

Imagining Europe

Conceptualizations of Europe in a cross-national comparison across social groups and networks

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1. Puzzle

Social and cultural life is no longer *necessarily* connected to a specific place. Globalisation has increased cross-border flows of goods, capital, people, culture, and ideas (Appadurai, 1996). Online and/or mobile communication technologies are increasingly ubiquitous. Moreover, individual mobility has never been more widespread in terms of speed, distance travelled, and availability across different social groups (Urry, 2007, pp.3-6). In Europe, national borders have become largely irrelevant within the territory covered by the European Union (EU) as obstacles to mobility for the large majority of its population. All of this occurred over the course of one or two generations. What's more, it arguably is the only place in the world where this 'post-national' condition (Blokker, 2008; Habermas, 2001) has been institutionalised politically, economically, and socially to such a great extent (Recchi & Favell, 2009, p.1).

Despite all of these changes, empirical studies repeatedly show that the large majority of Europeans say they feel 'national' before anything else (Bruter, 2005; Duchesne & Frogner, 2008; McLaren, 2006; Moes, 2009). Nevertheless, 'Europe' is rarely fundamentally contested as a relevant social category, and most of the same studies have found evidence that a relatively large and growing percentage of Europe's population would call themselves 'European' in certain circumstances or contexts. However, very little attention has thus far been paid to what it actually *means* to identify with Europe and what the social consequences are of this 'post-national' condition. This study will do just that, defending the central thesis that the meaning of 'Europe' has become (or perhaps always was) detached from territory as such.

If this is indeed the case, this may obscure discussions on 'European identity' in general because collective identification as a concept has *itself* come to be associated with territorial identities (i.e. nation-states). The conceptual and methodological issue with 'measuring' (European) identity could therefore be that people have gotten used to associating the concept 'identity' *itself* with nationality (Bruter, 2005, pp.101-102). In other words, when asked whether they have a 'European identity', people may indiscriminately take 'national identity' as a frame of reference for defining what it means to 'identify' in general. European identity may turn out to be a different kind of beast altogether and could well be a social category based on other markers than (just) territory. What is more, the question whether people 'identify' with Europe and whether they do so at the expense of their national identification have convincingly been settled in earlier studies, using a

wide range of approaches.¹ Therefore, this project aims to find an answer to the multi-dimensional question of how individuals relate to the concept of Europe (what it ‘means’) rather than the two-dimensional question of whether they identify with it or not (or to what extent). The overarching puzzle of this project thus concerns the question *what the deterritorialization of identity means in the European context* (cf. Shore, 2004, p.37).

Obviously, ‘Europe’ can mean something completely different not only in different contexts and circumstances, but also according to individual characteristics and experiences. To give some examples: for some people, in certain contexts, ‘Europe’ may represent an image of modernity. For others in other contexts, it is an expression of cosmopolitan ideals. For others still, it symbolizes all that is wrong with globalisation. Additionally, in some cases, ‘Europe’ may feel practically synonymous with the EU while in other instances these may be perceived to be two radically different concepts (Eder, 2009, p.435). The question that remains is *who* conceptualizes Europe *in which way*? If we argue that a transnational public sphere is emerging in Europe (Risse, 2010), then how has this changed the way ideas spread within this sphere? More importantly, perhaps, *which* ideas are spread rather than others, and *among whom*? What is the ‘Europeanized Europe’ all about, and what does it look like for different groups within different European societies? How are these discourses embedded in processes of identification with (the) nation-state(s) and with Europe (cf. Díez Medrano, 2003; Risse, 2010)? And what difference do individuals’ (transnational) social networks make with regard to their conceptualizations of ‘Europe’?

Below, I will first offer a central question that I will subsequently dissect into four sub-questions. Some concepts will be mentioned in that part, which I will elaborate on in the section thereafter while discussing the current literature in this field. After this, I will proceed to the suggested research plan, first clarifying the central arguments and then going into my empirical expectations. When that has been made clear, I will go into the specific cases for this research (the Netherlands, Estonia, and Italy, with a focus on academic communities) while discussing the methodological approach and sampling strategy. At the end, I will include a chapter outline and the time planning for this research project.

2. Research questions

European integration – whether social, cultural, political, or economic – leads to an intensification of cross-border flows of goods, people, knowledge, ideas, and eventually; culture (cf. Appadurai, 1996). Public debate concerning this topic often focuses on the perceived homogenization of cultures and conceptualizes Europe as an entity to which national identities are ‘lost’. However, throughout the history of the continent, tribes, empires, and later, nation-states have been engaged in constant cultural exchange. Separate, singular ‘national cultures’ never existed to begin with, which makes the question of their disappearance ill-informed. In this sense, one should rather pose the question to what extent European integration causes nation-states to become culturally intertwined even further. Yet, such a question problematically presupposes that nation-states

¹ See Bruter, 2005; Díez Medrano, 2003; Duchesne & Frogner, 2008; Herrmann, Risse-Kappen, & Brewer, 2004; Hooghe & Marks, 2004; Karolewski, 2010; McLaren, 2006; Moes, 2009; Recchi & Favell, 2009; Robyn, 2005; Shore, 2000.

themselves are homogenous cultural entities. In addition to sub-national identities that can be found all over Europe, one should keep in mind that societies are stratified, each 'layer' and group presumably having its own values, norms, and cultural codes. What we *should* be asking, therefore, is *who* is 'Europeanizing', and to which point in the future does this Europeanization occur?

Assuming, then, that there is a potentially infinite range of variation on ways of conceptualizing Europe, it is our job as social scientists to describe this range and to systematically analyze its patterns. On a general level, therefore, the central question that I will answer in this project can be formulated as follows:

Which meanings are attributed to 'Europe', and according to which patterns of individual, contextual, and social network characteristics do these meanings occur?

This question assumes the logic that a person's particular imagination of 'Europe' (Q1) can be explained through an analysis of her individual characteristics (Q2), the composition and nature of her social network (Q3), and the specific context in which she finds herself (Q4). This logic implies four major sub-questions (Q1-4), which I will now discuss in more detail.²

Three of the four sub-questions (Q2-4) query the determinants of how individuals imagine and relate to 'Europe'. However, if we are to understand these discourses empirically, we should first ask ourselves which conceptualizations we can *analytically* discern. My aim here is to take suggestions from earlier studies on this as important cues for informing the fieldwork for this project, but in principle to leave this question as open as possible to empirical investigation.³ For that reason, the first sub-question reads:

Q1: Which framings of Europe can be analytically discerned based on individual conceptualizations?

Note that I have chosen to talk about 'frames' in the question phrasing. This particularly refers to much of the work done in communication sciences, often referred to as 'framing analysis' or 'interpretative schemes' (De Vreese, 2003; Van Gorp, 2007). Using such an approach, a number of ways of 'talking about' Europe are analytically grouped together to form 'frames' (see also Díez Medrano, 2003). By doing so, different discourses on Europe can be compared and related to other empirical characteristics (i.e. Q2-4) in a meaningful way. While communication scientists generally apply this approach to media sources, the present study instead uses a similar logic to analyse interview data.

Quite a lot of research has been done on the question of which individual characteristics determine political attitudes towards Europe or more specifically the EU (Duchesne & Frogner, 2008; McLaren, 2006). However, instead of comparing and explaining normative evaluations of the EU, this study focuses on the meaning of Europe instead of identification with Europe in the narrower sense (see page 1). The second sub-question refers to individual characteristics that may influence how Europe is provided with meaning:

² Note that at least to some extent, the central question and sub-questions Q1, Q2b and Q3 refer specifically to conceptualizations within the selected case studies of the Netherlands, Italy, and Estonia.

³ For further argumentation and an overview of frames from the literature, see page 7 and Table 1.

Q2a: *Which individual characteristics and experiences determine which meanings are attributed to Europe?*

Q2b: *How do individuals attribute meanings to Europe?*

Question 2a is explanatory: which characteristics can we isolate? Question 2b focuses on individual characteristics as well, but focuses on the process in which Europe is provided with meaning. In other words: 2a covers determinants, 2b covers process.

In this study, I assume 'Europe' to be a concept that is provided with meaning not only on the basis of individual characteristics and (national) context, but especially through social interaction. It is in the daily social experience and interaction with other individuals that 'Europe' is socially constructed, and therefore the third sub-question reads:

Q3: *Which aspects of the composition and nature of one's social network determine which meanings are attributed to Europe?*

By 'composition and nature' I refer to both individual relations to other people and to the social network as a whole. Individual relations are assumed to have a strong impact on how the social network influences the imagination of Europe. Other people in one's network may have specific views of/on Europe, and discussing these could be a direct influence on one's conceptualization of Europe. This example would be a concrete case of a specific 'idea' or 'concept' being diffused across a social network. Less obviously, however, the frequency, intensity, or subjective importance of the relationship between two individuals may have an influence on one's worldview in general and one's conception of Europe in particular. In terms of composition, a person's social network can be made up out of other people who are scattered across the globe, for example, or one can move exclusively in spatially local social circles. One's social network can be very diverse in terms of socio-economic status, or highly homogeneous, and so forth. To be clear: although the alternative would be perfectly feasible, question 3 focuses on the influence of one's social network on the meaning of Europe; not the other way around.

The fourth sub-question that can be derived from the central question above refers to the context in which 'Europe' is being conceptualized:

Q4: *Which contextual characteristics determine the way in which 'Europe' is given meaning?*

Here, the most obvious 'contextual characteristic' is simply the nation-state in which one resides. Because 'Europe' is predominantly conceptualized *within* fairly distinct public spheres and therefore in particular national discourses, it *generally* means something different from country to country. Likewise, one could argue that this context varies according to other spatial definitions (regions, cities, etc.) and that this is strongly correlated with the context-specific interpretations of history (Lauristin, 2007). Moreover, there is always a 'situational' context: in some settings a person may call herself 'European', while in others she may not.⁴

⁴ E.g. within specific social settings or in case of international mobility.

Such contextual effects are likely to be mediated by individual and/or social network effects. For example, highly mobile people in different countries may be more alike in terms of their conceptualization of Europe than their 'immobile' counterparts. This also indicates that determining whether a difference encountered between social groups suggest an individual or contextual influence can be quite tricky. A high level of individual religiosity may easily be confused with a person's highly religious social environment which may lead to that religiosity, for example. By combining contextual, individual, and social network analyses, this project aims to disentangle such potentially problematic influences on the imaginations of Europe. I will elaborate on some of the most relevant contextual characteristics on page 9.

3. Literature review

Meanings attributed to Europe have only scarcely been addressed in prior research, but fortunately neighbouring domains offer an extensive analysis of perceptions of Europe and/or the EU. Especially attitudes towards the EU have been extensively studied. Some of those studies incorporated notions of identification in their explanations, which comes closest to respondent's definition of their 'relation' to Europe. While "scholars have been slow to explore the social effects of European integration" (Recchi & Favell, 2009, p.2), in recent years we have seen a number of ambitious research projects that have tried to capture European identity. Perhaps precisely due to the combination of both vagueness and importance of identity as a concept in social scientific analysis (Kohli, 2000, pp.114-115), the empirical and conceptual approaches to the topic have been quite diverse with regard to methodology and focus.

In the quantitative research tradition, many have focused on attitudes towards the EU directly or as a proxy for identification with Europe or the EU, not in the last place simply because that is the topic for which the best data is available.⁵ A number of such studies have as an advantage that they have been able to include a large number of countries in their analyses and/or that they analyzed trends over time. Central publications in this field have been made by scholars such as Duchesne & Frogner (2008), McLaren (2006), and Hooghe & Marks (2004). On the other side of the spectrum, there have been a number of qualitative studies of European identity such as Shore's (2000) ethnographic investigation into European identities of EU officials and Díez Medrano's (2003) frame analysis within Germany, Spain and the UK (for a different type of frame analysis on the topic, see also Van Os, 2008). In-between there have been a number of mixed methods or mixed-mode studies into the topic, such as Recchi & Favell's (2009) analysis of transnational 'movers', Robyn's (2005) Q Methodology analysis of 7 nations, Bruter's (2005) combination of survey data analysis and focus groups, or Moes' (2009) combination of multilevel country comparison and an in-depth ethnographic approach of a single case.

However, although most of these studies acknowledge that Europe is constituted in social interaction, none of these studies actually analyse the process of social construction itself, and very few focus on the determinants of specific 'versions' of Europe (i.e. which traits lead to which kinds

⁵ Usually based on Eurobarometer (EB) surveys, and in fewer cases the European Value Study (EVS) or European Social Survey (ESS).

of perceptions of Europe?).⁶ Ideas about how to relate to Europe are communicated from individual to individual, and it is only in such social processes that we can rightfully talk about *collective* meanings of Europe. The proposed study will attempt to tackle this problem by determining the influence of an individual's social network on her imagination of Europe.

Furthermore, many of the quantitative studies have taken 'affect' to be a proxy for identification by measuring things like 'pride' or 'attachment' with regard to Europe or its supranational institutions (Anderson, 1998). Undoubtedly, this too is partly due to the fact that the available data is inherently limited (Rother & Nebe, in Recchi & Favell, 2009, p.122). However, to measure affect in such a way means to (implicitly) model meanings attributed to Europe according to what we know about national identities. It also masks the relation between the evaluation of the political integration project on the one hand, and the emotional attachment to the idea of Europe more generally on the other. Differently put: an individual can be strongly opposed to the political integration of Europe, yet convincingly identify as being European. In such a case, the meaning attributed to what 'Europe' is (or should be) clashes with what the EU is perceived to be or what 'Europe' has become politically (Della Porta, 2009, p.94).

Additionally, as I mentioned before (page 1), asking interviewees directly about whether or not they 'identify' with Europe is problematic as well (Bruter, 2005, p.102). First, it is questionable whether identity can be measured by self-perception in the first place, and second, the concept of 'identity' itself has popular connotations that may have grown to be synonymous with processes of national identification. In this study, the central concept under investigation is therefore broader than a narrow definition of identification, focusing instead on meanings attributed to Europe.

I assume Europe to have at least some degree of 'entitativity' for all interviewees (Castano in Herrmann, et al., 2004, pp.54-55). It 'exists' in a social sense, and what is important, then, is exactly how people imagine it, and how they relate to it. There is no reason to assume that if there are social processes that we can reasonably call 'identification with Europe', that they are necessarily anything like the established forms of identification with nation-states. As Kohli (2000, p.114) phrases it: "European identity cannot take its clues from national identity, neither in form nor in substance". While national identities, like local and regional ones, are typically identities of the sort with a territorial reference (Kohli, 2000, p.117), European identity need not be. There are other potential categories in psychological, sociological, and anthropological theory that do not refer to any sort of territory.⁷ Precisely because European identity may well be a different 'kind' of identification, the question whether or not we should analytically call certain framings 'European identity' is an *analytical* one; not one that should be answered directly by interviewees.

A final issue with much of the existing literature is that it has mostly focused on Western Europe. Though this has been improving in recent years, most comparative studies still focus on Western Europe (e.g. Bruter, 2005; Díez Medrano, 2003; McLaren, 2006; Recchi & Favell, 2009; Robyn, 2005). Moreover, studies that do focus on Central or Eastern Europe are often restricted to single country case studies. Though a number of edited volumes do include separate chapters on country cases from Eastern, Central and Western Europe (e.g. Eder & Spohn, 2005), such a wide

⁶ An exception to this may be frame analyses such as Díez Medrano's (2003). However, also in his study the conclusions are eventually primarily grouped and implicitly generalized per country.

⁷ From an individual perspective, possible examples include gender, sexual preference, profession, political preference, etc.

geographical scope is rarely combined within a single research project. This is especially true for qualitative analyses.⁸ This is problematic not just because of the lack of case-specific information, but especially at a conceptual level. Focusing primarily on Western Europe reiterates 'Western' conceptualizations of Europe (see Kuus, 2004), and thereby constitutes a kind of 'academic neo-colonialism'. This study will contribute to filling this gap. Not only by including an Eastern European in-depth case (Estonia) and offering a quantitative cross-national comparison of the EU27, but also by mapping social networks across a wider territory.

Below, I will briefly discuss two central concepts that will be used in this study. After that, I will proceed with discussing the empirical research design.

Deterritorialization

For Appadurai, 'deterritorialization', as a general process of detachment from territory, applies specifically to certain social groups such as transnational migrants (Appadurai, 1996, p.49). I would argue that with regard to 'Europe' the concept not only applies to specific actors, but also to the idea *itself*. While it can be defined in territorial terms, I take 'Europe' to refer to a social classification rather than a territorial entity. Urry (2007, pp.262-263) makes a similar point about nationality: "Once nationality was based upon a homogenous and mapped national territory [...]. But now frontiers are permeable and much cultural life is interchangeable across the globe". Then, paraphrasing Maier (1994, p.149), he contends that nowadays, "territory is less central to national self-definition" than it used to be (Urry, 2007, p.263). This does not mean that territory as such has become irrelevant (the opposite may be true). Some have suggested that identification with Europe may be more salient in situations such as those in border regions (Kohli, 2000, p.132). Moreover, territory may be an important communicative device when referring to Europe or when differentiating within Europe (e.g. 'Eastern' and 'Western').

Europe in frames and meanings

How concepts are framed ultimately affects behaviour (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). However, rather than reiterating framings encountered in the media (Díez Medrano, 2003; Van Os, 2008), in this study the specific meanings that are attributed to Europe are ultimately an empirical question ('fluid frames'; Ragin, 1994, pp.75-76). Nevertheless, there have been a number of scholars who have suggested specific framings of Europe before. It is likely that at least some elements of those will appear in the data to be collected for this project as well. If and when they do, it is crucial to recognize them in order to contribute to the refinement of existing depictions and to relate my own findings to prior studies. For that purpose, a selection of some of the key findings on how Europe can be framed in public discourse is shown in Table 1.

⁸ In more recent years, better survey data have enabled more extensive quantitative comparisons.

Table 1 - Selected framings of 'Europe' according to previous studies.⁹

Díez Medrano (2003)	Robyn (ed. 2005)	Bruter (2005)
Common market		
Modernisation		
Social benefits		
	Homogenization	
Sovereignty	Preserve independence	
States too small	Stronger together	
Identity	Territorial identity	
Lessons from WWII	World War II	
Free movement		Borderlessness / free movement
		Cooperation
Removal of barriers	Disappearing divisions	Fading of historical divisions
Understanding	Unity in diversity	Harmony
Peace	Peace	Peace
		Prosperity

4. Research plan

As a point of departure, I expect that a common conception of Europe can indeed be said to have emerged among certain groups of people but not others. With this *'European gap' thesis* I suggest that transnationally mobile higher socio-economic strata are more likely to share a conceptualization of Europe that is similar to their counterparts in other European countries. On the other hand, 'less mobile', lower socio-economic strata are more likely to have a strongly 'nationalised' vision of Europe, thus making them more likely to have very different conceptualizations of Europe than their counterparts in other countries. To some extent, this implies that the national context has become less relevant to specific groups of people and conceivably more important to others.

I take *three dimensions* to be defining of an individual's conceptualization of Europe.¹⁰ *First*, the meaning given to Europe will vary along *individual traits and experiences* (Q2). In particular, I expect that on average a higher education, a higher socio-economic status, a lower age, and a higher degree of, and experience with personal mobility will all typically go hand in hand with more positive dispositions towards European integration as a *political* project (cf. McLaren, 2006). With regard to the *meaning* of Europe, matters are likely to be more complex. Nevertheless, I expect these groups to generally emphasize the discourse of openness, mobility, peace, and perhaps cosmopolitanism, all of which can potentially be perceived to contradict the 'actual' state of the EU (Della Porta, 2009, pp.94, 107). For slightly older individuals within this category, 'peace' may play a more important role, and World War II may be a relevant marker for the meaning of Europe. Finally, an individual's identity status within her country is likely to have an impact. If one is considered a 'minority' within her country, 'Europe' may offer a viable identification alternative thus changing its

⁹ Keywords on the same row indicate a similar frame. Note that this is by no means an exhaustive list and the keywords are largely my interpretations of the studies mentioned.

¹⁰ Explicit research hypotheses will be formulated for the quantitative part of this study, but on a rather empirical level; not necessarily at an abstract, theoretical level. Nevertheless, the following description indicates preliminary expectations.

meaning for that individual. This depends heavily on the context, however, as for example in many Eastern European states Russian minorities may in fact ‘*dis-identify*’ (De Swaan, 2007) with Europe because it can become a marker of difference towards the majority.

Second, I will analyse the composition of one’s *social network* (Q3). Ideas travel from person to person, and the people you communicate with on a frequent basis determine how you think about the world (Christakis & Fowler, 2009). More specifically, I expect that with regard to composition, a higher number of ‘alters’ from other (European) countries in one’s social network will lead to more strongly deterritorialized, cosmopolitan, and free movement frames of conceptualizing Europe. In addition, I expect that the medium through which one communicates with those people is relevant. More frequent travel to other places in Europe for ‘face-to-face’ meetings will lead to other influences from those people than the occasional *Facebook* status update. Most importantly, however, the dominant frames within one’s social network (both within one’s own country and abroad) are determining factors for how Europe is conceptualized.

The *third* and final ‘dimension’ that determines an individual’s conceptualization of Europe is the *context* within which Europe is provided with meaning (Q4). This can be taken into account in the quantitative part by conducting a multilevel analysis and in the qualitative part by asking interviewees how they relate to specific ‘contextual’ elements. Concretely, I expect that the institutional embeddedness in Europe plays a role.¹¹ Prior research has suggested that EU membership leads to stronger ‘civic’ rather than ‘cultural’ identifications with Europe (Moes, 2009, p.433). Furthermore, I expect historical context characteristics to be crucial to the imagination of Europe. In Central and Eastern European countries, socialist histories have a strong impact on how Europe is conceptualized in the present (Eder & Spohn, 2005), and varying WWII experiences are potentially important in various ways for imaginations of Europe in all parts of the continent (see Table 1). With regard to frames, I expect that *in general* modernisation and peace frames will be stronger in Eastern Europe than in the West. A final contextual aspect worth looking into is the ‘location’ of a country in the geographical imagination. Klaus Eder makes a distinction between “unmistakably defined Europeans” and “peripheral Europeans” as social categories (2005, pp.199-205), and I expect that this is indeed a lived experience at least among people in Central and Eastern Europe. Discourses of ‘returning to Europe’ are only viable if there is a ‘core’ to return *to*.

5. Methods, approaches, data

Methodologically, this work will employ a ‘mixed mode’ approach in which qualitative and quantitative strategies are combined to form a mixed methodology that takes the individual perspective as a point of departure. It considers the relations that individuals maintain with other individuals, and how they relate themselves to institutions and collective discourses. We should not look at “[...] political or cultural symbols but at stories that emerge in the making of a network of social relations among those living in Europe” (Eder, 2009, p.433).

The empirical design consists of one preliminary quantitative analysis of the EU27 based on existing (probability sample) data, and two major consecutive qualitative steps that will subsequently be conducted in three country-cases: Estonia, Italy, and the Netherlands. These two final steps involve a *stratified purposive sampling* approach (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p.186). The

¹¹ E.g. years of EU membership, and Schengen or Euro participation.

main contribution made by this project lays in steps 2 and 3. All three steps are discussed in more detail below, including the sampling strategy involved. Please see Figure 1 on page 12 for an overview.

Step one

The first, 'preliminary' step is to use Eurobarometer data¹² to quantitatively compare all 27 EU member states. Here, individual and contextual characteristics (see above) will be modelled in a multilevel analysis. The dependent variable will be constructed depending on the availability of survey items in specific years. In all cases, however, they will be selected as proxies for conceptualizations of Europe. By comparing different variables as dependent variables a general picture of differing trends across countries will become apparent. A central question here will be *to what extent* national context matters in the first place, and to what extent for which groups. Due to the nature of the central research questions and the availability of suitable data, this step does not constitute the main contribution of the eventual dissertation, but is a first tentative step towards the later country-case studies, and contributes to answering questions Q2a and Q4.

Step two

Second, in-depth interviews will be conducted with a small stratified purposive sample (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p.186). One part of that sample will consist of academics and higher level students (an 'extreme' or 'outlier' case sample; *ibid.*, p.176), and the other part of a maximum variation sample (*ibid.*, pp.187-188) which is *roughly* equally divided according to age, education, and gender.¹³ In order to construct these samples, I will select three cities within each country based on size, regional identity and/or 'ethnic' composition.¹⁴ Each sampled city should have a higher education institution. At these institutions I will sample a number of academics and higher level students for interviewing, and I will approach students for collaboration with further data collection among other groups (see below). The maximum variation sample will include fewer higher than lower educated (since academics are interviewed separately as well), and will be sampled through local organizations such as schools, companies, labour unions, elderly homes, and the interviewer's social networks. In total, around 7 people per city will be included, and I will interview at least 5 academics per country. This will therefore result in roughly 21 people in the maximum variation sample, and a combined total of around 26 people in the purposive sample per country. For all three countries combined, this would mean 78 interviews, of which I will personally conduct 36.

I consider the academics to be a 'natural group' (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, pp.176-177) who I expect to express relatively strong deterritorialized imaginations of Europe (Moes, 2009). Often, they are professionally dependent on aligning themselves to developments outside of their own country. Contrasting this group to the maximum variation sample allows us to answer a number of relevant questions. Do people who have neither substantial transnational experience nor a personal benefit from a society that is wider than their national state have different views of what

¹² EB data are the most likely choice due to this step's wide geographic scope (see also Moes, 2009). Other datasets will be considered as well (particularly EVS, and to a lesser extent ESS and ISSP).

¹³ This should not be seen as a 'formal' requirement but rather a general aim.

¹⁴ The cities currently under consideration based on these criteria are Tallinn, Tartu, Narva (EE); Rome, Florence, Bolzano (IT), Amsterdam, Nijmegen, and Maastricht (NL).

Europe is? Do they relate to it in a different way? This step will provide an answer to questions Q1 and Q2b, and constitutes one of the two central contributions from the resulting dissertation.

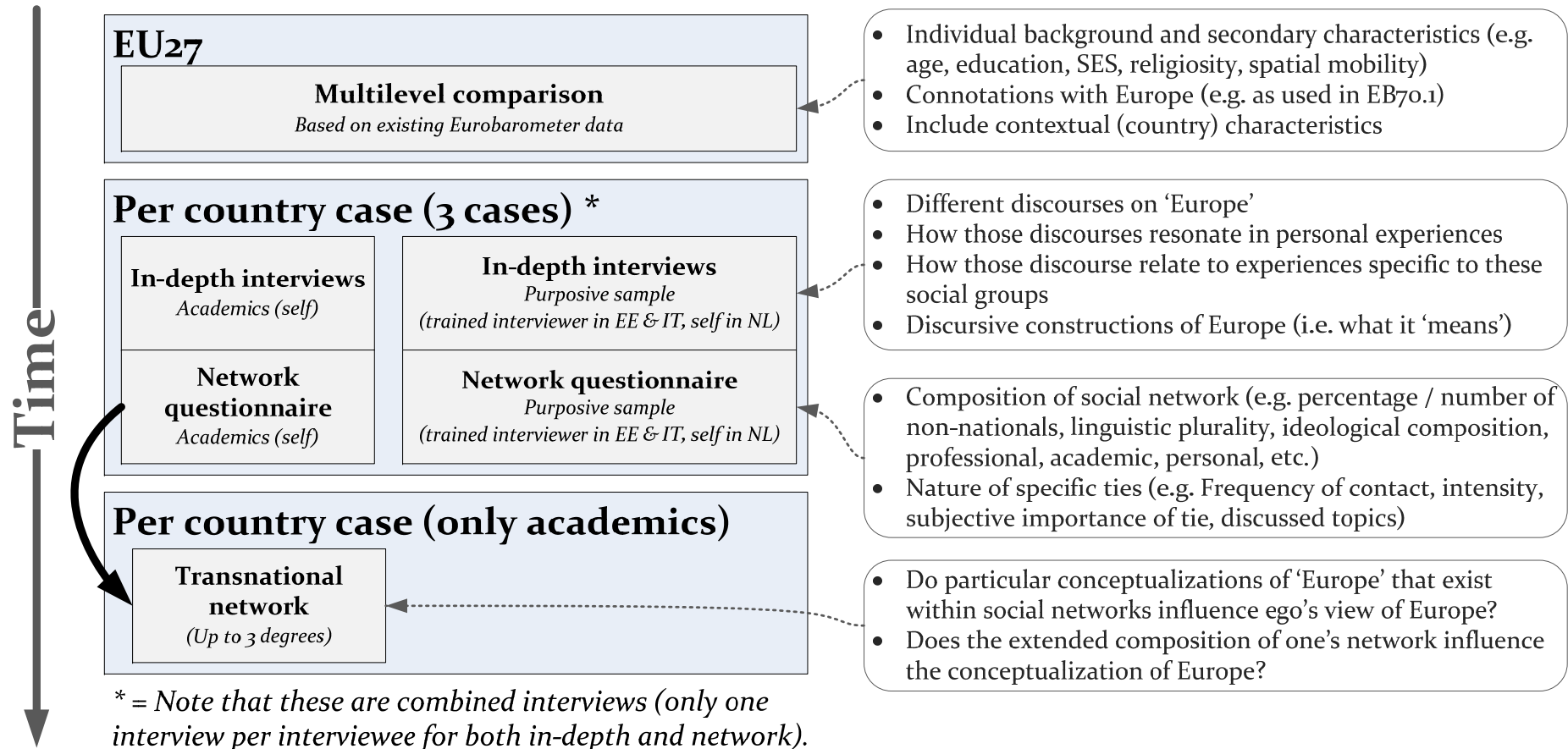
Although I will conduct the interviews with Estonian and Italian academics in English, the in-depth interviews with the maximum variation sample of interviewees from these two countries will be conducted by native speakers in order to assure the correct understanding of the discourse on the meaning of 'Europe' and its nuances (Q1 and Q2b). To this end, I will seek local collaboration of university students. For Estonia, I have already made a number of useful contacts and I am willing to offer a modest degree of financial compensation should that be necessary. For Italy, I will cooperate with a PhD researcher at the University of Florence and I may be able to involve students there as well. In all cases, an additional incentive for cooperation can be either technical interview training and/or co-authorship of any publications on that specific case resulting from their data collection. For the Netherlands, I will do all interviews by myself (both the extreme/natural case and the maximum variation sample).

An additional element in this second empirical step is a short social network questionnaire that is to be included *in the same interview* (for both academics and the maximum variation sample). Generating names for the social network is easiest if an interviewer is present to work with the interviewee, and such a combination will save precious time. The data collected here will contribute to answering Q3.

Step three

For the *third* step, the academics/higher level students from step 2 will be asked to cooperate in a follow-up data collection, focusing on their social networks. Here, special attention will be paid to which effect the composition of the social network has on the conceptualization of Europe in terms of having 'non-national' contacts, languages used, and the nature of the tie (e.g. academic/professional, personal, etc.). This network data will subsequently be expanded by approaching a subset of the individuals *mentioned* in those networks, up to three degrees of separation (Christakis & Fowler, 2009, pp.26-30), thus tracking 'friends of friends of friends' (technically 'snowball sampling'; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p.175). This step is only feasible using online survey tools, which should work well among academics. Approaching 'alters' will be done by asking the initial interviewees to introduce and recommend the project, and the survey time will be kept to an absolute minimum. This step directly contributes to finding an answer to Q3, and shows how abstract imaginations such as 'Europe' are diffused within and across national borders. This step constitutes one of the two major academic contributions made by this project.

Figure 1 - Schematic overview of data collection process (top to bottom). Each of the three larger blocks represents one actual step in time. Further breakdowns are for clarification.



The utility of mixing methods

The preliminary analysis in step one will show to what *extent* the national context matters, and if it does, for which individuals more than for others and according to which general patterns. This offers a rigorous and generalizable analysis that allows for an analysis across national contexts and various social groups. It cannot show, however, what people actually take 'Europe' to mean when they read the question text. And yet, how they imagine Europe is precisely what informs their answer to the question and – more importantly – what determines their attitude and behaviour vis-à-vis Europe. This is where step one reaches its limits, and the extensive analyses in steps two and three come in. In this way, step one provides a general framework in which to interpret the in-depth understanding that the two substantive later parts offer. The other way around, steps two and three allow us to more thoroughly understand the significance of the preliminary quantitative findings (see also Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, pp.33-36).

6. Rationale of case selection

Following the preliminary quantitative analysis, the central part of this study will be grounded within three different national frames of reference, selected based on the 'method of agreement' (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p.51). As mentioned before, the country cases under in-depth analysis are Estonia, the Netherlands, and Italy. These cases represent varying contexts within a European frame of reference. Important context characteristics to note are their diverging historical backgrounds (WWII, post-socialist / capitalist, cf. Lauristin, 2007), their (imagined) geographical locations (centre-periphery Europe, cf. Eder & Spohn, 2005, pp.199-205), and their internal divisions according to ethnicity or language (Russian / Estonian, cf. Feldman, 2008) and religion (Orthodox / Catholic / Muslim / atheist, cf. Nelsen, Guth, & Fraser, 2001). In terms of meanings attributed to Europe and their relation to contextual change, Estonia is moreover an interesting case because it will adopt the Euro in 2011. This is a historic event, likely to increase debate on how the nation relates to Europe.

Table 2 - Most different cases rationale.

	Estonia	The Netherlands	Italy
<i>Population (millions)</i>	1.3	16.6	60.2
<i>GDP per capita</i>	17,532	52,499	38,996
<i>Independence (year)</i>	1991	1581	1861
<i>EU/Euro membership</i>	2004/2011	1957/2002	1957/2002
<i>Largest minorities (%)</i>	Russian (21.6)	'Muslim' (6)	Romanian (1.3), North African (1)
<i>Largest religions (%)</i>	Luth. (15), Ortho. (14)	Cath. (27), Prot. (17), Islam (6)	Catholic (88)
<i>No religious affiliation</i>	76% (Eesti Statistika)	61% (SCP)	5.8% (EB63.1)

7. Tentative chapter outline

1. Introduction: topic, social & scientific relevance
2. The meaning of Europe in frames and identities (theory)
3. Research design, methodology, data (and sampling), and analytical models
4. Patterns of meaning (preliminary Eurobarometer analysis)
5. 'Europe' as a marker of difference and similarity (results Estonian fieldwork)
6. 'Europe' as a nested polity (results Italian fieldwork)
7. 'Europe' as a pragmatic choice (results Dutch fieldwork)
8. 'Europe' as a travelling concept (results from network analysis)
9. European Europe? (conclusion)

8. Timetable

When	What	
<i>Year</i>	<i>Term</i>	
2009/2010	1	Seminars, reading
	2	Seminars
	3	Workshop, fieldwork Estonia (<i>funding: UACES</i>)
	Summer	Fieldwork Estonia (<i>UACES</i>), Summer school social networks
2010/2011	1	Seminars, fieldwork Italy (collaboration Univ. Firenze)
	2	Repeat visit Estonia: finish Estonian case // repeat visit Italy
	3	Finish Italian case
	Summer	Conferences, Summer school
2011/2012	1	Fieldwork Netherlands, conferences
	2	Finish Dutch case // teaching experience
	3	Analysis, writing
	Summer	Analysis, writing
2012/2013	1	Writing
	2	Writing, submitting
	3	-

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