

Article

Man as a “Work of Art”: The Religious–Dialogical Dimension of Education as a Path of Education for Beauty/Goodness

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Abstract: Aiming to establish a dialogue with modern man, who lives in a culture marked by great challenges, church documents put a great emphasis on the *via pulchritudinis*. The *via pulchritudinis*, i.e., the way of beauty, is considered to be a privileged way of achieving dialogue. Awareness of the importance of beauty, in close connection with goodness and truth, is increasingly present in the theological and the religious–pedagogical thought. One of the specific questions related to education for beauty refers to the education of a person who is called to transform his or her life into a “work of art”. This paper reflects on only one specific aspect of the issue of shaping human beauty/goodness, that is, people’s “humanity”, in connection with the challenges of increasingly complex coexistence in diversity. Globalization and migration trends, primarily by complicating life together/coexistence, pose certain challenges to man as an individual, as well as to the entire society, especially the challenge that is coexistence of different cultures and religions. Since these problems also penetrate school classrooms, education systems are expected to provide appropriate responses. The paper consists of two parts. In the theoretical part, two specific fundamental issues related to the education of a person’s “humanity” in the atmosphere of “conflict culture” are considered: the issue of comprehensive education following the ancient connection of beauty and goodness, as well as the issue of education for coexistence. The second part presents the results of the research which was carried out in the Republic of Croatia and which aimed to examine the presence of curriculum content that enables the acquisition of religious–dialogical competence, using the method of text analysis. In more exact terms, faced with the challenges that arise from a society burdened with misunderstanding, violence and hostility, often linked with a religious affiliation and worldviews, we ask ourselves the following question: to what extent is the contemporary education system in the Republic of Croatia, at the level of its curricula, open to the comprehensive development of students, especially in terms of the development of the religious–dialogical dimension, necessary for living a good and beautiful life in the modern multicultural and multireligious world? The results reveal a different, mostly insufficient, openness of the curriculum to the religious dimension of intercultural education. That is one of the reasons why the education system does not seem to be open to the development of the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for a harmonious and “beautiful” coexistence in modern society.

Keywords: *via pulchritudinis*; education; religious dimension of intercultural education; beauty; goodness; coexistence; dialogue



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1. Introduction

The key question of any education is related to the questions of what kind of person we wish to raise, what kind of society we want to build and what values we strive to convey. Although there are no unequivocal and generally accepted answers to these questions, the absence of clear answers can make way for one-sided conceptions of education. In the search for possible elements of an answer to the question of what kind of person we wish to raise and what kind of society we want to build, our starting points are, on the one hand, the 2006 document compiled by the Pontifical Council for Culture, titled “The *Via*

Pulchritudinis, Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue” and the 1999 Letter of his holiness Pope John Paul II to Artists; and, on the other hand, documents and research dealing with the issue of coexistence in contemporary multicultural and multireligious Europe. Faced with the challenges of globalization, secularization and a materialistic view of the world, which distance people from certain fundamental values, the Christian answer is sought in a stronger education based on Christian morality, ethics and aesthetics. Starting from the document *The Via Pulchritudinis*, and the first way of beauty, i.e., the beauty of creation, we reflect on man and his life as a “work of art” (John Paul II 1999, n. 2) whose beauty/goodness is manifested in different areas, with this research specifically examining the area of coexistence in diversity.

Mankind and modern man are faced with numerous increasingly urgent issues. Among them, the problem of peace or coexistence of races, cultures and religions occupies a special place. One of the challenges, manifested at the level of an individual’s life, as well as the lives of the wider community and the whole world, which endangers the beauty of living together refers to thoughts, attitudes and behaviors characterized by mutual misunderstanding, nonacceptance and rejection. On the one hand, coexistence is threatened by an uncompromising focus on economic activity, competition and competitive spirit that affects the personal views and values of each individual and deepens tensions and intolerance between the rich and the poor (Delors [1996] 1998, p. 103). On the other hand, bearing in mind globalization and migration flows, problems related to the nonacceptance of diversity due to cultural, religious and worldview differences, among other things, are on the rise. In this sense, the phenomenon of religious plurality is associated with the possibility of conflict, violence and terrorism (cf. Pépin 2009; Roebben 2008), making the modern world unattractive, unattractive, hostile, unsafe, and even ugly to live in.

Various research, scientific work and European documents—especially documents issued by the Council of Europe—have intensively dealt with the issue of coexistence in a multicultural and multireligious society in the last few decades. The issue of coexistence has become crucial for the survival of humanity. Learning to live together (Delors [1996] 1998) is an indispensable pillar of education that enables more effective work on overcoming tensions and conflicts, typical of the modern world, and developing respect for other people, cultures, religions and values. The religious dimension of intercultural education, i.e., knowing and understanding others, as well as achieving dialogue between people of different cultural, religious and nonreligious backgrounds, is considered necessary for building a more beautiful and just society characterized by constructive dialogue and peaceful coexistence (Council of Europe 2008; OSCE/ODIHR 2007; Jackson and O’Grady 2019; Keast 2007; cf. Razum and Jurišić 2022). The religious dimension of intercultural education does not imply only religious knowledge but also specific attitudes and skills necessary for encounters with the other and the different, among which the attitude and skill of dialogue between members of different cultural, religious and nonreligious environments is crucial. As dialogue is inherent in the religious dimension of intercultural education, i.e., the most important means for achieving life in cultural and religious diversity (Council of Europe 2008), we can talk about the religious–dialogical dimension of education, or in other words, about the religious–dialogical competence.

The fundamental premise of this paper is that the religious or religious–dialogical competence, which includes knowledge (cognitive dimension), attitudes (affective dimension) and skills (behavioral dimension) (Deardorff 2004, p. 198; Jackson 2014, pp. 34–35), represents an essential aspect of intercultural understanding (Jackson 2014, p. 15), i.e., an essential aspect of achieving coexistence with the different. By developing this competence, each individual becomes more morally responsible towards him/herself and towards others, conveying an important aspect of his or her “humanity” (John Paul II 1999, n. 2). Bearing in mind that the entire educational system is responsible for the development of this competence, as recently highlighted in European documents (Council of Europe 2008; OSCE/ODIHR 2007; Jackson and O’Grady 2019; Jackson 2014), the focus of this research is to examine the extent to which the Croatian educational system is open to the promotion

and development of religious or religious–dialogical competence. In this sense, subjects and cross-curricular topics from the field of humanities and social sciences are explored, as those are the domains that reflect on different aspects of human existence. The curriculum content analysis method is used to see whether these subjects and cross-curricular topics enable the acquisition of knowledge and the development of attitudes and skills related to the religious or religious–dialogical competence.

2. Beauty as Goodness

Regardless of academic debates, beauty is attributed to different things and phenomena in everyday speech. Discussions on beauty in academic discourse are, almost without exception, connected to the question of aesthetics, especially from the perspective of philosophical aesthetics. At the same time, the everyday use of the word “beauty” is examined through the standard of aesthetic judgement ([Scruton 2009](#), pp. 80–96). Moreover, contemporary aesthetics is more concerned with the issue of conceptual analysis, which includes discussions about whether beauty is subjective or objective; whether there are any traits that necessarily imply that an object is beautiful, or whether it is the observer who attributes the trait of beauty to an object; whether principles of beauty exist; and what beauty has to do with pleasure ([McMahon 2007](#)).

The background of our discussion on beauty is the understanding of beauty in the ancient sense of the term, i.e., beauty understood in the broadest sense and associated with living a good life. In this sense, art is also oriented towards the realization of a good life as a cultivation of personality ([Wang 2018](#)). This means that here we understand beauty both in the objective sense, as an objective quality of the created world that includes the beauty of being human, and in the subjective sense, in connection with education and ethics, as an incentive for a person to be better ([Sharpe 2021](#)), both as an individual and as a member of the community acting for the common good. Beauty helps people to become better, which is why beauty can too be associated with love, just like Plato advocated ([White 1989](#)). The connection between beauty and goodness was particularly emphasized in Antiquity. The ethical aspect of the concept of beauty can be found in the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and especially in Plotinian Kalology, which closely connects beauty with virtues, as can be seen in his use of the adjective “beautiful” not only for perceptible things but also for moral and mental perfection ([Ignjatović 2019](#)). This understanding of the relationship between the beautiful and the good corresponds to the exhortation from The Letter to Artists ([John Paul II 1999](#), no. 2): “all men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own life: in a certain sense, they are to make of it a work of art, a masterpiece”.

Although here we are discussing beauty in the context of religion, especially Christianity, relying on the incentives provided in the document published by the Pontifical Council for Culture, “*The Via Pulchritudinis*, Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue”, our intention is not to offer any kind of aesthetic theodicy ([Baggett 2023](#)), nor to explicitly follow the theological aesthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar ([von Balthasar 1961–1969](#)). In the sense of life, beauty bridges the gap between the ideal and the real; it serves a kind of guarantee that, in the mess, imperfection and often ugliness of reality, what we can all agree on is not far—we actually encounter it ([Gadamer \[1993\] 2003](#), p. 26). Beauty, in the broadest sense of the word, shows the advantages that make the way of beauty suitable for creating a quality life in the community. The language of beauty is universal and connects people of different cultures and social statuses. Beauty has a direct and comprehensive effect on people and then requires a complete answer from them; if beauty is experienced as a value, then it calls for responsibility and action in accordance with it. Moreover, beauty also has a spiritual dimension ([Kraschl 2019](#), pp. 29–30). When discussing the beauty of humanity, we do not primarily mean the beauty of the body, which was also important in antiquity (as it is today), but rather the inner beauty that is connected to the character of a person and includes the virtues that are necessary for the authentic humanity of any individual and for living together. Since we are talking about the beauty of creatures and mankind in

the context of education, we are putting it in the framework of a great challenge, which is coexistence in a multicultural society.

3. Education for the Beauty of Coexistence

3.1. Complete Development: Creating a “Work of Art from One’s Own Life”

Although not all people are artists in the special sense of the word, every person is entrusted with the task of making his or her life “a work of art”, as Pope John Paul pointed out in his Letter to Artists (John Paul II 1999). In more elaborate terms, according to the Bible, although created beautiful and good, “in the image of God” (Gen 1: 26–27), man becomes capable of evil and ugliness because he had sinned. Thus, ugliness appears in the area of morality and reflects on man and his life (Pontifical Council for Culture 2006, n. III.1.B). Creating a “work of art from one’s own life” (John Paul II 1999, n. 2), that is, “shaping one’s own humanity” (John Paul II 1999, n. 2), represents a creative challenge and task for every human being. Thus, each person is “the author of his own actions, with responsibility for their moral value” (John Paul II 1999, n. 2; see also Francis 2013, n. 167; Pontificio Consiglio per la Promozione della Nuova Evangelizzazione 2020, n. 106–9).

However, when it comes to creating a “work of art from one’s own life”, i.e., shaping oneself, shaping one’s own personality, there are many helping but also hindering factors. In terms of children and young people, the educational system plays an important role in shaping their lives as “works of art”. Education is one of the key channels that can help a young person to responsibly shape his or her “own humanity” in accordance with the criteria of beauty and goodness. Pope Benedict XVI pointed out that the education of a person is a fundamental and decisive issue that calls for the awakening of courage in the process of making conclusive decisions (Benedetto XVI 2006, p. 19), while Pope Francis notes that the restoration of society and community is only possible if we put education first (Bergoglio 2015, p. 102). The Report of the UNESCO International Commission, which acknowledges the school’s fundamental role in promoting peace, freedom and social justice, claims the same. At the same time, it also emphasizes that we cannot consider this action to be a miracle cure that would open the door to a perfect world. Nevertheless, we can consider educational activities as the most important means available for encouraging more harmonious and fair human development (Delors [1996] 1998, p. 13).

Educational systems that take into account the comprehensive development of students will certainly prove more successful than systems that approach education in a partial manner and which, due to their partial approach, commit a “delict” against students, leaving many of their potentials untapped, therefore condemning society to value poverty, i.e., the lack of goodness and beauty, or in other words, condemning it to an excess of evil and “ugliness”, as well as depriving it of the effective talents of individuals. The danger of partial educational interventions that, every now and then, favor almost exclusively only certain dimensions of human and social development, is not new to the modern education system (Delors [1996] 1998; Nanni 2002; von Hentig [2007] 2008; Liessmann [2017] 2019). Contemporary education is characterized by trends that glorify the market, while ignoring the value orientation of education. The general atmosphere of competition, competitive spirit and the imperative of personal success, which characterizes the field of economic activity, all affect education, which then also assists in maintaining that atmosphere and that value system. Fundamental educational changes occur under the influence of economic factors that determine the very goals of education (Žiljak 2004; Sahlberg and Oldroyd 2010; Giroux 2014; Nanni 2002; Liessmann [2006] 2008; Delors [1996] 1998). The existing value system is changing or even collapsing, giving space to the development of a new one, in which everything is focused on utility and functionality. The question, however, is whether such a system enables education that encompasses the development of all potentials of a young person, especially whether it also includes the development of the spiritual and moral dimension (Delors [1996] 1998, p. 18; Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa RH 2011; Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa RH 2014, n. 4;) or education narrowly understood in the utilitarian sense, which boils down to the acquisition of knowledge useful

for goals that, by their nature, do not derive from the motivation of education itself, i.e., to a “mere provision of qualified labour force for the economy” (Delors [1996] 1998, p. 89). Since education also has a humanistic and social purpose, in addition to the economic one, the question arises whether, in a world abounding in bad news, the existing form of education, mainly quantitative and economically oriented, can help reduce the amount of bad news and increase the amount of good and positive news. Will such a system help make life better and more beautiful for everyone and everything?

Bearing in mind the denial of fundamental life values, which is especially evident in the postmodernism (Halstead and Taylor 1996), the increasingly strong determination of the school towards competencies that are closely related to the labor market, the problems faced by the school itself, especially the stress, anxiety and depression of students and the problem of peer violence and bullying in schools (cf. Bojčić and Mandić Vidaković 2022), the social environment issues that enter classrooms (Delors [1996] 1998, pp. 160–61), it is obvious how important it is for education to promote different values, i.e., to enable a complete education that provides space, not only for economic values but also for the development of moral and spiritual values. In contemporary pedagogical reflections, as well as in recent educational documents published in the Republic of Croatia, knowledge and cognition related to the quality of life and the balance of spiritual and material culture are increasingly emphasized. The importance of spiritual and moral development, as essential components of the complete development of students, is emphasized by, for example, the Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools (Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa RH 2014) and the National Framework Curriculum (Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa RH 2011), while the more recent Framework of the National Curriculum (Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja RH 2017), while elaborating on complete development, emphasizes moral development several times, with no mention of spiritual development. The issue of spiritual and moral development is becoming an increasingly important issue in rich and poor societies. Delors’s report points out that the survival of humanity depends on this development (Delors [1996] 1998, pp. 168–69). Education aimed at promoting spiritual values should be understood as a counterweight to globalization, understood almost exclusively as an economic and technological phenomenon, and which greatly contributes to the creation of a “culture of conflict” (Delors [1996] 1998, p. 54).

3.2. *Education for Peaceful Coexistence: The Religious–Dialogical Dimension of Education*

Modern society is becoming an increasingly risky place to grow up and live in due to the global changes that generate uncertainty in all segments of life. Society and the world are increasingly characterized by dramatic and ugly events: news of wars, refugees, exiles, various forms of violence and aggression, the nonacceptance of the other and the different, conflicts on religious grounds and the like are presented almost as media exclusives. Negative news is predominant in almost all areas of modern life. The large migration trends facing Europe require special attention. These migratory movements present an additional challenge to peace, security, cooperation and dialogue, well-being and peaceful coexistence, to everything that makes life beautiful and good. Due to the growing cultural and religious diversity, coexistence is becoming more and more complex. Learning to live with social, cultural, ethnic, religious and other differences is one of the biggest challenges of modern education. Philosopher and theologian Hans Küng (1996) warned that achieving comprehensive global peace is not possible without peace among religions. And, in order to achieve peace between religions, it is necessary to achieve an honest dialogue between them. On that note, Pope Francis also strongly advocates the valuable contribution of religions to the promotion of dialogue and meeting each other, as well as to the building of peace and fraternity (Francis 2020).

Since meeting the unknown and the different often incites fear, indifference, prejudice, misunderstanding and sometimes even hatred and violence (Garmaz and Mendl 2022, p. 265), learning to live with differences includes the need to know, understand and positively value that diversity (Keast 2007, p. 62; Congregazione per L’educazione

Cattolica 2013; Delors [1996] 1998, p. 104). Knowledge and understanding contribute to empathy; mutual respect; dialogue; cooperation; nonviolence; the reduction of prejudices and stereotypes about each other; and reduced suspicion, intolerance and discrimination. Numerous European documents therefore emphasize that intercultural dialogue, which includes the dimension of religious and nonreligious beliefs, represents a key prerequisite for preventing conflicts based on cultural, ethnic and religious differences, both for the development of a culture of common life and for the acceptance of different identities based on human rights (cf. Razum et al. 2021).

Cultural diversity cannot be solved without the inclusion of religion (Keast and Leganger-Krogstad 2007, p. 116). Leaving young people in religious ignorance and incompetence in contemporary pluralistic societies can have bad consequences for a person's identity, as well as for the communal life. The Council of Europe therefore advocates the stance that young people who have adequate knowledge and understanding of religion are more tolerant of differences within society than those who lack this knowledge (Jackson and O'Grady 2019, p. 255). This is supported by the research (REDCo 2009, p. 10; Jackson 2012, pp. 5–9) showing that students who have the opportunity to learn about religions at school are more willing to discuss religious and worldview topics with students from other backgrounds than those who are not provided with such learning experiences (see more about this in: Razum and Jurišić 2022). If knowledge and understanding support dialogue and life with adherents of other religions, then it is necessary for schools and other educational institutions to assume the obligation to promote "religious literacy" that is necessary for understanding current cultural, social and political processes (Jackson 2014, p. 30; Salvarani 2016). Although it is obvious that, in order to understand the current complex reality, it is necessary to be familiar with the alphabet of religions, we continue to witness traditional ignorance in the religious field, which is a very fertile ground for the emergence and development of various prejudices, as well as extremist and fundamentalist attitudes.

Mediation of religious knowledge, necessary for the acquisition of religious competence, i.e., intercultural and interreligious understanding and dialogue, cannot be the responsibility of only one school subject. In accordance with the current educational policy of the Council of Europe regarding religion, education about the diversity of religions and beliefs in society should be part of general education (Council of Europe 2008; OSCE/ODIHR 2007; Jackson and O'Grady 2019). Given that religion is central to our understanding of people and cultures, and that the teaching of religions and beliefs is interdisciplinary, it is necessary that the religious dimension is present in most subjects taught at school, and not just in Religious Education and History (Council of Europe 2008, pp. 30–31; OSCE/ODIHR 2007, p. 61; Eidsvag 2004; Kurikulum Društveno-humanističkog područja 2017). In addition, for effective teaching about religions and beliefs, it is necessary to provide all teachers with an education that would enable them to have "at least a basic understanding of teaching about religions and beliefs" (OSCE/ODIHR 2007, p. 61).

4. Results and Discussion

The curricula of subjects and cross-curricular topics, which serve as the foundation for teaching and learning in primary and secondary schools in Croatia, were adopted in 2019 as part of the School for Life curriculum reform (cf. Škola za život 2019). By analyzing the subject curricula and cross-curricular topics belonging to the field of Social Sciences and Humanities, we sought to assess the extent to which these subjects contribute to the development of religious competence, i.e., religious–dialogic competence, which is an essential prerequisite for coexistence in today's multicultural and multireligious world. This issue has not been systematically researched in Croatia until now. As part of the Religobraz project (Religobraz 2019), curricula of confessional religious education (Catholic Religious Education, Islamic Religious Education and Orthodox Religious Education) were explored. In addition to other research, we reference the work of T. Šegina, "Religious Dimension of Intercultural Education in the Secondary Educational System in the Republic

of Croatia" (Šegina 2022). The curriculum of Social Sciences and Humanities itself places significant importance, both in terms of domain description and outcome definition, on the topic of coexistence in diversity and on teaching and learning about religious and nonreligious worldviews that influence a person's relationship with oneself, others and the world (Kurikulum Društveno-humanističkog područja 2017). It is also worth noting that, in addition to the field of Humanities and Social Sciences, the National Curriculum Framework also lists the following: the field of Languages and Communication, the field of Mathematics, the field of Natural Sciences, the field of Technology and Information Technologies, the field of Art and the field of Physical Education (Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja RH 2017).

4.1. Science and Social Studies Curriculum

Science and Social Studies are taught and studied in the first four grades of primary school (Kurikulum PID 2019). Despite the subject covering topics related to "home, family, and the local and wider community", which helps pupils "form their personal, cultural, and national identities while also fostering sensitivity towards other identities and the broader living environment" (p. 5), there is no mention of the word faith, religion or any derivative thereof. The cognitive aspect, that is, the discussion about religions, has been completely omitted. The only word that includes this dimension is the term "religious holiday", which appears in the elaboration of several outcomes in domain A, Organization of the World Around Us; and in domain C, Individual and Society (PID OŠ C.1.1; PID OŠ A.2.2; PID OŠ C.2.1; PID OŠ C.3.1; PID OŠ C.4.1.) Throughout the entire subject curriculum, there is no mention of any correlation with Religious Education.

Key values necessary for developing the competence of "knowing how to live together", such as identity, coexistence, tolerance, acceptance, respect and cooperation, are addressed within various topics. However, there is no explicit mention of members of religious communities or those with nonreligious worldviews anywhere in the curriculum.

4.2. History Curriculum

History is taught and studied in the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades of primary school, as well as in all four years of gymnasium (Kurikulum POV 2019). In the History curriculum, the word religion (or one of its derivatives) is frequently used. The very introductory section of the curriculum underscores the significance of preserving one's national identity as a cultural and spiritual heritage, especially in a global context marked by a significant blend of diverse cultures, worldviews and religions (p. 5). In the description of domains, religious matters are mentioned in domain A, Society; and in domain E, which even references religion in its title: The philosophical, religious and cultural field. Domain A's description highlights the following: "The pupils become acquainted with different and evolving views on family structures, male and female roles, childhood, the role of children, the position of various groups in society (religious communities, ethnic communities, peoples, nations), and the relationships between individuals and social groups. This field also examines how economic, religious, cultural, and political changes have affected social life" (p. 8). Religious matters are addressed in a particular way in domain E. The description of this domain highlights the following: "By acquainting themselves with philosophy, religion and art, pupils learn how ideas, beliefs and values have deeply influenced human activities throughout history. Religion, philosophy, and culture have consistently stood at the core of people's ambitions and accomplishments in every society, serving as a wellspring of historical transformations since ancient times" (p. 9). In line with the name and description of domain E, a majority of the outcomes in this domain are related to religious matters. In primary school, out of a total of 24 outcomes, six explicitly emphasize the importance of studying religion. These outcomes are as follows: POV OŠ E.5.1, POV OŠ E.5.2, POV OŠ E.6.1, POV OŠ E.6.2, POV OŠ E.7.1 and POV OŠ E.8.1. Concerning secondary school, out of a total of 25 outcomes, 6 outcomes explicitly highlight the importance of studying religion (POV SŠ E.1.1, POV SŠ E.1.2, POV SŠ A.2.1,

POV SŠ E.2.1, POV SŠ E.2.2 and POV SŠ E.3.1.) Regarding the cognitive aspect, it is important to highlight that, within this subject, there is a notable emphasis on examining the impact of religions on society, culture and individuals throughout history. Given the significant historical influence of religions, particularly Christianity and the Church, it is understandable for the curriculum to devote a considerable portion of its content to religious matters. However, despite the fact that the History curriculum contains numerous outcomes/contents related to teaching and learning about religion, there is no mention of any correlation with Religious Education in the curriculum.

Values associated with the emotional and interactive aspect, such as dialogue, co-existence, cooperation, tolerance and mutual respect, appear to be of minor importance, judging by the frequency of these terms in the curriculum text. Even in cases where these values are mentioned, there is no reference to their connection with the religious aspect of intercultural education.

4.3. Geography Curriculum

Geographical knowledge and skills are developed through an integrated approach within the subject of Science and Social Studies from the first to the fourth grade of primary school. From the fifth grade of primary school to the end of the fourth grade of gymnasium, Geography is taught and studied as a separate and compulsory subject (Kurikulum GEO 2019). In terms of the cognitive aspect, religious topics are evident within this subject, especially in regard to the intercultural perspective. The religious dimension is taught and studied with the aim of understanding and accepting diversity, or within the context of discussions about identity. Religion is most frequently mentioned in the section on recommendations for achieving educational outcomes. The word “faith” and its derivatives (religion, religious structure of the population, religious heterogeneity and religious differences) are mentioned numerous times. The domain that is connected to the religious dimension of intercultural education through its content and outcomes is domain A, Spatial Identity. Describing the content of this domain, the following is emphasized: “Identity of specific geographical areas is shaped by the communities residing there, i.e., their traits, language, culture, religion, tradition, lifestyle and activities, as well as events, both contemporary and historical” (pp. 8–9). Considering the outcomes that promote the religious dimension of intercultural education, we highlight outcome B.A.6.3. The elaboration of this outcome explicitly mentions religious diversity. It is also highlighted that the pupil, within the scope of this outcome, is able to do the following: “explain the linguistic, religious, educational, economic, ethnic, and biological structure of the population using diagrams and thematic maps, drawing examples from both global and Croatian contexts”, as well as “discern between different religions in Croatia” (p. 25). Another explicit reference to religion can be found in the recommendations for achieving educational outcomes within the GEO OŠ A.B.7.3 outcome: “As part of the European Week (...), pupils can explore and present the social characteristics of individual countries (food, customs, clothing, music, language, religion, flags, and more)” (p. 35). Within outcome GEO OŠ A.B.7.8, the following content is mentioned: “Ethnic and religious heterogeneity in the countries of Southeast Europe” (p. 40). With regard to the secondary school curriculum, we highlight outcome GEO SŠ B.2.1. Its elaboration states the following: “analyses demographic structures (biological, educational, economic, national, religious, linguistic)” (p. 62). In the section on recommendations for achieving educational outcomes, the following recommendation is provided: “The pupil develops a sense of responsibility for respecting diversity and for showing respect, understanding and cooperation among all people, regardless of age, gender, educational, economic, national, religious and linguistic differences” (p. 63).

In primary school, out of a total of 47 outcomes in Geography, 3 of them explicitly emphasize the importance of studying religious topics. These are the following outcomes: GEO OŠ B.A.6.3, GEO OŠ A.B.7.3 and GEO OŠ A.B.7.8. When it comes to secondary school, out of a total of 45 outcomes, only one outcome explicitly highlights the importance of studying religion. This is outcome GEO SŠ B.2.1.

In the section that discusses correlations with other subjects, it is evident that, despite the curriculum containing content related to teaching and learning about religion, this subject does not seem to demonstrate openness to collaboration with a subject specialized in religious matters. In fact, there is no mention of any correlation with Religious Education.

With regard to the emotional and interactive aspect, the term “coexistence” in conjunction with tolerance is mentioned once, while the term “identity” is mentioned multiple times. This noun is a part of the domain name (Spatial Identity) and is also a key educational outcome in teaching and learning: “to recognise the importance of identity in a globalised society and act to preserve and promote local, regional, and national identity, while respecting diversity” (p. 7). Respect for diversity is mentioned several times (pp. 7, 25, 34, 63). The curriculum frequently highlights the importance of cooperation. These values are not associated with the religious dimension.

4.4. Philosophy Curriculum

The learning and teaching of Philosophy takes place in the fourth grade of gymnasium (Kurikulum FIL 2019). The word “religion/religious” is mentioned twice in the curriculum. It is mentioned for the first time in the introductory section, where values and principles of teaching and learning are presented, and the following note is highlighted: “Teaching must be free from the teacher’s ideological, religious or philosophical preferences” (p. 7). The second mention is explicitly found in one of the fundamental outcomes of the curriculum: “Developing the ability to connect personal experiences and nonscientific contributions to the understanding of humanity and the world, such as religion and art, with a philosophical approach (pluriperspectivity), as well as the ability to comprehensively perceive, articulate, discuss, and resolve diverse and seemingly unrelated issues (integrativity)” (p. 8).

The content that would indicate a connection between the philosophical approach and religion, as highlighted in the stated outcome, is not evident in the curriculum. The content of this outcome has not been consistently integrated into the descriptions of domains or the elaboration of their outcomes. In contrast to religion, art as a “non-scientific contribution to understanding humanity and the world” is given an entire domain—domain E, Art and Artistic Creation. However, when it comes to religion, it is explicitly mentioned in only one outcome out of a total of twenty-four. The specified outcome is located within the optional part of outcome FIL C.2, where religious ethics is mentioned. The Philosophy curriculum does not include any references to religion, its rational justification or a philosophical understanding of religion. While the curriculum does not foster the acquisition of religious knowledge in connection to philosophy, it does play a role in promoting reflection and understanding of topics common to both philosophy and religion. So, for example, in domain A, Existence and the World, outcome FIL A.1 places emphasis on introducing concepts associated with existence and the world, indicating topics that are shared between philosophy and religion. Similarly, in domain C, Actions and Orientation, outcome FIL C.1. addresses topics common to both philosophy and religion, such as morality, ethics, actions, human nature, freedom, will, responsibility, goodness, virtue, conscience and the like (p. 21).

The curriculum clearly underscores its connection to the subject of Religious Education, seeing that Philosophy and Religious Education are linked through their shared exploration of the origins of the world and the deliberation of the existence of man as a morally responsible being (p. 35).

As for the interactive aspect, values such as dialogue, tolerance and acceptance of diversity are mentioned in the curriculum. Dialogue is mentioned multiple times. The curriculum states that dialogue “should be the focal point of learning and teaching philosophy” (p. 36). It also highlights that, through mutual dialogue, “pupils understand and develop the values of diversity and tolerance, which are fundamental to a modern democratic society” (p. 5). The value of tolerance, which is mentioned several times, is also associated with the value of respect (FIL C.1).

4.5. Sociology Curriculum

Sociology is taught and studied in the third year of gymnasiums and other secondary schools as both a compulsory and elective subject ([Kurikulum SOC 2019](#)). Considering the fact that the subject of Sociology “develops the pupil’s acceptance and respect for social and cultural diversity within the framework of democratic values and provides young people with the opportunity to develop personal and social identity, responsibility, solidarity, and personal integrity” (p. 5), it is to be expected that religious matters, from a sociological perspective, are addressed in this subject. In the curriculum, however, there are only a few passing references to religious topics. Considering the domains and outcomes, religious matters have a relatively limited presence in domain B, Individual and Society; and in domain C, Analysis of Contemporary Society. The elaboration of outcome B.1. reads as follows: “recognises social and cultural differences (gender, ethnic, religious, and subcultural); compares personal and social identity with examples”. The content proposed to achieve the C.2 outcome includes the following: “Social institutions (economic, political, cultural and religious)”. In outcome C.3, among the proposed content, the following is also mentioned: “Contemporary Religiosity and other”. Considering the cognitive aspect, it can be concluded that the Sociology curriculum does not facilitate the acquisition of knowledge about religious matters from a sociological perspective.

Regarding its connection to other subjects and inter-curricular topics, there is a single reference to the correlation with Religious Education (p. 14).

Values such as tolerance for social and cultural diversity, solidarity, responsibility and cooperation are mentioned in almost every domain. Dialogue as an educational value/objective is not mentioned. These values do not refer directly to religious differences.

4.6. Politics and Economics Curriculum

The subject Politics and Economics is taught and studied in the fourth grade of gymnasium ([Kurikulum PIG 2019](#)). Considering that the purpose of teaching the subject Politics and Economics is “to create a stimulating environment for the development of pupils into informed, active, and responsible citizens in the community to which they belong, full of diversity, at the local, national, and global levels” (p. 5), it is to be expected that religious topics are addressed in the subject, in an appropriate manner. The Politics and Economics curriculum, however, completely overlooks the topic of religion and religious identities, or, in other words, it ignores the religious dimension of intercultural education. The curriculum does not contain any outcomes directly related to the religious dimension of intercultural education.

In the section that addresses the subject’s connections with other subjects and cross-curricular topics, there is no mention whatsoever of the subject of Religious Education, even though its objectives and content contribute to achieving objectives shared with the Politics and Economics subject.

As for the emotional and interactive aspects and the values that are crucial for promoting the religious dimension of intercultural education, the curriculum highlights the importance of tolerance, coexistence in diversity (pp. 5 and 7) and respect for different worldviews (p. 18), but without direct reference to religious differences.

4.7. Ethics Curriculum

Ethics is taught and studied from the first to the fourth grade of secondary school and is intended for students who choose Ethics over Religious Education ([Kurikulum ETK 2019](#)). In the subject description, great importance is given to the value of identity, emphasizing that the development and preservation of identity are values “that encourage pupils to develop personal and collective identity and tolerance towards different ideas, cultures, and lifestyles” (p. 5). Since the religious element is an important component of identity, it is to be expected that religious topics would be addressed more intensely within this subject. The subject description also underscores that this school subject equips “pupils with skills necessary to foster a culture of dialogue, respect, and tolerance towards others” (p. 9),

which is closely linked to acquiring knowledge of the other, and includes the religious component.

Religious topics are present only marginally, mainly in the first grade. An explicit mention of religious matters can be found in the first outcome, SŠ ETK A.1.1, of domain A: “Determines moral and ethical issues”. The elaboration further specifies the outcome: “In the analysis of moral and ethical problems and in formulating their views, the pupils make appropriate use of ethical terms: ethics, morality, ethical question, moral question, moral dilemma, values, virtue, conscience, good, evil, myth, religion, irreligion, atheism, agnosticism, golden rule, secularism, religious fundamentalism” (p. 13). As part of this outcome, the content section also lists the mandatory topic, “Moral and ethical issues regarding religions”, accompanied by several optional topics: morality and religion; ethical teachings of world religions; morality and irreligion; humanism and secular ethics; and the World Ethos Project and the possibilities of global ethics (p. 13).

Values associated with intercultural education, such as identity, tolerance, mutual respect, the culture of cooperation, solidarity, the well-being of all people, dialogue and coexistence, due to the nature of the subject itself, are strongly emphasized in the curriculum of this subject, especially in the first and second grades.

4.8. Psychology Curriculum

Psychology is taught and studied in the second and third grades of gymnasium (Kurikulum PS 2019). Psychology as a subject enables students to explain human behavior from a scientifically based perspective, facilitating a deeper understanding of themselves, others and society as a whole (p. 5). The subject description highlights that contemporary societies “are politically and economically interconnected and require a rapid acquisition of new knowledge and competences, promoting tolerance, acceptance, coexistence of different people and cultures, while preserving personal, national and cultural identity, and the ability to resist prejudices, attempts at manipulation by various media, aggressive marketing, individuals, or groups” (p. 5). The insights adopted within this subject can help pupils “understand the behaviour of groups and individuals in a group in different social situations and the impact of the social environment and culture in shaping their values, attitudes and beliefs” (p. 7). Taking into account the nature of this subject as described in the curriculum, it is to be expected that the curriculum includes religious topics, without which it is difficult to achieve the purpose and objectives of this subject. Throughout the curriculum, the religious element is explicitly mentioned only once, and that is in outcome PS C.1, in the section on recommendations for achieving educational outcomes: “students explore examples of gender, age-related, racial and religious stereotypes and prejudices in the everyday situations and surroundings or in a broader socio-historical context, and create a presentation, poster, film . . .” (p. 24).

In the section discussing the connection with other subjects and cross-curricular topics, the following is stated: “Topics related to attitudes, stereotypes, prejudices, social perception, group influences and manipulations are important for understanding the behaviour of individuals and various social groups which are addressed within the subjects of Sociology, Ethics, and Religious Education” (p. 28).

Given the values associated with intercultural education, domain C, Self and Others, holds particular significance. The content belonging to this domain provides knowledge, skills and competencies focused on relationships with others, including communication, shaping impressions, group influences, stereotypes, prejudices, attitudes, conflicts and prosocial behavior. The content emphasizes the importance of taking responsibility for one’s own behavior and building relationships with others based on “respect regardless of differences in opinion, and cultural, gender, or racial identity” (p. 10), but religious identity is not mentioned.

4.9. Curriculum of the Cross-Curricular Topic of Civic Education

This cross-curricular topic is taught in all grades of primary and secondary school. (Kurikulum GOO 2019). Within the cross-curricular topic that aims to train students to be “responsible members of the class, school, local, national, European and global community” (p. 5), not a single word refers to religious matters as an unavoidable component of all the mentioned communities. The only place in the curriculum where religion is mentioned is outcome A.3.3.: “Identifies the causes and consequences of examples of discrimination on all grounds of the Anti-Discrimination Act—racial or ethnic affiliation or skin colour, gender, language, religion, political or other belief, national or social origin, property status, membership in a trade union, education, social position, marital or family status, age, health condition, disability, genetic heritage, gender identity, expression or sexual orientation” (p. 23). On the other hand, the curriculum often refers to the correlation with Religious Education.

Values that we closely associate with interculturality, such as dialogue, cooperation, respect for the other and different/respect for diversity and tolerance, are mentioned several times. In the outcomes’ descriptions, interculturality is mentioned a few times in the context of attitudes: “stands for interculturality”.

4.10. Curriculum of the Cross-Curricular Topic of Personal and Social Development

This cross-curricular topic is taught in all grades of primary and secondary school. (Kurikulum OSR 2019). In the introductory part, the purpose of the topic is explained as follows: “It contributes to the development of personal, cultural and national identity, but also the identity of a person as a member of the global community, who respects differences and sees them as opportunities for learning” (p. 5). Since the development of identity is one of the key goals of this topic, the religious dimension is expected to be present to a certain extent. However, there is absolutely no mention of it. The curriculum includes no reference whatsoever to the words “religion”, “faith” and “interculturality” (or any derivative thereof). The only direct link with the religious dimension is found in the second cycle, in domain C and the related outcome OSR C.2.4, which mentions the term “religious holidays” (p. 42).

In the section where the correlation with other subjects is elaborated, the subject of Religious Education is not specifically mentioned anywhere. However, it should be clarified that almost every topic includes the broad declaration: “included in the curriculum of all subjects”.

What is interesting compared to all other analyzed curricula is the fact that this curriculum is one of the few that mention multiculturalism. This is emphasized in the context of the goals’ elaboration: “Students will adopt general cultural and civilizational values that are a prerequisite for living in a multicultural world” (p. 6). Within the framework of outcome OSR C.4.4, “Describes and accepts own cultural and national identity in relation to other cultures”, cultural identity and multiculturalism are mentioned (p. 48). Furthermore, despite the fact that outcome OSR C.5.4. reads, “analyses the values of own cultural heritage in relation to the multicultural world” (p. 51), religion, as an important factor of identity and understanding of the multicultural world, is never mentioned.

The curriculum repeatedly mentions the values of tolerance, acceptance of diversity and tolerance of different identities. Coexistence and dialogue are not mentioned.

5. Materials and Methods

The aim of this research was to analyze and present the elements indicating the extent to which various subject curricula and cross-curricular topics from the field of Humanities and Social Sciences in the Republic of Croatia are open to, on an education level, the religious or religious–dialogical dimension, a dimension that is necessary for competent orientation and navigation in the modern multicultural and multireligious world if we strive to live in the environment of dialogue, cooperation and mutual respect: if through learning the religious dimension of intercultural education, we aim to train children and

young people to contribute with the acquired knowledge and developed attitudes to the creation of a more beautiful and better society and world. The theoretical assumptions of the research were derived from the Council of Europe's guidelines for the implementation of the religious dimension of intercultural education (Council of Europe 2008) and intercultural competences (Jackson 2014). 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 is related to the extent to which the curricula of individual subjects and cross-curricular topics belonging to the field of Humanities and Social Sciences are open to the religious dimension of intercultural education, especially to the dialogic aspect of that dimension. Indeed, it is rather important to find out the extent to which subjects, within the framework of intercultural education, take into account the need to acquire knowledge about religions and the adoption of values that are crucial for coexistence and dialogue. In the analysis, the following criteria were considered: (1) in regard to the cognitive aspect, to explore whether other religions are discussed and how much importance is given to the acquisition of knowledge about religions (religious communities) in a particular curriculum; and (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 and mutual respect (especially regarding members of other religions/religious communities/worldviews). For the purposes of this analysis, using the predefined criteria, the analysis focused on the following curriculum categories: domains, purpose, goals and learning outcomes. The research sample consisted of the curricula of eight subjects (Science and Social Studies, History, Geography, Philosophy, Sociology, Politics and Economics, Ethics and Psychology) and two cross-curricular topics (Civic Education and Personal and Social Development).

6. Conclusions

By educating and shaping people in accordance with certain values, they are given the opportunity to transform their lives into a “work of art”, whose “beauty”, i.e., values, will be manifested across different areas of their individual and social life. Taking into account certain key challenges of modern society, including the challenge of coexistence in today's globalized, multicultural and multireligious world, mankind is faced with the responsible task of shaping its “own humanity” whose moral strength will be able to cope with these challenges of the modern world. People, especially children and young people, need adequate educational assistance. Educational institutions—schools, in particular—are tasked with empowering young people regarding the knowledge, attitudes and skills that they need to turn their lives into a “work of art” (John Paul II 1999, n. 2) and to become willing and able to do beautiful things at the level of their personal and social life. In terms of education, the current educational systems tend to be more market-oriented than value-oriented. An exclusively economic orientation calls into question the development of man and his “humanity” in accordance with the criteria of the beautiful and the good, as well as the adoption of a profession, the construction of attitudes that are necessary for the construction of a society in which striving for the good and the beautiful dominates over striving for the useful and the functional.

Bearing in mind the need to train children and young people for life in a multicultural and multireligious world, and considering the need to promote those educational values that, on the one hand, enable individuals to grow in their own humanity, and on the other hand, enable the adoption of the competencies necessary for the realization of a beautiful and good common life, we can single out several indicative elements in the current Croatian educational system. Basic educational documents, such as the Primary and Secondary School Education Act and the National Framework Curriculum for Preschool Education and General Compulsory and Secondary Education, emphasize the importance

of comprehensive development that includes the spiritual and moral dimension. The more recent document, National Curriculum Framework, which builds on the National Framework Curriculum, contains no mention of spiritual development/dimension at all. Value orientation, with clearly named and described values, is present in the fundamental educational documents.

Yet, even with the goal of creating peace and quality coexistence for everyone, today's extremely complex circumstances prove that the lack of adopting the values of dialogue, coexistence, tolerance, understanding and respect will result in the creation of a world that is neither beautiful nor good. At the level of European documents and numerous works by various authors, the religious dimension, and especially its dialogic element, is recognized as a necessary component of intercultural education. In fact, multicultural diversity requires the openness of the educational system, as well as all school subjects, to the promotion of the religious dimension. In order to achieve dialogue and coexistence, education also needs to imply the construction of a new mentality, the adoption of new dialogical and peaceful attitudes. The development of such a mentality is not a task placed only upon one subject. Education for peace and dialogue, that is, for coexistence in diversity, should be the responsibility of all school subjects. Education for dialogue and peace cannot ignore the religious dimension of life.

When it comes to the analyzed subject curricula and cross-curricular topics, including their openness to promoting religious–dialogical competence, the situation is rather diverse. The analysis of the content of the curriculum of subjects and cross-curricular topics from the field of Humanities and Social Sciences reveals that subjects differ in the extent to which they are open to the religious–dialogical dimension of intercultural education. Some curricula, even though they belong to the field of Humanities and Social Sciences, reveal a sort of silence regarding the religious dimension, i.e., there is no mention of religious matters in them. These are the curricula of the subjects Science and Social Studies, Politics and Economics, as well as the following the cross-curricular topics: Civic Education and Personal and Social Development. Religious content is explicitly present in the curricula of the following subjects: History, Geography, Philosophy (scarce and inconsistent), Sociology and Ethics (few minor references to religious topics), and Psychology (one direct reference).

Although religious matters are mentioned in some curricula, at the level of domains and outcomes, no reference is made to their correlation with Religious Education. These are the following subjects: Science and Social Studies, History, Geography, Politics and Economics, Ethics and Personal and Social Development. In contrast, the curricula that point to their correlation with Religious Education are Philosophy, Sociology (only once), Psychology (only once) and the cross-curricular topic Civic Education. The lack of openness for correlation with religious content that is mediated by the confessional subject of Religious Education suggests the existence of possible prejudices and closed-minded attitudes towards religious content or the confessional religious education as a school subject. Regardless of the reason, the mere fact of ignoring or being closed to a religious phenomenon or to a school subject that mediates religious knowledge will not help students acquire religious competence, which, in turn, aims to suppress prejudices and stereotypes, as well as to promote communication and dialogue between people of different cultural, religious and nonreligious backgrounds, and to overcome potential bias and misunderstandings. The existence of prejudices in the education system itself will not help in achieving the educational goal of overcoming stereotypes and bias among students.

Values that are crucial for acquiring the competence of “knowing how to live together”, i.e., for the acquisition of religious–dialogic competence, such as identity, coexistence, tolerance, acceptance and appreciation, and cooperation, are present in various topics, in most curricula, yet they never directly refer to members of religious communities or nonreligious worldviews. That testifies to the lack of awareness of the importance of the religious dimension of intercultural education, despite the fact that religious diversity is increasingly present in the Croatian society of today. It should be noted that the analyzed curricula were adopted in 2019. This discussion therefore focuses on recent documents,

which, thanks in particular to migration and globalization trends, came into force in a time of increased awareness of the importance of intercultural education, as well as its religious dimension.

This certain silence regarding the religious dimension of life testifies to the lack of openness of some curricula to the religious phenomenon, which is clearly incompatible with the documents issued by the Council of Europe, as well as with the concrete environment of increasing multiculturalism and multi-religiousness. These results do not support the claim that the curricula are sufficiently aware of the influence of religions on society, culture and people, as highlighted in the History curriculum: they are not sufficiently aware of the importance of intercultural education, at least in terms of promoting the religious dimension. Although the situation in Croatia is still quite homogeneous when it comes to the student population, current migrations are changing the situation on a daily basis. This closedness might be a sign of insufficient awareness of the current changes that are moving in the direction of greater societal heterogeneity, but it can also be a consequence of the decades-long communist regime in which religion was expelled from the public space, which is why religion is approached with suspicion and reservation even in the current educational system, in line with the notion that religion belongs to the “private sphere”. But in order to acquire more accurate data and interpretations, further research and new data are needed. The mere presence or absence of certain contents/values in the curricula, which we examined within this research, still does not guarantee that they are or are not implemented in classes. Therefore, in order to attain clearer and more unambiguous results, considering the openness of a particular subject to the religious–dialogical dimension, it would be useful to undertake a comparative analysis of the curriculum, textbooks and other teaching material used in classes.

It still seems that there is a belief at work that religious education is something that is reserved almost exclusively for the Religious Education school subject, which, in the case of Croatia, is confessional Religious Education. If religious knowledge will be mediated almost exclusively by one subject, i.e., Religious Education, students might get the impression that knowledge about religions and beliefs is ghettoized. Such knowledge does not sufficiently help to connect mutual knowledge or to understand the meaning of religion from different aspects, thus leading to misunderstanding, possible prejudices and nonacceptance, which are then reflected at the level of communication with those who are different in terms of their religious affiliation or worldview. All of it leads to problems at the level of common life, or, in other words, calls into question the harmonious and “beautiful” coexistence in modern society.

The path of beauty, understood as the path of educating a person called to transform his or her life into a “work of art”, i.e., to develop his or her own “humanity”, is an unavoidable path if we strive to achieve dialogue and peaceful coexistence in today’s multicultural and multireligious world. In that regard, the school is particularly invited to make a substantial contribution to the realization of dialogue between people of different cultural, religious and nonreligious backgrounds, with the aim of overcoming the numerous ugly experiences of conflicts and unrests, as well as building a more beautiful, more accommodating, peaceful and just society.

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