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Raising European Citizens? European Identity in European Schools

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Abstract

Citizens' identification with Europe could consolidate European integration. European Schools, created for children of EU officials, should mirror the EU's vision of citizens of member states united in (national) diversity. Instead, this study reveals that European School students construct an explicitly European in-group and deviate from EU visions by differentiating themselves from a more national and less mobile lifestyle. The article draws on qualitative content analysis of in-depth and focus group interviews with teachers and 101 students in European Schools in Germany, Luxembourg and England. This elucidates the relationship between European schooling and this peculiar but ultimately European identity. In a dual mechanism, by 'doing Europe', students actively nourish a transnational social network in school; by 'telling Europe', students are more passively exposed to European and diverse national narratives. Both the analysis of how their European identity emerges and descriptive underpinnings show the complexity of European identity construction even under most favourable conditions.

Keywords: European identity; European Schools; in-group/out-group; causal mechanism

Introduction

With the EU's triple crisis (Caporaso, 2018) on the Euro, refugees and Brexit, having a sense of belonging by Europe's citizens is an increasingly important element of sustaining European integration. Ever since the early days of the European project, European Schools for children of EU officials were meant to forge such a European identity. Today, 13 European Schools in six countries aim to raise 'responsible young citizens of Europe' (Schola Europaea, 2014), who know 'they belong together' and 'will become in mind Europeans' (European Schools, 2013). The schools are largely financed by the European Commission, catering for about 27,000 students and following harmonized curricula. Most students have more than one mother tongue and nationality (Schola Europaea, 2017).

Most studies of a European identity test the conception of Europeanness using quantitative data retrieved from adults.¹ Instead, I explore European identity at the stage where its very definition emerges. I adopt a constructivist approach to examine how *European schooling leads to students' peculiar identification with Europe*. This implies understanding an individual's European identity as a self-definition with feelings and meanings attached that may refer to the EU but also to other conceptions of a

¹Notable exceptions are Agirdag *et al.* (2011, 2016), who look at Belgian schoolchildren's identity. Kuhn (2012) studies the European identity of Erasmus students. Quintelier *et al.* (2014) examine the role of parents in their children's identification with Europe and mention the schools' role in their socialization, whereas Savvides (2006) looks at the role of teaching in European Schools.

European community. The qualitative analysis offers three novel contributions to the literature.

Firstly, I provide deep insights into a specific context for European identity development based on document analysis and interviews. This includes a vast and unique dataset of focus groups and interviews with 101 students across three European Schools in Luxembourg, Germany and the UK. To uncover the process components of individuals' identification with Europe, the study starts where it is likely to find it: European School students are young and socioeconomically privileged intra-European 'free movers' (Favell, 2008). Day in, day out, they interact with an in-group that transcends national belonging, framed by the institution of the European School.

Secondly, the study uncovers puzzling shortcomings of the EU's promotion of identity, thereby clarifying the students' peculiar kind of identification with Europe; the dependent variable of the study. While the students interviewed identify with Europe, qualitative content analysis reveals they deviate from the EU's formal view that citizens of member states are united in *national* diversity. Instead, the students describe nationalism as a thing of the past. For them, Europeanness is based on a transnational lifestyle (see Ciornei and Recchi, 2017) based on mobility and multilingualism. This notion excludes less privileged people in nation-states (Duchesne, 2013) and corroborates the view (Manners and Rosamond, 2018) that there is a discrepancy between EU goals and reality.

Finally, the study shows one way in which having a European schooling leads to this identification pattern of students. To demonstrate this, I develop broad propositions from the literature, on which the specific findings of the empirical section are based. I find that these students' peculiar identification with Europe is fuelled by having a European education equivalent to the national one and their teachers' enthusiasm to encourage interaction among their various students. I suggest there is an interaction between 'telling Europe' and 'doing Europe'. In their school setting, students actively do Europe by developing a transnational social network in which physical mobility and multilingualism are the tools that mark their in-group status. Moreover, students are told Europe by being (more passively) exposed by the school and their teachers to European symbols and stories. Teachers and peers furthermore encourage students to adopt various diverging national and anti-nationalist conceptions of Europeanness. While the students directly experience their membership of the small in-group of transnational Europeans in school, identifying with a larger in-group beyond school (that is, a group of similarly multilingual and mobile Europeans) requires both telling and doing Europe. Both features contribute to identity research beyond the specific case of these schools.

The article first reviews the literature on European identity and European schooling, discussing an education system that promotes the idea of European citizenship and cognitive mobilization for Europeanness, from which I develop broad propositions for the empirical analysis. The second section introduces the empirical approach. The third section outlines the in-group and out-groups to which students belong with regard to their identification with Europe. The fourth section traces their identification with Europe, identifying implications observable in the empirical analysis and theorizing there is a dual practice of doing Europe and telling Europe. Lastly, I discuss the implications of this work for European identity research and policy.

I. European Identity, Europe-building and the Role of Schools

Contemporary scholarship on national identity is based on a constructivist viewpoint, seeing nations as invented (Gellner, 2006) or imagined (Anderson, 2006). Similarly, and calling for a bottom-up perspective (Bruter, 2005), individuals mean different things when they claim to ‘feel’ European (Bruter, 2004). ‘Europe-building’ does not necessarily mimic nation-building, which relies on mass education and the mass media (Recchi, 2019), ceremonies (Smith, 1992), institutional settings and a culture that binds people across social groups (Fligstein, 2008). European identity is conceptually and empirically elusive: its referent is hard to define (what is Europe, who is European?) and it is necessarily work in progress (Duchesne, 2008). Hence, individuals’ or social groups’ own stories should be taken at face value. Theorizing around this complex reality follows Duchesne (2008) and others in conceiving the dependent variable ‘identification with Europe’, the outcome of the mechanism to be theorized, as an individually driven process (Bruter, 2004), requiring a bottom-up perspective.

This means that to understand identity constructions, an individual’s position vis-à-vis an in-group is key. An in-group exists where there is a ‘we-feeling’ of a cognitively imagined collective with attached emotions. The in-group identity is based on jointly defined symbolic structures that include the present and past, a collective narrative that serves as code for the social order (Hammack, 2008), a collective ‘scheme of life’ and, if applicable, a relationship to a geographical space (a ‘homeland’) (Erikson, 1968; Schlenker, 2013). Furthermore, it entails an evaluation enhancing the in-group’s cohesion by favourably demarcating it from out-groups (Barth, 1969; Tajfel, 1982). Every out-group constitutes a mirror for the in-group, allowing it to construct boundaries and a positive self-image because the dissociation from others helps to ignore differences within the own collective (Brewer, 2003). Crucial moments of identity building involve settling in-groups and out-groups. European schooling is just such a process of settling identities by insisting on shared qualifications (Gellner, 2006) that socialize students into European citizenship. In school, ‘it will be borne in upon them as they mature that they belong together’ (European Schools, 2013). Students come together and have to make sense of their exposure to diverse individual backgrounds.

Historically, schools are an important vehicle for nation-building, unifying a populace culturally or politically (Wiborg, 2000). Through mass education, modern nation-states constructed a unified national polity, ‘the core of one’s identity’ (Gellner, 2006, p. 60). Even in established nation-states education towards citizenship fosters state loyalty and democratic engagement (Mattei and Broeks, 2018): citizens grant durable legitimacy to the political community they identify with. The community, which is often a nation-state, can then exercise its coercive powers (Bruter, 2004) and provides common rights and duties (Smith, 1992). In education this logic may be transposed to a European scale, raising *European* citizens. The mechanism to be theorized accordingly focuses on European schooling practices and their influence on students’ peculiar identification patterns. European Schools explicitly incorporate European stories into students’ education. Following the literature on socialization and education (see Durkheim, 1925; Sapiro, 2004), they socialize students as initially passive subjects into a European in-group and ultimately into active European citizenship. European Schools transmit narratives through education. The expected observable

implications (Beach and Pedersen, 2013) of theories on education and identity building are summarized as follows:

Proposition 1: I expect European Schools to provide an explicitly European education to their students, which implies influencing their patterns of identification. Here, teachers act as mediators of the schools' envisaged European identity narratives.

It is also expected that implications of this proposition can be elaborated based on empirical analysis, and condition the subsequent parts of the causal mechanism traced and refined in the empirical analysis. Ultimately, a student's specific identification with Europe remains their personal, active achievement of bringing together competing identity layers.

Cognitive mobilization theory defines European identity as a centrifugal force that favours privileged elites at the centre to identify with Europe, whereas individuals with local economic and social horizons stick to national identities (Ciornei and Recchi, 2017; Fligstein, 2008; Fligstein *et al.*, 2012). Hence, for students of European Schools a European identity should be a readily available unitary image of themselves:

Proposition 2: Students do Europe using their socioeconomic horizons, which they exhibit in their family and at school and through which they transcend national and linguistic borders.

Europeanness is arguably at its strongest when it is not constantly remembered but routinized in everyday life, for instance, when citizens stop noticing the EU flag flying in front of public buildings. In this way, daily stories and reminders in European Schools reinforce 'banal' Europeanism (Bruter, 2005; Cram and Patrikios, 2015) among students. In school, symbols and even active remembrance practices are routine experiences from an early age. The literature on banal Europeanism, in line with theories on socialization in national schooling, thus leads to the following proposition:

Proposition 3: European Schools and teachers tell Europe to their students, providing European as well as various national stories and symbols, while students are further exposed to their peers' diverging national backgrounds.

In all, European Schools can be regarded as a most likely setting for an emerging European identity. The concepts of socialization into a European in-group and education towards European citizenship as well as students' cognitive mobilization for Europeanness are discussed as part of the theorization section below.

II. Methods and Data

I trace recurrent and routinized practices (Collier, 2011; Pouliot, 2015) of European Schools, their teachers and students to explore the transmission of narratives and thus practices that lead to students' identification with Europe. To this end, I iteratively refine the propositions outlined above to arrive at more fine-grained implications based on the empirical results (Beach and Pedersen, 2013). I studied three nested cases *within* the

overarching European School case: (1) Luxembourg I, which is the first and one of the biggest European Schools with about 3300 students; (2) Culham, UK: a small school close to Oxford with about 500 pupils² and (3) Munich, Germany: a large school with about 2300 pupils.

My selection of cases was purposive and was tailored towards providing a range for inference, illustrating, challenging and theoretically moving beyond ideas introduced above. Luxembourg, one of the unofficial EU capitals with several EU institutions, relates best to ideas of the Eurocity (Favell, 2008) in which individuals are positioned at the centre of a centrifugal force of identification with Europe (Fligstein, 2008). Culham, in a eurosceptic context (Risse, 2014), provides evidence for approaches to the banal signifiers of a European in-group. Meanwhile Munich, with its location in an international, non-EU city in a comparatively pro-European country may illustrate cosmopolitan narratives (Duchesne, 2013; Favell *et al.*, 2019) somewhat unrelated to EU-specific surroundings.

While the schools are broadly comparable, they differ in how Europeanness is lived in their national and local contexts and in whether the students' parents' jobs are EU-related. This is a purposive variation of the sample to strengthen the breadth and depth of the narratives and according identity patterns across schools. It also helps to eliminate competing propositions that might emphasize the role of context over that of European schooling. Rather than explaining variance, the analysis aims at establishing the internal validity of identification with Europe within the case of the European School. This within-case strategy was hoped to yield the full range of rich and reliable descriptions of identity narratives and their transmission. I employed NVivo for my qualitative content analysis of interviews with school directors, teachers and students. Purposive sampling ensured a balanced mix of respondents within and across schools.

For the analytical entity 'European school', data comprised EU policy documents, European School statements and seven interviews with EU officials and school directors. For the entity 'European School teachers', I conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 teachers in the three selected schools. For the entity 'European School students', I conducted individual as well as eight focus-group interviews including accounts of 101 young people.³ European Schools are relatively homogenous in terms of individuals' socioeconomic status. Nonetheless, the methodology pays particular attention to individual accounts and biographical narrations. Interviewees had single national and multinational (usually dual national) parents and either lived in a third country or in the country of one or both of their parents. They were aged 15–19 years and were within three years of finishing school. This allowed me to explore ongoing teenage identity formation yet ensured they could engage in a sufficient degree of reflection on their identity development in childhood. Meanwhile, the focus groups helped me to analyse the interactions of students and 'identity in action'. Before tracing the mechanisms of identification, I next describe students' peculiar in-group and out-group narratives, thereby shedding light on the dependent variable of students' specific identification with Europe.

²November 2015. Interviews took place shortly before the Brexit referendum. Culham was the first European School to close down in 2017, but its successor, Europa School UK, continues to operate at the same site as an accredited European School.

³There were 31 participants in Munich, 25 in Culham and 45 in Luxembourg. Two to three focus groups were conducted per school (with seven to 14 participants, respectively). Altogether 35 students were interviewed in-depth (11 in Munich, 14 in Culham and 11 in Luxembourg).

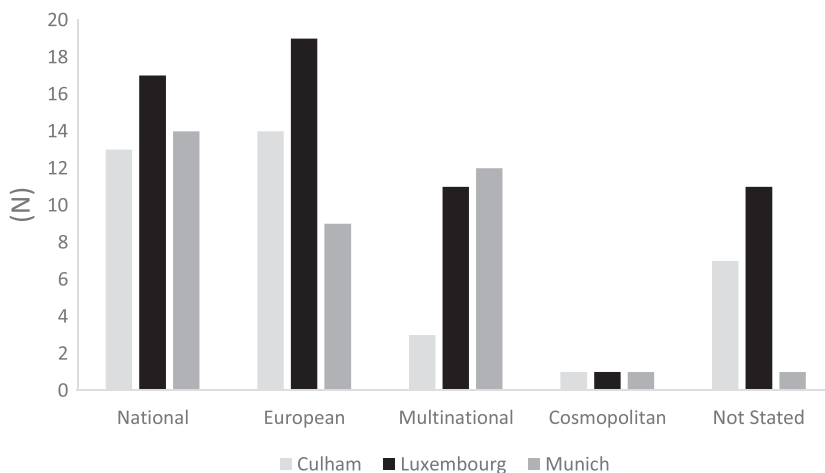
III. Students' European In-group and Exclusive Out-group Identity

The students interviewed commonly identified as both Europeans *and* nationals. However, in their in-group and out-group constructions, students diverged from the EU standpoint, which sees Europeaness as complementing a national identity. The students described themselves not in terms of one nationality but as having *several* nationalities or as straight up transcending them. Without an active trigger, students discussed 'Europeaness' as category of belonging, arguing that beyond national senses of belonging, 'I also feel absolutely European' (Javier, Munich, May 2015). The counting statistic, Figure 1 shows that this is a relevant and available description for many students, in particular in Luxembourg and Culham.

In each school, only one interviewee described themselves as a 'citizen of the world' (Ethan, Munich, May 2015), which surprisingly, provoked partly opposing reactions in focus groups. Students argued that 'you have to belong somewhere', criticizing the avoidance of national categories. Other students preferred to emphasize that their European identity was a sentiment shared with their very diverse peers.

How students frame Europeaness differed across schools. A 'European identity', called thus by interviewees, popped up naturally in Munich, with its relatively pro-European national context, while many students also expressed a local (city) identity and a identification with mobile, *transnationally* oriented Europeans: 'Munich is the city I live in but whether it is in Germany [...], I don't really care' (Gabriel, Munich, May 2015). In Culham, several students saw themselves as Europeans but linked this to comparisons with a less European environment. As Charlotte (Culham, November 2015) argued, 'I can relate more to people who have a similar [...] experience in life, which is the people in this school'. In Luxembourg, students identified least with their immediate surrounding, that

Figure 1: European School students response to 'What group do you identify with?'. Note: respondents $N = 101$; no or several answers allowed.



Source: author's interview data.

is, a Luxembourgish national identity. Many defined themselves as Europeans, in line with living in a Eurocity (Favell, 2008) with many foreign-born inhabitants.

Students were used to a transnational lifestyle, at least in their schooling and often in their families, and were fully aware that their schools differed from their national surroundings and other schools. Remarkably, students abstracted from their own transnational experiences – they travelled a lot, they lived in different places, their parents had mixed marriages – to favour the evolution of Europe in this direction. Accordingly, students describe an out-group of nationally oriented people, in which a non-European was seen as someone ‘who says that he is only from one country and that only his country is important to him and that he doesn’t care about what happens in other countries or Europe’ (Javier, Munich, May 2015). This recurrent coding item and normative twist among individuals and schools is a striking deviation from the EU’s slogan that (citizens of) EU member states are ‘united in diversity’.

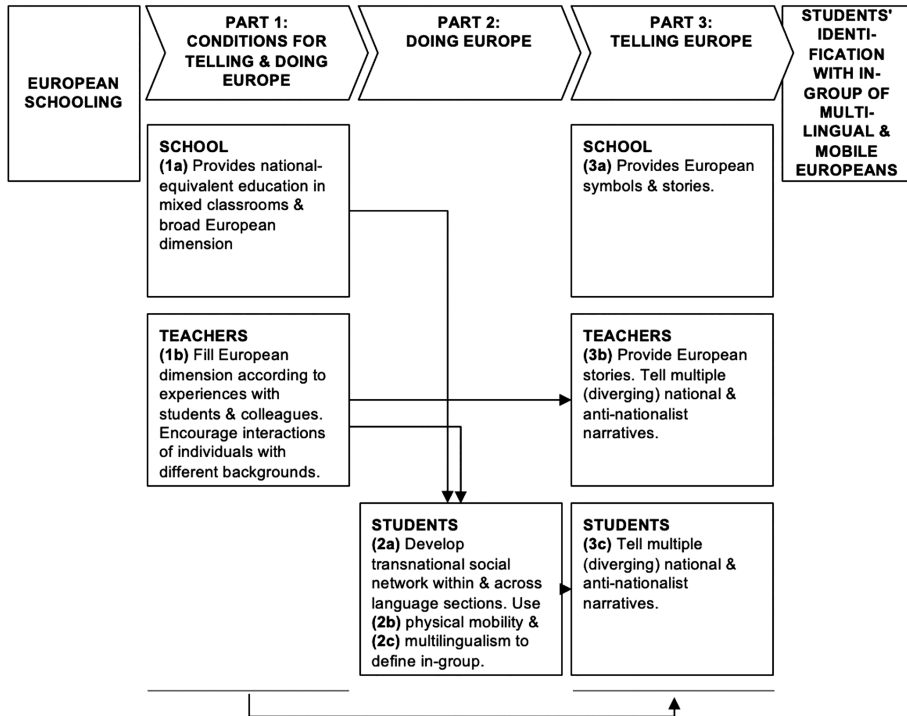
For these students, one cannot be European and nationalist at the same time. This feeds back into their in-group narrations: transnational practices, being in-between and transcending nations, make individuals more European. Here, departing from the findings of Favell *et al.* (2019), regardless of their national backgrounds, students rely on a cosmopolitan construct of Europeanness, with cosmopolitanism defined as aiming to create a moral community committed to universal values (Schlenker, 2013). Students in all schools and especially Luxembourg describe the European School as a ‘bubble’. Students in Culham remarked that the school differs from their eurosceptic surroundings, and one student called the school ‘an embassy’ (Charlotte, Culham, November 2015).

Summing up, students saw themselves as Europeans and nationals of one or several countries, too. Their in-group and out-group conceptualizations diverge markedly from the EU’s institutional narratives. The students constructed a more inclusive in-group than that of the EU: instead of saying it formally comprised citizens of EU countries, they said that everyone can be European if they adhere to European values. The students also diverged from the EU’s vision by constructing an exclusive out-group of people *within* Europe who were not as mobile and multilingual as they were. This implies they have an active understanding of citizenship or identity. They believed that one is not European by birth right, rather, to be so requires the active use of (cosmopolitan) norms and (mobility) rights. Instead of including all citizens of EU member states in their default in-group, the students argued that one cannot be a nationalist as well as a European. This is a peculiar finding whose origins are now explored in detail, by focusing on the contribution of European schooling. To this I now turn.

IV. Mechanism of Identification with Europe: Telling and Doing Europe

This section traces European identity transmission and development, moving from the practices of European schooling towards students’ identification with the in-group of multilingual and mobile Europeans discussed above. Figure 2 summarizes the mechanism theorized. Based on the propositions developed from the theory, the section seeks to identify the implications for the components this mechanism. For the initial mechanism, school and teachers are key entities. They condition the practices of doing and telling Europe that bring about students’ identification with the European in-group. The first part of this section hence entails having an explicitly European schooling that is equivalent to

Figure 2: Causal mechanism around doing Europe and telling Europe



the national one and the leeway for teachers to achieve a European dimension in teaching. The next part, doing Europe, is rooted in the students' transnational social networking practices, whereas the last part, telling Europe covers students' exposure to European and partly diverging national symbols and stories.

Conditions for Telling and Doing Europe

The first part of the mechanism focuses on the institution 'school' and teachers as its agents, that is, the mediators of the school's European identity visions. Based on theories of education and identity building, I expected that European Schools provide an explicitly European education, implying they influence students' identity patterns. From Proposition 1 developed above, I now identify its implications as observed in the empirical study:

Implication 1a: European Schools provide a education equivalent to the national one, yet create classes of students with mixed backgrounds and various mother tongues.

This implication affects the exposure of students to various national stories ('telling Europe', in the third part of this section). While most of the students have spent most of their school years in European Schools, having an education equivalent to the national one should ensure there is a smooth transition when students move to another country (such as that of their parents). Thus, besides following a common EU-wide curriculum and having national inspectors, these schools pool students into language sections with

near-native speaking teachers. These sections function as reminders of their national in-groups and simplify a student's dual nationality or multi-nationality. Almost as in Tajfel's (1969) minimal group experiments, students are assigned to a section they pick up as in-group, while out-grouping other form groups of the same grade. While such in-grouping also happens in non-European Schools, European School students increase the coherence of their own in-group using national labels, for example calling other form groups 'the French', 'the Italians'.

At the same time, all sections have students with mixed backgrounds, speaking the same 'language 1' in school but having different multinational family backgrounds. Furthermore, the school organizes multilingual classrooms by teaching subjects in the second language and mixing students accordingly. This departs from social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982). As different national backgrounds become visible, schools normalize mixed backgrounds and foster a common European in-group. Students experience from a young age that, even within their language section, 'there is no one who is, like, one hundred per cent one nationality' (Marina, Luxembourg, February 2016). This is both a parallel implication of having an education that is equivalent to the national one and a quasi-counterfactual for purely national types of in-groups. In addition, although about half of the students who were interviewed have a single national background, they themselves underestimate this proportion, for instance arguing that 'everyone is so mixed here. There's only people who are bilingual or even trilingual [...]. Some people don't even know really where they come from' (Gustav, Luxembourg, February 2016). This underscores their interpretation of their peer group in a transnational, European way. It shows how students rely on their gut feeling, cognitively and emotionally intertwining backgrounds and language skills.

A competing proposition could be that persistent national or cross-national (rather than explicitly European) in-groups are being formed. While nationality-laden form groups have been found to somewhat suppress an overarching in-group, transnational in-groups still develop at a smaller scale within each language section. Crucially, the interviews elicited the presence of an explicitly European in-group, as 'you learn to be international' (Marina, Luxembourg, February 2016). This is tied to a civic or cosmopolitan European identity, as described by Fligstein *et al.* (2012). Rather than leading to mere cosmopolitanism, the international outlook is framed as being European. As argued by Favell *et al.* (2019) this implies that students understand and use the European frame: being European is the most tangible referent of internationality because 'living in an environment with so many different people [...] coming from different places increases that [sense of belonging to Europe]' (Marta, Luxembourg, February 2016).

Implication 1b: Teachers use the leeway granted to them to interpret a European dimension and encourage interactions among diverse students.

European Schools have an explicit but also vague European dimension in their mission statements and curricular frameworks. This dimension can be compared with citizenship education in other contexts (see Mattei and Broeks, 2018). Addressing the European dimension is delegated to school directors and redelegated to teachers. They have extensive leeway in terms of its content and argue that 'the system comes to life through sovereign teaching staff' (Ms Weber, Munich, May 2015). Formally tasked with addressing the

European dimension in each subject, teachers drift from the EU's target multinational narrative that builds on distinct member-state identities. Instead, they fill the European dimension with own (often cosmopolitan) values and *personal* transnational experiences with their students and fellow teachers: 'we do have official values that we mediate [...], the European idea, the European spirit. [...] I find it important to mediate tolerance, [...] comprehension that the other is different' (Ms Smith, Luxembourg, February 2016). To this end, teachers encourage interactions of students with different backgrounds, as can be observed in their adjustment of seating arrangements and treating students as the experts on their respective countries, both in terms of their factual knowledge and softer cultural sensitivities. By constructing diverse backgrounds as an asset and arguing that they are 'not as European as our students' (Mr Berger, Luxembourg, February 2016) teachers positively fuel the students' European in-group.

The teachers claim that no student 'leaves this school without intercultural experience' (Ms Weber, Munich, May 2015). Teachers also report that students do not necessarily have a very good command of their 'first language' or mother tongue. Still, they praise students' language skills, accentuating the advantages of commanding several languages over perfecting only one, and argue that this influences their own mind-sets, too. Not only do languages not constitute significant interaction barriers, teachers use the leeway granted to them to drive interactions even further. The deliberate mixing of students in classrooms facilitates transnational ties towards a social network and enhances exposure to the full breadth of available (European) narratives. Maintaining an education that is equivalent to the national one at the same time affects various, partly diverging national narratives. Teachers' facilitation of interactions across language sections thus affects doing and telling Europe.

Doing Europe

The second part of the mechanism, doing Europe focuses on students' day-to-day, transnational social network. In line with cognitive mobilization theory, I propose that students are doing Europe through their socioeconomic background, which they make use of in school and family contexts and through which they transcend national and linguistic borders. The empirical analysis shows that students use their physical mobility and multilingualism to define their in-group of Europeans. In particular, based on the theory-derived proposition, I identify three observable implications.

Implication 2a: Students actively 'do' a transnational social network in school.

Students see their transnational peers in school as like-minded, while perceiving strong differences vis-à-vis school externals. Their density of interactions with peers from diverse backgrounds contributes to a close social network with defining properties like openness to learning about other nation-states, cultures and languages. Peers have 'the same kind of attitude towards what's important' (Charlotte, Culham, November 2015) and 'living together in the European School [...] really helps us and brings about a new train of thought. And not this really strictly national [thinking]' (Dorota, Munich, May 2015). The school as well as individual teachers and students generate a positive story about transnationality in which upholding nationalities is a merely supporting element of transnationality.

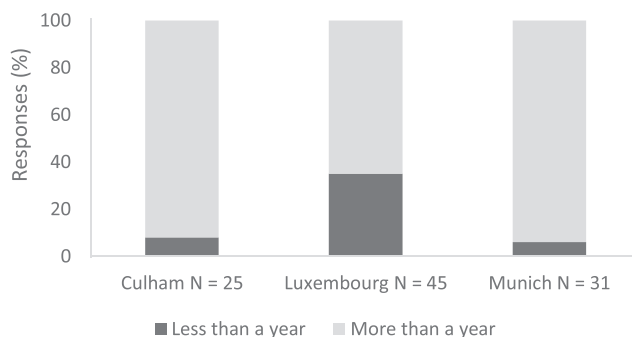
Enthusiasm about diverse social ties is theorized as a necessary condition for students to develop a positive approach to the network as such. Their network in school stands for a European culture, as illustrated by Camille's (Munich, May 2015) remark that there 'should be more European Schools, if you really want to make a European culture'. Constructing the transnational network as inherently European is, in turn, necessary for a sense of belonging to a European in-group. Overall, students say that they relate more easily to people with a similar upbringing. In school, these are fellow students as a tangible group. From this group, students abstract to individuals at other European Schools and more generally, to people with similar backgrounds. They cognitively and affectively widen school-specific experiences to their in-group of Europeans.

Implication 2b: Students ground their in-group of Europeans in a shared experience of physical mobility.

Through school trips and exchanges abroad, students enhance their understanding of European countries, as the school 'is very good at keeping [...] us [...] linked to different places and really helping us understand the different places and the cultures everywhere' (Laetitia, Culham, November 2015). Students' physical mobility fuels a feeling of ease in different European settings. This lifestyle is one of European free movers or 'Eurostars' (Favell, 2008) who live in dynamic multicultural environments and are barely affected by national categories. Students travel regularly to countries where they have lived or have family. As Figure 3 shows, most of these students have lived in another country than the current one for more than a year.

While students feel they can swiftly adapt to various national settings, they argue that they never fully belong to one national group. They feel alienated both from their parents' home countries and their country of residence. For Michael (Luxembourg, February 2016), 'it's harder to get attached to a place if you've lived in multiple ones. I have. I don't feel particularly [...] attached to any country. I think it's more of a past generation thing'. In line with the literature on Eurostars (Favell, 2008) and centrifugal European

Figure 3: Responses to 'How long have you lived in any country other than your country of residence'?



Note: respondents $N = 101$, source: author's interview data.

identity (Fligstein, 2008), students' lack of attachment to specific nations and their persistent attachment to both a more tangible group (of people equally diverse and mobile) and a local setting became particularly apparent in the Eurocity of Luxembourg. Elsa (Luxembourg, February 2016) says, 'for me it's hard to associate myself with a specific country [...] because obviously I'm not so involved'.

Nevertheless, with a transnational network and multilingualism, the students' physical mobility also facilitates their feeling at ease or even at home in different settings: 'I think I can now adapt more easily if I go to Italy [...] or Hungary or anywhere in Europe [...] it's not really different from anywhere else in Europe' (Louise, Culham, November 2015). Students extend the concept of home beyond geographical or national properties. Rather, they define it according to specific 'memories and incidents, something that happened in that specific country' (Vitan, Munich, May 2015) or by 'what kind of connection, like, [...] family or friends you have in that country' (Irene, Culham, November 2015). Instead of having access to a large-scale political mythology, as advocated by Smith (1992), students rely on their own small-scale memories of personal ties and events to define home.

A feeling of being out-grouped in national contexts amplifies this perception. Being European allows students to transcend this feeling as it signifies 'just not feeling foreign, in most countries, [...] in Europe' (Nicolas, Munich, May 2015). For Nicolas, this is a question of knowing how to take part in everyday life: 'you can feel at home really fast [...], [being] European is being able to interfere everywhere'. Students consider that purely national thinking is undesirable and, for themselves, even impossible. They frame recurrent mobility practices as an experience of Europe, feeding into their definition of a European in-group.

Implication 2c: Students use multilingualism to confine their own in-group of mobile Europeans.

Even for single national students, a multilingual environment is a natural setting in school, where 'you can be in one room and hear all these different languages' (Alia, Culham, November 2015). Students feel their language skills both weaken and strengthen their national identities: 'I speak German with my mother, [...] my father speaks Romanian [...]. In school, I speak English and French [...]. That's why I cannot identify with one country' (Valentin, Munich, May 2015). Learning yet another language is a transferable skill for unlocking cultural contexts, to 'open up, mind-wise' (Ethan, Munich, May 2015).

Language mixing is a common feature of speakers with multilingual backgrounds (Hinnenkamp, 2010) and is practiced alongside switching from one language to another. As part of multilingualism, being able to mix and switch languages catalyses students' imagination of an in-group of multilingual Europeans. It is – in itself – not a necessary process component. Rather, it contributes to the transnational social network students do in school and strengthens a feeling of being multi-adaptable in Europe: 'I definitely feel very close to Europe in general. Even if [...] I haven't been to every country but [...], if you hear [...] a familiar language [...] I know that's my familiar place, Europe' (Laetitia, Culham, November 2015). Hence, multilingualism reduces frictions when accessing cultures.

In sum, students actively develop and maintain a transnational social network in school, which is a necessary element of the mechanism: for a student to identify with Europe, they must ‘do Europe’ by experiencing dense transnational ties. The school and teachers structurally facilitate this social network within and across language sections. Students’ multilingualism and mobility provide supporting evidence but are not deemed necessary to yield the specific outcome of students’ identification with Europe. Instead, they further strengthen in-group cohesion (Barth, 1969; Tajfel, 1982), pointing towards the peculiar imagination of an in-group of Europeans.

Telling Europe

School, teachers and students are key entities for telling Europe. This part entails causal forces in which each individual student is a rather passive subject of socialization and education practices. I expected the European School and teachers to tell Europe to students – to provide students with European as well as multiple national stories and symbols, while students are exposed to their peers’ diverging national backgrounds. Based on this broad proposition, three more detailed observable implications have been carved out.

Implication 3a: The school provides explicitly European stories and EU symbols to students.

European Schools embed European symbols and stories in everyday school life, like flying the European flag or naming rooms after EU founding figures (‘salle Schuman’, ‘Monnet room’). During the ‘European hours’ taught across language sections or celebrations of Europe Day, students learn about Europe’s various national customs, food and dance. The schools thus create a joint space of experiencing and celebrating Europe: ‘it’s great to be European [...]. I was shaped that way here in school with this whole Europe Day and we also had to learn the anthem. [Being] European, it’s really due to this school’ (Lukas, Munich, May 2015). In combination with students’ curricular activities and knowledge about European issues, the (mostly banal) European context in school is positively framed. More conscious reminders like singing the anthem make this European frame omnipresent.

Daily, low-level references to the EU function as banal reminders (Billig, 1995) and normalize the EU’s legitimacy vis-à-vis citizens (Cram and Patrikios, 2015). When discussing European flags in focus groups, differences across schools became apparent, with students being surprisingly explicit on the perceived power of symbols. In the Eurocity Luxembourg and in Munich, the EU flag is indeed banal, whereas for several students in Culham, the flag is a salient signifier of the school’s in-group. Departing from a hypothesized banal Europeanism (see Billig, 1995), it is a symbol to outsiders that ‘we’re [...] unique, and our flag, the European Union flag, sort of represents our school, without that it wouldn’t really have a sort of meaning, it would just be a normal school’ (Paul, Culham, November 2015). Among Culham students, European symbols and stories are also explicitly connected to the political situation around Brexit.

While the European flag is partly trivial to students, it stands for a European narrative of nations coming together: the flag and the fact that ‘Europe Day is celebrated every year, stuff like that, I believe influences that you feel European at some point’ (Dominik, Munich, May 2015). Hence, even banal symbols and everyday stories of Europe fuel

European narratives and thereby catalyse the students' sense of belonging to a European in-group. In interplay with other components, especially exposure to diverging national stories and symbols in school, this is jointly necessary for the students' peculiar identification with Europe.

Implication 3b: Teachers expose students to European and diverging national narratives.

Teachers move away from their task to provide 'only' an education equivalent to the national one, for which they have been seconded by national governments. Through cooperation across sections, teachers also promote European stories and symbols.

National textbooks are used in school, which implies that students can reiterate and promote national narratives (Wiborg, 2000). Various teachers report that they are 'directed by [the] audience even more than by the syllabus' (Mr Berger, Luxembourg, February 2016), in which its European dimension remains underspecified. Hence, as teachers do not want to focus only on the hard facts of European history and integration, they move beyond a mere cognitive dimension (Inglehart, 1970) and into affective notions (Tajfel, 1982) of Europeanness. The lack of European textbooks also creates the very leeway that teachers use to teach a European historiography (Mr Meyer, Munich, May 2015).

A recurrent theme among individuals and schools is teachers' enthusiasm for their students' quality or broad-mindedness. They praise students' transnational biographies and language skills. This leads teachers to tell Europe in an idealistic and enthusiastic manner, while explicitly arguing that students influence the syllabuses and stories they put forward. This in turn influences students, who grow up seeing that their mixed biographies and multilingualism are an asset. Students link opportunities to learn about various countries and Europe in school to the existence of the EU. As one student says: 'we know that if there wasn't [a] European Union we wouldn't be here, we would be in our country and [...] I feel, maybe closer to Europeans, [...] because [...] they are more open-minded to other cultures and people' (Amelie, Luxembourg, February 2016).

While it is not only a direct result of teaching, the fact that European Schools offer a 'mix between everything' (Elsa, Luxembourg, February 2016) means that students can construct a positive narrative of their lack of a sense of belonging to a single nation. The teachers interviewed felt – and students confirmed this – that they were accompanying students in their development from being *more national* younger students to *more European* older ones. This confirms the expectation that the European School plays a crucial part in the students' identification with Europe.

Implication 3c: Students are mutually exposed to diverging national stories and symbols.

Students tell multiple and partly diverging national stories to their peers, for instance when discussing the history of countries in class. They also tell anti-nationalist narratives, a prominent coding item. This is catalysed by having teachers and peers from varying national backgrounds. Originating from several countries further fuels students' inclusive, abstract in-group.

One student directly connected the diversity of her peers to a general European inclusiveness, which she defines as coming from different countries and therefore from Europe: there are people 'from different countries, and what really connects us then is

having this European inclusivity [*sic*], that we all come from Europe' (Marina, Luxembourg, February 2016). Hence, varying (national) teaching styles, as well as the noted similarities and differences between fellow students contribute to their enthusiasm for the diversity of peers.

The provision of national symbols (for instance flying member-state flags on national holidays) could be conceived as working towards national identification (see Billig, 1995; Bruter, 2005). However, students do not mention that these symbols mobilize them towards national attachments and some of them even explicitly argue that, on the contrary, it makes them even more open-minded or European. The role that national symbols plays extends Billig's (1995) expectations: national flags encourage a European perspective because, in line with their exposure to multinational peers, students are reminded of *various* nations. They see the flag of their parental country as only one among many.

In sum, the empirical study hints that telling Europe is necessary for the overall mechanism that creates students' peculiar identification with Europe: the way the school and individual teachers tell Europe through symbols and stories strengthens the students' imagination of a transnational and multilingual in-group of Europeans: 'I believe this makes us very open and, well, Europe is what brings us together' (Maria, Luxembourg, February 2016). Multilingual interactions within the student body support this by further charging it with content of what is being told. Thus, more passively telling Europe is intertwined with doing Europe and both are necessary components of an overall mechanism that yields a peculiar identification pattern.

Conclusion

Working within the most likely case of European Schools, this article finds that students identify with Europe, defining it as an in-group of multilingual and mobile individuals and differentiating themselves from more national lifestyles. Coming back to the EU's turmoil, this is a case in point for the EU's shortcomings in identity promotion and narrative transmission to European citizens. It is striking that the EU cannot transmit an identity along the narratives intended, even within an institutionally controlled setting.

In European Schools, students reinterpret the narrative that Europeans are united in (national) diversity to see more national lifestyles as being a thing of the past, thereby excluding people within Europe from the very definition of 'European'. This relates to the criticism that cosmopolitanism is an elitist mind-set (Duchesne, 2013), which condemns less privileged people for being less open, and a criticised centrifugal character of the European identity (Fligstein, 2008). Furthermore, in line with 'out-grouping' (Barth, 1969; Brewer, 2003), the students' dissociation from school outsiders or generally, people living a less mobile and more national lifestyle, helps them to ignore differences within the in-group, particularly the students' own, specific multinational backgrounds, and to perceive the in-group of Europeans positively. For students, the schools' and teachers' positive framing of multilingualism and transnationalism allows them to have a positive and coherent notion of a European in-group despite otherwise feeling out-grouped from single national settings.

The study departed from correlated data: based on theory-derived propositions, it iteratively traced practices that link European schooling with students' identification with Europe, implying high internal validity of the study, while increasing the reliability of

inference through three nested cases. While this qualitative study does not claim to eliminate other variables (for example the influence of primary socialization and thus parents on students' identity), the article has shown that European schooling plays a formative role in these students' peculiar identification with Europe. A causal mechanism that is based on detailed observable implications opens this black box of students' European identity. This systematic mechanism can inform future research, as it also provides testable expectations for other contexts. While students directly experience a smaller in-group of transnational Europeans in school, their identification with a larger, European in-group beyond school needs recurrent practices of both telling and doing Europe. Students identify with an in-group of Europeans and feel particularly close to people who are similarly multilingual and mobile. More precisely: (1) although the education offered by the school is equivalent to the national one, it is European in content and together with teacher's leeway to encourage interactions among diverse students, it conditions the following parts of the mechanism. (2) In the school setting, students do Europe by developing a transnational social network with physical mobility and multilingualism as the tools of in-group demarcation. (3) Students are told Europe due to their exposure to European symbols and stories by the school and teachers and their exposure to multiple, diverging national and anti-nationalist narratives by teachers and peers.

The theorized duality of telling Europe and doing Europe is a substantial contribution beyond the favourable case of European Schools and their students. In line with banal nationalism and cognitive mobilization (e.g. Billig, 1995), students do not really 'do their nation' as much as other people do theirs. For them, their own or other peoples' national belonging are not banal. The interviewees argue that their national identities are important as they live abroad or that nation-specific characteristics seem 'weird' to them. On the other hand, their *European* network is more banal and part of their everyday life. This differentiates them from other people in Europe. Here, 'raising European citizens' is more than a top-down process with passive individuals: students grow up to be active European citizens and make sense of their schooling and available identities.

However, the study also underlines that beyond these active practices, 'telling Europe', that is, students' exposure to European stories and symbols as well as diverging national narratives, is another necessary component of the mechanism. Here, 'cognitive mobilization' and 'banal Europeanism' have not been entirely applicable even to the favourable case of European School students. The article underscores the role of a somewhat passive education and socialization for identification with Europe alongside more active practices of citizens. Through stories and symbols in European Schools, an imagined European community is invented and reproduced. This last component of the mechanism is particularly decisive. While having a transnational social network (actively doing Europe) is a necessary step, the overall causal mechanism can only take place if it also jumps the subsequent 'smallest hoop' (Beach and Pedersen, 2013) of telling Europe. This wheelwork of practices ultimately facilitates the outcome: students are told diverging national narratives in school and by further being told about Europe, a European in-group is available to them to be filled with positive images of themselves, their peers and their lifestyle based on multilingualism and mobility.

Having carved out a dual mechanism of 'doing' and 'telling Europe', this article has shown that research needs to acknowledge the complexity of identity construction and transmission. Meanwhile, to encourage a European identity, the findings suggest that

the EU should give more prominence to education towards an extended notion of European citizenship: a comprehensive story towards European identity instead of explaining the mere practical benefits of citizenship. If the EU wants to stabilize the European project, it needs to catch on with formulating a clear identity vision.

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Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Supporting Information S1