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CHALLENGES
OF EUROPE

TEACHING CHILDREN HOW TO FEEL?
THE ROLE OF NATIONAL CURRICULA IN THE CREATION OF A
EUROPEAN IDENTITY

**Final paper for the course 'Challenges of Europe: inclusion and
exclusion in contemporary European Societies'
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Introduction

"What a silly question! It's like you would ask me: 'Are you a father or a son?' I'm both father and son and the distinction between the two is absurd. I'm Italian and therefore also European. I'm from Trieste and therefore also Italian, although I don't speak Italian at home, but the dialect of Trieste."

– Claudio Magris, writer[1]

The opportunity to travel to Dubrovnik, to meet students from all of Europe and to follow an intense week full of lectures on inclusion and exclusion in contemporary European societies, made me think about European identity. Unaware that I had stumbled upon a topic that was subject of a large body of scientific research and publications, I asked myself the question: "Do I feel European?" This question and thee answer, 'no', were the starting point of this paper that discusses the creation of an European identity.

As I soon found out, I wasn't the only Dutchmen who identified herself more with the Netherlands than with Europe. Several studies conclude that most Dutch citizens feel first and foremost connected with the Netherlands and the Netherlands is no exception (i.a Van Renselaar, 2007; European Commission, 2013). The European Union seeks ways to enforce this European identity, like the creation of symbols and the emphasize of shared values and history. Besides the European Commission focuses on the national education systems to increase the attention for Europe at schools. Since an identity can be constructed, people teach each other about these identities. Based on this line of reasoning, this paper looks at the role of Europe in the Dutch curricula for primary and secondary education with regard to the

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[1] Claudio Magris is an Italian novelist, essayist and cultural philosopher born in 1939 in Trieste, Italy. This quote is his reaction on Frans Timmermans' question whether Magris was Italian or European (NRC Next, 2009).

creation of an European identity. The central question in this paper therefore is: *"In what way does the attention for Europe in the Dutch curriculum contribute to the creation and enforcement of an European identity?"*

Theory

In this part of the paper, some attention is first paid to the concept of an identity based on the territory people live in, like a national (or European) identity. Then the focus narrows to the merging of a European identity. After the concept of a European identity is discussed, briefly some attention will be paid to the existence of multiple identities. Finally the role of education in the merging of this European identity is highlighted.

In need for a shared identity

In order to make an entity work well, a shared identity can be a key role in this. Bruter (2003) shows the importance of a shared identity in the creation of a new political system by explaining how the revolutionaries fighting for the Belgium independence felt the need to create a Belgium identity. By using the flag of the old Duchy of Brabant and spreading that to the demonstrators they tried to create a sense of belonging to a distinct Belgium identity (Bruter, 2003: 1149). The first government after the revolution tried to reinforce this new identity. In creation a new identity shared memories are very important. These collective memories of past events can bind people together. In a group certain memories predominate and people adept themselves to these memories, identifying with other within that group. These memories about our history, are taught at school, through education and training (Erll, 2011). Belgium isn't unique in her effort to create a distinct identity. Every new political system feels the need to generate and promote a new mass identity. This also applies to the European Union (EU). Since most of its initial pacific and economic goals are achieved and there's peace among states in Europe, European identity becomes more political (Bruter, 2003; Held, 2014). A shared European identity would ideally improve the legitimacy of the EU (Bruter, 2003). Hence, there exists a desire to create an European identity within the EU.

So, besides national identities, based on shared memories about historical events, the EU is building an European identity. Just like national identities, symbols like the Euro, the European flag and an anthem are used to reinforce a sense of belonging to the EU. This goal is explicitly mentioned in several documents of European institutes, like the European Commission and the European Monetary Institute (Bruter, 2003). Empirical research states

that especially young and educated Europeans identify themselves with Europe, at least as a secondary identity that complements their national identity (Delanty, 2014).

Do multiple identities conflict?

In the previous paragraph Delanty suggested that citizens can have more than just one identity at the same time. Yet how does this match with the idea that an identity is forced out of shared memories of historical events? (Smith, 1992). Both European and national identities are created using symbols, myths and memories (i.a. Risse, 2003; Cinpoes, 2008; Erll, 2011). Studies about the creation of identity show that national identities are forged through opposition to the identities of significant others (Smith, 1992). The Republic of the Seven United Netherlands in the 16th century form the base of the current Dutch nation state. This republic was forced by separating from Spain after decades of war. Hence, national identities might clash with the idea of an European identity that people share with the exact same countries their nation fought against to gain their independence. This lead to the question whether people can have multiple identities at the same time?

Nowadays it's generally accepted that individuals hold multiple identities (i.a. Risse, 2000; Risse, 2003; Bruter, 2003). Citizens don't only have to feel European or Spanish or Catalan, but can have all these identities at the same time. An European identity isn't necessarily at the expense of the national identity. In practice scholars notice that most citizens first and mostly identity with their country, but *'with Europe too'* (Risse, 2003). Risse (2003) provides three theories about multiple identities. The first theory looks at identities as Matruska dolls, in which one identity is nested within another. For example, someone's identity as Parisian is nested in his France identity, which is nested in his Europe identity. Second, identities can be seen as cross-cutting (Risse, 2003). I can identify myself as Dutch and as a student. Some other students will also identify themselves as Dutch, but others might not share this identity with me, because they're from another country. This might lead to conflicts between several identities, because the groups the different identities are related to have opposite demands and goals (Risse, 2003). Finally, multiple identities can be seen as a 'marble cake'. This model claims that there's no clear distinction between several identities, but that they influence and blend into each other (Risse, 2003). Becoming a mother, and adopt the identity of parent, might influence a woman's identity as an employee, for example because she starts working part-time. This might influence what she regards most important in her job. Citizens also take their national identity with them in creating an European identity. Research proves that a

national and European identity can be combined very well, because a stronger connection with a nation state leads to a stronger identification with Europe. National and European identities are positively correlated (i.a. Bruter, 2003; RMO, 1999). The European identity is based on the concept of unity in diversity. *"Cultural diversity is increasingly being seen as what makes 'us' European. […] While belonging to a specific country or region, they also represent part of Europe's common cultural heritage."* (Johansson, 2007: 154). National characteristics are part of an European heritage and therefore of the European identity. Variety gives shape to the European identity (Johansson, 2007; Risse, 2014).

Transfer of identity

To enforce the European identity all over Europe collective memories of the past, symbols and rituals play a vital role. Citizens exposed to symbols identify stronger with Europe than others. The introduction of the Euro had a profound impact on the connectedness of citizens with Europe. Respondents claimed that the Euro made them feel more European (Risse, 2003). The impact of the Euro is allocated to the visibility of currency in our daily lives. Besides symbols also important values like democracy and diversity are central to the European identity. However, people are not born with an identity, nor with historical awareness or these values. People learn this and develop their identities during their life. How and what citizens is told about Europe can influence their identity. Good news on the EU increases the odds of someone identifying with Europe whereas bad news decreases the sense of belonging to the EU (Risse, 2003; Bruter, 2003).

Role of education in European identity creations

Besides the media also education is used to enforce a mass identity. Education helps people give meaning to symbols, teaches us our history at school and is an important factor in transferring this knowledge from one generation to the next. Surprisingly, there's been little attention to the role of education in the creation of a European identity, while primary and secondary school are the decisive with regard to identity formation (Haus, 2009; Agirdag et. Al, 2012). So, the impact of what is taught at school is something to take into account (Haus, 2009). The European Commission became involved in the field of education to create an EU identity (Petit, 2007). By creating transnational partnerships and language training, the European Commission tried to increase the sense of belonging to Europe. However, the effect of exchange programs like the Erasmus program is disputed. Although many scholars state that these programs make significant contributions to the reinforcement the European identity

(i.a. Mihalache, 2005), Kuhn (2012) on the contrary claims that the Erasmus exchange doesn't strengthen European identity. The relatively small amount of students participating often already feel European. Low educated students, who less often identify with Europe, hardly participate in these programmes (Kuhn, 2012).

Because of the limited amount of students that are able to participate in these programs, the focus should be on education on the national level, if we are to understand the European dimension in education (Haus, 2009). The EU has urged member states to pay attention to Europe in their curricula as an attempt to develop an European identity among young people (Agirdag et al, 2012). However, the result of this attempt differs among countries and between different courses (i.a. Faas, 2011; Haus, 2009). They way in which Europe is incorporated in the curricula partially depends on the school subject. Faas (2011) shows that history is mainly ethnocentric, but that geography and citizenship vary from ethnocentrism to Europeanism. The same study also shows differences between countries, like England and Germany. These are confirmed by Haus (2009) who finds that the extent to which Europe was previously internalized into the national identity explains some of the difference between the countries. In addition, the legacies with regard to education explain much of the difference. Whereas the British government tries not to intervene in a highly decentralized education system, the French had an educational system based on uniformity and with an important role for history in forging a national identity (Haus, 2009). This led to the conclusion that France adjusted her curriculum more than England, teaching her children more about Europe and contribute more to an European identity (Haus, 2009).

The above studies lead to the conclusion that education plays an important role in transferring European identity onto young citizens. Most education is regulated and takes place at the national level. Between counties there's much variation in the amount of attention paid to Europe. Therefore, this paper focuses on the attention paid to Europe in the regular education programme in the Netherlands to see how much the Dutch educational system contributes to the *creation and enforcement of an European identity?"*

Methods

To answer the central question, a document analysis is conducted using documents of the Dutch government, the National Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO), the Board of Education (Onderwijsraad) and previous studies conducted to the amount of attention for

Europe in the Dutch curriculum. First, there's attention paid to the amount of attention for Europe in the curricula of the primary and secondary education, since these are the first attempts to socialize young people and therefore the first possibility to teach students about Europe. Second, some attention is paid to the identification of young Dutch citizens with Europe and their knowledge about the European Union. The goal is to trace back the sense of belonging to Europe of Dutch students to the attention to Europe in the curricula.

Analysis

About the educational system in the Netherlands

In 19991 the Dutch ministry of Education, Culture and Welfare started making policy to stimulate the internationalization in education. To function properly in our society, people needed a trans boundary view and knowledge about other culture (Visser & Dinjens, 2004). This policy resulted in much attention for notions like tolerance, respect and recognition in Dutch schools (Nieuwwij.nl, 2003). Despite the stimulation of the government to pay attention to certain topics at school, the Dutch educational system is characterized by quite a lot of freedom. Therefore, the government has no program that explicitly aims to stimulate European identity. Also differentiation among schools are stimulated (Vissern & Dinjens, 2004; Onderwijsraad, 2011). Besides some general rules and guidelines the exact curriculum isn't prescribed. The exact content of the lessons about Europe may thus vary between schools, especially since Europe isn't seen as an appealing theme (Visser & Denjens, 2004). However, core objectives for both primary and secondary education are developed. Herein it's enclosed that some attention to Europe has to be paid in several different courses. The developments of the Netherlands are embedded in a wider context. Internationalization is seen in subjects like geography, history and economics. The amount of attention to Europe between primary and secondary education differs, because the idea is that for young children the broader context is not as important (Onderwijsraad, 2004).

Europe in the Dutch curriculum of primary schools

Primary schools can choose whether they incorporate attention for Europe into their classes (Onderwijsraad, 2011). The government however has created several core objectives for the Dutch primary education and some of them are related to Europe or the European Union. In 2006 these core objectives were revised. The number of core objectives was reduced from 115 to 58. With the exception of core objectives for mathematics and Dutch language lessons, these objectives are broadly formulated, to give schools the opportunity to teach based on

their own knowledge, insights and expertise (Greven & Letschert, 2006). In some of the core objectives Europe is explicitly mentioned. For geography students have to deal with Europe within their topography lessons, core objective 50, and by comparing the spatial planning of their own environment in the Netherlands with that of other countries. Core objective 47 explicitly states that at least two member states of the EU have to be involved in this comparison including two countries that became a member in 2004 (Greven & Letschert, 2006). The specific mentioning of Europe in the core objectives with regard to the history lessons from the 2004 version, have been removed by a more general core objective (Onderwijsraad, 2004). This objective now only states that children have to learn the characteristic aspects of different periods. These periods are based upon a history canon, created in 2006 (BRON). In this canon Europe is one of the themes in the final and tenth period. The role of Europe is nested in one of these periods and not explicitly mentioned in the core objectives for primary education in the Netherlands. Under the heading of 'man and society' there's one core objective specifically mentioning Europe. Objective 36 states that: *"Students have to learn the main issues of the Dutch and European polity."* (Greven & Letschert, 2006).

Besides the role of Europe in these core objectives, learning the English language helps to internationalize the students. Since 1986 English is a compulsory subject in the last two years of primary school. However, more and more schools want to teach their students English in earlier school years. The number of schools providing early language learning (VVTO) increased from 25 in 2002 to 590 in the academic year 2011-2012 (Corda e.a., 2012). There's hardly any attention paid to additional programs increasing internationalization among primary school students. Only 6% of the schools participate in one of these programs (Onderwijsraad, 2011). So, the amount of attention for Europe at primary schools is, based on the core objectives, quite low.

Europe in the Dutch curriculum of secondary schools

In secondary school education there are also 58 core objectives about what schools should include in their education. The focus on Europe in these core objectives can be found in the section 'man and society' where we find two core objectives which explicitly mention Europe. Core objective 38 is about linking changes and developments in their own environment to a broader Dutch, European and global context. Core objective 45 states that: *"The students learn to understand the significance of European cooperation and the*

European Union for themselves, the Netherlands and the world." (Onderbouw-vo, 2006). This core objective stimulates students to look at the positive sides of the EU to realize how important the EU can be. By stimulating this quest, students might me more positive about Europe. The current core objective for the history lessons is about the periods based on the Dutch canon. In this canon there are however several explicit references to Europe, regarding Europe as one of the fifty important themes for the Dutch history lessons. Besides these society-oriented subjects, the role of foreign language is also important to strengthen the European identity. The most spoken languages in Europe after all isn't Dutch, but English and German. There are however no references to Europe in the core objectives about language subjects. (Onderwijsraad, 2004; 2011).

Besides the curricula, there's also some attention for Europe in the examination programs. At lower levels of the secondary education, some subjects within courses offer clues for education with an European perspective. In subjects like History and Economics there are some explicit European components, like the theme 'The Netherlands and Europe' in the history course. The European dimension isn't completely lacking, but it's not a very substantial element in the total of examination programs. The attention in textbooks reflects this conclusion (Onderwijsraad, 2004). At the higher levels of secondary education the attention for Europe is substantial and explicit in subjects like geography, history and economics. The latter for example covers topics like European unification, European integration and the EMU. In the subject of civics, the common part of the course has no European component, but the elective has. So, Europe occurs in the examination programs of the higher levels of secondary school, but isn't very extensive. In the foreign languages for example, there's no explicit attention to Europe (Onderwijsraad, 2004). Finally, schools can opt for extra programs and activities to create an international profile. 70 per cent of the schools participates in such a program (Visser & Dinjens, 2004; Onderwijsraad, 2011).

This leads to the conclusion that there's some attention for Europe in the curriculum via core objectives and examination programs, but it's not very much. If schools want to emphasize Europe in their lessons, schools can use optional programs to do so. Since the schools can decide for themselves what exactly they teach their students, the exact amount of attention paid to Europe and the intensity of these lessons are uncertain and so is the impact on students (Onderwijsraad, 2004).

Dutch youth about Europe

Now it's known how much attention there's for Europe in the Dutch curriculum, our attention shifts to the European identity of the Dutch youth. How do they look at Europe? Do they feel European? The Board of Education in 2004 provides rather gloomy figures. Less than one third of the Dutch population feels involved in the European Union. This is due to the lack of information about the achievements of European cooperation and the role of Europe in Dutch education (Onderwijsraad, 2004). On the other hand several studies provide a different, though not completely positive, view. Maslowski et al (2010) agrees with the Dutch Board of Education that students haven't much interest in Europe. 56 per cent of the students isn't interested in the activities of the EU (Nationale Jeugdraad, 2008). But although their interest in Europe is below the European average, they have on average more trust in European institutions than other European students and four out of ten students think the EU is important (Nationale Jeugdraad, 2008; Maslowski et al, 2010). The knowledge of Dutch students about Europe is equal to that of their fellow students elsewhere in Europe, even though in absolute sense the knowledge is minimal. 25% of the students get taught about Europe at school, only half of them think that it's important that there's attention for Europe in class (Nationale Jeugdraad, 2008). Just like their European peers, most Dutch students (71 per cent) feel European (Nationale Jeugdraad, 2008; Maslowski et al, 2010).

From this we may conclude that the Dutch youth isn't interested in Europe, has marginal knowledge about Europe and the EU and most of them don't feel the need to know more. In comparison with young people from other European countries only the interest in Europe of Dutch youth is below average. Despite this lack of knowledge about and interest in the EU a majority of the Dutch students feel a sense of belonging to Europe. Therefore, we might say that most Dutch students have some form of a European identity.

Conclusion and discussion

The above analysis provides information about the educational curriculum of the Dutch primary and secondary schools and the identification of young people in the Netherlands with Europe. Based on this information, the central question *"In what way does the attention for Europe in the Dutch curriculum contribute to the creation and enforcement of an European identity?"* will be answered.

In the analysis we've seen that there's some, but not much attention for Europe. In the core objectives for primary and secondary education about two or three of the 58 objectives relate explicitly to Europe. These objectives are central in the subjects of geography, civics and history. The curriculum of the latter is based on a national canon in which Europe is one of the fifty themes. The structure of the educational system, with much autonomy for the schools, makes it hard to see how these core objectives are operationalized in practice. The diversity in education that the government stimulates, also allows for big differences in how much attention there's for Europe and the EU. To a certain degree every school and every teacher might herein follow his own judgment. In the examination programs the attention for Europe is explicit in the subjects mentioned before. The attention for Europe is bigger in the higher levels of secondary school examination programs than in the lower levels. Although the focus wasn't on extracurricular activities and programs, it's noteworthy that very few primary schools (six per cent) and quite a lot secondary schools (seventy per cent) joins programs to increase the internationalization of their students. The amount of attention paid to Europe in the regular program however is limited.

Research shows that young people in the Netherlands aren't interested in Europe nor do they know much about it. It's therefore all the more striking that a majority of 71% claims to feel European. Apparently there's a sense of European identity among Dutch students. Obviously the low attention for Europe in the Dutch curriculum contributes to the lack of knowledge of young people about Europe. However, the low attention for Europe doesn't result in a lack of identification with Europe. Most young people claim to feel European.

All in all, in answer to the question *"In what way does the attention for Europe in the Dutch curriculum contribute to the creation and enforcement of an European identity?"* we might conclude that the low amount of attention for Europe contributes to a lack of knowledge about Europe and the EU, which is in theory very important for the creation and enforcement of an European identity. However, there's quite a strong sense of identification with Europe among young Dutch people. Therefore, other factors might play a role and the Dutch curriculum is probably not essential for the creation of an European identity.

Discussion

This result raises a number of questions for discussion. First, the theoretical assumption that education is important in the creation of an European identity isn't verified in this case. It

seems important in the enlargement of knowledge about Europe, but not essential for the creation of a sense of belonging to the EU. This raises both questions about the exact role of knowledge and education in the creation of an European identity as well as the content of this 'feeling European' the Dutch youth shows. If we know more about why young people feel European and what they mean with that, we might clarify how their European identity is constructed. In that way we can take a more detailed look at the role of education and knowledge in the creation of an European identity.

Besides, the Dutch educational system gives schools a lot of freedom with regard to what and how much they tell about Europe. The exact role of schools on the identification of children with Europe therefore varies. It might be that some schools teach a lot about Europe, and that their students have a stronger identification with Europe. The general information about the Dutch curriculum doesn't provide any insights in the exact relation between what's taught at a specific school and the European identity of its students. Concrete cases should be studied to see how a school exactly influences the European identity of their students.

Finally, the creation of an identity is a long process. What children are taught in school, might nog have a direct result. Sometimes the lessons learned at school gain significance at a later age. Therefore I wonder if it's not possible that the attention to Europe at school is like seeds sown, while the harvest will prove later.

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