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CONTRIBUTION OF CONFESSIONAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TO INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA*

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Abstract

For a long time, the religious dimension was neglected within the framework of intercultural education, but during the last two decades, it has become its indispensable part. The inclusion of the religious dimension in intercultural education was triggered by the growing awareness of the importance of the religious dimension for the political, social, cultural and educational future of Europe and the development of the culture of coexistence. The need to further deepen knowledge of the religious phenomenon and to implement interreligious education and dialogue is becoming increasingly obvious. The fundamental school subject that systematically mediates religious knowledge in the Croatian education system is confessional Religious Education.

The goal of this research is to analyse, present and evaluate the elements that indicate the openness of the confessional Religious Education curriculum to education for interculturality. The research results are based on a comparative analysis of Catholic, Orthodox and Islamic Religious Education curricula. The subject of the analysis were the following curriculum categories: domains, purpose, goals and outcomes. Although all three curricula show openness to the religious dimension of intercultural

* This research was conducted within the framework of the scientific research project RELIGOBRAZ – The Contribution of Religious Education to Coexistence in a Multicultural Society (HRZZ: IP-2019-04-3661).

education, when it comes to the level of specific curriculum content, there is a noticeable difference in the percentage of outcomes and topics related to knowledge of other religions and the promotion of interreligious learning and dialogue.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education; Catholic Religious Education; curriculum of confessional Religious Education; Orthodox Religious Education; the religious dimension of intercultural education.

1. Introduction

1.1. Intercultural education and interreligious dialogue

Religious and cultural diversity today more than ever represent a strong cultural, cultural and political challenge, especially for Europe. Multiculturalism and interculturality were further stimulated by large migrations on European soil, contacts with other cultures, as well as the development of communication technologies and economic globalization. The Republic of Croatia is also increasingly becoming a multicultural and multireligious country. According to the 2021 Population Census, there are 3,871,833 people living in the Republic of Croatia, of whom 78.97% are Catholics, 3.32% Orthodox, 0.26% Protestants, 4.83% other Christians, 1.32% Muslims, 4.71% non-believers and atheists, while 1.72% did not want to state their religious affiliation¹. The above data provide an insight into the religious and worldview diversity in the Republic of Croatia, revealing that the majority of people are affiliated with the Catholic Church. In the last few years, due to increasingly strong migration flows, rapid and sudden changes have been observed, which also affect the cultural and religious diversity in the country. When the Republic of Croatia joined the European Union in 2013, a more intense emigration wave of the Croatian population began, followed by a trend of immigration to the Republic of Croatia, conditioned by the refugee crisis, as well as other economic, social and business reasons. According to the EUROSTAT data, 9.1 persons per 1,000 inhabitants immigrated to the Republic of Croatia in 2021, which places Croatia above the European average of 5 persons per 1,000 inhabitants² (Eurostat, 2023). The statistical data on residence and work permits issued by the Ministry of the

¹ Cf. DRŽAVNI ZAVOD ZA STATISTIKU, *Objavljeni konačni rezultati Popisa 2021*, [Croatian Bureau of Statistics: The final results of the Census 2021 have been published.] Available online: <https://dzs.gov.hr/vijesti/objavljeni-konacni-rezultati-popisa-2021/1270> (accessed on 30 August 2023)

² Cf. EUROSTAT, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statisticsexplained/index.php?title=Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics, 2003 (accessed on 2 September 2023)

Interior for the month of May 2023 reveal that in that month alone, 50,089 new work permits were issued for workers from BiH, Serbia, Nepal, North Macedonia, India, Kosovo, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Turkey and Albania.³ All these developments have made the state of the contemporary Croatian society rather complex, as it is increasingly becoming multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious.

In societies with an increasing pluralism of cultures, religions and life attitudes, the main questions are how to deal with differences and how to deal with conflicts that may arise from these differences. This issue particularly affects public schools that students attend, regardless of their cultural or religious affiliation. The Council of Europe has recognized intercultural education and dialogue as two key means of preventing conflicts based on cultural, ethnic and religious differences⁴. However, the religious dimension of intercultural education had been neglected for a long time, since European societies excluded religion from public life, especially from education, arguing that it belongs to the private life of each individual person⁵. Numerous international initiatives and recommendations signal the need to include the religious dimension in intercultural education. Today there is a broad consensus across Europe that religious education has an important place in the school system and that it represents an important dimension in the intercultural education of young people. In Europe, religious education has been recognized as a resource, a tool used for the purpose of promoting democratic values, realizing human rights and active citizenship. More precisely, religious education serves as one of the tools for accomplishing European policies in the matters of coexistence in a pluralistic Europe. The institution that promotes it the most is the Council of Europe, connecting it with the principles of its own organization, namely human rights, democracy and the rule of law.⁶ The need to

³ Cf. MINISTARSTVO UNUTARNJIH POSLOVA REPUBLIKE HRVATSKE, *Mjesečne statistike izdanih dozvola za boravka i rad svibanj 2023. godine*, [Monthly statistics of residence and work permits issued in May 2023]. Available online: https://mup.gov.hr/User-FilesImages/statistika/2023/6/radne%20dozvole_svibanj.pdf (accessed on 23 August 2023)

⁴ Cf. Ružica RAZUM – Marija JURIŠIĆ – Tomislav ŠEGINA, *Religijska dimenzija interkulturalnog obrazovanja: doprinos katoličkog vjeronauka interkulturalnom obrazovanju*, u: *Crkva u svijetu*, 56 (2021) 4, 591-618.

⁵ Cf. Antonio PEROTTI, *Pledoaje za interkulturalni odgoj i obrazovanje*, Zagreb, 1995.

⁶ Cf. COUNCIL OF EUROPE, *Declaration by the European ministers of education on intercultural education in the new European context*, 2003. Available online: <https://rm.coe.int/declaration-by-the-european-ministers-of-education-on-intercultural-ed/16807462b5> (accessed on 5 June 2023); COUNCIL OF EUROPE, *Final Declaration of the European Conference on 'The religious dimension of intercultural dialogue'*, 2007. Available online: <https://rm.coe.int/09000016805d5d56> (accessed on 7 August 2023); COUNCIL OF EUROPE,

expand and deepen knowledge about the religious phenomenon within the school education system is becoming increasingly obvious, with education for interreligious education and dialogue within the framework of intercultural education is also gaining importance⁷.

1.2. Confessional or non confessional religious education

European documents give precedence to non-confessional religious education, stating that it guarantees a critical and objective approach to one's own beliefs and the beliefs of others, as well as that it helps students taking religious education to expand their knowledge of their own religion, also providing those who do not consider themselves religious with an opportunity to reflect and deepen their own beliefs⁸. On the other hand, some authors believe that members of a certain confession or religion are generally better in communication that goes beyond the topics of their religion because, thanks to their own experiences, they can better understand the differences, limitations and attacks that occur on the grounds of religious beliefs. This makes them more prone to accepting differences and promoting tolerance.⁹ Certain recommendations and declarations show that even confessional (denominational)

White paper on intercultural dialogue »Living Together As Equals in Dignity«, Strassbourg, 2008. Croatian translation: *Bijela knjiga o međukulturnom dijalogu »Živimo zajedno jednaki u dostojanstvu«*, Zagreb, 2011; PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF COUNCIL OF EUROPE, *Recommendation 1962: The religious dimension of intercultural dialogue*, 2011. Available online: <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17973&lang=en> (accessed on 7 September 2023); Robert JACKSON, *Signposts: Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and Non-Religious Worldviews in Intercultural Education*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2014; John KEAST (ed.), *Religious diversity and intercultural education: a reference book for schools*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2007.

⁷ Cf. COUNCIL OF EUROPE, *White paper on intercultural dialogue »Living Together As Equals in Dignity«*; Hans-Georg ZIEBERTZ – Stephan LEIMGRUBERS, *Međureligijsko učenje [Interreligious Learning]*, in: Georg HILGER – Stephan LEIMGRUBER – Hans-Georg ZIEBERTZ (eds.), *Vjeronaučna didaktika. Priručnik za studij, obrazovanje i posao*, Zagreb, 2009, 394-402.

⁸ Cf. Flavio PAJER, *L'istruzione religiosa nelle scuole dell'unione europea: un'identità plurale e in evoluzione*, in: *Revista Pistis & Praxis*, 2 (2017) 2, 449-478, Available online: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321288377_L'istruzione_religiosa_nelle_scuole_dell'unione_europea_un'identita_plurale_e_in_evoluzione (accessed on 29 September 2023)

⁹ Cf. Matthias SCHARER, *Learning Religion in the Presence of the Other: Provocation and Gift in Public Education*, in: Kristina STOECKL (ed.), *The Future of Religious Education in Europe*, Florence, 2015, 39-43.

religious education can achieve the goals of the religious dimension of intercultural education.¹⁰

When it comes to religious education, the situation in Europe is rather colourful and diverse. However, confessional religious education still prevails in most European countries.¹¹ However, despite being confessional, it shows increasing sensitivity and openness towards religious pluralism and the requirements of intercultural education, especially interreligious learning.¹² Predominance of confessional religious teaching, however, necessarily results in the multiplication of confessional subjects, so in most European countries where confessional teaching is carried out, school systems offer several confessional versions, depending on the religious composition of the population. Many countries, in addition to confessional models, also offer a non-confessional alternative subject.¹³

1.3. Confessional Religious Education in the Republic of Croatia

In the Republic of Croatia, with the introduction of confessional Religious Education in schools, i.e., the school year 1991-92, an approach that enables the

¹⁰ Cf. COUNCIL OF EUROPE, *White paper on intercultural dialogue »Living Together As Equals in Dignity«*.

¹¹ Cf. Flavio PAJER, *L'istruzione religiosa nelle scuole dell'unione europea: un'identità plurale e in evoluzione*, 449-478; Martin ROTHGANGEL – Robert JACKSON – Martin JÄGGLE (eds.), *Religious Education at Schools in Europe. Part 2: Western Europe*, Vienna/Göttingen, 2014; Martin ROTHGANGEL – Martin JÄGGLE – Geir SKEIE (eds.), *Religious Education at Schools in Europe. Part 3: Northern Europe*, Vienna/Göttingen, 2014; Martin ROTHGANGEL – Martin JÄGGLE – Thomas SCHLAG (eds.), *Religious Education at Schools in Europe, Part 1: Central Europe*, Vienna/Göttingen, 2016; Martin ROTHGANGEL – Yauheniya DANILOVICH – Martin JÄGGLE, *Religious Education at Schools in Europe: Part 4: Eastern Europe*, Vienna/Göttingen, 2020.

¹² Cf. Jadranka GARMAZ – Hans MENDEL, *Transreligiös kompetent werden*, in: Ružica RAZUM – Nenad MALOVIĆ – Kristina VUJICA (eds.), *Religijsko obrazovanje u interkulturalnoj Europi. Zbornik radova*. [Religious Education in Intercultural Europe: Proceedings], Zagreb, 2022, 133-150. Available online: <https://repositorij.kbf.unizg.hr/islandora/object/kbf:134>

¹³ Cf. Ružica RAZUM – Marija JURIŠIĆ (eds.), *Interkulturalnost i religijsko obrazovanje u europskim dokumentima i kurikulumima – Interculturality and Religious Education in European Documents and Curricula*, Zagreb, 2020; Marianna KOMÁROMI, *Promjena perspektive: učiti od religije – analiza novog austrijskog kurikuluma katoličkog vjeronauka i njezova implementacija u novim školskim udžbenicima / Perspektivenwechsel »Learn from Religion« – Untersuchung des neuen Österreichischen Lehrplans des katholischen Religionsunterrichts und dessen umsetzung in den neuen Schulbüchern [Shifting Perspective: Learning from Religion – Analysis of the New Austrian Catholic Religious Education Curriculum and its Implementation in the New School Textbooks.]*, in: Ružica RAZUM – Nenad MALOVIĆ – Kristina VUJICA (eds.), *Religijsko obrazovanje u interkulturalnoj Europi. Zbornik radova*, 78-108 / 314-348.

performance of confessional Religious Education in several confessional variants was accepted¹⁴. Today, the National Curriculum encompasses the curricula of three confessional Religious Education subjects: Catholic, Orthodox and Islamic Religious Education. In addition to those three, Religious Education is also carried out by the Alliance of Baptist Churches in the Republic of Croatia and the affiliated Church of Christ, as well as the Evangelical Pentecostal Church and the affiliated Church of God in the Republic of Croatia, and finally the Pentecostal Church of Christ in the Republic of Croatia.¹⁵ These communities mainly provide religious education outside the school, in their community premises and in cooperation with the school. They also keep a record book and the final grade is listed on the class certificate. Other religious communities, which have concluded an Agreement with the Republic of Croatia, also have the right to conduct Religious Education.¹⁶

According to data gathered by the Ministry of Science and Education, in the academic year 2021-22, the total number of students in primary schools was 312,960, and Catholic Religious Education was attended by 273,025 students (87.24%), while the total number of students in secondary schools was 143,476, and Catholic Religious Education was attended by 106,501 students (74.23%).¹⁷ According to the data provided by the religious communities, when it comes to students of Orthodox Religious Education, Islamic Religious Education and Religious Education of the Union of Baptist churches and their affiliated communities, the situation in the academic year 2022-23 was as follows: Orthodox

¹⁴ MINISTARSTVO PROSVJETE I KULTURE REPUBLIKE HRVATSKE, *Plan i program vjerskog odgoja i obrazovanja*. [Religious Education Plan and Programme] in: *Glasnik Ministarstva prosvjete i kulture Republike Hrvatske*, Zagreb, 1991.

¹⁵ Data on the implementation of Religious Education by religious communities resulting from the reformation was provided by Svjetlana Mraz, M.Sc.

¹⁶ Agreements on matters of common interest between the Republic of Croatia and certain religious communities were drawn up by the following religious communities: Catholic Church (13 February 1997), Serbian Orthodox Church in Croatia (OG 196/03), Islamic Community in Croatia (OG 196/03, 86/14, Amendment and 46/16), Christian Adventist Church in the Republic of Croatia (OG 196/03), Union of Baptist Churches in the Republic of Croatia (OG 196/03), Evangelical Church in the Republic of Croatia and Reformed Christian Churches (OG 196/ 03), Bulgarian Orthodox Church in Croatia (OG 196/03), Old Catholic Church of Croatia (OG 196/03), Macedonian Orthodox Church in Croatia (OG 196/03), Evangelical (Pentecostal) Church in the Republic of Croatia (OG 196/03), the Coordination Committee of the Jewish Communities in the Republic of Croatia (OG 4/12), Association of Churches »Word of Life«, Church of the Full Gospel and Protestant Reformed Christian Church in Croatia (OG 112/14).

¹⁷ Data on the number of students by school year are available on the website »ŠeR – Školski e-Rudnik«, while the data on attendance of religious education was sourced from the register »e-Matica« (16 June 2023). Available online: <https://mzo.gov.hr/ser-skolski-e-rudnik-3419/3419>

Religious Education was attended by 1,955 students (0.62%) in primary schools, and 757 students (0.53%) in secondary schools, while 15 students attended religious education in the community (parish). The Union of Baptist Churches in the Republic of Croatia and their affiliated churches provide school religious education for 239 students in primary schools and 81 students in secondary schools, while 232 students in primary schools and 79 students in secondary schools attend religious education in the premises of their religious community.

2. Methods

The aim of this research was to comparatively present, analyze and evaluate elements that indicate the openness of the Religious Education curriculum in the Croatian education for interculturality. Considering that previous sociological and pedagogical research conducted in the Republic of Croatia on intercultural competence and intercultural education¹⁸ did not contain an analysis of the religious dimension of intercultural education, the analysis criteria followed the European criteria set at the level of the Council of Europe in order to determine their implementation in the Croatian education system. The theoretical assumptions of the research derived from the Council of Europe's guidelines for the implementation of the religious dimension of intercultural education¹⁹ and intercultural competences²⁰. The key concepts of the content categories stemmed from the aforementioned theoretical framework, and in the context of the educational policies of the Council of Europe, they are expected to be implemented in the subject curricula at the national level.

In this analysis, the main research question was the extent to which confessional Religious Education, in all three versions that exist in the National Curriculum, is open to intercultural education. It was important, in fact, to answer the question of how much Religious Education takes into account interreligious education and dialogue within the framework of intercultural education. The following criteria were taken into account in the comparative

¹⁸ Cf. Elvi PIRŠL et al., *Vodič za interkulturalno učenje* [Guide to Intercultural Learning], Zagreb, 2014; Neven HRVATIĆ, *Interkulturalne kompetencije i europske vrijednosti*. [Intercultural Competencies and European Values], in: Neven HRVATIĆ (ed.), *Interkulturalne kompetencije i europske vrijednosti*, Zagreb / Virovitica, 2018, 197-207; Vesnica MILINAREVIĆ – Ružica TOKIĆ ZEC, *Intercultural Competences in Initial Teacher Education – Comparative Analysis*, in: *Croatian Journal of Education*, 22 (2020) 4, 1081-1112.

¹⁹ Cf. COUNCIL OF EUROPE, *White paper on intercultural dialogue »Living Together As Equals in Dignity«*.

²⁰ Cf. Robert JACKSON, *Signposts: Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and Non-Religious Worldviews in Intercultural Education*.

analysis: 1) in regard to the cognitive aspect, to investigate the presence of discussions on the topic of other religions, i.e., to investigate how much importance is given to the acquisition of knowledge about other religions (religious communities) in a particular curriculum; 2) in regard to the emotional and interactive aspect, to investigate how important the following values are in each individual curriculum to the promotion of interreligious dialogue: coexistence, dialogue, cooperation, mutual respect (especially regarding members of other religions / religious communities / worldviews). For the purposes of this analysis, and using the defined criteria for conducting a comparative analysis, the following curriculum categories were analyzed: domains, purpose, goals and learning outcomes. The research sample is represented by three curricula: the Catholic Religious Education curriculum²¹, the Orthodox Religious Education curriculum²² and the Islamic Religious Education curriculum²³.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Comparative analysis of the three curricula: domains

Subject content, experiences and outcomes are organized in several domains. Their quantity is mostly uniform regardless of the subject. The Catholic and Islamic Religious Education curricula cover four, while the Orthodox Religious Education curriculum covers five domains.

The domains covered by the Catholic Religious Education are as follows: A) Man and the world in God's plan; B) The Word of God and the faith of the Church in the life of Christians; C) Christian love and morality in action; D) The Church in the world. Content related to the promotion of interreligious education is mainly found in the outcomes of the domains A, C and notably D. In the domains A and D, interreligious learning is achieved especially by recognizing and understanding different religious signs, holidays and customs

²¹ MINISTARSTVO ZNANOSTI I OBRAZOVANJA, *Kurikulum nastavnog predmeta Katolički vjeronuk za osnovne škole i gimnazije* [Catholic Religious Education Curriculum], Zagreb, 2019. Available online: https://skolazazivot.hr/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/KV_kurikulum.pdf (accessed on 8 June 2023).

²² MINISTARSTVO ZNANOSTI I OBRAZOVANJA, *Kurikulum nastavnog predmeta Pravoslavni vjeronauk za osnovne škole i gimnazije* [Orthodox Religious Education Curriculum], Zagreb, 2019. Available online: https://skolazazivot.hr/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/PV_kurikulum.pdf (accessed on 10 June 2023)

²³ MINISTARSTVO ZNANOSTI I OBRAZOVANJA, *Kurikulum nastavnog predmeta Islamski vjeronauk za osnovne škole i gimnazije* [Islamic Religious Education Curriculum], Zagreb, 2019. Available online: https://skolazazivot.hr/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/IV_kurikulum-4.pdf (accessed on 12 June 2023)

in the immediate environment, and later by recognizing and understanding basic symbols, buildings as well as by noticing other features and influences in contemporary society (in art, literature, music, films, etc.). It therefore starts from the immediate experience and presence of other religions in the environment (in the lower grades of elementary school) and moves towards modern society in general with the aim of promoting understanding and respect for other people and their life values. Within the domain C, students get to know the basic moral principles of monotheistic religions in order to find common links (commandments, human dignity and conscience, understanding of suffering and evil, and the like).

The domains covered by the Orthodox Religious Education are: A) Liturgy; B) Church; C) Theology and life; D) Feat and art; E) Proclamation. There is no explicit mention of topics related to intercultural education or interreligious dialogue within any of them.

The domains covered by the Islamic Religious Education are: A) Faith and life; B) Religious practice; C) Moral; D) Encountering others. The domain D is especially open to the promotion of intercultural goals, describing that: »Students develop empathy for the other and the different, that is, they become aware of the religious, ethnic and cultural diversity of the environment in which they live and work. They acquire knowledge about other religions, worldviews and cultures, showing tolerance towards others. They help promote equality, respecting the rights of every person and developing empathy to help the weak and the vulnerable. They develop responsibility for their loved ones, their homes and families, but also for their people, their spirituality, tradition, language – with full tolerance towards other nations and their religious, cultural and ethnic identities.«²⁴

On the basis of the domains analyzed, it can be concluded that the openness and sensitivity to the religious dimension of intercultural education is already evident at the level of the very names of the domains encompassed by the Catholic and Islamic Religious Education. Orthodox Religious Education, on the other hand, and its choice of domains, or their names, attest to a type of religious education that is more focused on intra-church issues and less on society. Its domains are closely related to the purpose, goals and outcomes of religious education.

²⁴ MINISTARSTVO ZNANOSTI I OBRAZOVANJA, *Kurikulum nastavnog predmeta Islamski vjeronauk za osnovne škole i gimnazije*, 10.

3.2. *Comparative analysis of the three curricula: purpose and goals*

When discussing Catholic Religious Education, its contribution to intercultural education, especially to the promotion of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, is clearly recognizable even in the stated purpose of this school subject. It is emphasized that »Catholic Religious Education is ecumenical and dialogically very open in its educational approach, content and goals. Its task is to educate students for true ecumenism and respect for members of other Christian churches and communities, and for sincere dialogue and coexistence with members of different religions and worldviews, respecting their beliefs, attitudes and traditions.«²⁵ The achievement of this task is accomplished by working on topics that focus on getting to know members of other Churches as well as members of different religions and worldviews. This task necessarily includes developing true attitudes of openness towards others, that is, promoting the emotional and interactive aspects.

Out of a total of ten goals, one explicitly mentions the importance of promoting knowledge and respect for other religions. Catholic Religious Education should enable every student »to know the fundamental characteristics of different religions, confessions and worldviews and to promote understanding and respect for different ways of thinking, attitudes, traditions and life decisions« (p. 7). The second goal highlights the importance of acquiring the competence of religious and communicative literacy, which is necessary for achieving dialogue and coexistence with members of other religions (p. 7).

In the part that elaborates on the purpose of Orthodox Religious Education, there is no explicit mention of intercultural education, ecumenism nor relations with members of other religions / religious communities. The part that presents the goals of that school subject is fairly similar. The curriculum lists five goals. None directly mentions interreligious teaching. The importance of training for community life, cooperation and dialogue is only mentioned in goal no. 3, without any mention of other religions²⁶.

Defining the purpose of Islamic Religious Education, the openness towards intercultural education is clearly highlighted: »Apart from teaching students about their own religion, Islamic Religious Education develops students' knowledge, feelings and tolerance for the other and the different, i.e., for re-

²⁵ MINISTARSTVO ZNANOSTI I OBRAZOVANJA, *Kurikulum nastavnog predmeta Katolički vjeronuk za osnovne škole i gimnazije*, 5.

²⁶ MINISTARSTVO ZNANOSTI I OBRAZOVANJA, *Kurikulum nastavnog predmeta Pravoslavni vjeronauk za osnovne škole i gimnazije*, 6.

ligious, ethnic and cultural diversity, contributing to a better understanding of other religions, worldviews and cultures. Islamic Religious Education contributes to broadening and deepening knowledge and ethical awareness of the problems our society faces. It develops students' fundamental abilities to properly understand the meaning of their lives, to better understand and accept their environment, i.e., the society in which they live, and helps them develop the necessary competences for active and responsible action in a democratic and multicultural society.«²⁷ When it comes to the goals, the curriculum also emphasizes the importance of training students for common life, which necessarily includes the understanding and acceptance of people of different cultural and religious affiliations. Thus, two of the four goals can be connected to the topic of intercultural education: »focusing on lifelong learning that trains students to live and work with others, contributing to the development and progress of the religious community and society as a whole; understanding people of different cultural, religious and other worldviews and the ability to evaluate their attitudes, thoughts and behaviour in the light of the Islamic message (intercultural approach)« (p. 7).

The analysis of the purposes and goals of the three confessional religious education school subjects reveals that Catholic and Islamic Religious Education show a significantly greater openness to the religious dimension of intercultural education compared to Orthodox Religious Education.

3.3. Comparative analysis of the three curricula: educational outcomes

The fundamental orientations and principles of interreligious education stated in the introductory parts of the Curriculum are implemented within the learning outcomes of each grade, i.e., year of religious education. It is therefore important to explore the extent to which content related to knowledge of other religions and the development of respect for members of other religions and those who do not believe are present in different confessional Religious Education subjects at the level of domains or outcomes in primary and secondary schools.

²⁷ MINISTARSTVO ZNANOSTI I OBRAZOVANJA, *Kurikulum nastavnog predmeta Islamski vjeronauk za osnovne škole i gimnazije*, 5.

3.3.1. Catholic Religious Education

In the Catholic Religious Education curriculum great emphasis is placed on the importance of getting acquainted with different religions in the different religious education classes in primary and secondary school. In the first grade of elementary school, students are encouraged to use their own experience in observing and accepting the religious differences they see in their own living environment (D.1.3.) and to respect students who express no affiliation with the Catholic Church (C.1.1.). In grade 2, students are expected to recognize diversity in their immediate environment and to develop an attitude of appreciation and respect. Students are encouraged to learn and adopt proper behaviour towards every human being (A.2.3; C.2.3). In the third grade, the outcomes are further developed, so within the framework of outcome A.3.1., students are encouraged to express an attitude of respect towards other religious communities. Within the framework of outcome D.3.3. students are instructed to recognize the fundamental concepts of Judaism and the signs (objects, symbols and celebrations) of other religions in their environment. A more systematic approach to learning about religions is noticed as early as in the 4th grade. The fundamental outcome A.4.3. reads: »Students recognize the different ways of man's search for God and the existence of different religions in order to understand and respect others«. In addition to this cognitive level, the elaboration of the same outcome also mentions the outcome that entails developing an appropriate attitude towards members of other religions and those who do not believe (A.4.3.). In the 4th grade, the topic of Judaism and Islam is further deepened (C.4.3). In processing this topic, the emphasis is put on recognizing and understanding what Christianity, Judaism and Islam have in common. At that level of religious studies, emphasis is also placed on the need to have better knowledge of monotheistic religions, with the starting point still being the students' concrete living environment (D.4.3.). An even more systematic approach to researching the religious phenomenon follows in the 5th grade. The outcome, which does not explicitly explain the relationship to other religions, but emphasizes the importance of communion with others, reads: A.5.1. »Students explain the importance of togetherness and how faith encourages us to accept ourselves and others.« Important topics covered within the framework of this outcome are dialogue, togetherness, diversity and discrimination. The key outcome related to that issue is the outcome A.5.3.: »Students explain the presence of God's traces in history and in other religions, distinguishes the main features of monotheistic religions in order to understand and re-

spect other people and their life values.« The aim of this outcome is primarily to understand and consequently to respect people affiliated with different religions. With regard to the domain C, in the outcome C.5.3. emphasis is placed on learning and understanding the fundamental differences and similarities between Christian moral principles and the moral principles of other religions, primarily Judaism and Islam. Within the 4th domain, the following outcome is stated: »D.5.3. Students investigate and separate the fundamental concepts of other religions, observe their influence and features in contemporary society (in art, literature, music, films...).« The emphasis is on observing, understanding and positively evaluating the influence of different religions on contemporary society. The topic of religion is also explicitly addressed in grade 6. Namely, in the 3rd domain, outcome C.6.3. aims at promoting a deeper understanding of the influence of religions and worldviews on concrete life values. In the 6th grade, students are expected to get to know and understand the similarities and differences between Christian churches and sacred buildings of other religions (D.6.3). The outcome is not focused only on acquiring knowledge and understanding, but also on developing an attitude of respect for the symbols and buildings of other religions. External visible religious facts serve as starting points, which are then further developed to the point where students acquire better knowledge of the life of a certain religion and its influence on society and culture. In the 7th grade, the focus is on promoting inter-religious dialogue, especially between Christianity and Judaism (A.7.3). The concept of conscience in other religions and worldviews is also explored in the same grade (C.7.3). The importance of knowledge about other Christian denominations is emphasized, as well as the development of an attitude of appreciation and respect for members of other Christian churches. The topic of ecumenism is especially emphasized in grade 7 (D.7.1.). The outcome D.7.2. further deepens knowledge about other Christian churches, especially knowledge about their influence on Croatian society and culture. This outcome, in addition to better knowledge of the contribution of other Christian churches to the development of society and culture in Croatia, also focuses on the appreciation and respect for other Christian churches. The topic of religiosity is covered in the 8th grade, as well. Within the domain A, students explore the different ways man has searched for God in the context of different religions, and especially different religious movements (A.8.3). That same year, students are encouraged to research and compare the interpretations of suffering and evil in Christianity and in other religions and worldviews. Although there is no explicit mention of religions in the outcome C.8.1., the issue of prejudices

that exist against people is discussed, encouraging students to understand and properly behave towards people who are different (C.8.1). The outcome C.8.3. reads: »Students compare the perceptions of suffering and evil in Christianity and other religions and worldviews, connecting them to the image of man in modern society.« This enables students to expand their knowledge of important existential questions by comparing them with the answers other religions provided to the same question. Students learn about the influence of different religions, especially different religious movements, on today's society, notably in the field of art, within the scope of the outcome D.8.3.

At the secondary school level, the openness of the curriculum towards the religious dimension of intercultural education continues. The first outcome for the first grade of secondary school reads: A.1.1. »Students explain the importance of fundamental life questions and finding answers to them, recognizes man as a religious being, explaining and evaluating man's relationship to God, especially in the writings, science, morality and cult of the great world religions.« Students learn about the answers to various life questions offered by different religions and different worldviews, developing an attitude of respect towards people who do not believe and whose religiosity differs from his own. Although the outcome C.1.1 does not specifically mention other religions, this outcome is also important for the promotion of inter-religious and intercultural education. As part of this outcome, students are encouraged to develop an attitude of acceptance, respect and appreciation for all people in their community. Also in the first grade, as part of the outcome C.1.3, students are encouraged to research and compare the moral and ethical principles of other religions and worldviews, identifying similarities and differences between them. The topic of the relationship between Christianity and other religions, and especially the importance of promoting interreligious dialogue and coexistence, is highlighted within the outcome D.1.2. »Students explain the peculiarities of Christianity in relation to other religions and analyse the attitude of the Catholic Church towards them, recognizing the need for inter-religious dialogue, respect and coexistence.« Therefore, the promotion of dialogue and coexistence, together with factual knowledge, represent the key goals of religious education. In the first grade, students also explore the contributions of the Catholic Church and other religions to the social and cultural life (D.1.3). The importance of recognizing the positive contributions of other religions to concrete social and cultural life is emphasized again. In the 2nd grade, recognizing and understanding the importance of ecumenism is emphasized in the outcome B.2.2. In the domain C, students are encouraged

to explore and understand the connection between fundamental values such as truth, freedom, responsibility and the like, as well as different religious and worldview systems (C.2.3). Within the framework of the outcome A.3.3., 3rd grade students delve into religiosity and morality starting from concrete experiences in contemporary society. The contribution of different religious communities to coexistence and dialogue in contemporary Croatian society is investigated within the scope of the outcome D.3.3. In the 4th grade, within the framework of the outcome A.4.2., students explore different worldviews and religious movements. That way students are provided with an opportunity to acquire the proper criteria for evaluating authentic forms of religiosity and distinguishing it from what is considered fanatical and fundamentalist. They are also enabled to better understand their own religion and the influence of different worldviews and religious movements on contemporary society and culture. Within the context of the outcome A.4.3., students are enabled to further understand the role and importance of religiosity and religions for the life of an individual as well as the entire society. Special emphasis is placed on the exploration of the great world religions' contribution to building a civilization of mutual understanding and respect. In the Religious Education curriculum, students are encouraged not only to understand different religions and their contribution to common life, but also to understand other worldviews and value systems (C.4.3). The contribution of religions to common coexistence, especially in Croatian society, is dealt with more systematically within the outcome D.4.2. which states: »Relying on Christian values, students evaluate the contributions of other religious communities in Croatian society in the process of building a 'society of solidarity' and a 'civilization of love'.« The emphasis is put on recognizing the positive contributions of different religious communities. In addition to topics that explicitly discuss the attitudes towards other religions and members of those religions, a number of other topics also aim to train students to accept differences and recognize everything that connects us.

The curriculum of Catholic Religious Education explicitly promotes knowledge related to other religions on a cognitive, affective and behavioural level within 19 out of a total of 90 outcomes (21%). Moreover, it is necessary to add a certain number of outcomes that do not explicitly mention the attitudes towards other religions, but do mention the attitude towards the neighbour, whoever they may be. As for secondary schools, out of a total of 48 outcomes, 13 explicitly promote knowledge related to other religions on a cognitive, affective and behavioural level (27%). In addition, as in the case of elementary

schools, a certain number of outcomes should also be added as they do not explicitly speak of attitudes towards other religions, but do mention the attitude towards the neighbour, whoever they may be. The number of outcomes that explicitly discuss the attitude towards other religions and members of those religions is continuously growing on the level of secondary schools, when compared to primary schools.

3.3.2. Orthodox Religious Education

When it comes to the outcomes expected to be achieved at the end of each grade, none aim at promoting interreligious and intercultural learning. There are only two exceptions. In grade 8, the outcome C.8.2. reads: »At the end of the eighth year of taking the subject Orthodox Religious Education, within the concept of Theology and life, students highlight freedom of religion as one of the basic, fundamental and human rights.« A more detailed explanation of that outcome is stated in its elaboration: »Students learn about the world's great religious systems and their contribution to the entire civilization.« The second exception is the secondary school outcome C.4.3.: »At the end of the twelfth year of taking the subject Orthodox Religious Education, within the concept of Theology and life, students consolidate the acquired knowledge and experience of 'life in Christ', connecting it with life in a multi-religious society and multicultural world around them.« The elaboration of this outcome highlights that: »Students reject stereotypes and prejudices imposed from outside. They see all people as their siblings – children of one heavenly Father (who is our neighbour).«

The entire curriculum, in all its elements, does not show any particular openness towards contents and goals that could be associated with intercultural education. This closedness of the curriculum towards intercultural aspects of upbringing an education is fairly understandable considering the identity of this subject, which manifests a strong catechetical and liturgical direction and inspiration.

3.3.3. Islamic Religious Education

On the elementary school level, there are only two outcomes that emphasize the importance of achieving intercultural goals in the outcome elaboration, and both are associated with the fifth year of Religious Education. The elaboration of the outcome D.5.1. for grade 5 reads: »Students show interest in ear-

lier revelations and prophets recognized by Islam. Students are made aware of the universality of Islamic revelation and of their tolerance towards other religious traditions.« The elaboration of the outcome D.5.2. reads: »Students propose, design and implement projects that contribute to coexistence and tolerance«. On the secondary school level, there is again a rather small number of outcomes that highlight the importance of intercultural goals. So the outcome C.3.1. for the third grade of high school states that: »Students get acquainted with Islamic viewpoints on coexistence and tolerance in a pluralistic society. Students promote dialogue with members of different nations and religions.«

The curriculum of Islamic Religious Education at the level of basic orientations and goals reveals great sensitivity to the issue of intercultural education. When it comes to the application of those outcomes, this awareness is less noticeable. That means that real-life teachers, who primarily rely on the specified outcomes in the design and implementation of teaching units, they will have less incentive to process content and to apply methods with the aim of achieving intercultural goals.

Conclusion

Based on the comparative analysis of Catholic, Orthodox and Islamic Religious Education curricula, it can be concluded that there are significant differences in the way domains, purposes, goals and outcomes of each individual confessional Religious Education are defined. Out of the three analyzed curricula, the Catholic Religious Education curriculum is the most open to the requirements of intercultural education. The extent to which attention is given to the knowledge of other religions is significantly greater in Catholic Religious Education, when compared to the curricula of Orthodox and Islamic Religious Education. It is also noticeable that the share of outcomes and topics related to knowledge of other religions has increased in comparison with the previous versions of the Catholic Religious Education curriculum. This focus on the religious dimension of intercultural education is clearly and resolutely emphasized at the level of learning purposes, goals and outcomes. In addition to knowledge and understanding, which are regularly highlighted throughout different outcomes, the values of cooperation, dialogue, coexistence, and respect for members of other religions/worldviews are inevitably promoted within the framework of the basic curriculum guidelines. Apart from the cognitive level, the outcomes are also achieved on the affective level, through a concrete attitude towards members of other religions in the students' environ-

ment (class, school). The dimension of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue is becoming an increasingly powerful component of Catholic Religious Education, in line with the conciliar and post-conciliar teachings. In the context of religious pluralism, confessional Religious Education is becoming more thematically open to other confessions and religions, promoting religious learning in which everyone can learn together and from each other. In that sense, this analysis also confirms G. Fioroni's notion that Catholic Religious Education has the opportunity to become a »workshop of interculturality«²⁸ and a true place of dialogue that helps build a more tolerant, peaceful and just life. This claim is based on correlational and interreligious educational didactics, which includes specific contents of interreligious and intercultural learning, important for achieving the goals of intercultural education.²⁹

Orthodox Religious Education, as a school subject, is catechetically conceived, placing liturgical catechization at the centre. In this sense, the curriculum of Orthodox Religious Education does not attach any importance to the goals that are connected with interculturality, ecumenism or interreligious dialogue, neither at the level of purpose, nor at the level of goals or outcomes.

The introductory parts of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum are very promising, but at the level of outcomes, the fundamental directions regarding the promotion of intercultural goals stated in the purpose and domains, are not articulated in an equally strong and clear manner.

Since the Catholic population is predominant in the Republic of Croatia, it is not surprising that the religious education associated with that confession is more open to meeting and accepting others. Members of minority communities are probably more focused on preserving and promoting their own, which needs to survive surrounded by the majority, than on establishing a dialogue with others.

Considering the increasingly strong plurality, young people from different countries, cultures, religions and traditions meet more and more often in Croatian schools. School education, and thus religious education, should facilitate their acquisition of the competencies necessary for successful coex-

²⁸ Cf. Giuseppe FIORONI, Il contributo dell'insegnamento della religione cattolica e degli insegnanti di religione al raggiungimento delle finalità della scuola, in: *Religione Scuola Città*, 12 (2006) 3, 6-18.

²⁹ Cf. Ana Thea FILIPOVIĆ – Denis BARIĆ, Interkulturalna dimenzija obrazovanja i vjeronauka u školama u Europi. Usporedba triju zemalja [Intercultural Dimension of Education and Religious Education in Schools in Europe. Comparison of three countries], in: Ružica RAZUM – Nenad MALOVIĆ – Kristina VUJICA (eds.), *Religijsko obrazovanje u interkulturalnoj Europi. Zbornik radova*, 133-150.

istence. So what requirements should confessional religious education meet in this context? Since the religious dimension of intercultural education implies knowledge, attitudes and skills, besides training students to acquire the religious competence of intercultural education, it is necessary to fill Religious Education classes with the content that enables students to acquire knowledge, build attitudes and develop the skills necessary to meet the other and the different in this modern pluralistic society. Given that Religious Education is the only school subject that systematically promotes religious knowledge, which is an indispensable part of intercultural education, it is essential that every version of Religious Education contributes to the acquisition of competencies that include knowing others, the ability to establish contact and dialogue, and developing community. In addition, considering the need to develop intercultural competences within the school system, as pointed out by European documents, it is necessary to exercise cross-curricular correlation between Religious Education, other school subjects and cross-curricular topics. Such religious education can contribute to conflict management, peace education, or violence prevention. It should also help young people overcome dissociation and fear of strangers, the unknown, the different. It is supposed to bring students closer to other confessions/religions and to teach them how to create links between other confessions/religions and their own confession/religion. Although, on the one hand, the presence of that content in the curriculum still does not guarantee the acquisition of the discussed competencies, the lack of such content in Religious Education curricula, on the other hand, prevents teachers from paying enough attention to that specific content and the related competencies.

Sažetak

**DOPRINOS KONFESIONALNOGA RELIGIJSKOG OBRAZOVANJA
INTERKULTURALNOM ODGOJU I OBRAZOVANJU U REPUBLICI
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Dugo je religijska dimenzija bila zanemariovana u okviru interkulturalnog obrazovanja da bi u posljednja dva desetljeća postala njegov nezaobilazan dio. Do uključivanja religijske dimenzije u interkulturalno obrazovanje došlo je zbog sve prisutnije svijesti o važnosti religijske dimenzije za političku, socijalnu, kulturnu i obrazovnu budućnost Europe te za razvoj kulture zajedničkog života. Sve je očitija potreba produbljivanja znanja o religijskom fenomenu te provođenja međureligijskog odgoja i dijaloga. Temeljni predmet koji sustavno posreduje religijsko znanje u hrvatskome školskom sustavu je konfesionalni vjeronauk.

Cilj istraživanja je analizirati, prikazati i vrednovati elemente koji ukazuju na otvorenost kurikulumata konfesionalnog vjeronauka odgoju za interkulturalnost. Rezultati istraživanja temelje se na komparativnoj analizi kurikulumata katoličkog, pravoslavnog i islamskog vjeronauka. Predmet analize bile su sljedeće kategorije kurikulumata: domene, svrha, ciljevi i ishodi kurikulumata. Iako sva tri kurikulumata pokazuju otvorenost religijskoj dimenziji interkulturalnoga obrazovanja, na razini konkretnih kurikulumskih sadržaja uočava se velika razlika u udjelu ishoda i tema koje se odnose na poznavanje drugih religija te na promicanje međureligijskoga učenja i dijaloga.

Ključne riječi: Islamski vjeronauk; Katolički vjeronauk; kurikulum konfesionalnog vjeronauka; Pravoslavni vjeronauk; religijska dimenzija interkulturalnog obrazovanja.

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