

JACOBS FOUNDATION MARBACH CONFERENCES – SCIENTIFIC EXCHANGE AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL



EVERY YEAR, THE JACOBS FOUNDATION INVITES LEADING RESEARCHERS TO MARBACH CASTLE AND OFFERS AN IDEAL SETTING FOR SCIENTIFIC DISCUSSION.

The Jacobs Foundation is convinced that successful child and youth development is not possible without a solid scientific basis.

The research work concerning positive youth development covers the psychological, cognitive, emotional, intellectual, social, vocational, academic, economic and physical development of young people. A large number of disciplines contribute to a better understanding of successful and positive child and youth development, including psychology, pedagogy, economics, sociology, media studies, political science, linguistics and neuroscience. The promotion of excellent and target-oriented research in these disciplines is an essential element of the Foundation's strategy.

The Jacobs Foundation would like to firmly anchor the conditions for positive child and youth de-

velopment in society on a solid scientific basis such as this. For this reason, it seeks out dialogue with experts, researchers, and political policy and decision-makers, establishes platforms and builds networks.

Since the first conference was convened by the Jacobs Foundation in 1991, the Jacobs Foundation Marbach Conferences have become known worldwide as forums for discussing vital issues regarding child and youth development. The Marbach Conference is a synonym for scientific exchange at the highest level and for interdisciplinarity put into practice. The conferences bring together leading international scientists and young researchers from the area of child and youth development. The results of the conferences are applied directly to our work so that we can ensure that our projects reflect the very latest research developments.



THE ROLE OF VALUES AND RELIGION IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT.

JACOBS FOUNDATION MARBACH CONFERENCE 2010.
MARBACH CASTLE ON LAKE CONSTANCE

In both the media and in public debates, young people today more often than not receive only negative attention. Juvenile violence and youth unemployment make headlines, and young people are portrayed as underachieving, politically apathetic, party-mad and materialistic computer/Internet addicts who have tossed overboard the values and virtues respected for generations.

How can young people today find an identity that will enable them to orientate themselves among the diverse offerings of a globalised world? With the advent of globalisation, religious and social conflicts around the world have become visible and palpable, and violent confrontations are daily fodder for television newscasts. The world appears to be heading directly towards an environmental disaster of apocalyptic proportions and is burdening the next generation with the untold costs of the mistakes of its predecessors. Whereas churches in many areas stand empty, religion is experiencing a fundamental revival elsewhere, and the meaning of life is becoming a consumer good. Globalisation seems to have abolished all borders, including those of ancestry, while at the same time an educational system with high expectations and global competition for opportunities and jobs is closing the borders more tightly than before for many people.

What can we do to provide young people with positive, encouraging perspectives in light of the current situation? According to Gisela Trommsdorff,

questions such as these have led to a focus on the meaning of values and religion for young people. Together with psychologist Xinyin Chen from the University of Western Ontario in Canada, Trommsdorff, a developmental psychologist from the University of Konstanz, organised the conference titled “The role of values and religion in youth development”, which was held at Marbach Castle at the invitation of the Jacobs Foundation.

For the Jacobs Foundation, it is important to approach a highly complex issue such as that of youth religion and values in an interdisciplinary way. Using a comparative approach, historical, sociological, anthropological and, most importantly, religious-scientific aspects were also incorporated. Because the uncertainty of globalisation affects all cultures and nations, researchers from diverse world cultures were part of the discussion.

Twenty-five researchers from numerous European countries, the USA, Israel, Canada, China, Palestine, Japan, Indonesia and India presented their studies and reflections during the Jacobs Foundation Marbach Conference. Together with ten young, highly talented junior researchers, they discussed complex questions regarding the attitude of young people towards traditional values.



What are values in essence? Israeli psychologist Shalom H. Schwartz, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, defined values in his introductory lecture as “the belief in the importance of abstract life goals”. Thus, not only lofty goals such as freedom or equality are considered values, but hedonistic goals like pleasure, power or success also qualify as values because they, too, dictate human behaviour.

However, values not only influence what we do, Schwartz explained. We also need them to explain why we do something, and they provide an additional service by helping us evaluate people and actions, as well as influencing what we actually perceive to be true. Nevertheless, most people are largely unconscious of their own values and often first become aware of them when presented with a conflict of values. Even fundamental values can mutually exclude one another; for example, conservative values such as obedience and safety counteract the hedonistic values of stimulation, pleasure and wealth.

Are there values that are typical of youth? Shalom H. Schwartz attempted to answer this question with data from the European Social Survey, which is carried out in 30 countries around the world every two years and differentiates between two age groups of young people (15–17 years and 18–21 years) and adults (22 years and older). In fact, so-called self-oriented values – performance, stimulation, pleasure – are very pronounced in young people, whereas

values directed towards other people – social justice, willingness to help – become more important only as individuals grow older.

Values are far more important for young people than simple religious affiliation

If values are examined as they relate to religious affiliation, it is no surprise that Muslim and orthodox Jewish youth tend towards conservative values and only rarely endorse values of openness, while Protestant and non-religious youth are at the other end of the spectrum. Does this mean that religion influences one’s canon of values? “Only in some regards,” was the reply from Shalom H. Schwartz. His analysis also suggests that values in general are far more important for young people than simple religious affiliation. Accordingly, it does not seem that religion dictates one’s own values, but rather young people choose and practice different religions based primarily on the values that they deem important.

Researchers from different countries are looking at the effects of both religious affiliation and subjective religiosity (in other words, the intensity of belief) on the values of young people.

Bernhard Nauck, Professor of Sociology at the Chemnitz University of Technology, attempted to prove that religious affiliation influences the behaviour of youth in their first romantic relationships. By means of different studies, Vassilis Saroglou, Professor of Religious Psychology at the Catholic University



of Leuven, Belgium, focused his attention on the relationship between religion and the formation of personality and identity among young immigrants. In particular, he researched Muslim and Christian youth who find themselves in a minority position in the country to which they immigrated. Independent of religious affiliation, subjective religiosity (or the intensity of one's own belief system) revealed itself to be strongly connected to the need for stability, to social engagement and to the bond with one's own family background. In contrast, the connection between religiosity and personal development traits, openness to change, and identification with a new country of residence proved weaker. According to Vassilis Sargolou's conclusion, religiosity does help young immigrants to overcome the first phase in their new country. However, it is just as detrimental to personal development as it is to successful integration.

Adolescence is a critical stage of life when it comes to religiosity as well

Lisa D. Pearce, sociologist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, used precise figures to express the connection between religiosity and family values among American youth. The more religious young people describe themselves to be, the earlier they choose to marry (at 24 years, on average, compared to 26 years for atheist youth), the less willing they are to cohabit without being married, and the

more children they wish to have (on average 2.7 compared to just under 2 for atheist youth). In the USA at any rate, religiosity is connected to clear ideas of one's own future family life.

As psychological research has been trying to show for many years, this is why adolescence is a stage of life in which religious conversions are especially prevalent (just as an abrupt falling away from religion is also very common). Religion can be a method of overcoming day-to-day stress, especially for young people with an insecure attachment to their parent/s.

The supposed spectacular thronging of young people to papal visits and church conferences cannot hide the fact that established Christian churches have lost their appeal to idealistic young people that they enjoyed for centuries, right up to the beginning of the 20th century, thanks to their protests against injustices in the world, argued theologian and ethicist Friedrich Wilhelm Graf from the Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich.



Europe's youth have diverse attitudes towards their own cultural traditions

Grace Davie, religion sociologist at the University of Exeter, also researched the attitude of young people in Europe towards religion in general. Although she emphasised the broad diversity of attitudes to one's own cultural tradition, a diversity which is still prevalent in Europe from Estonia to Greece and from Sweden to Croatia, she considered the behaviour of young people from a Christian background in Great Britain as typical for Western Europe. In the younger generation, the understanding of religion as a public service – used for birth, marriage and death – barely exists nowadays. With most of these young people situated in the spectrum somewhere between religious indifference and fundamental secularism, they are void of almost all cultural knowledge of Christianity, yet it is precisely the youth in Western Europe who are increasingly confronted with very religious immigrant youth. These confrontations – whether they be with Muslims or Christians from Africa, for example – often prompt young Europeans to think more seriously about religion in a way that their own religion was never able to accomplish.

In stark contrast to these occidental examples, researchers from various cultures in Asia clearly represented the enormous and positive role that religion can still play for children and adolescents. Ramesh Mishra, of the Banaras Hindu University

in Varanasi, presented video clips of a traditional Sanskrit school whose daily curriculum includes up to 80% religious activities. His research revealed that these Sanskrit pupils distinguish themselves from pupils from a modern Hindi school by their more pronounced sense of self-worth, greater contentment and their high regard for helping others.

Religiosity has an equally positive effect in the Islamic schools on West Java, reported family researcher Doran French, from Purdue University, USA. Religious practice there is associated on the one hand with responsible parenting and on the other hand with academic success and social competence, whereas antisocial and depressive behaviour correlate negatively. According to this researcher, religion still plays a significant role in youth development in these cultures.

CONFERENCES

- 2009 Development and potential of immigrant youth
- 2008 Early childhood development and later achievement
- 2007 The transition from school to work
- 2006 Improving the future of the younger generation: research frontiers for intervention and assessment
- 2005 Skill formation: interdisciplinary and cross-national perspectives
- 2005 Equity and excellence in education and training: challenges for political and administrative decision-making



The expert articles from the conferences are published in the "Jacobs Foundation Series on Adolescence" by Cambridge University Press.



“ Youth today are faced with an enormous developmental problem: they must learn how to find their way in this globalised yet very complex world; they must find an identity in a society that demands a great deal of them, when they do not know if they will in turn receive security and a livelihood. ”

Gisela Trommsdorff, University of Konstanz, Germany

“ Religious language is closely linked with the afterlife, with another life altogether. Religion has always proposed a language for the shortcomings of the present. This language of religion was useful for young people when protesting against an unjust world. However, church institutions today have to a large extent lost that trust, and with it their once strong influence on young people. ”

Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, Ludwig-Maximilian University, Munich, Germany



“ Different empirical studies indicate that religiosity presents a strategy for combating stress, primarily in insecure attachment relationships, with God taking on the role of a substitute bonding figure. It is very likely that religion provides a protective factor against the negative effects of adolescent behaviour such as alcohol, drugs, etc., that often accompany insecure attachment relationships. ”

Pehr Granqvist, Stockholm University, Sweden

“ A change can be observed in the area of church attendance, with a trend emerging from a culture of duty towards a culture of consumption or personal choice. This can be clearly seen when you look at the example of the pattern of confirmations in the Church of England. The total number of confirmations has decreased dramatically. Confirmation is no longer an accepted initiation rite for teenagers, but instead a rather rare event that is undertaken by personal choice by people of all ages. Confirmation thus becomes a very momentous act for those who choose this option. ”

Grace Davie, University of Exeter, UK



About the Jacobs Foundation

The Zurich-based private Jacobs Foundation was established in 1988 by entrepreneur Klaus J. Jacobs. Ever since, the Foundation has focused its efforts on the development of children and youth. Today it has many decades of experience in the funding of science and specific intervention programmes and their implementation in this field.

The Foundation invests in projects, and supports and accompanies activities which promise to provide answers to the question of how best to shape and support young people's lives and learning experiences, ensuring that they participate successfully in

modern society. To that end, it donates funds for projects worldwide amounting to a total annual figure of about 35 million Swiss francs.

As far as its methods and approaches are concerned, it is particularly committed to scientific excellence and evidence-based findings. With its investment of 200 million euros in the Jacobs University Bremen (2006), it set new standards in the area of private funding.

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