

In the field of qualitative approaches a number of methods were used to analyse interviews:

- Multi-step method developed by Schmidt (2012) based on a five-step process, starting with creating categories for the interpretation of transcribed interviews, then organized in an analysing guide, which was used and then revised. On this basis, the interviews are coded and the data encrypted. On the basis of the codes an overview of the different cases becomes possible and finally this creates the basis for selecting cases for more in-depth analysis.
- Personal interview procedure according to Inghard Langer (2000) as unstructured open interviews focused on personal dialogue.
- Structured qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz 2014), focused on categories that contain the substance of the investigation. They become tools of the analysis and also elements of a theory. This method is directed by a research question, sometimes also by a hypothesis or a theory. It can be used to describe social phenomena, centered on the meaning of the content but does not follow a set procedure for interpretation such as the so-called objective hermeneutics (Oevermann et al. 1979).
- Content analysis (Mayring 2014), an approach of systematic, rule guided qualitative text analysis which tries to preserve some methodological strengths of quantitative content analysis but to also make it fit with qualitative procedures.
- Intervention studies that are considered to yield reliable insights on possible effects of educational approaches in teaching units.
- Ethnographic approaches.
- Grounded Theory.
- Thematic coding (Flick 2012) as a form of qualitative analysis which involves recording or identifying passages of text or images that are linked to a common theme or idea, allowing to index the text with categories. A framework of thematic ideas can then be created on that basis.
- Scientific evaluation of existing programs or best-practice models.

## 2.2 Quantitative research

In the field of quantitative approaches questionnaire-based surveys are normally used for the acquisition of data. Especially in fields that used to be blind spots of empirical research, the studies presented in this volume had to start out by collecting data about the framework and the general situation in a given non-formal field of work. The respective chapters describe youth work (Ilg), Orthodox Sunday Schools (Danilovich), Protestant Sunday Schools (Schreiner) or the mini-confirmands program (Christensen). Evidently, the researchers felt the need of generating basic reports on the reality of these offers as a starting point for deeper research endeavours. In contrast to the much studied area of school learning, the non-formal learning world still has continents lacking even basic descriptions. In this case, quantitative survey studies have the task to describe the landscape of a certain non-formal field, giving an overview of its size and characteristics. Thus, readers can become aware, for example, of how often a certain offer takes place, how many children take part in it, what role paid and voluntary workers play, etc. The example of the long-term international research project on confirmation work which also started out with basic descriptions of this kind, shows how in-depth analysis becomes possible once such a descriptive basis has been secured (cf. Simojoki).

Beyond mere descriptions of the situation, quantitative methods can provide further insights by using inferential statistics (correlations, regression analysis, analysis of variance, etc.). The claim of presenting an overall picture of a research field presupposes a representative collection of data points (for example, parishes, groups or individuals) and a large enough sample size. Again, the international studies on confirmation work with more than 30000 young people involved in the surveys show the potential of large-scale studies also in the non-formal field. In studies of this size, also multi-level methods can be applied, offering insights into individual as well as group effects of educational activities.

Other than many common studies which only ask young people involved in a certain program, the complex study of First Communion Catechesis in the Catholic Church (Altmeyer and Boschki) works not only with several surveys over time, but also includes the comparison with a control group, thus identifying specific effects of a non-formal “treatment”. This procedure allows for testing hypothetical assumptions: The method of structural-equation models develops theories of the interdependency between different variables and tests these models with research data.

A special approach to the effectiveness of certain educational activities is applied in intervention studies. Here, two or more groups receive a different treatment. If the groups differ in the outcome of the criteria variable, it can be assumed that the intervention has had a specific effect. In the present volume, only the research project presented by Wörn et al. uses intervention studies. To be precise, this intervention study is actually located in a field of formal learning, e.g. the training of



kindergarten teachers. It is no surprise that intervention studies are much more common in school settings than, for example, in youth work. As soon as the participants have a decisive role in deciding on group activities it is hardly possible to conduct different intervention schemes planned by an external research team. Nevertheless, given the need for finding out more about the actual effects of certain educational programs, possibilities for capturing such effects empirically are also important in the field of non-formal religious education.

In some studies in the non-formal sector, preference is given to action research which provides the opportunity for developing interactive shared research, allowing the research object to participate in a more active role in the research itself. Naturally, certain research tasks, such as the actual data collection (e.g. in guideline interviews), are exempt from this specific methodology.

### **2.3 Combining qualitative and quantitative results**

One of the main questions which remains is how to combine the outcomes of different research approaches and methodologies. There can be no doubt that making use of quantitative as well as qualitative methodologies proves to be useful because both research approaches allow for finding answers to different questions. This applies, of course, in general but is of special importance in the context of non-formal religious education, for example, in doing research on young volunteers (Schweitzer in this volume).

In some projects quantitative and qualitative types of research were combined. As long as they are not part of an integrated consecutive research process in which quantitative and qualitative steps or phases can build upon each other, however, the results can not just be put together. It may be different when the different methodologies and approaches become integrated, e.g. by developing hypotheses in qualitative studies and then testing the hypotheses quantitatively by using representative samples. In most cases presented in this volume it seems most appropriate to view the different approaches as different spotlights, each of them shedding light on certain aspects while leaving other aspects in the dark. This allows for bringing the different results into conversation with each other without claiming to have achieved true triangulation. The resulting interpretations are richer and more reliable than understandings which are based on single studies or methodologies (cf. Wörn et al.; Schweitzer in this volume).

### **2.4 Characteristics of research in the religious area**

Regarding the special character and aims of non-formal *religious* education the reports in this volume show that only few studies focus on the religious content or the theological questions connected to it – an observation which is explicitly mentioned in the Norwegian contribution (Leganger-Krogstad in this volume) but can

be made in many of the research projects presented. One could provocatively ask how meaningful the content taken up in non-formal religious settings really is if content tends to be neglected when it comes to empirical studies. Yet this would probably be too simple, at least in certain respects. Content-related and theological perspectives are often involved in empirical work, even if this is not always made explicit. Using again the example of the studies on confirmation work in Europe it can not only be said that the results of this research are highly pertinent in terms of theology but that these results are also based on theological criteria and decisions (cf. Simojoki et al. 2018).

Another observation relates to further research lacunae. Considering the studies described in this volume it also becomes clear that especially studies with a broader approach and basis, for example long-term observations of a field or systematic cooperation in an international network, are lacking so far. One promising experience has been the cooperation within the “International Network for Research and Development of Confirmation and Christian Youth Work” (<http://www.confirmation-youthwork.eu>) which was founded in 2007 and has coordinated different studies on a European level, especially the studies on confirmation work (cf. Simojoki in this volume). Interestingly enough, these studies have not only gained a lot of attention in the nine participating European countries but also triggered parallel studies in other countries like Belarus (cf. Danilovich in this volume) or in the United States of America (Osmer and Douglass 2018).

### **3. Observations concerning the future development of non-formal religious education**

It is not possible to sum up the 17 chapters presented in this volume in a few lines. Yet some observations concerning the future development of non-formal religious education emerging from these contributions can be stated. The observations may help to highlight the potentials and promises of non-formal religious education in additional ways.

A first observation sounds fairly simple: Non-formal educational settings often are associated with a lot of fun by the (usually young) people who participate in such programs. In contrast to school, providing opportunities for having fun and a framework for good relationships can be seen as a fundamental presupposition for successful offers in this area. As participation is voluntary, an offer that is not promising and attractive for the target group will soon disappear. “Fun” in this sense is related to intense experiences, time for friendship and relevance for daily life. This is why it should not be confused with superficial entertainment.

The workers in the non-formal area seem to be of special importance for the participants and their number is often much larger than the number of paid workers (cf. Ilg in this volume). In contrast to school teachers they can take on the role of “older friends”. Moreover, participation in a non-formal program often leads one

to become a volunteer in this field or related fields later on. At the same time, the professionalization needed for attractive programs spurs developments towards a larger number of paid workers, as it is described for the Faith Education Reform in Norway (cf. Leganger-Krogstad in this volume) or the school-related youth work in Germany (cf. Wolking in this volume). As the contribution of Schweitzer (in this volume) shows, successful non-formal education promotes young people's motivation for voluntary commitment. Thus non-formal education is not only the result of voluntary work but at the same time is one of its roots. When non-formal fields become professionalized, it is important to maintain a basic feeling of voluntary commitment even if some parts of the work are organized by professionals. In other words, professionalization does not necessarily mean that paid staff is taking tasks over from volunteers but rather pave the way for improved opportunities for volunteerism supported by full-time workers.

When one asks about how new developments in the non-formal field come about, it can often be observed that changes in the sector of formal education trigger major initiatives outside of school. This can be clearly observed with the changes concerning Religious Education in school in Norway and Switzerland, which in both cases were a decisive factor for the development of new youth work and confirmation schemes in the respective Churches (cf. Leganger-Krogstad; Schlag and Voirol-Sturzenegger in this volume; cf. also the effects of Danish school reform described by Christensen in this volume). These examples are especially noteworthy as they also show the sometimes rapid rates of changes which can affect even settings of formal religious education with a long tradition. Regarding the discussions on the future of Religious Education as a school subject, for example, in Germany it seems striking that the idea of strengthening non-formal approaches as a complementary strategy has not yet been discussed more thoroughly – although Norway and Switzerland show the options for possible compensatory approaches in religious learning by strengthening non-formal religious education.

When comparing formal and non-formal settings in religious education, one striking difference lies in the innovative potential which non-formal education includes. The remarkable examples from Swedish confirmation work (Pettersen in this volume) show the flexibility with which a Church has reacted to problems in the participation rates of confirmation work. Made possible by open framework regulations and the willingness of the Swedish Church to invest money in this field, new forms of confirmation work have been established which have the potential of giving confirmation work a completely new image, be it connected with hunting, football or a film profile. Looking at these innovative examples, one wonders why experimental changes are not also tried out in other fields more often.

Looking at the contributions dealing with Islamic religion (cf. Ulfat; Rothgangel and Jäggle in this volume), it becomes obvious how controversial not only educational programs in this field can be but also the research referring to such programs.

It is also significant – and in fact deplorable – that, for the most part, approaches to interreligious education are still lacking in the non-formal field. The importance

of research in respect to interreligious issues may be seen from the results of current investigations in the field of kindergarten (cf. Wörn et al. in this volume).

Taken together these observations clearly speak for giving non-formal religious education more emphasis, be it in church or in society. This field of education appears to be very vital and full of additional potentials that should no longer be underestimated. Non-formal religious education can include unique learning experiences which are not available anywhere else, neither in the formal nor in the informal sector.

#### 4. Perspectives for future research

The one statement which can be found in almost all of the chapters in this book is that “more research is needed”. On the one hand, the compilation of different studies concerning non-formal religious education in this book shows some impressive results. On the other hand, this compilation makes it very clear that many questions remain open and that much more needs to be investigated and discovered in this field.

Taking the studies in the present book as the starting point, especially the following approaches deserve more attention in future research:

- One important wish concerns international cooperation of researchers jointly researching a comparable field in different countries with methods or questionnaires which are as similar as possible. As the research project on confirmation work shows, this kind of international cooperation seems to be much easier on the basis of quantitative than of qualitative research. Nevertheless, qualitative research with joint international approaches would be interesting for future research as well.
- In an increasingly globalized world, international cooperation should not be limited to European countries. Future projects should also involve research on non-formal education in other parts of the world. As first successful examples of transatlantic research cooperation show (Osmer and Douglass 2018), a broader view can be enriching for research as well as for the praxis of non-formal education.
- Long-term studies are still too rare. It seems promising to learn about effects over time by following a certain group of (young) people over years – also after they have no more contact with their former involvement with non-formal education.
- If more studies with a control group or intervention studies could be implemented, this would help to identify learning effects from Religious Education in school as well as from non-formal religious education. Which kind of learning has what effects for the young people?
- As the project from Finland shows (Tervo-Niemelä in this volume), churches should become more interested in research on people who drop out of reli-

- gious institutions, for example, on people leaving the church. In this respect, future research should also include possible positive or negative effects of formal and non-formal education at different stages of people's biographies concerning dropping out of the church at a later point of their lives.
- How can different denominations learn from each other in respect to non-formal education? The most well-known example of such ecumenical learning has been the idea of having camps as part of confirmation work which were first developed in Finland, at least in Europe (for earlier camp approaches in the United States of America cf. Osmer and Douglass 2018). One may also wonder, for example, if Protestant programs with confirmation work for children imply that there have been influences from the Catholic Church and the First Communion Preparation there, although the Danish mini-confirmation program (Christensen in this volume) developed in a context without much Catholic presence.
  - One challenging task for researchers might also be to make their research results more accessible for practitioners. Even more, if practitioners are enabled to have access to reliable data of their own, for example, from easy to use evaluation tools, their willingness to support research projects and the interest in evidence-based work in the non-formal area might increase significantly. Approaches of this kind are documented in the chapter on mapping Christian youth work (Ilg in this volume) but could be extended to many other fields as well.

## 5. Outlook

The idea for this book goes back to an international consultation in Tübingen/Germany in March 2018 which also explains the high share of reports from Germany. One clear understanding among the researchers of the conference was that more exchange as well as more international cooperation in this field is needed. In this respect the volume documents first steps in this direction that should be followed by more structured exchange and comparative research initiatives. The aim must be to build a structured research network with vivid exchange and tools for collaboration. This step could also contribute to the further appreciation of non-formal religious education and its effects on strengthening civil society.

The more non-formal education receives attention in the course of a biographical learning history, the more important it will also be to have reliable scientific accounts of what is going on in the non-formal settings. Non-formal education often operates on the basis of voluntary commitment. In contexts where not even the leaders of a program are paid, it is difficult to convey that money should be spent on research activities. So the institutions can hardly be expected to raise funding for appropriate studies. Therefore, research on non-formal education is in need of funding from central agencies or actors like the state or – in the context of religious education – from churches, mosques or other religious bodies.

At a time when, in the educational as well as in the political field, there are more and more demands for evidence-based approaches, the non-formal sector would necessarily be put at a serious disadvantage if the research there remained on a low level. Strengthening research on non-formal religious education appears to be key strategy for strengthening the field of non-formal activities on the long run.

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