

Catholic Religious and Spiritual Identity of Mediterranean Adolescents: Comparing Four Regions in Post-Communist and Western Europe

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Abstract

We investigated religious identity and spiritual profile of adolescents in selected communities of Bosnia, Croatia, Italy and Spain using a standardized questionnaire on three major areas of interest: inner content of religiosity, attitude towards Catholic doctrine and regulations, and the impact of religiosity on daily life. Controlling sample differences by age, socioeconomic status and gender, we tested the significance of differences in attitudes of adolescents in transitional post-Communist societies (rural and small-town Croatia and Bosnia) and western European postmodern culture (Sicily in Italy and Mallorca and Madrid in Spain) by analysis of variance (ANOVA). We tested 1204 adolescents from Franciscan high schools (Sicily and Spain) and public high schools (Bosnia and Croatia). Overall, Spanish youngsters appeared least religious and most socially permissive as they differed significantly from other groups in all three major areas of interest. Bosnian and Croatian adolescents were similar to each other and overall more religiously imbued. Sicilians were most often found between Spaniards on one side and Croatians on the other. The study shows a gradient of increasing religiosity from the West to the East, from Spain to Bosnia and establishes baseline values for the future longitudinal studies of the communities in Bosnia and Croatia.

Key words: Religious and spiritual identity; adolescents; transitional post-Communist societies; inner religiosity

The demise of Communism has greatly affected the former Communist countries. Their political and economic systems changed fundamentally providing more freedom, but less job security, fewer guaranteed medical and pension benefits, and occasionally less personal security. In some countries, particularly those that joined the European Union, the changes facilitated growth in national and personal wealth, but for others major economic transformation is still an awaited goal. As the youth, particularly adolescents, are profoundly sensitive to deep societal changes (Ingelhart/Welzel 2005), it is plausible that the post-Communist transition is affecting the identity of individuals caught in the transition at this particularly impressionable developmental stage. Contrary to the many published studies of socioeconomic changes in post-Communist societies (Nikodem 2006), there are few studies of the consequences of these changes on the formation of identity in adolescents.

Post-Communist transition is affecting the identity of individuals

Issue of the study	<p>In this study we focus on religiosity in adolescent development because religiosity constitutes a hallmark of identity (Erikson 1969). We look for similarities and differences among samples of adolescent youth from Croatia, Northern Bosnia-Herzegovina (henceforth referred to as Bosnia), Italy and Spain. We focused on the communities that share some aspects of rural or small-town tradition (except a group from Madrid) and purportedly traditional educational systems. These countries share their belonging to the European Mediterranean, the long Catholic tradition and, to some extent, the associated cultural background. Though, the selected communities substantively differ in wealth and political history, arguably the main predictors of general social values (Inglehart/Welzel 2005). Croatia and Bosnia were parts of Communist Yugoslavia (until 1991) that nominally allowed freedom of religion, but <i>de facto</i> scorned it as “opium for the masses.” Italy and Spain, however, share a longer history of West European democracy. Therefore purpose of this study is to assess the religious and spiritual status of adolescents in post-Communist Roman Catholic Bosnia and Croatia at the beginning of the 21st century and to compare them to similar contemporary populations in Italy and Spain.</p>
Connection of religion and identity	<p>Adolescence is known to be rife with crises that can accompany the search for <i>personal identity</i> and securing that identity in the face of confusion (Besecke 2005). Erikson (cf. 1968, 1969) emphasized that religion can help explaining existential issues and providing a sense of belonging, both important factors in the process of firming up identity. Later Markstrom-Adams <i>et al.</i> (cf. 1994) demonstrated that higher religious commitment accompanies a higher level of specification of identity, particularly in the area of ideological commitment. Continuing the inquiry, Markstrom-Adams and Smith (cf. 1996) reported a positive association of the “intrinsic religious orientation” with the level of achieved identity, while the “extrinsic [i.e., non-religious] orientation” was predicted the opposite.</p>
Religious values are the crux of individuation	<p>Religion and religious beliefs are parts of adolescents’ need to reconstruct their past and reexamine their previously passively accepted beliefs in the process of individuation. Ultimately this leads to the clear(er) conception of oneself and of the intended goal of individuation, including the distinction between oneself and others. The adolescent resolves the identity crisis by reconsidering the adopted models, values and lifestyles instilled by parents and the sociocultural environment (Dowling <i>et al.</i> 2003). Adolescents desire independence from authority and the escape from protection of those close to them, while at the same time yearn for leadership, <i>i.e.</i>, authority (Živković 2008). Religiosity and religious values are, more often than not, at the crux of individuation. Within this context, adolescents feel lonesome and tend consequently towards a closer relationship with God, who becomes their friend and support in search for identity (King 2003). Hence, a renewed interest of developmental psychologists in the role of adolescent spirituality in the appreciation that many normative developmental characteristics of adolescence may make teenagers more responsive to spiritual exploration is apparent (Good/Willoughby 2008).</p>
	<p>Developmental psychologists suggest that religiosity and spirituality are important developmental assets for adolescents (Crawford/Wright/Masten 2006). In that, scholars often consider spirituality and religiosity as independent of each other. They characterize spirituality as more private thoughts and behavior</p>

like prayer, meditation, and spiritual belief not necessarily connected with a formal religion. On the other hand, they usually define religiosity as behavior within organized religion, such as observing the ritual and sacramental life. However, some argue that the incidence of religiosity and spirituality are highly correlated and that both are associated with positive adjustment (*Zinnbauer/Pargament 2005*). They claim that characterizing religion as solely institutional might neglect the fact that the fundamental objective of every religion is to facilitate personal belief, emotions and experience of the sacred. Similarly, defining spirituality as strictly individual ignores the fact that spiritual experience is greatly facilitated within the context of organizational religion.

Religiosity and spirituality are important developmental assets for adolescents

There is a general consensus among students of religiosity and spirituality that adolescents' capacity of cognition and abstraction allow them to engage in religious and spiritual explorations that result in the commitment to religious belief, atheism or agnosticism (*Roehlkepartain et al. 2006; Spilka et al. 2003*). Among the considerable number of studies affirming the role of adolescent religious commitment, Smith/Denton (cf. 2006) reported that 55 percent of adolescents they studied in the USA reported to having made a personal commitment "to live life for God". Even the 13 percent who considered themselves nonreligious stated their personal commitment to "life for God". The overwhelming evidence for religious and/or spiritual commitments as part of identification is in line with the recent assertions of evolutionary psychology that we are as "programmed" for religious belief (*Soeling/Voland 2002; Bunge 2007*) as we are for language (cf. *Hauser et al. 2002*).

Evidence for religious commitments as part of identification

Proponents of theory of secularization have forecast a weakening or even disappearance of religiosity in modern Western societies (*Berger 1967; Swatos/Cristiano 1999*), but these societies are witnessing a religious awakening, mainly as postmodern religiosity and new spirituality (cf. *Hanegraaff 1996; Heelas 1996; Milbank 2004*). Lippman/Dombrowski Keith (cf. 2006) studied the demographics of spirituality among the youth in 41 countries and found that most are spiritual and religious. They reported statistical support for religious awakening not only in some developing countries, but also among the most industrialized and developed countries like the USA.

Religious awakening

Religion is an important component of collective identity. More than a quarter of a century ago *Tajfel* (cf. 1981) argued that collective identity permeates the concept of the self, which derives from the familiarity with and attitude towards the membership of the group. Thus, it does not come as a surprise that the religious identity in the studied Mediterranean communities partakes in the respective national and cultural identities (*Živković et al. 1995*). Given the forces of postmodern spirituality, broadly available through the modes of electronic communication (e.g., www.religioustolerance.org), the question is as to the extent the traditional religious sentiments resist the forces of modernization, individuation and subjectivization of religion. We are interested in the European Mediterranean, particularly in Bosnia and Croatia, where numerous (geo)political and social changes in the latter half of the 20th century may have impacted the otherwise traditional Catholic communities.

Religion is an important component of collective identity

To answer the question above, we designed this study as the test of the following hypotheses: (i) Religiosity among Mediterranean adolescents follows the

- Study was designed to test three hypotheses
- developed Christian nations in the trend away from institutional religiosity and towards a more personal experience of the transcendental; (ii) Based on the particular recent political and socioeconomic changes in rural and small-town Croatia and Bosnia, we postulate that local youth will see religiosity as more meaningful than will the youth in similar communities of the purportedly more secular postmodern Italy and Spain, e.g., Sicily and Mallorca; (iii) Because religious identity in transitional post-Communist societies inevitably contains national and cultural components (*Baloban et al.* 2005), we expect that the studied Catholic adolescents in Croatia and Bosnia will demonstrate greater respect for the institutional doctrine of faith than their counterparts in Italy and Spain.
- Communities were selected for historic and social analogy
- In this study we compare adolescents in communities selected for historic and social analogy. Sicily is known for its conservative Catholicism resulting from its unique hardship since time immemorial (*Benjamin* 2006). The close connection of their Catholic faith and cultural identity has been solidified through centuries of struggle. Although geopolitically and culturally vastly different from Sicily, Spain is similar to some extent in the role of Catholicism in rallying the Spaniards in recapturing *Al Andalus* from the Moors (*Carr* 2001). Not dissimilar in that role is Croatia, the *antemurale Christianitatis* (rampart of Christianity) as Pope Leo X titled her in 1519 (*Magaš* 2008), and Bosnia where Catholicism got solidified as a key element of (Croat) national and cultural identity in the course of centuries under Ottoman Turks (*Hoare* 2007). This key role of religion was apparent as late as the violent breakup of the former Yugoslavia 1990-1995 (*Mojzes* 2000).
- Adolescents growing up in religious environments acquire more orthodox beliefs
- Adolescents growing up in religious environments acquire more orthodox beliefs than their peers living in secular surroundings (*Kelly/Nan Dirk* 1997). In more secular communities/nations, religious life in the family shapes adolescent's beliefs. Interestingly, in more religious communities/nations, familial religiosity is less important than is the national context (*Kelly/Nan Dirk* 1997). The influence of the environment is apparent in Sicilian youth who did not differ from the rest of their Italian peers in inner spirituality, but their more traditional environment fostered a higher respect of the Church as institution (*Trenti* 2003; *Buzzi et al.* 1997).
- Revitalization of religion
- Over the past fifty years, many Croatian scholars (e.g., Bahtijarević, Ćimić, Vrcan, Črpić, Marinović Jerolimov, Goja, Mandarić, Zrinščak and Marinović Bobinac) studied social aspects of religiosity in Croatian adolescents, but psychological aspects of this phenomenon received only sporadic attention (*Marinović Jerolimov* 1995; *Zrinščak/Črpić/Kušar* 2000; *Mandraić* 2000; *Marinović Bobinac* 2000; *Bezinović et al.* 2005). Pertinent studies revealed that the appearance of modern currents towards individualized and subjectivized religiosity in contemporary Croatian society is rather similar with the trends in Europe and North America. The countries of Eastern Europe and some countries in Central Europe, especially post-Communist ones, find themselves amidst a similar, but not yet fully understood process that many authors consider a revitalization of religion (*Marinović-Bobinac* 2000). Croatia and Bosnia, where religious life had been suppressed for nearly forty years, are expected to be in the latter group.
- To understand the forces that shape religiosity of contemporary adolescents in the rural and small-town Croatia and Bosnia, this study compares them with

adolescents in Sicily and Spain. In that, we have had three general goals. First, we wished to characterize the religious identity and spiritual profile of adolescents in Županja (Northeastern Croatia) and Dubrovnik (Southern Croatia), Orašje (a Catholic enclave in Northern Bosnia), Syracuse (Sicily), Mallorca and Madrid (Spain). Understanding that a full match for all external factors is impossible, we selected for comparison students exposed to similar school curriculum, Catholic education, and overall Mediterranean environment. We collected the data by use of a standardized questionnaire on inner religiosity, attitude toward the Church doctrine and regulations, and the effects of religiosity on daily life. Second, we embarked on the study of the extent of difference among the samples in realization of religious identity. Finally, we assessed the differences in their attitude toward institutional Church. The results will provide a cross-section of the current status of the studied aspects of religiosity in the selected groups of adolescents, but they also establish baseline values for the longitudinal follow-up of spirituality and religiosity in Bosnia and Croatia.

Three goals to understand the forces that shape religiosity of adolescents

Methods

Subjects and Procedure

The data were collected in 2005 using a questionnaire, which the adolescents filled in voluntarily in public secondary schools in Županja (population: 5.000), Dubrovnik (49.000) and Orašje (3.600) that offered one hour per week of elective Catholic catechism attended by most students. These students were compared to those in Franciscan private schools in urban centers (Palma de Mallorca, 380.000; Madrid, 3,2 million; Syracuse, 120.000) that catered to students from families with preference for Catholic education. It is noteworthy, however, that these schools also taught Catechism for one hour per week and that they followed the general curriculum prescribed for secondary schools.

A school psychologist, trained in the use of the questionnaire, collected the data during regular instruction hours. Students were assured of the strict anonymity of the results. Forty-five minutes was allotted to responding to the questions about personal values, conflict situations, and 39 variables that probe the religious orientation. Student demographics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics of participants in the study

Country	Participants	Male to female ratio	Age [(mean (SD))]
Orašje	391	1,14	16,34 (1,00)
Županja, Dubrovnik	168	0,79	16,11 (1,10)
Syracuse	203	0,99	17,06 (1,04)
Mallorca, Madrid	442	1,14	15,02 (0,80)
Total	1204	1,02	15,94 (0,35)

The groups did not differ in gender composition, but they did differ from each other (except between Orašje and Županja/Dubrovnik) by age ($F = 251,49$, $p <$

0,01). Consequently, for all analyses we used analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the significance of differences among adolescents in the four regions with age as a covariate. We tested the homogeneity of variance, *F*-ratio and finally applied the multiple comparison tests (Bonferroni test for equal variances and Tamhane test for unequal variances). Differences between groups were considered statistically significant for values of $p < 0,05$. In addition, we assessed the probability of gender difference in responses for each area of interest by the two-sided Student's *t*-test for independent samples.

Economic and demographic characteristics were recorded

Economic and demographic characteristics of subjects were also recorded. This included gender, age, place of birth, and 12 indicators of material wellbeing (the number of automobiles, television sets, cell phones, *etc.*, in the household). The questionnaire probed the economic status, rather than the typical variables of socioeconomic status (SES), using seven instruments taken from the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study (Kunter *et al.* 2003). We inferred the SES of respondents based on their economic status; the resulting scale of SES exhibited satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0,63$). Analysis of socioeconomic and demographic characteristics demonstrated that the subjects in the four communities lived under different socioeconomic conditions ($F = 103,2, p < 0,01$). Spanish youth were in the most favorable material position (owning on average 10,3 of 12 analyzed indicators), followed by the Italians and Croatians (9,7 indicators), and Bosnians (8,1 indicators). As the samples were not selected randomly, the results cannot be generalized without restrictions to the whole adolescent populations in their respective countries. Although the groups cannot be considered to be representative of their respective countries, for brevity often we refer to them in the text by their national affiliation.

Questionnaire

Students were asked to fill in the "Questionnaire on the Dimensions of Religiosity and its Impact on Daily Life," based on Glock/Stark (cf. 1965, 1966) and King/Hunt (cf. 1967, 1969) as adapted by Ćorić (cf. 1998) excluding some questions from the original questionnaire by Glock and Stark. The questionnaire probed three distinct areas of religiosity: (i) *inner content of religiosity*, (ii) *attitude toward the Church doctrine and regulations*, and (iii) *the impact of religiosity on daily life and behavior*. In each area, the original questionnaire encompassed (sub)scales whence we selected three for inner content of religiosity (*personal experience of God, private devotion, building of religious knowledge and belief*), one for the scale of *agreement with the doctrine of faith*, and four for the impact of religiosity on everyday life (*cognitive depth of religious conviction, critical attitude towards religious authorities, critical attitude towards God and religious openness*).

Three distinct areas of religiosity

Glock (cf. 1962) defined the inner content of religiosity as "items of spiritual experience" that refer to the sense of connection with God, belief and communication with transcendental reality as well as the desire to penetrate one's own faith in the most informed manner possible. Agreement with the doctrine of

faith consists of metrics whereby *Glock* attempted to measure the intellectual dimension of faith. Assessing the impact of religiosity on everyday life includes essentially a description of religious experience as motivating force giving meaning to life (*Glock/Stark* 1966); it is assessed on the scale of *cognitive depth of religious belief*. On the other hand, the scales of *critical attitude towards God* and of *critical attitude towards religious authorities* measure the reaction to injustice in society and nature (*King/Hunt* 1972) and the attitude to Church officials (*King/Hunt* 1969), respectively. Finally, the scale of *religious openness* attempts to measure extrinsic religiosity to determine exclusivity, intolerance and rigidity of traditional belief (*Allport* 1959).

In an analysis of *Ćorić's* questionnaire (cf. 1998), *Kutle* (cf. 1999) found that 52 out of 126 original questions/items were most reliable and internally consistent (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0,97$). Consequently, of these 52 questions we singled out 39 items for an abbreviated version, representing all three areas in the original *Glock* and *Stark* questionnaire. The response to each item uses a scale from 1 to 4 (1=Never, 2=Sometimes, 3=Often, 4=Regularly), or for scales of agreement with the doctrines of faith, critical attitude towards religious authorities and religious openness (1=I do not agree at all, 2=I somewhat agree, 3=I mainly agree, 4=I agree completely). With one exception, all eight scales exhibited satisfactory internal consistency; Cronbach's α value ranged from 0,49 (for Critical attitude towards God), to 0,66 (Critical attitude towards religious authorities), 0,76 (Religious openness), 0,77 (Agreement with the doctrine of faith), 0,77 (Building religious knowledge and belief), 0,85 (Private devotion), 0,85 (Personal experience of God) and 0,89 (Cognitive depth of religious belief).

39 items were chosen, representing all three areas in the original *Glock* and *Stark* questionnaire

Results

The mean values and standard deviations of students' answers are displayed in Supplemental Table 1, while the results of statistical analysis of differences between regions on the scales are shown in Table 2. What follows is a breakdown of the findings by major areas of interest: inner contents of religiosity, agreement with the doctrine of faith, and impact of religiosity on everyday life. We studied each major area by analyzing specific sub-areas with the intention to provide enough detail to construct a compounded and multifaceted view. As SES could impact religious identity, we tested the impact of differences in SES on the perceived differences among regions by the use of SES indicators as a covariate. We found that the apparent differences among regions (Table 2) did not result from the differences in SES. Table 2 reveals significant differences between the communities in all scales.

Supplemental Table 1. Mean values and standard deviations (in parentheses) of answers to the questionnaire by students in Bosnia, Croatia, Italy and Spain.

Area of interest	Average score (standard deviation)			
	Bosnia	Croatia	Italy	Spain
Personal experience of God				
There are situations when I feel the influence and presence of God.	2,4 (0,7)	2,4 (0,7)	2,4 (0,8)	1,7 (0,8)
God is the power which stands behind all creatures.	3,0 (0,9)	3,0 (0,9)	2,7 (1,0)	2,0 (0,9)
I feel that God is a being with Whom I can establish contact.	2,8 (1,0)	2,9 (0,9)	2,6 (1,0)	1,9 (1,0)
I feel that God knows me and protects me.	3,1 (0,9)	3,1 (0,9)	2,9 (1,0)	2,1 (1,0)
Private devotion				
When I experience something nice and joyful, I thank God for it.	3,3 (0,8)	3,2 (0,8)	2,8 (1,0)	2,2 (1,0)
If conversation with God is prayer, then I pray often.	2,9 (1,0)	3,0 (0,9)	2,6 (1,0)	2,0 (1,1)
I have a personal experience of a merciful God.	2,2 (0,8)	2,0 (0,9)	2,8 (1,0)	2,2 (1,0)
When I make a mistake, I ask God for forgiveness.	3,1 (0,9)	3,1 (0,8)	2,6 (1,0)	2,1 (1,0)
Sometimes faith motivates me to take up works of self-sacrifice.	2,2 (0,8)	1,9 (0,9)	2,2 (0,9)	2,0 (0,9)
I pray to God when I am in trouble or when I need something desperately.	3,1 (0,9)	3,1 (0,9)	2,6 (1,0)	2,2 (1,1)
The members of our family pray together.	2,1 (0,8)	1,8 (0,7)	1,7 (0,9)	1,4 (0,8)
Building religious knowledge and belief				
How often do you read books of religious nature?	1,8 (0,8)	1,6 (0,8)	1,7 (0,9)	1,4 (0,8)
How often do you discuss with family the religious aspects of life?	2,0 (0,8)	1,9 (0,7)	2,0 (0,8)	1,7 (0,9)
How often do you read about your religion?	2,3 (0,8)	2,0 (0,8)	2,5 (0,8)	2,6 (1,0)
How often do you read the Bible?	2,0 (0,8)	1,9 (0,7)	1,6 (0,8)	1,4 (0,7)
Do you participate in courses related to religious issues?	1,7 (0,9)	1,8 (1,0)	1,5 (0,9)	1,4 (0,8)
Agreement with the doctrine of faith				
In my religion I find motivation and strength to live a more honest and fruitful life.	2,7 (0,9)	2,5 (0,9)	2,5 (1,0)	2,0 (1,0)
God is creator of the Universe and life on Earth.	3,6 (0,8)	3,5 (0,8)	3,3 (0,9)	2,4 (1,1)
God reveals Himself in Bible.	3,4 (0,8)	3,3 (0,8)	3,2 (0,9)	2,5 (1,1)
Catholic position on contraception should not be respected.	2,4 (1,0)	2,6 (1,0)	2,8 (1,0)	2,2 (1,1)
God loves humans and forgives their sins even when they are not faithful to Him.	3,5 (0,8)	3,5 (0,7)	3,3 (0,9)	2,7 (1,1)
There is life after death.	3,6 (0,7)	3,5 (0,8)	2,9 (2,9)	2,6 (1,0)

Cognitive depth of religious belief				
Because of my religion I live a more satisfied and better life.	2,8 (0,9)	2,7 (1,0)	2,4 (1,0)	1,9 (0,9)
Religion is very important to me because it gives me answers about the real sense of life.	2,8 (0,9)	2,7 (1,0)	2,4 (1,1)	1,9 (0,9)
My religion helps me endure the difficulties of everyday life.	2,9 (0,9)	2,9 (0,9)	2,6 (1,0)	1,9 (1,0)
In making small decisions each day, I ask God what he wants me to do.	2,6 (0,9)	2,4 (1,0)	2,1 (0,9)	1,7 (0,9)
Whatever I do, I am trying to act according to the principles of my religious belief.	2,4 (0,8)	2,2 (0,9)	1,9 (0,9)	1,5 (0,8)
Critical attitude towards religious authorities				
It is easy to deal with God! The problems are his religious representatives and religious institutions on earth.	2,7 (0,9)	3,0 (0,9)	2,9 (1,0)	2,6 (1,1)
In modern society clergy are not well prepared for their work and some priests are not the best witnesses of faith.	2,6 (0,8)	3,0 (0,8)	3,0 (0,9)	2,6 (1,0)
Good many religious functionaries take care primarily of their personal interests.	2,6 (0,9)	2,9 (0,9)	2,7 (0,9)	2,6 (1,0)
Critical attitude towards God				
Sometimes I think that God is severe and unjust.	1,8 (0,7)	1,8 (0,7)	2,4 (0,9)	2,0 (0,9)
Sometimes I think that God is not taking care of humans.	1,7 (0,8)	1,8 (0,8)	1,9 (0,8)	2,0 (0,9)
Sometimes I am angry with God when I see that children and innocent people suffer.	1,9 (0,8)	1,8 (0,8)	2,5 (0,9)	2,1 (1,0)
Religious openness				
My religion is the only true religion.	3,0 (1,0)	2,7 (1,0)	2,3 (1,1)	2,1 (1,1)
All people should accept my religion.	2,4 (1,0)	2,0 (0,9)	2,3 (1,1)	2,5 (1,2)
Every honest person belongs to a religion.	2,6 (1,1)	2,2 (1,0)	2,6 (1,1)	2,0 (1,0)
People who do not believe in God will not have eternal life.	2,6 (1,0)	2,2 (0,9)	2,1 (1,1)	1,7 (0,9)
Every authentic religion embodies God's Spirit.	3,3 (0,8)	3,3 (0,7)	3,1 (0,9)	2,6 (1,1)
Among many roles of religion, the most important is nurturing our cultural tradition.	2,8 (1,0)	2,5 (0,9)	2,7 (0,9)	2,3 (1,0)

Table 2. Average scale score for respondents from four countries and the results of the analysis of variance with age as covariate.

Area of interest ^a	Average factor score				F
	Bosnia ^b	Croatia	Italy	Spain	
Personal experience of God	0,34	0,34	0,10	-0,83	109,82
Private devotion	0,28	0,14	-0,03	-0,66	66,78
Building religious knowledge and belief	0,00	-0,22	-0,19	-0,43	18,40
Agreement with doctrine of the faith	0,47	0,38	0,11	-0,71	105,93
Cognitive depth of religious belief	0,44	0,27	-0,10	-0,72	110,69
Critical attitude towards religious authorities	-0,07	0,40	0,26	-0,13	12,67
Critical attitude towards God	-0,45	-0,49	0,28	-0,07	37,88
Religious openness	0,38	-0,07	0,01	-0,45	50,84

a For all areas, $df = 3$ and $p < 0,01$

b For brevity, the community of Orašje is referred to as “Bosnia”, Županja and Dubrovnik as “Croatia”, Syracuse as “Italy” and Mallorca and Madrid as “Spain”.

Inner contents of religiosity

Personal experience of God. Spanish subjects scored the lowest on this scale relative to other three groups, while Croatians and Bosnians scored the highest and nearly identically (Table 2). The respective average scores (range: 1,7–2,1; Supplemental Table 1) demonstrate that Spanish adolescents rarely experienced God personally. Analogous scores for respondents in Croatia, Bosnia and Italy ranged from 2.4 to 3.1 indicating more frequent personal experience of the Divine.

Multiple comparison tests revealed statistically significant differences between Spaniards and all others and between Italians and Bosnians implying that Spanish adolescents connected with God less frequently than the three other groups and that young Italians connected with God less frequently than young Bosnians. Analyzing the data across all four communities by age only, we found that the youngest subjects scored the lowest on this scale ($F=8,81$; $p<0,01$), *i.e.*, growing up was accompanied with the growing experience of the Divine. Responses did not differ by gender ($t=-1,557$; $df=1179$, $sig=0,120$).

Private devotion. This scale measures feelings of faith and communication with the transcendental. Again, Spaniards scored at the bottom and were followed by Italians and Croatians. Bosnians were at the top of the scale. Interestingly, the replies scoring lowest across all groups were to the statements “The members of our family pray together” (Supplemental Table 1; range: 1,4 to 2,1) and “Sometimes faith motivates me to take up works of self-sacrifice.” (range: 1,9 to 2,2). The best embraced among statements was “When I experience something nice and joyful, I thank God for that” (average score 2,2 for Spaniards to 3,3 for Bosnians).

Multiple comparison tests confirmed the statistically significant differences between Spanish adolescents and all others, and between adolescents in Italy and Bosnia. Specifically, Spanish adolescents felt faith and communicated with God less frequently than other groups. Furthermore, Italian adolescents prac-

ticed in private devotion significantly less frequently than Bosnian adolescents. On this scale, differences between males and females were significant ($t=-2,788$; $df=1170$, $p<0,01$): Females practiced in private devotion more often than males.

Building of religious knowledge and belief. In keeping with the above results, on this scale Spaniards scored on average the lowest. Croatians and then Italians followed. Again, Bosnians scored the highest. Average scores in Supplemental Table 1 indicate the most infrequent activities: attending religious seminars (range: 1.4 to 1.8) and reading books on religious issues (1.4 to 1.8). Only in one item did the average values exceed 2.0 — “How often do you read about religion?” Paradoxically, this question elicited a much warmer response that did the closely related question “How often do you read books of religious nature?” All the other statements scored low (1.4 to 2.0), which indicates a weak/infrequent desire to deepen faith through information. However, it is interesting that Spanish youth exhibited the largest discrepancy between answers to the two questions, and that it is they who actually scored the highest among groups in response to the latter question, *i.e.* they read about religion the most frequently. In general, adolescents in all groups were quite unenthusiastic about the desire to deepen faith through study and information; they were not much interested in attending religious seminars and reading about religion.

Building of religious knowledge and belief

We established significant differences between Spanish adolescents and those in other three countries who did not differ significantly among themselves in the frequency of activities deepening faith through information. Analyzing by age only, we noted that the older the subjects, the higher involvement in religious studies ($F=6,53$; $p<0,01$). The genders did not differ ($t=0,199$, $df=1188$, $sig=0,842$).

Significant differences between Spanish adolescents and the other three countries

Agreement with the doctrine of faith

The emerging rank order starting with Spain (scoring the lowest) to Italy and Croatia to Bosnia (scoring the highest) appears in the replies on this scale as well (Table 2). Croatian and Bosnian adolescents agreed with the official Church doctrine more than did their Spanish peers. The most accepted assertions were that “God is the Creator of Universe and life on Earth” and that “there is life after death” (Supplemental Table 1).

Emerging rank order starting with Spain (scoring the lowest) to Italy and Croatia to Bosnia (scoring the highest)

Respondents in all four communities agreed little more than they disagreed with the rejection of Church position on contraception. Contrary to their attitude on other issues, on this topic Spaniards agreed with the Church more than others, while the Italians found the Church position least acceptable. Statistically significant differences are evident between Spanish adolescents and others, and between Italian adolescents and others. There were no differences between Bosnia and Croatia. Specifically, this means that Spaniards agreed less than others with the assertions of the doctrine of faith. Furthermore, Italian adolescents agreed less than did their Croatian and Bosnian peers. Female respondents were more in agreement with Church doctrine than were males ($t = -2,734$, $df= 1170$, $p < 0,01$).

Impact of religiosity on everyday life

Cognitive depth of religious conviction

Cognitive depth of religious conviction. The analysis of this factor is intended to capture the motivational dimension of faith. Again, Spanish adolescents scored the lowest, while the subjects in Bosnia scored the highest, with the adolescents in Italy and Croatia in between (Table 2). The responses to pertinent queries indicate rather infrequent “reliance on faith”, particularly among Spaniards and Italians (Supplemental Table 1). The statement “In whatever I do, I am trying to act according to the principles of my religious belief” received the lowest approval in all groups, while all accepted the assertion “My religion helps me endure the difficulties of everyday life” best.

Multiple comparison tests demonstrated that Spanish adolescents relied on faith as a motivational force significantly less than others. Italian adolescents differed from all others as well. Bosnians and Croatians again scored the highest and were indistinguishable. Again, the youngest subjects scored the lowest ($F = 10,93$; $p < 0,01$) implying that faith-based motivation increased with age. Genders did not differ from each other ($t = -0,868$; $df = 1187$, $sig = 0,386$).

Critical attitude towards religious authorities

Critical attitude towards religious authorities. Spanish subjects scored the lowest and were followed by those in Bosnia, Italy and, lastly, Croatia. This means that Croatian adolescents, on average, were most critical toward religious authorities, while their Spanish peers were least critical. Overall, adolescents in all four countries were rather critical towards religious authorities (range: 2.6 to 3.0), *i.e.*, adolescents in all four groups were somewhat critical towards clergy, differing only in degree.

Multiple comparison tests indicated no significant difference between Bosnians and Spaniards and between Italians and Croatians. This indicates that Croatians and Italians were more critically oriented towards religious officials than those Spaniards and Bosnians. There was no difference between boys and girls ($t = -1,026$; $df = 1190$, $sig = 0,305$).

Critical attitude towards God

Critical attitude towards God. The attitude towards Church authority is not mimicked by the attitude towards the Divine. In fact, adolescents were not very prone to criticize God. Croatians were the lowest on this scale, followed by Bosnians, Spaniards and Italians (Table 2). The respective average scores are rather low, particularly for Croatia, Bosnia and Spain, *i.e.*, their adolescents for the most part criticized God rarely. Croatian adolescents criticized God the least (let us recall that they were the most critical towards clergy), while the most critical were young Italians. Multiple comparison tests revealed statistically significant differences between Spaniards and all others, and between Italians and all others. This means that Spanish and Italian adolescents criticized God, although rarely, significantly more frequently than did Croatian and Bosnian adolescents. Females and males did not differ ($t = 1,053$; $df = 1187$, $sig = 0,293$).

Religious openness

Religious openness. The questions pertinent to this area probed religious exclusivity and intolerance. Spanish adolescents scored the lowest; Croatians, Italians and Bosnians followed (Table 2). Overall, adolescents were neither particularly

closed nor were they particularly open towards the “other” (Supplemental Table 1). Nonetheless, it is interesting that Spanish adolescents agreed more than the others with the assertion that “all people should accept our religion” (average score: 2.5) and less than others with the assertion “the spirit of God is in every religion” (average score: 2.6). However, when we consider the scale as a whole, it is actually Spanish adolescents who scored the lowest on the scale of religious openness, *i.e.*, they demonstrated the greatest religious openness. Significant differences were identified among all groups except between Croatians and Italians. Analyzing by age, it transpired that tolerance to other religious beliefs grew with age ($F = 4,06$; $p < 0,01$). Again, there was no difference between genders ($t = -1,248$; $df = 1167$, $sig = 0,212$).

Discussion

An important aspect of growing up is striving to find the meaning of the world and one’s own role in it. Developmental psychologists stress the importance of religion in this search for identity. *Erikson* (cf. 1969) postulated that adolescents find meaning, sense of order, and place in the world within the overreaching ideological context where they form beliefs, worldviews, and religious values. *Elkind* (cf. 1970) emphasized that cognitive abilities coupled with the desire to personalize religion enable the adolescents to reach introspectively for an understanding of religious components of their personalities. Religion offers moral principles and general human values upon which adolescents build their own personal value systems. Therefore, within a religious system, adolescents acquire a sense of individuality, a key aspect of personal identity.

Importance of religion in the search for identity

To understand better the role of current socioeconomic and (geo)political circumstances in the formation of adolescent religiosity (as a hallmark of overall identity) in adolescents in the rather poorly investigated rural and small-town communities in post-Communist and post-war Bosnia and Croatia, we undertook a comparative analysis of adolescent Catholic religiosity in four Mediterranean regions. The results demonstrate considerable similarities, but also important differences in religiosity of adolescents in the selected communities of Bosnia, Croatia, Italy and Spain. While we are confident that the results are interpreted based on an adequate analysis of influencing factors, we must emphasize the possible limitations of the study. The main potential limitation resides in the differences among the general character of the studied communities. For example, the fresh post-war experience of Orašje, Županja and Dubrovnik (all heavily bombed during the war 1991–1995) is impossible to match in any community in Italy or Spain. As our predominant interest resides in social and spiritual development of youth in Bosnia and Croatia with their specific post-war and post-Communist experience, we sought to match them with groups from the generally similar environments (Mediterranean, Catholic, school environment, religious instruction), but could not circumvent the differences in economic status. For example, the gross domestic products (GDP) per capita (data for the year 2000, in US\$) were: Spain, 25,100; Italy, 28,600; Croatia, 12,400, and

Limitations of the study

Bosnia-Herzegovina, 6,800. Thus, it is possible, even probable, that some of our interpretations will benefit from further testing in the future.

Spanish adolescence differed from other groups in all three major areas of interest

Overall, the studied Spanish youngsters appeared least religious and most socially permissive as they differed (statistically significantly) from other groups in all three major areas of interest (inner content of religiosity, agreement with the doctrine of faith and impact of religiosity on daily life). This is in line with recent evidence for Spanish adolescents as increasingly consumerist, focused on instant gratification and with little sense of altruism (*Casas et al.* 2007). This is not at all surprising in view of the recently published statistic that self-proclaimed affiliation with the Church among Spanish adolescents dropped from 75 percent to 50 percent in the decade since 1996 (*Herrero* 2006). According to the researchers, Spanish youth blame this rate of defection on the ecclesiastic focus on material wealth, interference in politics and conservative attitude towards sexuality. Importantly, this is apparent in the respondents' comparatively low level of personal experience of the Divine, of religious devotion and of interest in religious education. Religion matters less in their daily life and they are somewhat more open to religious "others." Unexpectedly, they are more accepting of the Church attitude to birth control and least judgmental of Church authority and clergy. One can speculate that this reflects a higher level of confusion among younger adolescents about sexual matters and, possibly, the understanding that unplanned pregnancy may present a major impediment to the realization of plans for the future. If this is true, Catholic doctrine would provide them with a (self-)justification for a more conservative position and a tool of resistance to peer pressure. At the same time, their critical attitude towards the Church and clergy could reflect their indifference to the ecclesiastic world, similarly as observed recently in the United States (*D'Antonio et al.* 2007).

Bosnian and Croatian adolescents appeared more religiously imbued and more socially conservative

On the other side, rural and small-town Bosnian and Croatian adolescents appeared overall more religiously imbued and more socially conservative. This transpires from their similar inner religiosity and generally high acceptance of the Church doctrine. This is likely related to the role of Catholicism as of a key element of national and cultural identity (as the *differentia specifica* relative to the neighborly Christian Orthodox Serbs and Bosnian Slav Muslims). This notion is buttressed by a recent study that found that, among ten European post-Communist countries, 82,2 percent of Croatians declared themselves as Catholics, trailing only Poland (*Nikodem* 2006). Among Croats in Bosnia, where they are a minority among Serbs and Muslims, there is even a tendency to equate Catholic religiosity with national identity (*Šagi* 1997), a phenomenon understandable from the vantage point of the critical role the Church played in the preservation of Croat identity for more than five centuries of Ottoman, Serb and Communist domination (*Cifrić* 1995). Consequently, with the fall of Communism, the Church has established a comparatively strong social position and influence (*Nikodem* 2006).

It is noteworthy that the lower levels of religiosity in Spanish and Italian adolescents (attending private Catholic schools) in comparison to Bosnians and Croatians (in public schools) indicate that the formal status of the school (Catholic v. public) did not affect appreciably the observed differences among regions. In fact, one would expect even larger differences in religiosity if, for

example, Spanish and Italian youth attended public schools. Parenthetically, one might question whether Catholic and private schools in the studied regions differ only in name.

The cross-cultural differences parallel to some degree those found in studies of values. In the *Atlas of European Values*, Halman, Luijkx and van Zundert (cf. 2005) assessed several aspects of religious experience and practice (attendance to service, praying, trust in Church, importance of God, traditional beliefs, secularization). Here too Spaniards trust the Church least and give low importance to God. Inglehart and Baker (cf. 2000) reported that between 1981 and 1998 many Italians lost the sense of importance of God in their lives; concomitantly, in post-Communist Latvia, Russia, and Slovenia the trend was reverse. Unexpectedly, in the same period Spaniards experienced a marked increase in appreciation of religious values.

Overgeneralization about religiosity should be avoided, as Bosnian youth are just as lenient towards the Church and clergy as their apparently more secular Spanish peers, while Croatians and Sicilians are most critical. This interesting attitudinal difference between Croatians and Bosnians can be rationalized by the aforementioned crucial role of the Church in preservation of Croat identity in Bosnia; Croatians and Italians—more typically—criticize the Church for its wealth and meddling in politics and the clergy for their inability to resist materialism, secularization, and individualism (Mandarić 2000; Montesperelli 1990). In the same vein, Croatians are more accepting of the “other,” again an observation in line with the fact that Catholicism in Croatia is perceived less as a key determinant of national identity than in Bosnia. Sicilians are most often in the middle between Spaniards on one side and Bosnians and Croatians on the other, possibly because Sicily is currently transitioning from a patriarchal traditional society into postmodernity (Schneider/Schneider 2006).

The general picture that emerges from this study is one of a gradient of increasing religiosity from the West to the East, from Spain to Bosnia. Likewise, it is one of a gradient of decreasing wealth, from Spain to Bosnia. And last but not least, it reflects the differences in the political history, as Croatia and Bosnia only recently switched from a Communist to a democratic system. Also, the picture paints Spanish adolescents as most consistent in their (comparatively secular) attitude towards religion to the more transitional and less settled religious identity in Sicily. The transitional position of Sicily can be inferred from the fact that local adolescents were more similar to Spaniards in some parameters and to Croatian and Bosnian in others and, intriguingly, from their unique “anger” with God (where, otherwise, West and East did not differ at all). Finally, the youth in post-Communist Bosnia and Croatia appeared inhomogeneous in their differing attitudes towards authority and religious exclusivity.

Religious and spiritual profile of contemporary adolescents, especially in West European countries is formed to a great extent by social forces of postmodernity. Sociologists note the importance of modernization as a key determinant of religious identity and religiosity of the young (Inglehart/Welzel 2005). First and foremost, they emphasize secularization characterized by the marked reduction, or even disappearance, of social, institutional and individual importance of religion, and transition from the religious world of traditional society to

Critical attitudes
towards the church

Increasing religiosity
from the West to
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to Bosnia

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the non-religious world of modern society (*Swatos/Cristiano* 1999). In this process, greatly important is individualization of religion, *i.e.*, separation of individuals from religious tradition manifest in the decline of religious practices and abandonment of pertinent systems of values and faith (*Cnaan/Gelles/Sinha* 2004). Essential to this is subjectivization of religion, a component of postmodern religiosity, as a factor in the construction of religious identity expressed by strengthening of personal choice and diminishing influence of religious institutions (*Smith/Danton* 2005). In that, contemporary Western Europe and North America are characterized by individualization that constantly increases individual autonomy in personal values and standards free of influence of religion and traditional moral norms. It is not surprising, thus, that adolescents in the two studied post-Communists communities are most traditional in the extent of structured spirituality (as evidenced by the parameters of personal experience of God and devotion).

Individualization of religion

Besides modernization in the sociological sense, the cultural ambiance of modern society with its primacy of the individual has significantly influenced religiosity, religious identity and spirituality of contemporary adolescents. The philosophy of “therapeutic individualism” is that the individual is the source and standard of authentic moral knowledge and authority, and only self-realization provides meaning to life. Personal experience is the fundamental criterion of authenticity, righteousness and truth. In this context, traditional and religious demands and institutions are considered hindrances in the attempts to achieve self-realization (*Smith/Denton* 2005). The postmodern culture, characterized by the communication revolution (Internet, cell phones, cable and satellite television) and the distancing of adolescents from adults, place adolescents in a specific position with regard to personal choice of all values, especially religious ones. Therefore, in postmodern culture, as emphasized by *Ester, Halman* and *De Moor* (cf. 1994), values are not dominated by institutional religion but by individual choice, while self-development and personal happiness become guiding principles for the activity of the individual. Authority of the individual is assuming an increasingly important role in determining the meaning of religion in individual life, while the authority of institutional Church and Church hierarchy is diminishing (*Besecke* 2005). Taken together, we hypothesized that Italy and Spain, as typical post-modern countries, are overall less religious than Croatia and Bosnia that, according to criteria by *Inglehart* (cf. 1997), are regarded more modern than post-modern. Indeed, our results are generally in line with this postulate, although they also indicate the role of local circumstances as Sicily and Spain differed from each other in numerous parameters despite the overall comparable level of material wellbeing, social development and access to information.

Aspect of ‘therapeutic individualism’

Italy and Spain are overall less religious than Croatia and Bosnia

Inasmuch as we attempted to match the four groups of adolescents by age, gender, and education, the final results indicate some demographic differences. This necessitates a discussion of the influence of “microscopic” factors, *e.g.*, different age of the four groups. In view of the above discussion of progressive detachment of spirituality from institutionalized religion and individualization of spirituality in the course of adolescence, it is intriguing that Spaniards, full two critical years younger than Sicilians, were much more secularized by all

Influence of different age of the four groups

measured criteria, except in their attitude to the Church doctrine on birth control. While the former cannot be explained differently than by the influence of the more secularized environment for Spanish youth, the latter is most likely caused by the age difference, *i.e.*, the 15-year old Spaniards are less sexually active than their two year older Italian counterparts. It is noteworthy that female respondents, analyzed across all four samples, were more conservative relative to birth control than their male peers. This is in line with the more permissive attitude towards sexuality in (and by) males engrained in all (but not only!) Mediterranean societies.

The higher level of secularization in Spanish adolescents is intriguing also because both they and Sicilians attended similar Franciscan high schools. While this study has not been designed to probe the role of educational institutions in the formation of spiritual identity, the clear (and counterintuitive) difference in religious attitudes of the younger Spaniards and older Italians opens both new areas of investigation, but also poses questions about the intent, role and effectiveness of the respective Catholic educational institutions.

During the past decade, developmental psychologists have increasingly emphasized the importance and positive impact of religion and spirituality in the development of adolescent identity (*Dowling et al.* 2003; *Benson/Roehlke-partain/Rude* 2003). Earlier studies indicated that the extent of cognitive ability, emotional intensity and experience of a social milieu beyond the family are major factors in religious maturation in adolescents (*Benson/Donahue/Erickson* 1989). Some found that the concept of religiosity at the onset of adolescence corresponds more or less to the notions acquired up to that point in the individual cultural and religious environment (*Deconchy* 1964). Adolescent tendency toward seclusion spurs the desire for affective engagement and the desire for friendship with God, to Whom they can confide in their inner monologue. Here, again, we must invoke the differences among the four groups in the face of the low level of family involvement in spiritual nurturing (*cf.* the low average score among groups on the question of praying together with the family). Interestingly, girls were more devout than boys; understanding of the difference necessitates a future comparison of the dynamics of religious development in girls and boys.

In the course of adolescence, elements of religious animism and religious magic are gradually lost and a sense of the transcendental develops (*Daquino* 1980). The material anthropomorphism present in childhood gradually shifts to moral anthropomorphism, which is actually the adolescent attempt to attribute to God the moral and ethical qualities produced by the “I” due to the interiorization of social moral principles. Since God is already interiorized, God is experienced as close, concrete, personal and living. In the first years of adolescence, religiosity is regarded as fairly significant dimension while later religiosity can become problematic. Due to adolescents’ need to question authority, they approach critically all imposed doctrines, and become independent re-examining all *per se* accepted values, they require subjectivization of religiosity that leads to their own individual religiosity. Concomitantly, passive religiosity transitions into more active personal religiosity. By these criteria, Bosnians and Croatians—who scored high on the scales of private spiritual experience and devo-

In adolescence passive religiosity transitions into more active personal religiosity

tion—would be ranked as personally most mature among the groups. On the other hand, Spaniards are the most secularized and, thus, “most mature” by the criteria of postmodernity. In view of this reasoning, it is worth further effort to unravel the factors that set Spanish adolescents, the youngest among the groups, so much apart from the rest. This may be particularly intriguing as their age should protect them somewhat from premature secularization—if they received adequate religious education and spiritual guidance (despite attending Franciscan schools).

Religiosity plays a part in the crisis of adolescence, especially in its early phase (Živković 2008). Adolescents between 14 and 16 pass through a religious crisis characterized by phases of doubt progressing from “intellectual doubt” (questioning religious truth and dogmas) through “conflict doubt” (internal conflict between actual behavior and religious principles resulting in guilt), “frustrating doubt” (realization that religious institutions do not meet the needs of the *ego*) to “doubts of scientific character” (aroused by the search for rationality and logic in faith; Allport 1950). Consequently, one can anticipate a progressive decline in interest in religiosity. Thus, it is expected that younger adolescents are more religious and have more faith in Catholic institutions. While this study is a cross-sectional comparison, rather than longitudinal, the high level of skepticism among Spanish adolescents may be gnomonic of social and familial factors specific for the local environment. In that sense, it is plausible that the metropolitan Madrid and cosmopolitan Palma are more “postmodern” than Syracuse in the traditional and historically neglected Sicily, and provincial Dubrovnik and Županja in Croatia and the nearby Orašje in Bosnia. In that, it appears that the character of the local community is more essential for the role of religion as a developmental instrument than the recent history of the studied communities. In fact, post-Communist provincial Bosnia and Croatia are quite similar to provincial Sicily although their recent political histories are substantially different. We plan to scrutinize these assertions in our future longitudinal studies that will use the data from this investigation as baseline values.

The character of the local community is essential for the role of religion

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