INTRODUCTION

Recently both Switzerland and Germany have witnessed major changes in their religious landscapes. While just a few decades ago the established Protestant and Catholic churches dominated the religious landscapes of these two European countries, today the picture displays an increase in pluralization and individualization of religious beliefs. In particular, religious communities that have gained importance in Switzerland and Germany largely through immigration, but also esoteric religiosity and spirituality, are examples of important societal developments.

Considering that adolescence is the period of life in which religious traditions and conventional value systems are increasingly questioned, it can be assumed that the changes in the religious landscape are of particular importance for adolescent development. Adolescence is accompanied by a questioning of and search for ideas and beliefs in many areas of life, including religious beliefs and values. This orientation process is part of identity development and represents one of the major developmental tasks for adolescents. The question therefore arises of how these changes in the religious landscapes in Switzerland and Germany are mirrored in the lives of young people. Until now, very little research in German-speaking countries has addressed this question.

The present VROID-MHAP-Study\(^1\) is part of a national Swiss research programme on Religion, State, and Society (www.nfp58.ch) and encompasses both an investigation in Switzerland and a corresponding parallel study in Germany. This project aims to investigate the religious

\(^{1}\) Values and Religious Orientations in Relation to Identity Development and Mental Health: Adolescent Perspectives.
beliefs and value systems of young people from a variety of religious communities living in Switzerland and Germany. What do young people today really believe? What role does religion play in their lives and how important are religious beliefs for them? Does religion provide a point of reference for their lives? Or are there other systems that offer young people an orientation during this period of life? How do they feel about living in an increasingly diverse society? These are some of the questions guiding the present research project. Above and beyond the goal to describe different aspects of religion and to present the value orientations of young people, this study aims to understand how religiosity and value systems are connected. Here, such questions are being asked as: Are there typical covariances between religious orientation and value systems? Do religious attitudes support the specific values held by young people? Religiosity and values are important points of orientation in identity development, regardless of whether one identifies with them or rejects them. Thus, the question of how religiosity, value orientation, and identity development are connected is of particular interest.

What roles do religion and value orientation play in young people’s experiences and in the development of their identity? To which extent do adolescents experience their religiosity and religious affiliation as significant factors in their identity? The context in which young people live can be seen as an important factor influencing religiosity, value orientation, and identity development. For this reason, the contextual background is also incorporated into the study: Which attitudes, religious experiences, and religious practices do young people have or follow who have a Christian background, who belong to a non-Christian religious community, or who are not affiliated with any religious organizations? Do young people whose families have lived in Germany or Switzerland differ consistently from those whose families or parents immigrated themselves to Switzerland or Germany? Furthermore, many studies have shown that during this time young people often struggle for psychological stability. Does their religiosity help them in such times? Or might religiosity be an added source of stress in adolescence? Can specific values help young people find stability in their lives or increase their well-being? Such questions linking religiosity and value orientations with mental health are also part of the investigation, for which the longitudinal approach is of particular importance. Through the cohort-sequence design, the aforementioned factors may be investigated as influences on the mental health of adolescents.