European Values, National Anxieties? How Multilayered Networks Promote Higher Education in Europe

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Introduction

European education policies, such as the Bologna Process, have enhanced mobility and comparability and underpinned the role of the European higher education area in the wider world. As globalisation enforces competition for the best brains, cooperation among the member states has become the means to promote Europe as a destination of world-class education. Susan Milner, European studies scholar at the University of Bath, claims that the spread of internationality often goes hand in hand with national actors feeling threatened to lose their “distinctiveness”.¹ This perception has resulted in a large body of research published on the theory and practices of place branding, both as a response to promotional measures already taken by national actors and as an attempt to establish further strategies on how to stress unique selling points.² Accordingly, Georg Allen, from the economical perspective of a brand consultant and creative designer, emphasises the “need to provide clear product differentiation in an increasingly competitive, globalizing marketplace […].”³

Yet, the discussion has focused primarily on tourism and neglected the multi-layered system of European, national and regional campaigns promoting higher education in a globalised world. Thus, this study is eager to shed light on that particular research area from a cultural perspective, asking: Is there a fear of homogenisation to be observed in national activities promoting higher education in Europe? This would suggest that national actors perceive ‘Europeanisation’ in the sense of “the diffusion of cultural norms, ideas, identities, and patterns of behaviour on a cross-national basis within Europe”, as conceptualised by Kevin Featherstone, professor of social and cultural theory.⁴ The fear of homogenisation indicates that

³ Allen, “Place Branding,” 61.
power relations are perceived as unequal and threatening. Therefore the analysis will develop along with the sociologist Manuel Castells, whose communication theory explores power as a relational capacity in the “global network society”.

On the basis of this theoretical framework, the study enters into a comparative, semiotic analysis of the multi-layered, web based campaigns “Study in Europe” by the European Commission, “Study in Germany” by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and “Study in Holland” by the Netherlands organisation for international cooperation in higher education (Nuffic). In order to shed light on the existing fears of homogenisation among the national actors of the European higher education area it will explore how diversity is promoted on the European and national level. How does the EU introduce the value of diversity in order to obviate fears of homogenisation? Do the national campaigns act in accordance with the way diversity is represented on the European level? How are unique national features promoted? The findings of the case study will offer insight into the compliance and resistance of national actors to the EU’s promotion of a common European higher education area and inform about the power relations at stake.

### Power relations

Castells develops his theory of communication power in the “network society” based on Foucault, Weber and Habermas’ theories of power among which he identifies the *tertium comparationis* of a belief in discourse and violence as the sources of social power. While Castells points out that these capacities are still the ones operating, he stresses that the environment in which they are practiced has changed considerably due to new information technologies. Arguing that digital communication has laid the foundation for global networking and triggered a transition of social structures, Castells defines the “network society” as a “global society”. Along with this goes Castells’ thesis that power in the new “network society” is no longer obtained by single actors, but created in the interaction of various multi-

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7 Castells, *Communication Power*, 11-12.

8 Ibid., 50.

9 Ibid., 25. Castells acknowledges the Janus-faced character of globalisation resulting in benefits for some and disadvantages for other parts of the world, as has been pointed out by scholars such as Sylvia Walby [Sylvia Walby, *Globalization and Inequalities: Complexities and Contested Modernities* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009)]. Accordingly, Castells explains that his theory does not imply that everybody is included, but rather affected by globalisation.
layered networks each resembling “a set of interconnected nodes”.\textsuperscript{10} Furthermore, Castells views common goals as defining and uniting elements of any network consequently arguing that at the very centre of a network is often the interest to outperform other competing networks hereby displaying a binary logic of in- and exclusion.\textsuperscript{11} To identity theorists like Peter Burke, this is not surprising as networks are only one example of a strategy of belonging and rejection a group could employ as part of its identity construction.\textsuperscript{12} In Castells’s theory, power evolves from the contact between “nodes” and other networks as a “relational capacity”.\textsuperscript{13} The highest degrees of power are gained by those who are able to set up and programme networks, and next those who manage to foster the success of the network by tactics of co-operation. They are the actors who hold “network-making power” and are named “programmers” and “switchers” by Castells.\textsuperscript{14} Developing his argument, the author claims that the “global network society” results on the one hand in a crisis of the nation state, which has to reposition itself in a globalised world and on the other hand in the chance of local actors to build their own, alternative “global networks”.\textsuperscript{15} While the nation state is criticised for its exertion of influence and local actors are introduced as potential resources towards more equality in society, the European dimension is not taken into consideration. Castells assesses the EU merely as a result of the crisis of the nation states which identified the need to associate in order to underpin their voice in the “global network society”.\textsuperscript{16} Hereby, he omits the EU’s role as a “programmer”\textsuperscript{17} in the perception of national and global networks which Milner highlights and this analysis explores.\textsuperscript{18}

**Programming values**

Along with Castells, strategies to programme values are at the core of the organisation of networks and define their hierarchical structures.\textsuperscript{19} One area in which these dynamics are prominently exhibited is branding since, according to Marieke de Mooij, scholar in cross cultural communication, brands are created by programming values and attributing them to

\textsuperscript{10} Castells, *Communication Power*, 19.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{12} Peter J. Burke and Jan E. Stets, *Identity Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 121.
\textsuperscript{13} Castells, *Communication Power*, 10.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 39.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{18} Milner, “Cultural Identities and the European City”.
\textsuperscript{19} Castells, *Communication Power*, 28-29.
certain products or places. Accordingly, Castells introduces branding as “the cultural dimension of the global market, and the process by which individuals assign meaning to their consumerism”. In his discussion of branding Castells emphasises the role of the audience, pointing out its ability to create meaning and taking a reader-response perspective. Yet, as Castells assesses the communication process as a multidirectional dynamic, which defines all participating “nodes” of the network as “programmers” and addressees, he furthermore develops the strategy of “framing” employed by the “programmer”. Quoting Robert Entmann, a US-American expert on political communication, he refers to framing as “the process of selecting and highlighting some facets […] to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation and/or solution”.

Since Castells depicts communication as a process which involves “framing” and creating meaning by both “programmer” and audience, it relates to Stuart Hall’s theory of en- and decoding. Hall, the pioneering scholar of British cultural studies, describes the communication process as a set of “linked but distinctive moments”. Following Hall’s semiotic model “framing” may be referred to as the moment of “encode[ing] messages in the form of meaningful discourse”. Even though research such as Hall’s semiotic writings or Castells’s communication theory have pointed out that the correspondence of encoding and decoding cannot be secured, branding seeks to suggest a dominant reading and attempts to find the most promising strategies of delivering values.

**Promoting higher education in Europe**

Castells’s conceptual arsenal of “global networks”, “nodes”, “programmers”, “switchers” and “framing” serve as a theoretical framework to explore the power relations in the European higher education area. Indeed, “global networks” are to be found on various levels of higher

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21 Castells, *Communication Power*, 120.
22 Ibid., 158.
27 See Allen, “Place Branding”.
28 Starting with this chapter the terms “global networks”, “nodes”, “programmers”, “switchers” and “framing” will be set in quotation marks highlighting them as Castells’s concepts but will, for the sake of readability, not be followed by references as they always go back to the definitions introduced in sections 1 and 2 of this paper.
education in Europe. One of these networks is the Global Promotion Project (GPP) which was launched in 2007 by the European Commission in order to “improve […] visibility […] of European higher education in the world”. The European Commission is a late-comer in higher education branding in comparison to the member states, who are skilled “switchers” involved in alternative networks at the same time. Many national actors seek further ways to position their national higher education among Europe’s most prestigious in campaigns such as “Study in Germany” or “Study in Holland”. In 2004, the Commission published a call for tenders to explore the means already taken by national actors to promote their higher education. It concluded, that while “[t]here is a clear potential for a European brand […] [t]he challenge is to create a perception of Europe as a whole. A European ‘brand’ can only cover elements which are common to all European countries”. Thus, the GGP could not programme values on a blank sheet of paper exerting power freely, but had to take existing campaigns and positions of the national “nodes” into account via the establishment of a “European ‘umbrella’ brand […] allowing for tailor-made campaigns”. Against this background the GGP defines “quality”, “diversity” and “opportunity” as the core values of the European higher education area. Accordingly, it promotes diversity as a value of the European higher education area which may incorporate various, national features and qualities in order to obviate potential fears of homogenisation among the member states.

At the same time national campaigns such as “Study in Germany” and “Study in Holland” continuously revise their strategies, responding to the values set on the European level into account. As the member states are at the same time “nodes” of the European and “centres” of the national promoting networks while targeting the same global audience, they have to secure some consistency in the way diversity is framed and delivered. In this sense the multi-layered

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30 ACA, Perceptions of European Higher Education in Third Countries, 14.
31 European Commission, *The Erasmus Mundus Global Promotion Project*.
32 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, *Communication Tool-Kit* (Brussels: June 2008), http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-mundus/doc/toolkit_en.pdf (accessed 3 May 2010), 12. Even though it is arguable whether diversity represents a value, research on this is beyond the scope of this paper. Furthermore, the choice of values of course depends on the programme of the network. In the Seminar “The Cultural Heritage and Academic Values of the European University”, which took place in Vatican City in 2006 and was organized by the Rectors of Pontifical Universities and UNESCO-CEPES under the patronage of the European Commission, a tendency to promote Christianity as the core value of European higher education was clearly visible. See Sadlak, Jan et. al., eds., *The Cultural Heritage and Academic Values of the European University*, in *Higher Education in Europe 31* no. 4 (2006).
“Study in” campaigns display the characteristics of networks situated in a globalised world, as introduced by Castells, functioning as “programmers” and creative audience at the same time.

**Defining the decoding procedure**

The comparative semiotic analysis of the European, German and Dutch web pages explores the power relations between the European and national “global networks” of European higher education further. Hereby the research profits from their parallel arrangements already alluded upon by the similar titles. The campaigns work within an identical syntagm, first asking “Why study in X?” and secondly, offering a set of values as answer. Nevertheless, the three web pages employ different modes of representation ranging, for example, from a limited use of images in the German campaign to a promotion film retrievable from the Dutch web page. Clearly, these paradigmatic choices are not merely motivated through aesthetic decisions, but also mirror differences in budget. This already alludes to some restraints the research faces.

Thus, in order to minimise its arbitrariness the study defines tradition and innovation and multiculturalism which are introduced as subthemes of diversity by the “Study in Europe” campaign as categories of analysis. Consequently, the procedure in each case study is as follows: firstly, the study discusses the corporate design and mode of representation exhibited by the web page. Secondly, it moves on to explore how multiculturalism and tradition and innovation are defined taking both linguistic and iconic messages into account. With regard to the latter it explores how multiculturalism is signified by the way people are portrayed in the images and tradition and innovation defined by the representation of places. Finally, it deals with the way the web pages exhibit unique national selling points. Necessarily, the choices made by the study, such as defining the categories of analysis and the examples, determine the readings which it presents. While being aware of the fact that the research may only offer some possible meanings and can neither claim to be exhaustive nor assume what precisely was intended to be encoded, it is confident that it, despite its limitations, sheds light on power and fear in the context of flourishing European as well as national media policies in a globally networked world.

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34 European Commission, “Why study in Europe”.  
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“Study in Europe”

The “Study in Europe” web page is retrievable from the European Commission’s web page.\textsuperscript{35} Accordingly it is dominated by blue colouring marking it as a European policy area and arranged under the logo of the European Commission. In addition to the EU’s logo the web page incorporates a “Study in Europe” logo: a yellow star set into three rings. By replacing the twelve stars by only one, the unity of the higher European education area is signified. This is underlined by the circles mapping a clear cut space. As the circles are of different size and do not overlap, they express Castells’s idea of a network in which various “nodes” of higher European education cooperate, while possessing several unique, but also common features. There is no homogenisation alluded to, as would have been the case by showing a spiral instead of individual circles. Thus, the logo represents a network of European higher education with several independent and equally important “nodes”. Yet the blue circles on the blue background may also be read as a symbol signifying waves triggered by a stone, introducing further possible meanings. Followings this decoding, the waves hint at Europe as a centre from which innovation is spreading. At the same time the image of the waves as convoluted circles may, in deviation from the “programmers” intended decoding, also be read as a symbolic depiction of a relationship of centre and periphery. This alludes to a network build around a “centre”, which Castells defines as a “particular important node”\textsuperscript{36} and leads to the question, how the programmed messages define the roles of the national “nodes” within the “Study in Europe” network.

\textit{Multiculturalism as Bordering Concept}

“Europe offers a unique cultural \textit{experience} in a dynamic, multinational environment.”\textsuperscript{37} Multiculturalism, as defined by the quote, seems to refer more so to the geographical closeness of various nations, than a culturally diverse society within the individual member states. This is underlined by the idea of Europe as a “dynamic” place, which among others hints at people travelling back and forth without borders. This reading is underlined by the images of the backpack, the trains and the laptops representing mobility. Yet, freedom is not merely referred to in the literal meaning of free movement, but also as the freedom of mind and equal

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid. If not indicated otherwise, all observations and examples presented within this section refer to this web page. Direct quotations from the web page will nevertheless be referenced.

\textsuperscript{36} Castells, \textit{Communication Power}, 18.

opportunity of all members of society regardless their nationality or gender: “Europe is a destination that welcomes diversity of opinion and offers you the freedom to create, to experiment and to innovate”. The visual representations of people support these messages. Among the nine students portrayed are six women and three men. This selection emphasises the opportunities of women in the European higher education area and paradoxically seeks to represent gender equality by favouring the representations of female individuals. Moreover, the pictures resemble a multi-ethnic student body as they depict European and non-European students with different facial features. Nevertheless, this diversity is attributed exclusively to the university surrounding, as the students from various backgrounds are represented in laboratories and libraries. Multiculturalism is represented in the context of academia and not in daily life where various cultures interact with each other and constitute national societies. Speaking with Castells, the messages are programmed according to the aims of the “Study in Europe” network. They highlight a common European higher education area and avoid putting national “nodes” on the spot in order to allude to their equal importance.

*Continent of Traditions and Innovations*

“Immerse yourself in a continent with a wealth of traditions and a history as rich and varied as its many peoples and landscapes. At the same time, Europe is a hotbed of research and innovation […].” This linguistic message inscribes diversity within the boundaries of “a continent”. The verb “immerse” creates an image of European higher education as a diverse, yet united space, in which the audience is invited to enter. The sentence thus displays the ambiguous dynamics of an exclusive network while at the same time welcoming a global audience. Moreover, describing European tradition by using the adjectives “wealth” and “rich” the sentence immediately evokes associations of prosperity, which “innovation” promises to secure also in future times. Trains, laptops and laboratories portrayed in the pictures underline this linguistic statement.

Central to deliver the message of tradition and innovation are the representations of places. Six out of the eight images depicting places show a large European city (Berlin, Cologne, Madrid, Paris, Seville and Valencia), one a small Greek town, another the Trakai castle in Lithuania and a last one the transnational landscape of the Alps. Clearly, any attempt to represent Europe faces the problem that places are widely associated with geographies of the

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38 Ibid. Emphasis in original.
40 European Commission, “Study in Europe - Diversity”.
member states. The endeavour becomes even trickier once one tries to do so in only fourteen images. Yet, even if this is taken into consideration the choices are surprising: Some European member states are shown more frequently than others. Moreover, the impression that particular “nodes” are favoured is not only triggered by the fact that Spain and Germany outdo other European countries in terms of number but also because of the manner in which they, along with France, are represented. It differs significantly from Greece and Lithuania who are introduced by representations of untamed cultural heritage pointing towards the value of tradition. France, Germany and Spain are depicted as urban centres which unite tradition and innovation. As research has been eager to highlight the relationship between urbanity and innovation the city is frequently perceived as the cradle of innovation and knowledge. While the representations assert the coexistence of tradition and innovation in Western Europe they exclude other member states from the double coding of the old and new, threatening the representation of equality among the several “nodes” of the network.

*Censoring National Symbols*

Even if a tendency towards representing centre-periphery relations can be observed on the web page, one would paint a black and white picture if one approached the “Study in Europe” campaign as a strategy, which underneath the programmed umbrella of European values, favours some member states. Despite the dominance of Spain, Germany and France in the representations, the pictures at the same time attempt to limit national connotations. The picture of the German Bundestag is censured to work as an image of Europe since it precisely shows merely the parts of the building where no German flags are on display. What at first sight looks like an aesthetic decision, namely to show the Bundestag off centre, proves to be a political one if one knows that there is a flag post on the right side of the stairwell. In a similar way, the Thalys – as European train – is placed in front of the German ICE in the picture of Cologne and in the representation of Paris the Eiffel Tower is merely hinted upon while the backpack of the girl, which once more may be read as symbol for transnational travel, governs the picture. Even though the European higher education brand is programmed to allow national “nodes” with individual programs to be grouped under it, it is sensitive to control the communicative power of the member states in its attempt to grant equal importance to the “nodes” of the network.

*“Study in Germany”*

“Study in Germany” excludes iconic signs associated with Germany such as national colours or a symbol alluding to a well-known monument such as the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. Instead, the logo and the blue colouring reflect the corporate design of the DAAD. Moreover, the web page presents only a few images while giving more room to linguistic messages as it works with several hyperlinks offering “further information”. Moreover, the linguistic messages are not presented as the work of the “programmers”, but as testimonials of the Vietnamese scout Mai, who “has listed the five most important motives that helped her make her decision”. These features employed by the “Study in Germany” web page are very much in agreement with De Mooij’s homogenising description of German advertising:

> German advertisements show a strong information orientation; they are direct and factual. The lesson form is much used, with testimonials […]. Germans downplay imagination and favour orderly, logic presentations. Their style is clean, rational, straightforward and serious.

**Seriously Diverse**

When entering the German network’s homepage the visitor is welcomed by a smiling, Asian girl, called Mai, portrayed in a medium close-up stressing her friendly mimic. Below the picture there are five smaller photos. They show Mai in different contexts, sometimes grouped with other students, yet always in a university surrounding. As on the “Study in Europe” web page, the pictures present a diverse student body while predominantly portraying the female Asian student hinting at gender equality and equal opportunity even though favouring the female. The representations focus on people and their personal experience, but are, as in the “Study in Europe” campaign, limited to an academic context and do not picture a multicultural German society in a more general way. Buildings are only hinted upon twice in the background and are both historical and well maintained. This is in line with the promotion of a diverse higher education area offering both tradition and innovation, as put forth by the “Study in Europe” campaign. Strikingly, while the EU’s campaign does show the Bundestag the pictures on “Study in Germany” could have been taken anywhere. Yet, already the economic motivation of the campaign suggests that it is very unlikely that the national “programmers” share the

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42 This icon was chosen by the German Consortium for International Higher Education Marketing, which was responsible for the German campaign “Hi Potentials!”. See German Consortium for International Higher Education, “GATE,” http://www.gate-germany.de/index.html (accessed 4 May 2010).
43 DAAD, “Study in Germany”. If not indicated otherwise, all observations and examples presented within this sub-section refer to this web page.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 De Mooij, *Global Marketing and Advertising*, 274.
enthusiasm of the public relations and communication scholar Theilmann, who calls for coining a “pan-European brand” which “focus[es] on the common features of European countries”, and subordinate the aim to stress a unique German position to a European perspective.\(^{47}\) In fact, the modest use of images as well as the focus on representing an academic surrounding, instead of a travel destination may be read as reinforcement of what is commonly perceived as ‘typical’ German seriousness.

**German Qualities**

The delivery of serious information is accompanied by the claim of the outstanding performance, as introduced by Mai’s statements including various adjectives stressing high quality:

1. First-class service for international students […].  
2. Wide choice of degree programs […].  
3. Excellence in research and teaching […].  
4. Close links between theory and practice […].  
5. Strong international focus: Excellent achievements through worldwide networks.\(^{48}\)

Moreover, the web page makes a reference to the well-known “Made in Germany” slogan as well as to the German CHE-University ranking.\(^{49}\) This observation once more accords with De Mooij’s claim that “[w]inning is important” in German advertisements.\(^{50}\) The information focus, the testimonial and the key role of quality reinforce a standardised image of what is typically German. Yet, this does not mean that “the advertising style of a country reflects the culture of that country” as De Mooij has argued quite one-dimensionally. It rather represents the attempt to frame a unique image of the German higher education area easy to grasp and thus, to sell by reinforcing national stereotypes.

Michael Pickering, British professor of Media and Cultural Analysis, views stereotypes as mechanisms which “are usually considered inaccurate because of the way they portray a social group or category as homogenous”.\(^{51}\) In the “Study in Germany” campaign stereotyping serves as technique to reinforce existing relations of power, yet in the reversed manner as Pickering thinks of it.\(^{52}\) The “programmers” do not introduce the stereotypes in order to subordinate the categorised subject, but to put it on display and to sell it to the target audience. Hereby they

\(^{48}\) DAAD, “Study in Germany”.  
\(^{49}\) Ibid.  
\(^{50}\) De Mooij, *Global Marketing and Advertising*, 274.  
\(^{52}\) Ibid.
employ a basic principle of marketing, which takes existing perceptions as a starting point to create and sell the brand.\(^53\) This strategy also affects the way diversity is represented. Multiculturalism, as promoted by the “Study in Europe” network, is expressed both by the images and the messages, but at the same time it is undermined as Germans are homogenised in order to attribute the German higher education area with a unique selling point in comparison to other “nodes” and networks of the European higher education area.

“Study in Holland”

The “Study in Holland” web page stresses national symbols by welcoming the audience with an orange design.\(^54\) Jeroen Duijvestijn, Dutch communication consultant, highlights the uniqueness of orange for the Netherlands, which represents the royal family and the House of Orange, football and also heartiness.\(^55\) In addition, the web page presents a tulip shaped frame to the audience incorporating both a logo of the campaign and a promotion film. The logo consists of several abstract symbols, the top one being another tulip as a *mise en abyme*. Duijvestijn describes tulips as the “friendliest face of ‘Holland’”.\(^56\) Thus, the tulip, the waves and the windmills do not only represent characteristics of the Netherlands but aim at invoking positive emotions towards the Netherlands as an open-minded and welcoming country. Moreover, as the windmills are given a modern shape they deliver the idea of the Netherlands as an innovative area. The same goes for the book, the two graduation hats, the glasses used for experiments in a laboratory and the bulb which all together promote the Netherlands as a place of knowledge and research. The symbols of the logo are picked up by the promotion film, which offers the answers to the question “Why study in Holland?” Already the choice of the medium film alludes to a modern and lively study destination. The variety of pictures enables the “programmers” to deliver a substantial selection of images to the audience. The film also introduces different styles of representation. Realistic images captured by the camera turn into more abstract ones or are interrupted by takes of animated silhouettes, ink drawings or a comic

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\(^{54}\) Nuffic, “Study in Holland”. If not indicated otherwise, all observations and examples presented within this chapter refer to this web page.


\(^{56}\) Ibid.
strip. These refractions attract attention as they surprise the audience. Furthermore, the intermingled formats signify an environment which is tolerant and open towards variety.

*Dynamics of a Diverse Surrounding*

“Study in Holland” does not limit the representation of multiculturalism to the university context but introduces it as a characteristic of Dutch society, showing street views with pedestrians from various cultural backgrounds. Pictures of Queen’s Day and carnival are introduced as parallelism symbolising the equal importance of the Dutch and other cultures within the Netherlands. As in the German and European campaigns, more women are shown, delivering the idea of gender equality by, once more, favouring the female in representation. Whereas the German campaign focuses in its representations of places entirely on the university surrounding, the Dutch promotion film introduces both cities such as Amsterdam and Groningen and landscapes such as tulip-fields, windmills on a lawn and dikes at the sea which are associated with the Netherlands.

Yet, these images are not merely employed to highlight the uniqueness of the Netherlands, but they at the same time introduce dimensions of diversity stressed on the European level. The coexistence of tradition and innovation is exemplary highlighted by the windmill. First introduced in its traditional shape representing an idyllic Dutch landscape, it is altered in abstraction, transformed into an aircraft and picked up later when a modern wind farm is shown. Furthermore, laboratories and technical devices portrayed add to the modern image, as in the German and European promotion campaign.

*Typically Dutch*

The linguistic messages support the frequent use of national symbols in order to stress the unique selling points of the Netherlands as study destination. Hereby they refer to average numbers and reinforce stereotypes of Dutch society:

The Netherlands are inhabited with on average the tallest people in the world. If you haven’t heard much about them it is probably because their motto seems to be: Let’s not pretend to be bigger than we are! […] Just who are these tall, internationally minded entrepreneurs living at the heart of Europe?\(^{57}\)

This quote unfolds a double dynamic. On the basis of a statistical physiognomic fact the second sentence introduces modesty as general character trait of the Dutch. That it is indeed a well-spread belief is documented by De Mooij’s typology of national advertising styles. With

\(^{57}\) Nuffic, “Study in Holland”.

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reference to Dutch advertisements she observes that “[m]odesty leads to infrequent expressions of ‘being the best’. Success can be shown only in understatements”.58 The third sentence of the quote undermines this assumption. The concept of Dutch modesty is counteracted by an expression of belief in one’s own greatness. Here the “programmers” present a negotiated version of the Dutch stereotype, in Hall’s sense, presenting it on a general level while deviating from it on occasion.59 Yet, this does not affect the stability of the Dutch stereotype as self-irony and humour are among the qualities usually associated with the Dutch as De Mooij’s categorisation highlights.60 The film introduces further descriptions of the Dutch as “uncomplicated” and “generally open minded, freedom loving and tolerant towards foreigners”.61 While “Study in German” implicitly reinforces national stereotypes, “Study in Holland” explicitly refers to typical Dutch traits. Hereby it employs a strategy identified as a characteristic of place branding by the economist and brand consultant Joao Freire, who concludes “that much of a place’s image is likely to be created by stereotyping the ‘typical’ local people”.62 Along with Burke it can be argued that the web page constructs a Dutch group-identity on the basis of the stereotypes presented.63 Yet, even though these strategies are usually accompanied by mechanisms of in- and exclusion,64 the audience is nevertheless welcomed to join the Dutch higher education network. In contrast to the German stereotype of seriousness and order which rather undermines the idea of variety, the stereotype of the Dutch is suited well for both highlighting national uniqueness and multiculturalism. Nevertheless, the promotion film also introduces a meta-level to the representation of stereotypes. The words “uncomplicated” and “tolerant” are written in a naïve style, assembled with childish icons such as “A, B, C” or comic figures. Via this technique of aesthetic abstraction the “programmers” point towards the simplifying and restricting mechanisms of stereotyping and the difficulties to successfully “frame” unique values of the national higher education area beyond homogenising descriptions. “Study in Holland” reflects upon the powerful position it holds as “centre” of the national branding network where it, in a similar manner to the “Study in Germany” web page,
reinterprets the definitions of the EU campaign and, speaking with Castells, exerts “counter power […] to defend alternative values and interests”.65

Conclusion

While promoting higher education in Europe the multi-layered campaigns “Study in Europe”, “Study in Germany” and “Study in Holland” exhibit various features of “global networks”. As laid out by Castells, they employ the characteristic mechanisms of in- and exclusion and switch between co-operation and competition. The “Study in Europe” web page introduces diversity as a value to encompass various national “nodes” and seeks to diminish the fear of a homogenisation among the individual member states. It defines multiculturalism as a concept highlighting the geographical closeness of various nations and places it in a transnational academic context. At the same time the web page struggles to stress the equality of its “nodes” as it introduces innovation and tradition as an asset of the European continent, yet does not associate it with all member states. Paradoxically, this goes along with the effort to restrict the symbolic power of the member states as national symbols are censored by the representations. Germany and the Netherlands are both “nodes” of the European promotion campaign and “centres” of national branding networks. In their national promotion campaigns they comply in many ways with the way diversity is defined on European level. Tradition and innovation, as well as multiculturalism, are central themes of the web pages. Yet, while some messages, such as promoting gender equality by favouring the female in representation, are very similar, national “programmers” also “reframe” the values by translating them from the European program into a local context. This can be observed in the case of “Study in Holland,” which represents multiculturalism as a feature of Dutch society, but it can most strikingly be seen in the effort “Study in Germany” and “Study in Holland” put in reinforcing national stereotypes. Hereby the “programmers” undermine the concept of diversity defined at European level and juxtapose the idea of multiculturalism with a homogenising representation of their national societies.

Observing this technique, the paper indeed senses a fear of homogenisation among the national “nodes” of European higher education. At the same time the analysis has identified both the EU and the member states as powerful “programmers” worth to be recognised on the multi-layered global networking scene. Hereby it broadens the scope of Castells’s observation.

65 Castells, Communication Power, 52.
which shows only limited interest in the power of the European Union. Still, along with Castells’s reader-response perspective further research is necessary in order to explore how the target audience, as well as the stereotyped subjects of the representations, use the possibilities of global networking, such as YouTube or Facebook, to react to the “Study-in” campaigns. They may employ alternative means to stress regional or national unique selling points by offering approaches beyond homogenising mechanisms of stereotyping, which hinder the development towards a European higher education area as diverse learning and living environment.
Bibliography


