

IV. Country-Specific Articles

1. Confirmation Work in Germany

FRIEDRICH SCHWEITZER, WOLFGANG ILG, GEORG HARDECKER AND
CHRISTOPH MAASS

1.1 Introduction

The first study on confirmation work in Germany showed a very positive picture for this field of work, with high and stable participation rates and much satisfaction, among the confirmands as well as among the workers and the parents (Ilg et al. 2010b, cf. Ilg et al. 2009). According to the results of the current study, this situation has basically remained the same (Schweitzer et al. 2015). Germany belongs to the group of countries where confirmation work obviously continues enjoying a broad acceptance as is expressed by the fact that more than 90 % of all Protestant youth in the respective age group take part in this program.

This does not mean, however, that there have been no changes in the situation of the church altogether in recent years. Three interrelated tendencies deserve special mention here. First, there are the demographic changes. The German birthrate is stable at a very low level of approximately 1.4 (Statistisches Bundesamt 2015). Among the Protestants, it is even lower. This explains why the absolute number of the 14 years old Protestants has gone down by more than 10 % during the five years between the first and the second study on confirmation work. Second, together with the continued loss of adult members dropping their membership, the Protestant Church in Germany (as well as the Roman Catholic Church, the other major Church in this country) is dwindling in size. Germany keeps seeing a fair amount of immigration but the immigrants tend to either be Catholics or to belong to non-Christian religions. Observations concerning the shrinking size of the Church explain why – third – financial constraints make themselves felt more strongly now than in the past. Recent publications on the future of the Church tend to describe a grim picture, especially concerning younger age groups. According to the latest study of this kind (EKD 2014), the younger the respondents, the less they feel related to the church.

Against this background the results from the first study on confirmation work were mostly received as a hopeful sign. High participation and satisfac-

tion rates were viewed as a basis for encouragement. At the same time, the critical issues emerging from the study, for example, concerning the confirmands' often negative views of worship services, were also addressed, among others, in the ongoing training for pastors and other workers. Moreover, all newly developed guidelines of the regional Churches within the Protestant Church in Germany make explicit reference to the findings of the first study (for detailed references: Schweitzer et al. 2015). Finally, there also is a tendency for church leaders to expect educational programs like confirmation work to contribute to a stronger identification with the church and with church membership in particular.

In Germany, the second study on confirmation work was conducted by a team of researchers at the Theological Faculty of the University of Tübingen – in a manner very similar to that of the first study. Again all of the regional Churches took part in it. The sample of parishes was selected by an independent social science institute (GESIS – Leibniz Institute for Social Sciences). The resulting random sample can be considered representative. 583 parishes had the questionnaires filled in by the confirmands resulting in a return rate of almost 45 % of the original sample (for more details cf. p 332 f.). According to the international agreements for the second study, new items were introduced especially concerning worship services and the question of voluntarism. A t₃-study was conducted in spring/summer 2015 and will be published in a book in 2016/17. The following Table 46 shows the sample sizes for the first and second study.

1.2 Overview on data

Table 46: Number of questionnaires (Germany) in 2007/2008 and 2012/2013

	First study 2007/2008			Second study 2012/2013			
	t ₀	t ₁	t ₂	t ₀	t ₁	t ₂	percentage matched (basis: t ₂)
units	635	634	613	573	576*	517	97%**
confirmands		11 513	10 961		10 191	9 096	81 %
workers		1 601	1 444		1 667	1 336	65 %

* The N of t₁ is higher than N of t₀ because not all parishes participating in t₁ gave their t₀-data.

** The value is < 100 % because some parishes did not start answering the questionnaires until t₂.

1.3 Major Results

As mentioned above, participation rates have been very stable in Germany. More than 90% of the 14 years old Protestant adolescents take part in it. Compared to the population in general in 2012, this equals almost 30% of all Germans at this age. There are major differences, however, between the situation in Eastern and in Western Germany. In Eastern Germany, 14% of the respective general population take part in confirmation work while the figure for Western Germany is 31%. These differences are due to the different rates of church membership in Eastern and Western Germany. The lower numbers in Eastern Germany can be considered a lasting effect of the times of the Socialist GDR and of its atheist education and indoctrination.

Attitudes Concerning Faith and Church

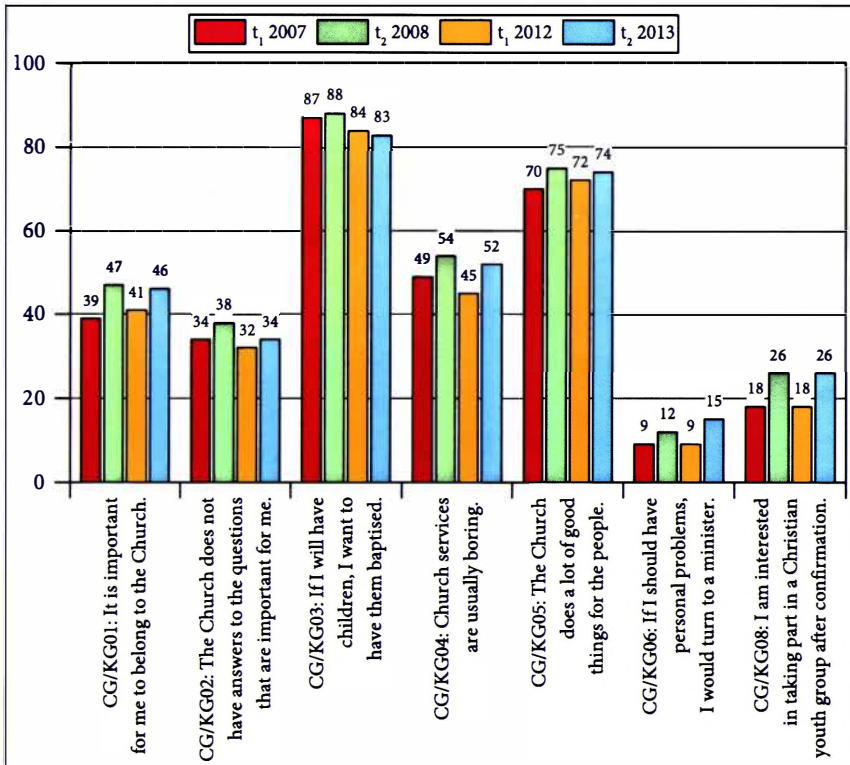
General attitudes concerning the Christian faith and the Church were addressed by a number of questions concerning the adolescents' »current attitude in general«. Figure 34, Figure 35 and Figure 36 summarise the results.

The design of the study with its questionnaires at the beginning (t_1) and towards the end of confirmation time (t_2) makes it possible to ask about changes during this time. Considering the aims of confirmation work and its focus on giving young people an opportunity to become clear about their own faith, this question applies first of all to religious attitudes in general and especially to their attitudes towards the church.

Concerning religious attitudes, the changes during confirmation time are rather moderate. With some of the items, there are practically no changes (2 percent points or less, CE01/CE03/CE04/CE09). Correspondingly, on the basis of the indexes relating to faith, there are only small changes from t_1 to t_2 (M for iCE1 = 4.68 and for iKE1 = 4.77). As far as there are bigger changes, they tend to go into the direction intended by the workers (whose intentions are known from the questionnaire concerning the aims of the workers).

- The biggest change can be found with the question »I know what the Christian faith entails« (CE/KE10, 11 percent points increase). This result shows that confirmation work is indeed effective in terms of one of its core aims – orientation in relationship to the Christian faith.
- Also, the sense that one's faith is of help in difficult situations increases during confirmation time (6 percent points increase, CE/KE08).
- The belief that there is life after death, increases as well (CE/KE02, plus 7 percent points) while faith in the resurrection of Jesus only goes up by 2 percent points (CE/KE04).

Figure 34: Attitude towards the Christian faith and the church in a cross-temporal comparison (both for t_1 and t_2 and 2007/2008 and 2012/2013) in Germany (%)

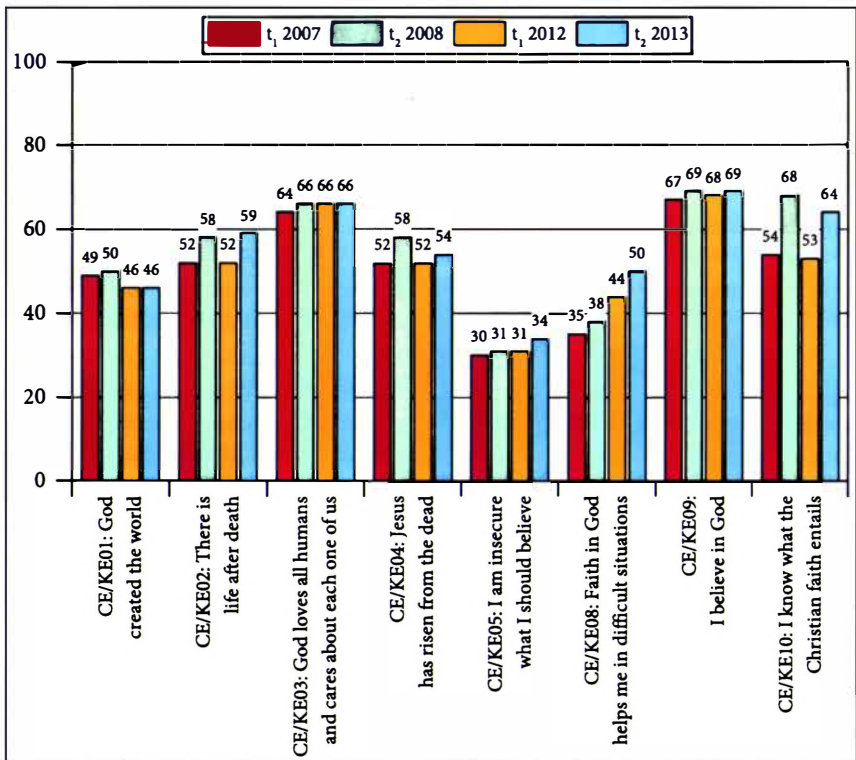


N = 11170-11340 ($t_1/2007$); N = 10574-10694 ($t_2/2008$); N = 9829-10074 ($t_1/2012$); N = 8864-8964 ($t_2/2013$)

- Although knowledge of the contents of faith increases, the feeling of being »insecure what I should believe« does not decrease but goes up by 3 percent points (CE05/KE05).

According to the results, there were more changes between t_1 and t_2 concerning the attitudes towards the church than concerning faith. The statement »The Church does not have answers to the questions that are really important to me« received with 34% even 2 percent points more agreement in t_2 than in t_1 (CG/KG02). One has to keep in mind that, in this case, an increase clearly contradicts the aims of confirmation work as viewed by the workers or set down in respective statements by the Church. For one third of the confirmands confirmation work seems to not succeed in making clear the relevance of perspectives

Figure 35: Findings concerning religious beliefs in intertemporal comparison (both for t_1 and t_2 and 2007/2008 and 2012/2013) in Germany (%)

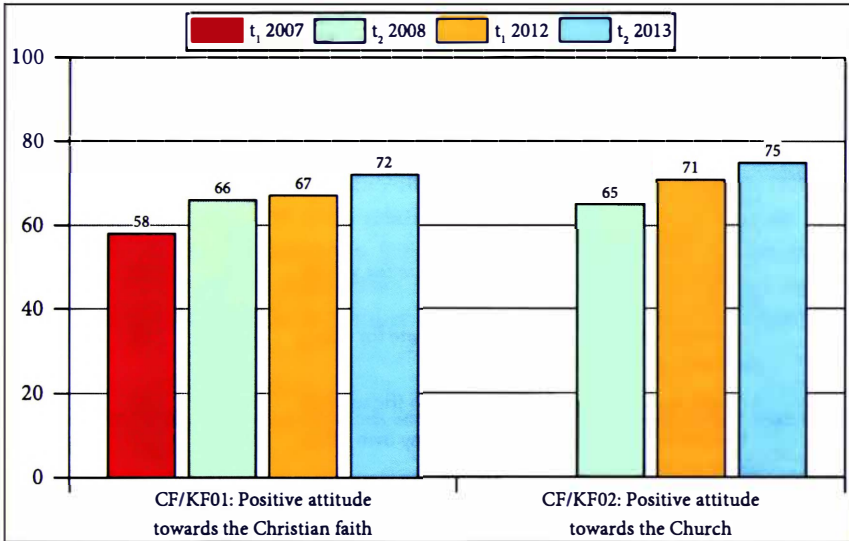


N = 11267-11365 ($t_1/2007$); N = 10618-10727 ($t_2/2008$); N = 10006-10092 ($t_1/2012$); N = 8885-8962 ($t_2/2013$).

maintained by the Church for their own lives. The other results within section CG of the questionnaire refer to positive changes in relationship to the Church:

- The image of the church that confirmands have, is rather positive from the beginning. At the end of confirmation time, 74 % of the adolescents agree that the »Church does a lot of good things for the people« (KG05) – this means an increase by 2 percent points. Also, the positive rating of the Church increases between t_1 and t_2 from 71 % to 75 % (CF/KF02).
- The importance of belonging to the Church increases by 5 percent points to 46 % (CG/KG01).
- The tendency to address a minister in case of personal problems, went up from 9 % agreement to 15 % (CG/KG06).

Figure 36: Attitude towards the Christian faith and the Church in a cross-temporal comparison (both for t_1 and t_2 and 2007/2008 and 2012/2013) in Germany (%)



N = 10550 (t_1 /2007), 10023-10563 (t_2 /2008); N = 9937-9957 (t_1 /2012), 8004-8012 (t_2 /2013). CF02 was not asked in the study 2007/2008.

- A noteworthy change can also be found with the item »I would be interested in taking part in a Christian youth group after confirmation« (8 percent points increase, CG/KG08).

Confirmands' Views on Worship Services

Introducing young people to worship services is an important aim in German confirmation work. According to the information from the parishes, attending a certain number of services during confirmation time is mandatory in most parishes. The concrete number of mandatory services during confirmation time, however, varies from parish to parish (WG02: In 50% of the parishes confirmands have to attend 16-25 worship services, in 33% of the parishes 26 and more services).

At the same time, adolescents tend to be sceptical regarding worship services. In the first study, 49% said that worship services are »boring« (t_1) and this percentage increased markedly during confirmation time (t_2 : 54%). Accordingly, experiences with worship services were called a neuralgic point in confirmation work (Ilg et al. 2009, 225). This pattern holds true in the second study on a slightly lower level (45% in t_1 , 52% in t_2). In order to find out more about the background of these perceptions, the second study put special emphasis on

the confirmands' views of worship services, with a number of additional items. Table 47 presents selected results concerning the confirmands' views of worship services (for more details on worship cf. p. 170 ff.).

Table 47: Confirmands' expectations and experiences with worship services (t_1 and t_2) in Germany

		M	SD	Yes
CG04	Church services are usually boring.	4.34	1.82	45%
KG04	Church services are usually boring.	4.62	1.74	52%
CS01	I (wish) to experience services adequate for young people.	4.94	1.83	60%
KS01	I experienced forms of worship adequate for young people (e.g., youth services).	4.31	2.06	48%
CS02	I (wish) to contribute my own ideas to the services.	3.36	1.88	27%
KS02	I had the opportunity to contribute my own ideas to the services.	3.42	1.87	28%
CS05	I (wish) to listen to interesting sermons.	4.22	2.14	47%
KS05	I listened to interesting sermons.	3.98	1.79	39%
KS14	The services usually dealt with things that concern me and my life.	3.84	1.67	34%
KS15	I felt secure in the group.	4.98	1.66	62%
KS16	I liked being part of the worship community.	4.53	1.65	50%
KS17	I felt uncomfortable.	2.54	1.76	15%

N = 10004-10017 (t_1); N = 8877-8934 (t_2); scale: 1 = not applicable at all; 7 = totally applicable; M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation; Yes = Positive response (5, 6, 7).

Experiences and Satisfaction with Confirmation Time

Some of the experiences during confirmation time are a positive surprise for the confirmands. The experiences (KB) are better than their expectations or aims (CB) stated at the beginning of confirmation time.

- 75% of the confirmands report positive experiences concerning the community within the group (KB02). At the beginning, only 44% viewed that as an explicit aim.
- 70% of the confirmands say that they got to know more about God and faith (KB01). 65% felt that they were enabled to come to a decision about their own faith (KB03).
- 59% felt strengthened in their faith (KB08).

At the same time, the confirmands report less positive impressions concerning the openness of confirmation work in relationship to their questions and ideas.

The same is true concerning the relevance of the contents discussed for everyday life. Only 39 % of the confirmands feel that their questions concerning faith were taken up (KK11) and only 32 % agree that they had a chance to influence the choice of topics (KK04). For 47 % of the confirmands, the relationship of what they learnt to everyday life is not clear (KK35).

In 49 % of the parishes, confirmands do not have the chance to try out helping with one of the parish's programs (internships, etc.) (VQ06) and only 35 % of the confirmands report that they have taken part in such programs (KK26). Yet the confirmands view their relationship to the parish positively in most cases. 67 % of the confirmands felt welcomed and accepted in the parish (KK37). Concerning the satisfaction of the confirmands with various aspects of their confirmation time, a number of items were used. Table 48 presents the results.

Table 48: Satisfaction of the confirmands with different aspects in confirmation time (t_2) in Germany

To what extent are you satisfied with ... ?		M	SD	Yes
KN01	the whole confirmation time	5.31	1.41	75 %
KN03	content/topics of lessons in confirmation work	4.77	1.31	59 %
KN07	minister/person primarily responsible for confirmation work	5.45	1.62	75 %
KN08	other teachers/workers	5.26	1.57	73 %
KN10	church services	4.65	1.49	57 %
KN11	camp(s)	5.37	1.73	73 %
KN14	music, songs and singing	4.60	1.67	55 %
KN20	working methods (for example, working with biblical texts, group work, etc.)	4.67	1.39	56 %

N = 8172-8991; scale: 1 = not satisfied at all; 7 = totally satisfied. M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation; Yes = Positive response (5, 6, 7). The statement »we didn't have that« was treated as missing. The proportion of those confirmands who made this statement to a greater extent affects the following items (proportion of all confirmands making statements towards the items KN): KN08 (7%); KN11 (5%); KN14 (3%).

75 % of the confirmands were satisfied with their whole confirmation time (KN01). A similar value is only reached concerning the satisfaction with the ministers or other full-time workers. The satisfaction rate with other workers and with camps also reaches 73 %. While 90 % of the confirmands indicated that they want to have fun (CK05), 68 % felt at the end that this was actually the case (KK05).

Results Concerning Employed Workers and Volunteers

One of the facts that the first study on confirmation work in Germany brought to light was the high number of volunteers who are active in this field. On the basis of the current study, their number was calculated as 62 000. This means that their number increased by more than 3 % during the five years between the first and the second study although the number of confirmands decreased by more than 10 %. In other words, the role of voluntary workers in confirmation work has become even more important. Statistically, there is one volunteer per every third or fourth confirmand now. There are certainly differences between the parishes and also between different regions. Especially Eastern Germany has fewer voluntary workers than Western Germany.

Many of the volunteers are still in adolescence themselves. More than 60 % are under the age of 18 years and another 10 % are under 21 years. This implies that most of them are still attending school. In Germany, becoming a volunteer with confirmation work can be an important answer to the question what could come after confirmation.

Concerning the aims of the workers, it is interesting to compare the voluntary workers' aims with those of the main responsible persons. Many aims are actually shared by the two groups, for example, that the confirmands should experience that their questions related to faith play a role (WC15), that they can come to a decision concerning their own faith (WC01) and will be supported in their personal and social development (WC04). Moreover, both groups agree that the confirmands should experience community (WD03), increasingly feel at home in the parish (WC16) and participate actively in the worship services (WD10). In other respects, the aims differ between the two groups. The volunteers put more emphasis on the possibility for the confirmands to influence the topics to be treated (WB09) and that the confirmands have fun (WD07). The ministers give more weight to the confirmands meeting people who find faith important for themselves (WB10), learning by heart central texts (WC03), getting to know silence and contemplation (WC10) and that the confirmands develop a faith related to their everyday life and its challenges (WC11). It must be mentioned critically that only 41 % of the pastors consider it important that confirmands can influence the topics to be taken up in confirmation time (WB09).

Ministers and volunteers are showing high satisfaction with their work (VM01). While 78 % of the ministers say that they are satisfied, 89 % of the volunteers say so.

1.4 Changes between the First and the Second Study

The results of the first and the second study on confirmation work differ in many respects. Yet in even more respects the differences are marginal so that the general conclusion must emphasise aspects like continuity and stability. In this section, we consequently limit ourselves to major changes between the two studies.

- A very positive development can be seen in the further steps on the way from confirmation instruction to confirmation work that have been taken during the five years between the two studies. There are more internships for the confirmands now (13 percent points increase) and there is more cooperation with youth work (14 percent points increase). The tendency towards having special days for confirmation work with a broad variety of activities instead of the traditional type of instruction has also continued.
- Satisfaction rates have gone up even further, although they were very high already with the first study (satisfaction with the whole confirmation time among the confirmands is now 75 %, compared to 67 % in the first study).
- The interests expressed by the confirmands have changed. There is less interest in other religions (CL07: 39 %) and also in environmental issues (CL16: 34 %).
- The number of volunteers (who often are older adolescents) went up from 60000 in 2007/2008 to 62000 in 2012/2013 – despite a shrinking number of confirmands.
- The views of worship services have become less negative although they still indicate problems in this respect. Alongside this finding, the confirmands report slightly more experiences with services suitable for young people (48 %, plus two percent points).
- In most cases, the religious attitudes of the adolescents remained unchanged. The only exception is the view that one's faith is of help in difficult situations. There is a remarkable increase concerning this view (CE08, up 9 percent points).
- Attitudes relating to the church show similar stability. In this case, differences between 2007/2008 and 2012/2013 reach a maximum of 4 percent points (CF02). It is interesting to note that the differences indicate a slight tendency towards a closer relationship to the church (increases with CG01 and CG05, less assent for negative statements about the church with CG02 and CG04). The only exception is the negative tendency for the intention of having one's own children baptised (CG03, 4 percent points less), although still at a very high level.

1.5 Challenges and Questions for the Future

In the evaluation of the results of the Germany study, the following challenges for the future were identified:

- From traditional instruction to creative variety: The transformation of traditional confirmation instruction to confirmation work with its broad spectrum of youth-oriented activities has continued (more internships, more camps, more non-school-type activities). At the same time, this transformation is still not complete and has not been accomplished in all of the parishes. Consequently, the respective efforts in this direction should continue in the future.
- Demographic change: Responses to the challenge of the declining absolute numbers of confirmands still have to be developed. Examples might be more cooperation between confirmation work and other forms of Christian youth work as well as cooperative programs of several parishes. In any case, the demographic change includes new challenges that should be evaluated very carefully and the parishes should be supported in developing new strategies in line with the local and regional situation.
- Worship services: An important task for the future will be to create more possibilities for young people to contribute their ideas for worship and to have more services that are suitable for them. The importance of the sermon should not be underestimated in this context. Having sermons that are of interest to them, is a clear demand of the confirmands.
- Relevance for life: Especially those confirmands who have not experienced more intense forms of religious socialisation prior to confirmation time, feel that their questions concerning faith were not addressed during their confirmation time. The confirmands will only have a chance to understand the meaning of the Christian tradition for them if their questions are addressed.
- What comes after confirmation? Do the parishes have programs for young people? Are there attempts to relate to these programs already during confirmation time?
- Research: Efforts should be made to bring praxis and theory closer together in confirmation work. Moreover, there are still many questions waiting to be researched empirically.

The results of the second study for Germany are published in two books. In summer/spring 2015 the results for t_1 and t_2 were published in »Konfirmandenarbeit im Wandel« (Schweitzer et al. 2015). In summer 2015, the third wave of questionnaires (t_3) was sent out. The results from this last part of the study will be published in 2016. More information about the German study can be found on: www.konfirmandenarbeit.eu.