



LUND UNIVERSITY

Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology

# Promoting a European Identity

- *an idea- and argumentation analysis of a European identity construction via the European Education Area*

Author: Caroline Lloyd

EUHK30

Centre for Languages and Literature

Lund University

Supervisor: Mattias Nowak

## Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how a transnational European identity is articulated and constructed in the initiatives constituting the “European Education Area” (EEA). Identity is one of the most disputed and dissociated concepts of social sciences and humanities. Despite this, the concept remains pivotal in order to ensure the EU’s legitimacy. Hence, understanding how the EU works in strengthening their identity is vital for understanding Europe in its entirety. Based in the theory of social constructivism characterized by social interaction, the EEA’s initiatives are strongly related to developing possibilities for European Citizens to transnationally meet and exchange ideas. The methods distinguishing the different ways in which the Union promotes a European identity in the EEA are idea- and argumentation analysis. These, together with a social constructivist approach created the framework in which the result of this study was conducted. The results can be categorized into three themes: how the EU aims to further advance its relation to its member states, strengthen its role internationally and make itself more appealing to its citizens. These themes depict the different target groups in the creation of the EEA, opening up for a deeper understanding in how a common identity is promoted in its entirety.

**Keywords:** European Union, Identity, European Education Area, Europeanization, Social constructivism, European cultural policy, Nation

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## 1. Introduction

It is education that helps us adapt to a rapidly changing world, to develop a European identity, to understand other cultures and to gain the new skills one needs in a society that is mobile, multicultural and increasingly digital<sup>1</sup>

Developing and promoting a European Identity has during the last decades been a priority for the European Union in order to respond to the democratic deficit its institutions are faced with, as well as providing legitimacy for the existence of the union itself. Many researchers have emphasized that the EU, as a polity without a clear ‘European demos’, suffers from a democratic deficit, which has resulted in the Union’s attempts to increasingly articulate ideas and messages about European political and cultural unity. The EU:s identity politics started to receive a growing academic attention, which also included analytical discussions regarding the European citizens’ identification with the Union as a foundation of its socio-political legitimacy.<sup>2</sup> The social anthropologist Cris Shore describes this European democratic deficit as something synonyms to a ‘cultural deficit’, a deficit reflected in the absence of the European public, a ‘demos’ with its own collective, common self-identification.<sup>3</sup> This perception of the EU as elitist is one of the Union’s major problems, creating an internal demand for an even stronger promotion of a common European identity aiming to erode the democratic deficit.

Identities help us understand ourselves and the people in the world, laying the fabric of ideas and feelings that may constitute a fundament where political structures and states can be created and long-lasting. This idea is presented in professor Barry Buzan’s “model of the state”, which consists of three internal components that, taken together,

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<sup>1</sup>“Future of Europe: Towards a European Education Area by 2025.” European Commission - European Commission, November 14, 2017.

[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_17\\_4521](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_17_4521)

<sup>2</sup> Athanasios Psygkas "From the 'Democratic Deficit' to a 'Democratic Surplus': Constructing Administrative Democracy in Europe" (Oxford University Press, 2017), p.2

<sup>3</sup> Cris Shore. *Building Europe: the Cultural Politics of European Integration*. (London: Routledge, 2006), p.4

constitute a state. The components elaborated by Buzan are the *idea of the state* (national identity and ideology as well as political culture), the *physical base* (e.g. population & territory) and the *institutional base* (institutions, constitutions).<sup>4</sup> Hence, state-bearing ideas and norms, as part of a state's political structure, evidently give meaning to organizational and institutional frameworks. This notion, elaborated by Barry Buzan, can be applied on a supranational level as well, for example in an analytical discussion concerning the European Union. It is of large relevance for the present thesis and will be further developed in the theoretical chapter.

In the constitutional basis of the European Union, built on a set of treaties between the member states and the EU which operate in establishing the EU institutions, a commitment to promote lifelong learning for all citizens of the Union is presented.<sup>5</sup> One of the newest attempts in ensuring this promise, as well as establishing a further spread of a common European identity is the creation of an initiative labeled the *European Education Area* (EEA). The EEA aims to reinforce the cultural aspect of Europe and encourage youth participation in the educational sphere, leading to an enhanced 'europeanness' among the participants.<sup>6</sup> This initiative was developed between the EU supranational actors and the member states with the shared premise of creating means in which citizens can experience European identity in all its diversity.

## 1.1 Purpose and Objective

The purpose of this thesis is to qualitatively frame and analyze the main ideas in the European Union's identity and education politics, which intersected in 2017 through an initiative labeled the European Education Area (EEA). While different actors are currently promoting European identity, this thesis aims to facilitate a deeper

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<sup>4</sup> Barry Buzan, "People, States & Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era", 2nd edition (London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991) p.65

<sup>5</sup> EUR-Lex, "*Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*", <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12008E167> art. 165

<sup>6</sup> "Towards a European Education Area by 2025" European commission - European commission, May 22, 2018. Accessed April 21, 2020 [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/towards-european-education-area-2025-2018-may-22\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/towards-european-education-area-2025-2018-may-22_en)

understanding of the European identity construction as it is articulated and embodied within the European Education Area. Amid the many theories of European integration, a social constructivist approach will be used in order to theoretically elaborate key concepts such as: identity construction, Europeanization and nation state in relation to the EU's cultural politics. The social constructivist approach, together with the methodological tools from idea- and argumentation analysis work as the catalysts in trying to analyse and systematically present the EU's attempt to facilitate a European identity through the EEA, analytically scrutinizing the main articulated ideas and arguments.

On the basis of the purpose/objective I formulate the following research question: *Which are the main ideas and arguments articulated within the European Education Area aimed to promote a growth of a common transnational European identity? A relevant sub-question is: How is the process of articulation rhetorically manifested in the studied material?*

## 1.1 Disposition

This paper is built on six different parts (excluding source reference). After the introductory chapter, a brief clarification of the European Education Area, as well as the European High Education Area is done, composing chapter 2. Chapter 3 presents how a general social constructivist approach beneficially operates in relation to identity construction and international relations. Then, after establishing the given theoretical framework, concepts such as identity, Europeanization and nation state in relation to EU cultural politics are defined. The idea of the chapter is to pinpoint different mechanisms relating to identity construction, as well as clarifying in which way the EU attempts to promote a European identity in the EEA. Furthermore, chapter 4 explains the methodological approaches used in this thesis. Chapter 5 presents and analyses the main articulated ideas and arguments made by the European Union for their cultural and educational initiatives related to the EEA. This is carried out within the social constructivist theoretical framework, using the methodological tools from idea and argumentation analysis. The thesis then ends with chapter 6 presenting a final summarizing discussion, conclusion and further ideas for future research.

## 1.2 Material Description

In this thesis the material studied will be narrowed down to EU official documents related to the European Education Area. The material is constituted by contributions from the European Commission and the European Council as well as a speech held by the previous President of the European Council, Donald Tusk. Tusk's speech took place during the Social Summit in Gothenburg on the 17th of November 2017, marking the 30th anniversary of the Erasmus+ programme. Donald Tusk chaired a debate on education and culture with the EU leaders, where questions on how to enhance EU efforts in the area of education and culture were discussed. This summit is where the idea of the European Education Area emerged.<sup>7</sup> The European Commission's vision for the EEA in 2025 came the same month as the summit took place, described as a process “in which learning, studying and doing research would not be hampered by borders”.<sup>8</sup> In total, four different sets of EU papers constitute the material for the analysis conducted in this thesis.

One potential criticism in relation to the chosen material is that no separate first hand source from the member states about the EEA is presented. This thesis aims to find, discuss and analyse the EU's supranational truth. Hence, the material needs to be articulated by the EU in order to justly present their perception on European identity in the cultural political framework which the EEA operates. This thus eradicates the significance and need for other actors, that in this case would be the member states, perception and truth.

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<sup>7</sup> Denise Chircop, “European Education Area”. (European Parliament Think Tank, March 4, 2020)  
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS\\_AT A\(2020\)646205](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_AT A(2020)646205)

<sup>8</sup> “Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture” European Commission. November 14, 2017. p.11  
[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-strengthening-european-identity-education-culture\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-strengthening-european-identity-education-culture_en.pdf)

## 2. The European Education Area within EU Cultural Politics

The European Education Area exists as part of a larger framework of culturally related policies of the EU. Its existence is the result of the European Commission's effort to strengthen European identity through education and culture, working with its member states in order to develop initiatives enabling European citizens, youths in particular, to benefit from high quality education and to find employment across Europe. The initiatives and projects constituting the EEA relate to improving digital skills, ensuring lifelong learning, promoting common values and further development on inclusive education and strengthening previous EU projects such as the Erasmus+ program.<sup>9</sup> These internal initiatives are articulated as a set of ideas and arguments which in turn facilitate in constructing a European identity. By 2025, these initiatives aim to have been implemented, completing the set vision of the EEA.

In his book *'Building Europe: the Cultural Politics of European Integration'*, Cris Shore highlights the notion that EU officials and politicians are not focusing on whether a political union can be developed, but rather how to foster a European identity that will transcend integration into the more cultural and psychological domains of everyday life.<sup>10</sup> This distinction in the purpose of the EU officials is of importance in relation to the structure of the EEA, as well as its relevance.

As previously mentioned, Barry Buzan has constructed an analytical model in which he explains the structures and functions of a state. This model could be applied to the EU in the sense that the Union, partially, organizes its institutional and legal frameworks and policies somewhat similarly to a state. The EU is composed of a population, a defined territory, internal institutions, legal frameworks, and aims to foster a socio-political feeling of community among its citizens. By applying Buzan's model on the EU, the relationship and dependency between the physical and institutional means of a state and the more abstract cultural and ideational ones such as identity and political

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<sup>9</sup> "European Education Area." Education and Training - European Commission, August 2, 2019.

[https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area_en)

<sup>10</sup> Cris Shore. *Building Europe: the Cultural Politics of European Integration*. p.2



structure are relatively evident. In other words, the cultural and ideological aspects (Buzan's "idea of the state") are important for the concrete institutionalized politics of the EU. Hence, the usage of an idea analysis in this thesis is deemed relevant. Furthermore, ideas are closely linked with argumentation, which strengthens the notion that these two methods will cooperate beneficially in order to answer the thesis question.

## 2.1 The European Higher Education Area and the EEA

Previous to the creation of the European Education Area, a similar initiative labeled the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was created as early as 2010. The EHEA was launched at the Budapest-Vienna Ministerial Conference, marking the 10th anniversary of the Bologna process (similarly to the EEA and the establishment of the Erasmus program). The Bologna process was launched with the Bologna Declaration of 1999, and operates as the main voluntary processes at European level. The Bologna process is currently implemented in 48 states in which have cooperated in establishing a common set of commitments: structural reforms and shared tools. The reforms constituting the process of developing the EHEA are characterized by common values presented as the following, "freedom of expression, autonomy for institutions, independent student unions, academic freedom, free movement of students and staff".<sup>11</sup> The aim of this initiative is similar to the one of the EEA, aligning with factors such as increasing students and staff mobility as well as facilitating employability. As is evident in the European Higher Education Area's name, it only concerns higher education systems. The EEA target all pupils (young people) as well as adults which are included in the initiative for "lifelong learning" that will be elaborated in the analysis<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> "European Higher Education Area and Bologna Process".

<http://www.ehea.info/index.php>

<sup>12</sup> "Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture" European Commission. November 14, 2017, p.8

### 3. Theoretical Approaches

The social constructivist approach provides a social and cultural dimension into the theoretical framework for the present thesis. This theoretical perspective is itself composed of many different theories, but generally speaking it provides a social dimension to international relations, which is fruitful in analysing the ideas and arguments aimed towards articulation, construction, and promotion of the European identity discourse within the European Education Area.

Like any other large theoretical perspective, social constructivism has been developed in different directions by different scholars, making one ‘true’ definition more or less impossible. Due to Alexander Wendt being one of the key contributors to social constructivism as it exists today, particularly within the field of international relations, I have chosen to use and further develop his approach as elaborated in his publication ‘*Social theory of international politics*’, using it as the basis of my theoretical discussion. The work of other relevant theoreticians will be used in relation to Wendt, further advancing the given discussion.

Furthermore, three main concepts; identity, Europeanization and the concept of a nation state in relation to the EU cultural politics will be defined in the current chapter. I deem these definitions necessary in order to fully comprehend the subject that will be analytically scrutinized.

#### 3.1 Social Constructivism

Social constructivism does, unlike many other IR theories, look beyond the material means of world affairs. It emphasizes the importance of human awareness and consciousness, and how those factors should be taken into account in order to fully comprehend world politics and structures.<sup>13</sup> What characterizes the theory is the focus on ideas, norms, values and the way in which they are embodied in institutional frameworks and activities. Furthermore, it emphasizes the role of identity in political affairs. Thus,

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<sup>13</sup> Robert H. Jackson & Georg Sørensen. *Introduction to international relations: theories and approaches*. 3. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p.162

social constructivism constitutes an approach to international politics that is multidisciplinary and combines perspectives from as well a political science, as humanistic approaches. A further focus lies in the social and cultural dynamics regarding structures and actors. This belief is shared by the following theoreticians: Jill Steans, Lloyd Pettiford and McGlinchey, whose perspectives are elaborated in the following section.

While emphasizing the importance of the social aspect in world affairs, Alexander Wendt constructs the ground for how social constructivism operates in opposition to materialism and rationalism. Unlike materialism, it argues that the structures of human associations to a main extent are cultural and psychological, rather than material and mechanically rational. This notion is one that will generally characterize this thesis. Furthermore, Wendt argues against rationalism in stating that political and institutional structures construct identities and regulate interests.<sup>14</sup> To put this in practice, Wendt presents a scenario explaining how 500 British nuclear weapons pose a smaller threat than five North Korean ones. This is based on the ideational structure providing meaning to the actors presented, rather than the material structure taking shape in numbers of nuclear weapons. This case diverts importance to understanding the social relationship between states, its political cultures, showing how the shared understanding of the social relationships becomes the premise of their interactions. The social context of the situation brings meaning to the material means, such as for example the nuclear weapons. This approach of going beyond material reality by including the effect of ideas and cultural paradigms in world politics is what characterizes many social constructivists. It demonstrates how reality is always under construction and re-constructions due to ideas and beliefs possessed by the actors in question being under constant change.<sup>15</sup> However, this approach does not neglect the fact that various socio-political phenomena, even if constructed, can under long periods of time exist in stable, fixed forms. It only acknowledges the possibilities for, as well as characteristics of changeability in relation to political structures and institutions. Many social constructivist theories do not deny the

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<sup>14</sup> Alexander Wendt, *Social theory of international politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p.193

<sup>15</sup> Stephen McGlinchey, Rosie Walters & Christian Scheinpflug. *International Relations Theory*. (E-International Relations Publishing, 2017) p.3-4

very existence of ‘truths’ as such, which distinguishes these theories from perspectives of radical relativism.

The two theorists Jill Steans and Lloyd Pettiford discuss in their book *Introduction to international relations: perspectives and themes* the premise of social constructivism, landing in the notion that it is based on joint agreements and intersubjective thinking. Furthermore, Steans & Pettiford argue that society according to social constructivists is created by people in interaction with each other. The relationship between the actors and structures is described in a sense that the actors’ actions are created by the structure, including the ideational and cultural substances of existing structures, the actor exists in. The actor then, in turn, facilitates in reconstructing the structure. This process therefore creates a space where the actor is affected by the environment and vice versa, following on to the previous example demonstrating how social relationships change and further develop in a typically slow moving pace. Change, leading to a reconstruction of the environment is thus possible through changing the actors’ behavior.<sup>16</sup> Such a line of reasoning carries a particular kind of importance while discussing the EU cultural policies. These policies are permitted by and infused with interacting sets of ideas, norms and values that together constitute a basis for concrete institutional politics and policies. Hence, cultural politics can be used as a mechanism in identity construction. Summarizing the social constructivist perspective discussed in this section, one can state that scholars generally agree in their opinion that actors construct something. By using the norms and ideas which they articulate, the actors construct fundamental elements and mechanisms within e.g. institutional structures. This perception of the theory will operate in understanding the EEA, analysed below.

### 3.2 Concept Definitions & Conceptual Elaborations

Four particular concepts will be theoretically elaborated below: identity, Europeanization, nation state in relation to EU cultural politics. These four concepts are ones chosen in order to further develop and understand the scenery in which the European Union

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<sup>16</sup> Steans, Jill & Pettiford, Lloyd. *Introduction to international relations: perspectives and themes*. 2. ed. (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2005), p.183-187

operates, henceforth facilitating the analysis. What is of interest in relation to this thesis is the existence of an actor (EU) that socio-politically forms a European Education Area that in turn facilitates in promoting a common European identity. The conceptual elaboration of 'identity' may help to understand what is being constructed, whilst Europeanization, nation state in relation to EU cultural policies enable a deeper understanding of the scenery and framework where this happens.

## Identity

Alexander Wendt argues that identities are subjective, based on the actors own self understandings, as well as constituted by external and internal structures. If one may identify as a student internally but the teachers don't share the same belief, the perceived identity will not work in their interaction. Hence, identities are role specific representations and expectations, defined in social means such as principles, values and norms. This notion is supported by the international relations scholar Thomas Risse-Kappen, who argues that the origin of identities lay in a process where actors (individuals and groups) try to understand what they are and what they want.<sup>17</sup> Hence, a process of navigating social principles comes into place. Wendt further develops his ideas on identities, claiming that they are not a unitary phenomenon defined by one general definition. This then induces a conclusion of different kinds of identities existing more or less harmoniously, but not simultaneously. Wendt presents and discusses four of these; personal or corporate, type, role, and collective.

The 'personal or corporate' identity is the only one, according to Wendt, that is not shaped by relations to other states in the international sphere. Hence, it is the only identity of the four types presented that does possess the possibility to operate in multiple forms simultaneously within the same actor. The personal or corporate identity is characterized by self-organizing and homeostatic structures in which differentiates the *Self* from the *Other*. Furthermore the actor only possesses one personal identity that reinvents and repeats itself continuously on several levels.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Risse-Kappen. *A community of Europeans? : transnational identities and public spheres*. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. 40

<sup>18</sup> Wendt (1999). *Social theory of international politics*, p.225

Secondly, Wendt introduces 'type' identity. This category is borrowed from the political scientist James Fearon, who defines it as a "label applied to persons who share (or are thought to share) some characteristic or characteristics, in appearance, behavioral traits, attitudes, values, skills (e.g. language), knowledge, opinions, experience, historical commonalities (like region or place of birth), and so on".<sup>19</sup> The structures of the identity hence vary culturally and historically, and societal phenomena such as politics and the economy have a significant impact on it.

Contrarily, Wendt introduces 'role' identity whose existence is solely dependent on being existing in relation to 'the Other', unlike 'type' identity that is characterized by intrinsic characteristics. Further emphasizing on norms and social structures, role identities can only be acquired by acting within institutionalized social framework.

Finally, collective identities are introduced as being the most popular identity in foreign policy studies. What characterizes collective identity is that the distinction between the self and the other is eroded, meaning that the 'Self' becomes the 'Other'. Wendt argues that humans are ruled by their own self interest, but collective identities divert from this notion emphasizing the important and cooperative relationship between the Self and Other. Your own self interest becomes the groups interest, hence the groups success is your success.<sup>20</sup> This is the type of identity acting as the basis for the European identity, where the EU actively tries to construct an identity on top of its citizens' national ones. Hence, the 'Others' being members of other countries need to transform into the 'Self' for a common European identity to successfully exist. The prospect of a fully united Europe is vital in order for a collective identity to spread, which is not the case of Europe today.

In this thesis, I will mainly focus on collective identity in relation to understanding and analysing the discourse on the European identity in the chosen material.

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<sup>19</sup> Wendt (1999). *Social theory of international politics*, p. 224

<sup>20</sup> Wendt (1999). *Social Theory of International Politics*, p. 337

## Europeanization

Europeanization is a widely used concept existing in several areas regarding politics, integration and the EU. Hence, it is still considered to exist in its ontological phase due to many different definitions of the concept occurring in literature.<sup>21</sup> This diminishes the credibility of the term which consequently has led to many scholars disregarding it as a whole. I deem it still being of relevance however, and the justification for why will be elaborated in this section.

In the book “Transforming Europe: Europeanization and Domestic Change” Maria Green Cowles, James A. Caporaso and Thomas Risse however aim to clarify the concept as well as its impact. They explain Europeanization as a top-down phenomenon, meaning that distinct structures of governance at the EU level have an impact on domestic structures among the member states. In order to strengthen this clarification Cowles, Caporaso and Risse study different cases in which nearly all have proven their hypothesis on the impact of Europeanization, meaning that identifiable changes in the domestic institutional structures have been identified as a result of Europeanization. Additionally, every member state analysed has had to adapt to Europeanization. Hence, the authors conclude that Europeanization matters.<sup>22</sup> This legitimizes the importance of the concept as well as providing a perspective that will be useful in my further analysis.

Building on the previous notion that Europeanization can be perceived as a process of change, the political scientist Johan P. Olsen makes an attempt to try to define *what* is changing. Identifying five different areas of use, he depicts the complexity and diversity of the concept. Starting off with the category “*changes in external boundaries*” Olsen presents Europeanization as a process taking place through the EU’s territorial enlargement.

Olsens second part of use is “*developing institutions at the European level*” that concerns the supranational and intergovernmental structure of the EU. It focuses on

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<sup>21</sup> Paolo Graziano & Maarten Vink. *The member states of the European Union*, eds. Simon Bulmer & Christian Lequesne, (2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.32

<sup>22</sup> Maria Cowles, James A. Caporaso Green and Thomas Risse-Kappen. *Transforming Europe: Europeanization and Domestic Change*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012). p.22-24

centre-building of institutions enabled with a collective action capacity. In other words, it operates in regulating and controlling the actions of the member states. It aims to create a collective policy within the EU. Due to changes in laws, competition or conflict resolution institutional change can be possible.

The third part, “*central penetration of national systems of governance*”, concerns the division of responsibilities and power between different levels of governance. Hence, how the political system changes and then in turn is adapted to the European level. This part emphasizes the impact of Europeanization on domestic policies as well as political structures.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, the fourth part is “*exporting forms of political organization*” which relates to Europe exporting political organization and governance typical outside the European context. Here the EU operates as an international actor interacting with other international actors.

Finally, the fifth part “*a political unification project*” relates to how four previous processes presented unanimously result in a more equal and united Europe. In creating common political arenas and structures a stable organizational basis is established, that leads to an enhanced ability for Europe to act as a unified political system, both in its internal and external relations.<sup>24</sup>

These five concepts together constitute the areas that according to Olsen make Europeanization useful to study. Furthermore, it shows how the EU transfers its values through other countries via institutions that could potentially contribute to a spread of EU identity.

## The Nation State and the EU’s Cultural Politics

To further understand the political landscape in which the EU operates, defining a nation state is of the essence. The political scientist Benedict Anderson presents his conceptualization of nation states as imagined communities. Nations are imagined due to the fact that members of a nation will never know or interact with their fellow members.

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<sup>23</sup> Johan P. Olsen. ‘The Many Faces of Europeanization’ (*Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2002), p. 930-932

<sup>24</sup> Olsen (2002) ‘The Many Faces of Europeanization’, p. 939-940



Anderson argues that communication between the members are still existent, imagined, in each person's mind. One key aspect to a nation state is that it is inherently sovereign and limited due to the territorial boundaries. Furthermore, a nation is imagined as a community due to it always existing in the form of deep and horizontal comradeship, prevailing over potential internal, domestic injustices. It is this comradeship that according to Anderson acts as the fundament for nationalism, convincing people to fight and die for “such limited things”.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the nation and identity are closely linked which fuels Anderson’s elaboration and definition of nationalism. He argues that nationalism in modern nations are not conceived through blood, but rather imagined in language.<sup>26</sup> Due to the sense of belonging nationalism fuels, further boosting multilingualism is a key element in the EEA.

Cris Shore discusses the potential for Europe to become a supranational entity or nation state. Emphasizing the developments in technology, facilitating communication, Shore concludes that the possibility for this is emmersably greater than before. Using the work of the historical sociologist Anthony Smith, Shore states that the basis (if there is any) for transcending the nation state would be found in the patterns of European culture as well as traditions such as Christian theology, Roman law etc.<sup>27</sup> These together produce a European culture area. What is noteworthy with these previous remarks is their similarity to EU discourses on European Culture. The creative culture programme is one of the prime examples, supporting European culture and audiovisual sectors, emphasising shared cultural heritage and fostering further European developments in the area.<sup>28</sup> However, unlike EU officials, Smith argues that besides the unifying factors, any attempt to establish and create a supranational community in Europe is unlikely to succeed to social and cultural factors:

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<sup>25</sup> Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London: Verso, 2006), p. 5-7

<sup>26</sup> Anderson (2006), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, p. 134

<sup>27</sup> Shore, Cris (2006). *Building Europe: the Cultural Politics of European Integration*. p.16-17

<sup>28</sup> “About”. European Commission.

[https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/about\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/about_en)

Of course, one can forge supra-national institutions and create economic and political unions, as Bismarck did for the German states. But these frequently cited parallels contain an obvious flaw. Language and historical memories, as well as myths of ethnic descent, united the population of the German states; the same factors divided the people of Europe.<sup>29</sup>

This parallel drawn between Europe and the German states combined with the previously mentioned European culture area built on culture and traditions is of relevance in relation to the thesis topic. The European Union's motto, Unity in diversity<sup>30</sup>, is a clear portrayal of the difficulties related to the European unification. The European Union embraces its diversity implementing it as a utility in its cultural policies. It is however anchored in the scepticism of the Union, which can be related back to Benedict Anderson's belief that a nation, strengthened in its domestic solidarity by nationalism, needs a common language to unite. This is a notion acknowledged by the Union in its proposals for establishing the European Education Area: "The European integration process calls for acquiring good language competences. Multilingualism represents one of the greatest assets in terms of cultural diversity in Europe and, at the same time, one of the most substantial challenges".<sup>31</sup> Multilingualism will be further elaborated in the analysis below, but this section is however of relevance due to it portraying the different challenges with the nation in relation to the EU's cultural policies, as well as understanding the Union's actions in responding to it.

#### 4. Methodological Approaches

As previously mentioned, this thesis will be based on idea analysis combined with argumentation analysis. The EU does, with a particular set of interactive ideas and norms, infuse cultural politics in trying to construct a common identity. Due to this notion, the

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<sup>29</sup> Anthony Smith, *Europe versus the nation?* (The new federalist, 1992) quoted in Cris Shore, *Building Europe: the Cultural Politics of European Integration*. (London: Routledge, 2006), p.17

<sup>30</sup> Europeiska Unionen, "EU's motto", [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/motto\\_sv](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/motto_sv)

<sup>31</sup> "Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture" (European Commission. November 14, 2017). p.5

choice of method is deemed most suitable for the aim to depict how this is done. Furthermore, the methods align well with social constructivism in relation to the theory's emphasis on social matters such as ideas, norms and institutions and how the human awareness and consciousness affect these. Both argumentation- and idea analysis operate beneficially in understanding reasoning and purpose which are results of human awareness, even when applied to an institution such as the EU.

The two methods can be used and take shape in different forms, but the main principle will be to analyze political messages. Furthermore, the decision for these two methods are based in my aim to investigate *what* the material expresses, as well as justifying *how* it is expressed.

Argumentation analysis as a tool is of use in this thesis due to its main focus laying in aspects of meaning, as well as facilitating in analyzing the underlying meaning and purpose of certain statements.<sup>32</sup> Introducing idea analysis as an analytical tool in combination with argumentation analysis enables the possibility of analysing the logic and reasoning within a political ideological discussion.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4.1 Idea Analysis

Methods in themselves are versatile in relation to what purpose they serve, and idea analysis is no different. Two main types of studies are ones of descriptive purposes and ones where the starting point is of a more unbiased nature, where the author takes an active stance in relation to the question presented. Beyond this distinction there is a possibility of categorising different kinds of idea analysis in what explanatory purpose one has with the method. These three objectives are the different ways ideas can be chosen to be studied.<sup>34</sup> Due to the main purpose of this thesis being to understand how the EU integrates the promoting of a European Identity in the European Education Area and clarify that, I will be describing the assigned material.

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<sup>32</sup> Göran Bergström & Kristina Boréus red. *Textens mening och makt : metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*. (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2012) p. 92

<sup>33</sup> Bergström & Boréus (2012), *Textens mening och makt*. p. 146

<sup>34</sup> Bergström & Boréus (2012), *Textens mening och makt*. p. 145

Something that characterizes idea analysis is that no framework for it has been created. This enables a situation where the user is provided with freedom in developing analytical tools suitable for the purpose of the analysis.<sup>35</sup> Hence the analysis can be useful in many ways relating to the purpose and aim. This thesis will be rooted in *descriptive idea analysis*.

Descriptive idea analysis analyses the creation of ideas in general which is beneficial when the researcher aims to contribute with something new in relation to the given material.<sup>36</sup> Hence, this method works well in relation to this thesis analysing and describing the way EU actors use education as a way to facilitate European identity. Due to descriptive idea analysis commonly being perceived as the first step towards the actual explanatory study, it could conclude as being insufficient. The political theorist Ludwig Beckman does however rebuttal this by stating that it is a mistake to believe that descriptions of reality fails in additionally describing it as well.<sup>37</sup> A description does not however explain why something has taken place/been done, it conducts what these phenomenons are. Hence, idea analysis will function as the “what” aspect in my analysis and argumentation analysis as the “why”.

In order to further justify my decision in choosing descriptive idea analysis, I would like to divert the focus to the renowned anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Geertz uses the term “thick descriptions” which aims towards providing specific and detailed portrayals of reality.<sup>38</sup> The term in itself describes a kind of scientific representation within the fields of social science and humanities that possess the abilities to be both interpretive and descriptive. Hence, I find my choice of descriptive idea analysis justified.

## 4.2 Argumentation Analysis

The aim when using argumentation analysis is to broaden the understanding of the argumentation related to the creation of the European Education Area, as well as the

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<sup>35</sup> Bergström & Boréus (2012), *Textens mening och makt*. p. 175

<sup>36</sup> Bergström & Boréus (2012), *Textens mening och makt*. p. 146

<sup>37</sup> Ludwig Beckman (2005), *Grundbok i idéanalys: det kritiska studiet av politiska texter och idéer*. (Stockholm: Santerus), p. 11.

<sup>38</sup> Clifford Geertz (1973), *The interpretation of cultures*, (New York: Basic Books), p. 23

motives behind the promoting of a European identity in relation to the creation of it. There are three main purposes of argumentation analysis; descriptive, norm-related and the conclusive power of arguments. This thesis will focus on the descriptive purpose, where the arguments do not exist in a typical manner, but rather needs to be 'found' by the researcher.<sup>39</sup> In this thesis arguments arguing for how and why European identity should be prioritised in the EEA will be analysed within the framework of classifying arguments in three different ways; cause, generalization and authority arguments. Cause arguments are characterized as the sender using arguments indicating causal relationships. In the case of generalization arguments on the other hand, the sender aims to convince by drawing conclusions from a few cases and then applying that conclusion to many cases. If the sender wants to weigh in its arguments via a particular authority, the arguments go under the category authority arguments.

Another way to structure an argumentation analysis is the widely used *Pro et contra* model developed by Arne Næss. This model has the purpose of determining different arguments' credibility.<sup>40</sup> It operates in creating first-order arguments, arguments of the second order, etc. which will then be categorized into two categories: pro or contra arguments. Contra arguments have the purpose of undermining what the thesis will be arguing for, whilst pro arguments will function in strengthening the thesis objective. Due to this thesis not fully arguing for and against something, but rather analysing the arguments used by the different actors in the material, the first method presented classifying arguments into three categories will be used.

## 5. Analysis

This analysis will depict how the EU articulates ideas and norms which are embodied in the cultural policies within the European Education Area. The chapter is divided into three sections relating to different themes found in the analysed material: 'National space within the EU - the member states and the EEA', 'Rebranding Europe in a global world' and finally 'The EEA as an internal reestablishment of the EU'. The common

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<sup>39</sup> Bergström & Boréus (2012), *Textens mening och makt*. p. 147

<sup>40</sup> Bergström & Boréus (2012), *Textens mening och makt*. p. 94

denominator for these three themes is that all involve the EU as an actor in relation to the member states, the global world or its internal affairs. This is a consequence of the material being created by different EU institutions providing their first hand perspective on the matter.

## 5.1 National space within the EU - the Member States and the EEA

The first category is strongly related to the idea that cultural and educational cooperation must exist as well between member states as the supranational level (the EU:s institutions). The then president of the European Council, Donald Tusk, concluded in his final remarks after the meeting of EU:s heads of states/governments in Gothenburg 2017 that eight concrete ideas had been discussed. Tusk acknowledged that these ideas “*were suggested not by Brussels, not by institutions, but by member states*”.<sup>41</sup> He hence made an attempt to rectify an idea of the EU as a political project primarily associated with supranationalism and institutional elitism, shining light on the member states, seen as main actors behind the possibility of making the EEA initiative a successful reality. Furthermore, the Commission described a contemporary political landscape where European democratic values and democracies are threatened and tested by populist forces, by ‘fake news’, as well as by the manipulations of information networks. The suggested action to approach these phenomenons is for the European leaders on national levels and the EU institutions to react in unity, working together towards a strengthening in the integration oriented European education, culture and identity.<sup>42</sup> This could be categorized as a cause argument, since the Commission argues for the importance of the EEA by emphasizing its commitment to solve these threats via promotion of a world order based on their fundamental values; freedom, democracy, equality, respect for the rule of law, human rights and dignity.<sup>43</sup> These ideas are in line with Alexander Wendt’s arguments that culture, including cultural initiatives and projects, help to internationally

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<sup>41</sup> European Council of the European Union, “Remarks by President Donald Tusk after the informal meeting of the EU heads of State or Government in Gothenburg”. (Press office - General Secretariat of the Council, November 17, 2017)

<sup>42</sup> “Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture” European Commission. November 14, 2017, p.2

<sup>43</sup> “Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture” European Commission. November 14, 2017. p.9

imply relevant conditions for free and active participation. In other words, culture is more versatile than being limited to solely entertainment and pleasure. It involves the formation of social spaces in which citizens are enabled to collectively coexist and participate, enriching one another through different modes of interaction. Politicians and EU officials may facilitate in creating such spaces, like the Erasmus+ programme, due to either democratic motives or other goals such as promoting a common European identity.

The previous section aligns with the social constructivist approach due to the EEA not only acknowledging the diversity of European member states and their cultures, but present concrete measures for the activity of national and supranational actors to open up for a new spirit of dialogue, mutual listening and learning in order to construct common fundamentals for a successful and democratic international cooperation.<sup>44</sup> The possibility to harness culture in its full potential as playing a dominant role in external relations is however not fully met. In section 5.2 of this analysis I will further elaborate on how the use of culture aims to facilitate a re-establishment of the EU in the international, global sphere. To clarify the use of re-establishment, it signifies the educational fallback of the EU's citizens performance in relation to other countries, which the EEA presents initiatives to improve. Hence, aiming to re-establish themselves internationally. For now however, the analysis will be narrowed down to the EU's supranational activity in relation to its member states. The researcher Vivien Burr emphasizes the importance of recognizing regional differences and locally sensitive issues in culture relations, and then tailor measures accordingly.<sup>45</sup> This notion, in relation to the EEA, does not fully align due to the EU focusing on boosting the common European education and complimenting national efforts in these areas. A deepened understanding of national and regional structures within the member states, regarding these areas, is not fully taken into account. An example of this would be the widely discussed case of the situation for Romani people in the Czech Republic. The Romani children were put in 'Practical schools' intended for children with physical and/or mental disabilities. Although the EU has intervened and these schools were eradicated as a result of an educational reform,

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<sup>44</sup> Burr (2003), *Social constructivism*. p.28-29

<sup>45</sup> Burr (2003), *Social constructivism*. p. 27-29

discrimination against the Romani children in Czechian schools are still existent.<sup>46</sup> Hence, for the EU to promote an investment in education for all EU citizens, national cultural tensions and patterns of discriminations may hinder the accessibility of these benefits for all European citizens. The EU's cultural relations should therefore focus on mutual learning and joint creative policies, working on how to establish the fundamental principles of the EU including all its citizens, without disrupting the subsidiarity of the member states.

In relation to the limitations of the European Union regarding the rule of subsidiarity, the Union and its member states have a strictly defined framework to operate in. According to article 6 of the Functioning of the European Union, “the Union shall have the power to take action to support, coordinate or complement Member States' actions in the field of culture”.<sup>47</sup> This can be anchored in Johan Olsen's second part of the Europeanization process, relating to the development of institutions competences at EU level connected to controlling as well as integrating the actions of the Member States, in order to create a collective policy within the EU.<sup>48</sup> When developing cooperation policies, such as the European Education Area, the Union and its member states act in full respect to subsidiarity. Looking at the policies establishing the creation-process of the EEA, the Union emphasises the fact that its “competences for education and culture lay primarily with Member States at national, regional and local level. The Union's competences are limited to encouraging cooperation, supporting and complementing national actions”.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the member states and EU complement and reinforce each other. The EU is active in advocating a European identity through measures taken at national, regional and local level. Put differently, the EU establishes conditions that contribute to encouraging cooperation and interaction between European national cultural and educational institutions. With this said however, collective identities and national identities are bound to the nation state in which they operate. They are both anchored in a self understanding

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<sup>46</sup> Regeringskansliet. “Utrikesdepartementet. Tjeckien – Mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och rättsstatens principer : Situationen per den 30 juni 2018”, p.12

<sup>47</sup> Treaty of the functioning of the European Union

<sup>48</sup> Olsen (2002), *The Many Faces of Europeanization* . p. 930

<sup>49</sup> “Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture” European Commission. November 14, 2017. p. 2



of a larger group. These groups are usually, as presented in Wendt's definition of identity, interlinked with a common background. Furthermore, these identities then present an image which is troublesome for some people in relation to a larger union. When a country decides to become a member of a larger Union, like the EU, some countries retain their features in comparison to some who decide to follow the developments of other countries.<sup>50</sup> In order for these countries to assimilate to the EU level, there may be a need for certain features to change. Therefore, in order to create a fully united Europe, institutions of the member states will have to be adapted in order to fit the EU regulatory system.<sup>51</sup>

## 5.2 Rebranding Europe in a Global World

Diverting focus to the EU and its international dimension, cultural diversity is an integral part of the Union's fundamental structure articulated in politics and values. By the use of international cultural relations, the European Union is strongly committed to the promotion of diversity which is an important part of the EU's role as a global actor.<sup>52</sup> This implies a willingness to promote the Unions international cultural relations via the support and assistance that it provides to third countries.<sup>53</sup> A connection from this can be drawn to John Olsen's "fifth part of Europeanization", that emphasizes the promotion of the image of the EU that is constructed by the different cultures of the Member States, through cultural diplomacy.<sup>54</sup>

An evident aspect in the creation of the EEA is the external perspective from the EU towards other international actors. The European Commission states that "education and culture help make Europe an attractive place to live"<sup>55</sup>, which legitimises the

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<sup>50</sup> Olsen (2002) 'The Many Faces of Europeanization', p. 934

<sup>51</sup> Olsen (2002) 'The Many Faces of Europeanization', p. 924-926

<sup>52</sup> "Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture" European Commission. November 14, 2017. p.1

<sup>53</sup> 'JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL - Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations', (European Commission, June 6, 2016)

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52016JC0029&from=EN>

<sup>54</sup> Olsen (2002) 'The Many Faces of Europeanization', p. 940-942

<sup>55</sup> "Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture" European Commission. November 14, 2017. p.3

awareness of the international perspective. This statement can furthermore be categorised as an authority argument, due to the European Commission's wish of further boosting their vision and arguing for their creation of the EEA on the international arena. Furthermore, it aligns with globalisation as a concept presented in the EEA initiatives, as well as its usage in terms of justifying the creation of the EEA. Globalisation is a phenomena of high relevance in relation to the European Union due to its inevitable effect on it. The EU's awareness of it has opened up for internal discussions within the Union, responding to globalisation's challenges and outcomes. These discussions portray an evident awareness that countries in other parts of the world already harness the potential that comes with globalisation, prior to the EU. An area of significant impact in relation to globalisation, which relates to the EEA, is the education sector. The European Commission states that "Europe does not excel in delivering high-quality skills, as even the best-performing Member States are outperformed by advanced Asian countries".<sup>56</sup> Subsequently the European Commission proceed with the following statement, diverting the attention back to the internal benefits with a strengthened education policy,

It is therefore in the shared interest of all Member States to harness the full potential of education and culture as drivers for jobs, social fairness, active citizenship as well as a means to experience European identity in all its diversity.

<sup>57</sup>

This can henceforth be perceived as a generalisation argument in relation to globalisation and its positive impact on Asian countries in contrast to its negative consequences on the European ones, leading to the conclusion that all member states aim to harness the full potential of culture and education in several forms.

The awareness of other states (beyond the ones in the European Union) perception of Europe aligns with social constructivist ideas due to its emphasis on ideas, norms, and identities in institutional state-relations. As elaborated in the theoretical chapter, states

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<sup>56</sup> "Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture" European Commission. November 14, 2017. p.2

<sup>57</sup> "Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture" European Commission. November 14, 2017. p.2

accordingly possess an identity and political structure that is of relevance in understanding and shaping relations with other states. Based on this premise, it would be in the EU's interest to create and maintain an image of Europe as an attractive place to live in. It promotes and provides increased legitimacy to the Union's position in world affairs. Therefore, the underlying motive in financially focusing more on European universities, increasing the Union's educational and cultural influence in the world, is motivated by arguments aligning with a strengthened sense of belonging to the EU. It can be seen as external interests motivated by internal benefits.

The Erasmus+ programme is a widespread initiative by the EU which has been active for more than 30 years. Henceforth, its success is of relevance in relation to the development of the European Education Area. The initiatives presented in the EEA emphasize how Erasmus+ has facilitated in people studying, training, teaching or volunteering in another country, increasing their possibility to excel in the increasingly international labour market. Due to this being the EU's prime project embracing learning mobility, it lays the groundwork in which further initiatives within the area can grow. When the Union argues for developing a framework where learning mobility will be the norm of cultural policies in Europe, it is described as making Europe "an attractive place to study"<sup>58</sup>, as well as operating in boosting "learning mobility throughout and beyond, and makes a significant contribution to [...] strengthening European identity".<sup>59</sup> This phrasing is therefore also connected to the EU's ambition to rebrand itself globally. The aim to make Europe attractive in educational means as well as establishing learning mobility throughout Europe and beyond depicts an evident international focus and interest from the EU; the Union as a global actor.

Furthermore, the European Union aims to via the EEA "strengthen the sense of belonging together and being part of a cultural community."<sup>60</sup> Through emphasising the cultural bonds binding Europeans together in a 'cultural community' it has the

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<sup>58</sup> "Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture" European Commission. November 14, 2017. p.5

<sup>59</sup> General Secretariat of the Council of the EU, "Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area" May 23, 2018. p.3

<sup>60</sup> "Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture" European Commission. November 14, 2017 p. 2

consequence of via culture and education boost its international visibility. The EU encourages participation by its citizens in the initiatives presented, portraying it as vital for the success of the EEA. By doing so, the EU shows actors in other educational sectors from outside of the EU the opportunities created in the EEA, potentially encouraging them to join the network. The strengthened ambition in the educational sector may be attractive for other non-member states encouraging them to apply to become part of the EU themselves.

### 5.3 The EEA as an Internal Reestablishment of the EU

An evident emphasis on the EU citizens is something that characterises the chosen material relating to the European Education Area. The previously mentioned initiative by the EU - the European Higher Education Area - has a set target group on European students in the higher education stage of learning. The EEA takes another, more inclusive, approach emphasizing the educational and cultural development being accessible to all citizens. In terms of promoting a European identity, this approach would be deemed appealing since all citizens aim to access the educational benefits of the Union, regardless if being a student or an adult with a full time job. Furthermore, the EEA consists of initiatives in relation to boosting innovation and digital technologies in education. The justification for this focus is strengthened by facts presenting numbers claiming that 44% of all European citizens between ages 16 and 74 lack sufficient digital skills.<sup>61</sup> As was previously elaborated in the section above, Europe is falling behind Asia and other parts of the world which is stated in relation to justifying a further advancement in the digital sphere. The European Commission claims that digital technologies “offer new possibilities for teaching and learning approaches but Europe is lagging behind in making use of them”.<sup>62</sup> Hence, the rhetoric is based on presenting initiatives that benefit the European citizens in distributing more resources for improved digital competences and possibilities, as well as putting Europe back on the map.

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<sup>61</sup> “Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture” European Commission. November 14, 2017 p.8-9

<sup>62</sup> “Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture” European Commission. November 14, 2017. p.8

What is also of significance in relation to this is the European Council's attempt in rectifying itself using words usually not synonymous to the Union, "[The European Council] RECOGNISES the importance of strengthening strategic collaboration between higher education institutions in Europe through a bottom-up, flexible, unbureaucratic, inclusive, open and transparent approach".<sup>63</sup> This is related to the concept Euroscepticism, a phenomena born in relation to the development of the European Union - especially to the Unions integration policy. The core value of this belief is the shared perception of the EU as an elitist organization, lacking democratic legitimacy, transparency and being too bureaucratic among other perceptions.<sup>64</sup> Due to Europe being the epicentre of Euroscepticism, as well as its citizens being the main carriers of the belief, the phenomena is existent in the national politics of the member states as well as political parties in the EU. One of the most significant and recent results of Euroscepticism is Brexit that had a significant impact on the European Union as a whole. Euroscepticism could hence have been an important idea laying the groundwork in which the formulation of the previously presented extract by the European Commission was based on. This notion is hence of interest in relation to this thesis in the sense that the EU acknowledges, as well as responds to worries presented by its citizens. Going back to Wendt's definition of the identity concept, identity is described as a phenomena based on the actors own self understandings as well as constituted by external and internal structures. Wendt's previously stated example of this in practice therefore regains its relevance: If a person may identify as a student internally but the teachers don't share the same belief, the perceived identity will not work in their interaction. The same goes for the EU and it's repeated work towards legitimizing itself as well as establishing and promoting a common European identity. Based on Wendt's social constructivist ideas, a European identity is therefore only possible if the European citizens identify as European, as well as the European Union perceiving them as citizens of Europe. Hence, it would be and is evidently in the EU's interest to rectify itself with its citizens.

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<sup>63</sup> General Secretariat of the Council of the EU, "Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area" May 23, 2018. p.6

<sup>64</sup> Yves Bertoncini & Nicole Koenig. *Euroscepticism or Europhobia: Voice vs Exit?*. (Jacques Delors Institute. November 2014). p.4-6

Emphasizing one particular sentence in the previously stated quote by Anthony Smith is deemed important to understand the focus of language in the EEA program: “Language and historical memories, as well as myths of ethnic descent, united the population of the German states; the same factors divided the people of Europe”.<sup>65</sup> Language is intrinsic to the expression of culture. It possesses an important social function as well as operating in fostering feelings of group identity and solidarity. Additionally, it works as a tool in communicating values, beliefs and customs. As mentioned in the identity section of this thesis, Wendt describes identity as being constructed by internal and external structures. One could argue that the basic premise of this definition is that identity to some extent is a phenomena produced in human’s awareness during the process of accumulation of social experience, eg. expressed through speech. This in addition to Anthony Smith’s claim that language played a pivotal role in uniting Germany, but operated in dividing Europe, legitimizes the EU’s focus in fostering language learning through the EEA. In the European Council’s conclusions on moving towards a vision for the EEA, it is stated that the European Council “STRESSES that languages play a key role in fostering understanding and diversity, as well as promoting European values [...]”.<sup>66</sup> This notion is built on the European Commission's proposal for improving language learning in Europe, claiming multilingualism to be one of the greatest assets in regards to cultural diversity in Europe.<sup>67</sup> They do however also declare it to be one of the biggest challenges, which encourages a need for action. This approach can furthermore be categorized as a cause argument due to it acknowledging the central role of languages in promoting European values that the European identity is constituted of.

A common perception about the EU is that it operates from a top-down approach, closely linked to supranationalism. Supranationalism is, according to the Oxford dictionary of politics, “the formal transfer of legal authority and decision-making power

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<sup>65</sup> Smith (1992), ‘Europe versus the nation?’, quoted in Shore (2000), ‘Building Europe: the Cultural Politics of European Integration’, p. 1

<sup>66</sup> General Secretariat of the Council of the EU, “Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area” May 23, 2018. p.9

<sup>67</sup> “Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture” European Commission. November 14, 2017. p.7

from member states to an institution or international body”.<sup>68</sup> Hence, the term can be used in classifying the European Union as a partly supranational institution in certain areas such as the economy. In other areas however, like education, the EU works in an intergovernmental manner together with its member states. In the policies regarding the EEA, a clear focus is diverted to establishing bottom-up networks between higher education institutions and the EU. In the section 11.3 in the European Council's conclusions suggesting how to operate towards a EEA, the following extract is stated: “[The European Council] RECOGNIZES the importance of strengthening strategic collaboration between higher education institutions in Europe through a bottom-up, flexible, unbureaucratic, inclusive, open and transparent approach”.<sup>69</sup> In the following section, 11.4., the European Council further states that it “SUPPORTS the emergence of ‘European Universities’, consisting of sustainable bottom-up networks (...)”.<sup>70</sup> Supranationalism is in itself merely a way of describing how an institution operates. What is of interest here is the ideas and perceptions aligned with the concept. As previously stated, Eurosceptics perceive the Union as too bureaucratic and elitist which can be the result of understanding an institution as supranational, operating in a top-down manner.

The European Education Area aims to further boost mobility and facilitate cross-border cooperation, emphasizing the notion that “The European project has always been about overcoming borders and allowing for free movement”.<sup>71</sup> In a Flash Eurobarometer conducted in April 2018, 90% of young Europeans consider it important to have an experience abroad.<sup>72</sup> In the case of social constructivism, if one considers learning as a social process, the most important learning will occur when people engage in social interactions. This legitimizes the EU’s emphasis on mobility and exchange, enabling students from all over the world to interact further boosting their learning.

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<sup>68</sup> Iain McLean and Alistair McMillan. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). p.73

<sup>69</sup> General Secretariat of the Council of the EU, “Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area” May 23, 2018. p.6

<sup>70</sup> General Secretariat of the Council of the EU, “Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area” May 23, 2018. p.6

<sup>71</sup> “Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture” European Commission. November 14, 2017. p.4

<sup>72</sup> “European Education Area”, (European Commission, Flash Eurobarometer, 2018). p.4

Hence, social interactions between Europeans is one of the main objectives for the European Education Area.

## 6. Final Discussion

The global landscape has changed drastically over the last decades. Technological advances have eased and improved communication worldwide providing citizens with more tools than ever for connectedness. Despite this, we see a Europe characterized by conflicts and challenges in the forms of xenophobia, rise of right wing forces, Brexit and most recently, a global pandemic. Anchored in political disputes, culture may be the way forward in bridging divisions, strengthening societies and improving international relations. Social interactions between states may therefore be of the essence in reshaping international relations. As previously mentioned in the section on social constructivism, the constant changes in society shapes a new reality, where the political truth exists beyond the sovereign state, which in turn does not offer a common history or traditions. The perceived social reality is in a constant process of always being reconstructed by the people acting accordingly with their interpretations and knowledge. This is then spread to others by socialization of institutions with education and social intercourse which may result in a more common identity, among other potential outcomes. European unity hence may be the result of political inventions. Therefore, education as well as social interactions may play a pivotal role in strengthening the European identity, justifying the European Commission's aim to strengthen European identity through education and culture.

The European Union's main ideas in constructing the EEA-framework are related to further developing the social dimension of Europe, boosting internal initiatives related to the educational sphere. What is emphasised in regards to the means of action is a stronger collaboration between the Union and its member states, acting in respect to the subsidiarity principle. States are, in social constructivist terms, socially constructed by internal and external influences. They are hence reliant on identities, in order to understand themselves and other states. Therefore, the EEA aims to operate in encouraging cooperation and synergies between its member states, in addition to



supporting and complementing national actions. The member states will therefore not be overthrown by supranational means in the EEA, but rather further boosted in terms of their own national educational resources.

There are many ideas and arguments related to the creation of the European Education Area, all in which are related to the EU further advancing their cultural policies in Europe as well as in the rest of the world. Understanding the complications in strengthening cooperation in the educational area laying primarily with the member states at national, regional and local levels, the EU acknowledges its limitations in the matter. Hence, the ideas presented justifying the EEA are all based on the notion of mutual benefit between the Union and its member states. Even though the quality of education differs substantially from one European country to another, initiatives such as boosting mobility and facilitating cross-border cooperation would be in the interest of every member state.

What is evident now is that the structures constituting the social reality around us influence several institutional political organizations. They relate to a larger political international order which has a significant impact on one another. A consistent social constructivist justification for this is the one clarifying that a state's identity is the basis for one's interest, subsequently determining how to act. As previously mentioned, a collective identity could possibly be stable in a society that to a great extent is unified. In the case of the European Union however, the fact that its becoming notably diversified hinders this from taking place. As understood from the arguments constituting the EEA, the need for a European identity is constructed by arguments diverting attention to community and cooperation. These guidelines presented by the EU may facilitate in creating and fostering communication channels between communities and the Unions citizens. Furthermore, these guidelines may in turn create the right cultural conditions for educational areas to prosper, thus boosting the spread of a transnational European identity.

## 6.1 Conclusion

The European Union and its institutions are reliant on unity among its member states in order to exist and operate. Hence, promoting a common European identity was to some extent the basis in which initiatives constructing the EEA were based on. Initiatives further advancing the EU's cooperation with its member states, establishing and promoting itself globally as well as becoming more appealing for its citizens were the main ideas constituting the framework for the EEA. Furthermore, the arguments found were anchored in these ideas, displaying how the two methods can operate in strengthening and further advancing each other. There are therefore several ways in which the European Union chose to promote a common identity within the EEA framework, using initiatives related to education as well as culture.

## 6.2 Suggestions for Future Research

It would be interesting to follow up on the implications of the European Education Area as well as the success or failure of the initiatives implemented. One could perhaps choose a particular member state and analyse the education system prior and post to the benefits ensured by the Union. Furthermore one could do a survey on the European citizens taking part in the different initiatives launched as a result of the Unions aims, such as the EU-student card and #Digital4Culture. Questions regarding the participants' sense of identity can be studied, investigating if there is a strengthened belonging to the EU as a consequence of participating and/or receiving the benefits of the initiatives.

## 7. Source reference

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