

## From connectedness and learning to European and national identity: results from fourteen European countries

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- Fostering national and European identities can be compatible with education for tolerance.
- Social relationships in school are important predictors of national and European identity.
- Formal learning opportunities are especially important for fostering a European identity.

**Purpose:** The aim of this article is to analyse the concepts of national and European identities through a multidisciplinary lens and to examine empirically how schools develop those identities in adolescents.

**Method:** The study employs data from the *International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2016*. Correlation and regression analyses are conducted with data from over 45,000 students from fourteen different European educational systems. Country-specific weighted statistical analyses are conducted.

**Findings:** A combination of perspectives from the fields of psychology, political culture, and civic and citizenship education is useful to reflect upon the dimensions and desirability of overarching identities. Formal learning opportunities are shown to be particularly relevant for fostering a European identity. Positive relationships between students and teachers and between students statistically predict stronger identities.

**Practical implications:** Good social relationships at school help to develop national and European identities. Moreover, the development of a European identity especially depends upon its explicit inclusion in the curriculum. Teachers should guide students to reflect on the meaning and content of tolerant and complex national and European identities.

**Keywords:** European citizenship, national identity, European identity, learning opportunities, social relationships at school.

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## 1 Introduction

Education provides opportunities for equipping students with skills and for fostering development of attitudes and identities. In this paper, we will explore the role of national and European identities in the formative stage of adolescence. The present empirical analysis is based on the *International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2016 (ICCS 2016)*. This study offers us the opportunity to glance at the formative effects of the school environment, where students are exposed to malleable formal and informal learning opportunities, which include instruction and social relationships in school.

The European Union (EU) represents a political structure with a great impact on political decisions which affect the everyday life of European citizens. As such, it co-determines the cultural environment in which adolescents grow up, learn, and form their identities. This environment has recently experienced a backlash of enclosure and nationalism in many member states of the EU. In this context, questions of identity and processes of 'othering' are critically discussed in the public sphere.

We will analyse the topic of national and European identities using three theoretical approaches: Theories from the field of *psychology* will be used to explore the relevance of identity formation for adolescent students. Theories regarding *political culture* will help us to understand why and which kinds of national and European identities can be valuable for the persistence and also development of the respective political structures. Finally, approaches from *civic and citizenship education (CCE)* will be used to offer practical and critical perspectives concerning the development of identities with (supra)national entities in school. For each discipline, we present theories that are suitable for providing a multidimensional understanding of adolescents' political identities in the areas of tension between students' development, societal need for stability, and opportunities for social change within the framework of ICCS 2016.

## 2 Theoretical background

### 2.1 Identity in ICCS 2016

The *International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS 2016)* is organised by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) and examines how students across the world are prepared for their role as citizens (Schulz et al., 2018). In particular, the study focuses on the political mindset of students and examines how school and learning environments outside of school contribute to relevant learning processes and outcomes. The political mindset of students can be categorised along four dimensions: identities, attitudes, participation, and civic knowledge (Abs, Hahn-Laudenberg, Deimel & Ziemes, 2017). We use the word mindset to convey that those aspects are meaningfully connected with each other. A strong national identity that is not underpinned by attitudes of tolerance can require different approaches towards CCE than, for example, the strong support for democratic values, a low perceived level of national identity, or low levels of trust in political institutions.

Identity in a civic and cultural sense has been an emerging and broadening construct since the first international comparative *IEA Civic Education Study* in 1971. Since ICCS 2009, the notion of



students' identity has evolved into more complex conceptions. For European countries, this conception of identity now includes questions concerning European identity in harmony with those exploring national identity (Hahn-Laudenberg, Jasper & Abs, 2017). Still, none of the internationally used scales included in ICCS 2016 acknowledges such hybrid affiliations which are signified by multiple combined identities (Arnett, 2015). While the aspect of hybridity cannot be (fully) mapped with the instruments available in ICCS 2016 (Hahn-Laudenberg, Jasper & Abs, 2017), the instruments do offer a rich source for analysing questions of identity from a comparative perspective.

The items measuring national and European identities are listed in Table 1. While the former focuses more on affective components of identity, such as pride and respect, the latter focuses more strongly on a feeling of belonging. Some of the items were already used in the CIVED 1999 assessment labeled as national identity scale, for the purposes of ICCS 2009 the scale was adapted and renamed to 'attitude towards the country of residence'. As will be discussed in the next section, national identity encompasses affective and evaluative aspects, both of which are represented in the items (Hahn-Laudenberg, Jasper & Abs, 2017).

Table 1

Items included in the identity scales in ICCS 2016

National identity	European identity
The <flag of country of test> is important to me.	I see myself as European.
I have great respect for <country of test>.	I am proud to live in Europe.
In <country of test>, we should be proud of what we have achieved.	I feel part of Europe.
I am proud to live in <country of test>.	I see myself first as a citizen of Europe and then as a citizen of the world.
Generally speaking, <country of test> is a better country to live in than most other countries.	

*Note.* Answer options were 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', 'strongly disagree'.

## 2.2 National and European identity in psychology

In this section, we focus on links between psychological theories and (supra)national identities. We conceptualise students as emerging citizens whose identities define their lasting relationship with their environment. Identity is the answer to the question: *Who am I within my environment?* According to Erikson (1959/1994), identity is fundamental for a positive development during adolescence. Young people form relationships with the world and explore social roles and meanings which will influence the course of their lives. Longitudinal analyses agree that lasting political attitudes are formed at this age (Meeus, 2011). Exploring new experiences and roles as aspects of identity seems to be an important driver of this formation (Marcia, 1966). Identity diffusion arising from avoidance of this development task and an exploration driven by external norms are generally seen as inhibitors of this process (Crocetti, Garckija, Gabrielavičiūtė, Vosyli, & Žukauskienė, 2014). Information-based approaches are considered to be highly productive in the formation of identity (Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, & Geisinger, 1995). Identities can be more or less complex. Theories on identity complexity refer to social identity theory, which elaborates on



multiple group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Less complex identities increase the risk that people belonging to an outgroup are devalued, while more complex identities increase opportunities for connecting with other people (Moshman, 2011; Prati, Moscatelli, Pratto, & Rubini, 2016).

According to Barrett (2012), a sense of national identity contains cognitive and affective components and emerges during childhood around the age of seven. Sometimes it is connected with intense emotions and stereotypes even before the concept of a nation is fully understood. European identity was successfully assessed in children as young as ten (Agirdag, Huyst, & van Houtte, 2012). Before theories on identity complexity were widespread, European and national identities were conceptualised as competing. Newer approaches see the identity aspects as nested within each other (Westle & Buchheim, 2016). Still, Landberg et al. (2018) found subgroups of students who identified only with one aspect. The nested nature of European and national identities therefore remains a probabilistic, not a deterministic, one.

In a sample of 107 British university students, Cinnirella (1997) found that British identity did not correlate with European identity and found a negative correlation with attitudes towards European integration. More recent studies with greater sample sizes from various countries found a stable positive relationship between European and national identities (Agirdag et al., 2012; Jugert, Šerek, & Stollberg, 2018; Markowski & Kotnarowski, 2016; Westle & Segatti, 2016).

In the ICCS 2009 cycle, a great majority of students saw themselves as European. However, when asked if they saw themselves as European rather than as citizens of their country of residence, levels of agreement fell below 50% in all countries (Kerr, Sturman, Schulz & Burge, 2010, p. 69). This indicates that students do not construct these identities in a conflicting manner unless explicitly asked to do so.

While identity formation is considered to be an aspect of the healthy development of adolescents, the positive framing of developing a national identity is not undisputed. Especially in Germany, a certain scepticism towards national identity exists amongst citizens, political actors, and scholars. Especially the latter group worries that a strong sense of national identity will lead to violent nationalism and violence against vulnerable groups (Oesterreich, 2002, p. 27). From a purely psychometric point of view, these concerns have some foundation. If national identity follows a normal distribution, a higher mean would entail a higher amount of people with high absolute levels of identification. These concerns are based on the assumption that national identity transitions smoothly into nationalism with increasing strength.

However, this psychometric view neglects current discussions on the qualities that identity can possess. Multiple scholars differentiate between civic national identity, which refers to the duties and rights of citizens within a country, and ethnic definitions of identity. People who share ethnic conceptualisations of national identity believe that being born in a country, sharing its culture and religion, and having ancestors from that country are fundamental prerequisites for truly belonging (Berg & Hjerm, 2010). This conception of identity is empirically connected to lower levels of trust in institutions and therefore is not an attribute of system stability (see 2.3). An experimental study was able to show that civic concepts of national identity can be fostered by increasing the salience of tolerance in the history of the country (Smeekes, Verkuyten, & Poppe, 2012).

The items listed in Table 1 illustrate affective and evaluative aspects of identity. No external prerequisites, such as a place of birth or ethnicity, are mentioned. The third item regarding



national identity uses the plural pronoun 'we', which conveys that any reader may feel part of this community to some degree. The items on European identity focus on the individuals' perceptions as well.

### 2.3 Identity as political support

Like psychology, the field of political culture allows a differentiation between various forms of national identity (Norris, 2011, p. 25), which is consensually regarded as an aspect of political support. After outlining a possible meaning of the term 'political support', we introduce the theory of the 'critical citizen' by Pippa Norris, who aims to reconcile stability with democratic transformations. Political support can be defined as the attitudes and behaviours on which political institutions rely in order to persist and to develop in line with the interests of the people they aim to represent (Easton, 1957, 1975). Social cohesion, as manifest in concrete collaboration and generalised trust, is acknowledged to be an important foundation of political support. From this point of view, social experiences of successful collaboration provide valuable 'bridging social capital' (Putnam, 2000, p. 22). Bridging social capital facilitates the collaboration of people from different groups, such as people living in different regions of the same country or different social groups. Bridging social capital is not believed to inhibit bonding social capital, which enables the collaboration within groups (Putnam, 2007). Putnam states that citizens are willing to collaborate on and invest their time in common goals of specific initiatives only if they have positive experiences with each other.

According to the object or entity to which it relates, political support can be categorised from specific to diffuse (Easton, 1957). The recent reconceptualisation of political support is closely related to the original version but aligns aspects of political support more deliberately on a scale from more to less diffuse, rather than categorising the approaches themselves (Norris, 2011). Norris applies her systematisation to nations, but it can be generalised to apply to supranational institutions and probably to all political institutions that have a representative organisational structure. Identification with the political community can be seen as the most diffuse type and therefore the most fundamental aspect of political support. The more specific aspects of support are, in order of their increasing levels of specificity: approval of core regime principles and values; evaluation of regime performance; confidence in regime institutions; and approval of incumbent office-holders.

Identity and citizenship are conceptually linked. While identity is multidimensional and not restricted to the political sphere, citizenship refers to the membership of an individual in a political community (mostly states) which is connected to rights and duties as well as practices. In this function, citizenship enables people to transform their personal identity-related issues into political ones (Isin & Wood, 1999). Conover (1995) conceptualises citizenship as a multidimensional concept which encompasses three components: membership, a sense of citizenship, and practice. Membership is signified by a legal status which comes with formal privileges and citizenship responsibilities. In contrast, 'sense of citizenship' is defined as the psychological meaning of citizenship, consisting of two elements: citizen identity as 'the affective significance that people give their membership in a particular political community' (p.134), and an understanding of the sense of beliefs, e.g. regarding citizen ideals. Conover states that 'identity



provides the emotional energy, and understanding the substantive direction' (p. 135). Based on this statement, she regards the individual's sense of citizenship as the main motivation for civic practice.

As many supporters of the EU claimed that the EU would help to overcome hostile nationalism, some scholars worried that identification with the EU or Europe might undermine national political support (Westle & Buchheim, 2016). As discussed above, empiric results from the last two decades do not indicate that such a negative connection exists or that identity as a source of political support is a limited or zero-sum resource. Like Landberg et al. (2018), Westle and Buchheim (2016) find only a small group of people who identify with Europe much more than with their own country, and they are convinced that 'a wholly European attachment will probably remain a marginal phenomenon' (p. 127). What exactly it means to be European remains both elusive and a continuing object of discussion among scholars, policy makers, and citizens.

Most scholars agree that particularly the more specific forms of political support can and must be earned by institutions and incumbents through the proper performance of their duties or roles. In her 'critical citizen' approach, Norris (1999, 2011) empirically shows and praises the ability of citizens to advance the democratisation of institutions through an incremental increase in their expectations arising from their education. Fuchs (2002) further states that the more diffuse aspects of support (identification and support of core values) can be seen as universally supportive and enhancing for democracies, while the more specific forms of support (trust in institutions and incumbents) can and should be more variable in order to hold office-holders and institutions accountable and to foster positive developments. The conceptualisations agree that a lack of identification on the part of members poses a problem for the persistence of systems. Both scales in ICCS 2016 can be interpreted as aspects of diffuse support. They assess very general feelings of connectedness without specifying certain events, institutions or incumbents.

Conceptualisations of critical citizenship by Norris and other scholars by no means advocate national identification as a tool for appeasing citizens or as a distraction from the lack of opportunities for effective participation; rather, they illustrate, through theories and empirical results, that a common identity is the basis for collective action for democratisation and social change.

#### **2.4 European identity from the perspective of CCE**

Several scholars assert that 'education is the primary instrument with which people can be socialized to think and feel as Europeans, an instrument through which a European identity or feeling of European citizenship could be nurtured in them.' (Ollikainen, 2000, p. 7). Theories of political culture imply that schools need to foster national and European identities to stabilise the political system and motivate (emerging) citizens to actively engage with and improve their countries' institutions. Print (2014) sees national and European identities as a goal of education; he states that identities and belonging are an aspect of social and psychological resilience in times of crisis, such as the global financial crisis. Indeed, since the 1988 Resolution of the European Council of Ministers, European policy documents have explicitly included the aim that (citizenship) education should 'strengthen in young people a sense of European identity and make clear to them the value of European civilisation and of the foundations on which the European peoples

intended to base their development today' (p. 5). This resolution (and more current, e.g. European Council of Ministers, 2015) influenced national policies of European citizenship education and curricula in the following years (Faas, 2007, p. 162). Faas identified Germany as a country with a strong European agenda, which is in accordance with the findings of the international comparative Eurydice report (Eurydice, 2017). In 1990, the German Council of Ministers of Education (KMK) stated that one goal of education was 'to awaken in young people the consciousness of a European identity, to prepare them to be aware of their responsibilities as citizens of the European Community; and to promote mutual learning with young foreigners to foster the ability to feel mutual solidarity' (see translation in Faas, 2007, p. 162). While (some) comparative papers and (inter)national policy papers consider the aim to strengthen European identity as a given (Ollikainen, 2000; Verhaegen, Hooghe, & Meeusen, 2013), other scholars—prominent, but not exclusive, in German discourse—oppose the idea that schools should intentionally foster the formation of national or European identities. Two lines of reasoning can be observed here. The first line indicates a conflict between CCE promoting, on the one hand, a specific identification or attitudes that reach beyond fundamental democratic values and, on the other hand, the imperative of non-indoctrination and controversiality (Oberle & Forstmann, 2015). Some observers criticise the concept of *Education about Europe* for being focused mainly on the goal that education should contribute to stabilising and legitimising the European political system, without paying heed to quality, democratic processes, or social justice. They point out that education might cover EU crises but not the sources of these crises, which may result from failed politics rather than from a lack of European identity (Klein, 2015; Richter, 2004). Instead of fostering a European identity as an 'active European citizenship' which would likely promote a less controversial education approach aimed at reproducing the existing political order, Biesta (2009, p. 154) calls for 'civic learning that embod[ies] a commitment to a more critical and more political form of European citizenship'. Likewise, Lösch (2009) argues for global citizenship education and critical political education which focuses on democratisation and change to promote social justice. Considered within the framework of the critical citizen as described above, however, such concerns lose some of their impact and thus illustrate the value of theories of political culture for civic education discourses (see also Oberle, 2015).

Second, conscious of the disastrous consequences that nationalism has had throughout German history, authors raise objections against fostering collective identities at school, as this may promote exclusion and intolerance (Eis, 2015; Richter, 2004). They assume that in most cases, this is associated with the perception of identity as a homogeneous cultural/collective identity (*Leitkultur*). Lösch (2009) warns that national identity is inherently linked to exclusion and discrimination and calls for caution before transposing concepts of national identity to the European level, as such a transposition would not solve the problem of exclusion but merely shift it from a national to a supranational level. In this view, CCE should not only clarify the legal and political framework but also subject the social and cultural mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion to reflection and critique (Eis, 2015).

These objections apply in particular to the ethnic conceptions of identity described earlier. There is a lack of consensus regarding the definition of a European identity which, in turn, hinders a differentiation between inclusive and exclusive conceptions. For example, Delanty (2005) states that '[to] be European is simply to recognize that one lives in a world that does not belong to a

specific people' (p. 19) indicating that being European is fundamentally linked to the impossibility of exclusion on the basis of an ethnic understanding of citizenship. Richter (2004) outlined a matching educational approach under the label 'Doing European' that emphasises the individual and ongoing process of identity construction. The idea of *doing identity* can be closely connected to the concept of complex identities, which underlines that the sense of belonging can be individually constructed in a multifaceted and changing way. Anglo-American traditions are more optimistic regarding the possibilities of reconciling national identity and the pursuit of social justice. Norris (2011) emphasises the role that high-level competencies play in the ability to criticise institutions, and Banks (2017) states that 'the teaching of critical patriotism should be a priority in schools' (p. 369). This reflects back on the different ways in which national and European identities can be conceptualised.

Regardless of their theoretical approach, most scholars agree that national and European identities can have significantly different qualities, which can make the crucial difference between a violent approach and a tolerant and active approach to identity. Only with this differentiation in mind can we ask *which form* of a national or a European identity can and should be fostered.

## 2.5 Didactic structures and interventions for identity formation

While the previous sections discussed the nature and relationship as well as the desirability of fostering national and European identity in adolescents, this section will provide a comprehensive overview of the methods used to foster these identities in schools and to what extent their assessment was incorporated in ICCS 2016 study. Compared to the aim of fostering European identity itself, the tools for fostering such a European identity seem cause less controversy.

First, offering formal, and compulsory learning content about Europe and the European Union is the key for imparting a conceptual understanding of political processes at the European level (Oberle, 2015), and is also discussed in the context of fostering a European identity (Verhaegen et al., 2013). Learning a European foreign language at school and the participation of schools (and universities) in student exchange programmes (Oberle, 2015; Ollikainen, 2000) are widely accepted as substantial contributions to the formation of an identity as a European citizen (for a critical empirical review, see Verhaegen et al., 2013).

Verhaegen and Hooghe's (2015) analyses of the ICCS 2009 cycle's data show that cognitive learning about Europe can explain differences in the levels of European identity. Conversely, Oberle and Forstmann (2015) report that for a sample of 885 German students, lessons about the EU or EU knowledge have no effect, whether direct or indirect, on the development of a European identity.

Beyond decisions concerning the curriculum, the second relevant factor turns out to be instructional design. Encouraging discussions on topics which are controversial in society or in the scientific community enables broad explorations of possible selves and opinions. According to Marcia's (1966) identity model, open discussions should lead to a greater exposure to different perspectives, enabling students to engage directly with such perspectives. A discursive teaching style is often utilised as a universal tool in CCE. The popularity of the concept reflects the normative belief shared by many scholars that teachers should engage students in critical discussions rather than teaching knowledge and fostering values top-down. Besides being praised





by scholars as a more participatory or even democratic way of teaching, the discursive teaching style is discussed as a more effective and sustainable approach generally and as a tool for fostering identity formation in particular (Flum & Kaplan, 2006; Waterman, 1989).

Third, school participation is regarded as an important informal learning experience in the field of CCE (Deimel & Hahn-Laudenberg, 2017; Scheerens, 2009). It has long been recognised that experience of participation promotes identity formation. The reciprocal connections between engagement and identification are emerging with increasing clarity (Crocetti et al., 2014). Quintelier and van Deth (2014) conducted a longitudinal study and showed that the experience of participation had a greater impact on attitudes than vice versa. Attitudes such as self-efficacy are relevant for identity. But as the authors did not assess aspects of identity, we cannot conclude that these results refute the findings of Crocetti and their colleagues. We can, however, conclude that important reciprocal effects do exist. Where identity is concerned, participation can be seen as a relevant predictor, an outcome variable, and an aspect of political support itself.

Fourth, fostering of positive relationships in schools is a CCE tool that is often overlooked and more explicitly discussed for its connection with bullying (Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger & Ziemes, 2017). The relevance of positive social relationships for political support is mentioned in the literature on political culture, but it is seldom operationalised in studies on CCE. Identity formation is an inherently social activity (Erikson, 1959/1994, p. 94). Negative and violent social relationships are seen as a great risk to the formation of a stable and healthy identity which would be resilient against violent extremism (Moshman, 2011).

Recent studies prove the importance of social relationships for creating trust in political institutions as a more specific aspect of political support (Ziemes, Hahn-Laudenberg & Abs, 2019). The school climate not only encompasses the relationships of students with each other, but also of students and teachers, and of teachers with one another. The way in which schools are physically, socially, and organisationally structured influences the development of political mindsets. This is also in line with Putnam (2000), who states that social experiences and attitudes are generalised.

### 3 Research questions

Drawing on the data regarding schooling and individual experiences contained in the ICCS 2016 study, we will explore the relationship of national and European identities and explore the relevance of schools as a malleable context for the formation of identities. In our analyses, we will present descriptive statistics on national and European identities among students in European countries. Based on previous research, we expect a positive relationship and we assume that the relationship can be found in all participating countries (Hypothesis 1.1). Further, we assume that tolerance is more strongly associated with European than with national identity (Hypothesis 1.2).

We also assume that the school context can be shown as an enabling condition for national and European identities in various ways. First, schools can provide students with curriculum content about Europe (Hypothesis 2). Second, as part of the characteristic of instruction, teachers can create spaces for discursive exchanges in the classroom (Hypothesis 3). Third, teachers can enhance participation (Hypothesis 4); and fourth, teachers can foster positive relationships with and among students (Hypothesis 5). Student and family background will be controlled for. In a



final step, we will also control for acquired civic knowledge and trust in political institutions to explore if the results are stable after controlling for these variables.

## 4 Methods

### 4.1 Sample

The basis for the analyses is data taken from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2016 (ICCS 2016). Extensive information on the sample and methodology used can be found in the international report (Schulz, et al., 2018), the European report (Losito, Agrusti, Damiani, & Schulz, 2018), and the technical report (Schulz, Carstens, Losito, & Fraillon, 2018).

Overall, more than 94,000 students in more than 3,800 schools across 24 countries participated in the study cycle. Classes constituted the sampling unit. The target year was the eighth year of schooling, unless the age mean of that group was less than 13.5 years, in which case year 9 became the target year. Selection was stratified to provide representativeness. In Europe, 15 countries and education systems were part of the assessment, where students also filled out a regional European module. Norway participated in the module but was excluded from the analyses as it is not a member state of the European Union. We assume that the perception of European identity in Norway is not equivalent to that of students who expect to become legal citizens of the EU as political community. This means that in this instance we deviate from the procedure in the European report. 46,517 students were part of the resulting European subsample. The exact numbers, extracted from the technical report, are listed in Table 2. In Belgium, the Flemish region, and in Germany, the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) participated. Both regions have strong regional control over their educational policies. We included the data from NRW even though the sample did not meet the international sampling requirements. We assume the sample size to be sufficient for the analyses at hand. Notwithstanding, we implemented additional measures in order to ensure the robustness of our results. For instance, we achieved equivalent results with and without including sample weights. Further, the smaller sample size results in higher standard errors and higher thresholds for the tests of significance in this educational system.

### 4.2 Measures

The IEA performed Rasch analyses to create scale values, which are appended in the available dataset. In the previous ICCS 2009 cycle, scales were calibrated to an international mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10. These scales, which were re-used in the 2016 cycle, were calibrated to these numbers to ensure comparability across study cycles, and therefore continue to cluster around the mean of 50.

Three questionnaire modules were used in European countries. First, the timed student test was conducted. The second part was the student questionnaire, which contained all the scales used except the one on European identity. And finally, the scale on European identity was presented in the third module. Gender was captured through respondents' self-assessments and adjusted with information provided by the school coordinators. The socioeconomic status (SES)

was assessed with questions regarding the parents' highest occupation according to the ISCO-08 classification, levels of parental education, and the number of books in the home. The SES indicator called NISB was calibrated to have a weighted average of zero in each country and to vary between plus and minus one. Students were categorised as having an immigration background (IMB) if the students themselves or at least one of the parents were born outside the country of residence. Here, we opted for a conception of IMB which is broader than the one used in the international ICCS 2016 report. The rate of students with immigration background varies greatly between the countries, from 3.5% in Bulgaria to 40% in NRW.

For the analyses, we focus on explaining variances in the scales of European identity and national identity. The assessment framework distinguishes national identity (CNTATT) from uncritical patriotism and nationalism (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Losito, & Agrusti, 2016, p. 32). The items are presented in Table 1 and cover a range of items relating to identity, including affective and evaluative aspects of identification. The scale regarding European identity (EUIDENT) is presented in Table 1 as well, and the items explore the students' feelings of connection. One item asks students to rate their European identity in comparison to a global identity. While this special item does not follow modern conceptualisations of identity which allow for hybridisation and complexity (Hahn-Laudenberg, Jasper & Abs, 2017; Jasper, Ziemes, & Abs, 2017), it was included by the IEA to increase the stability of analyses including data from ICCS 2009 and 2016. As no anchor items with the same wording exist in both the CNTATT and EUIDENT scales, comparisons of agreement rates or scale means are not informative.

Two scales were used to measure tolerance. GENEQL measured attitudes towards gender equality, especially women's rights, and employs six items. IMMRGHT focused on attitudes towards equal rights for immigrants; it uses five items. For both the GENEQL and the IMMRGHT scale, items could be answered on a 4-point Likert scale.

We further used scales investigating the structure and/or content of educational provision. Two scales focused on students' reports of instances of formal learning opportunities offered to them. The CIVLRN scale included seven items exploring learning opportunities concerning politics, mainly within the country of residence, while the EULRN scale included four items focusing on learning opportunities concerning European history and politics.

OPDISC followed the tradition of scales investigating the openness of classroom discussions as a form of discursive classroom climate, indicating the opportunity for students to discuss political topics. SCHPART assessed students' experiences of participation in school. Two scales assessed social relationships at school. STUTREL is the students' perception of student-teacher relations, focusing on an evaluation of teachers' fairness and benevolence. The scales included six and five items respectively. INTACT is a scale relating to students' perception of student interaction in school. It employed four items to assess perceived levels of respectfulness in schools.

INTRUST is an aspect of political support, and this scale assessed students' trust in political institutions, such as parliament, courts of justice, and the police. It was introduced to control for the general performance of the political institutions within each country. One further item assessed students' trust in the European Parliament.

We also considered civic knowledge as one central dimension of the political mindset. The civic proficiency test (PVCIV) employed a rotating booklet design to assess students' levels of civic knowledge and reasoning abilities (Schulz et al., 2018).



## 5 Results

### 5.1 Descriptive results

Descriptive results have been publicised previously (Jasper, Ziemes, & Abs, 2017; Losito et al., 2018; Schulz et al., 2018) and are listed in Table 2 to present a comprehensive picture regarding the research questions. We find that the country means of both national and European identity scales differ substantially between countries.

Analyses were conducted with the IDB Analyzer (IEA, 2018) which provides Macros for SPSS (IBM, 2013) to employ weights and calculate the appropriate standard error. The overall mean of national identity is 47.81 scale points. The country averages range from 43.63 in NRW to 51.91 scale points in Bulgaria. Together, Belgium, the Netherlands, and NRW constitute a regional cluster of countries with rather low national identity. The countries with higher values — Bulgaria, Croatia, Malta and Finland — do not, however, constitute a regional cluster.

The mean score for European identity is 53.03. The country means reflect the differences observed for national identity, ranging from 48.33 in Latvia to 56.03 in Finland. The European identity scale values are especially low in Latvia, Bulgaria, and NRW, and especially high in Croatia, Finland, and Slovenia. In all countries, a significant positive correlation between national and European identity could be found at the  $p < .001$  level. The coefficients ranged from .24 in Bulgaria to .50 in Estonia. The average correlation was .37, indicating a relevant positive connection between both variables. We find no evidence for the assumption that national and European identities are conflicting in any country; on the contrary, they seem to be complementary overall among the adolescents in the European countries assessed.

In all countries, levels of support for gender equality and for immigrants' rights were only weakly associated with identities ( $|r| < .30$ ). The largest correlations could be found in Estonia; here support for gender equality correlates at .24 with national, and at .21 with European identity. In Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, and Malta, support for immigrant rights correlated at .20 with European identity. In the majority of countries, correlations between European identity and tolerance scales were somewhat stronger than correlations with national identity. In NRW and Sweden, a negative connection of national identity and attitudes towards the rights of immigrants emerged. The data thus supports Hypothesis 1.1 strongly and Hypothesis 1.2 rather weakly.



Table 2  
Sample information, mean identity scores, and correlation of identity scores

	Schools	Students	National Identity		European Identity		r (national identity, European identity)	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>SE</i>
Belgium (Flemish)	162	2.931	45.35	0.20	52.14	0.28	.36*	.02
Bulgaria	147	2.966	51.91	0.28	51.96	0.30	.24*	.03
Croatia	175	3.896	50.66	0.26	55.46	0.28	.31*	.02
Denmark	184	6.254	47.37	0.20	52.80	0.18	.37*	.02
Estonia	164	2.857	48.20	0.34	53.22	0.28	.50*	.02
Finland	179	3.173	51.22	0.21	56.03	0.22	.37*	.02
Germany (NRW) <sup>1</sup>	59	1.451	43.63	0.33	50.55	0.34	.37*	.03
Italy	170	3.450	46.04	0.20	54.14	0.21	.44*	.02
Latvia	147	3.224	47.48	0.32	48.33	0.25	.39*	.02
Lithuania	182	3.631	47.54	0.26	53.53	0.26	.36*	.02
Malta	47	3.764	50.48	0.18	54.00	0.18	.36*	.02
Netherlands	123	2.812	45.49	0.28	51.99	0.32	.41*	.03
Slovenia	145	2.844	47.93	0.24	54.80	0.22	.39*	.02
Sweden	155	3.264	46.10	0.26	53.47	0.30	.33*	.02
Overall	2.039	46.517	47.81	0.07	53.03	0.07	.37*	.01

*Note.* \* indicates  $p < .05$ ; <sup>1</sup>did not meet sample participation requirements; results should be interpreted with caution.

Table 2 (continued)

Sample information, mean identity scores, and correlation of identity scores

	r (national identity, gender equality)		r (European identity, gender equality)		r (national identity, immigrant rights)		r (European identity, immigrant rights)	
	<i>r</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>SE</i>
Belgium (Flemish)	.07*	.03	.10*	.03	.03	.03	.01	.03
Bulgaria	.04	.02	.05*	.02	.06*	.02	.20*	.02
Croatia	-.02	.02	.06*	.02	.10*	.02	.20*	.02
Denmark	.08*	.02	.13*	.02	-.03	.02	.09*	.02
Estonia	.24*	.02	.21*	.02	.04	.02	.10*	.03
Finland	-.03	.02	.08*	.02	-.07*	.02	.10*	.02
Germany (NRW) <sup>1</sup>	.02	.03	.13*	.04	-.12*	.05	.01	.03
Italy	-.05*	.02	.05*	.02	.10*	.02	.13*	.02
Latvia	.11*	.02	.13*	.02	-.03	.03	.10*	.02
Lithuania	.06*	.03	.12*	.02	.16*	.02	.20*	.02
Malta	.10*	.02	.11*	.02	.07*	.02	.20*	.02
Netherlands	.08*	.03	.05*	.02	.03	.03	.05	.03
Slovenia	.10*	.02	.07*	.02	.13*	.02	.17*	.02
Sweden	-.05*	.02	.06*	.02	-.10*	.02	.06*	.02
Overall	.05*	.01	.10*	.01	.03*	.01	.12*	.01

*Note.* \* indicates  $p < .05$ ; <sup>1</sup>did not meet sample participation requirements; results should be interpreted with caution.

## 5.2 Regressions

Before proceeding with regression analyses, Intra Class Correlations (ICCs) were calculated with Mplus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2018). In multi-group, two-level analyses, the ICCs for national identity ranged from .045 in Denmark to .265 in Estonia, averaging .091. For European identity the ICCs ranged from .035 in NRW to .179 in Estonia, averaging .068. A three-level-analysis for national identity revealed an ICC of .092 at class level and of .056 at country level. For European identity, the ICC at class level was .066 and at country level .033. While these analyses indicate that a relevant but mostly small amount of variance can be found at class level, they also indicate the great differences between countries, especially concerning national identity.

Because previous research did not indicate a great relevance of the classroom and because the present research focus lay with the individual level analyses, we opted to use the IDB Analyzer to perform a separate calculation for each country. This decision was also driven by a restriction of Mplus, which is not yet able to utilize jackknife zones and weights in multi-level analyses which would be needed to calculate the standard error of the estimation of population values. For these



analyses, we deemed the standard error to be of greater relevance than controlling for effects at the classroom level.

To answer the question of which variables can predict national and European identity, linear regressions were calculated. Table 3 presents the results of the regression analyses. Regressions were conducted separately for each country and each identity aspect. New variables were added cumulatively. In this way, 135 separate regressions were calculated overall. Table 3 presents the mean regression coefficient for all countries, the standard error of this estimation, and a summary on the number of countries in which the regression coefficient is significant and positive, negative or not significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

The first set of analyses included sociodemographic variables, namely gender, the immigration background and the socioeconomic status of the students. In six out of the fourteen European countries, being female was a negative predictor of national identity. In all countries, students with an immigration background reported a lower national identity than their peers ( $\beta_x = -.15$ ). Note that the rate and composition of immigration background vary greatly between countries. In our further analyses, we consider immigration background more as a control than an analysis variable. The effect of socioeconomic status was negative in seven countries and positive in two countries. A similar picture emerged concerning European identity. In eight countries, being a girl predicted lower identification with Europe. In twelve countries, immigration background was associated with lesser levels of European identity ( $\beta_x = -.11$ ). A higher socioeconomic status was associated with greater levels of European identity in two countries.

The second set of models introduced variables that are malleable in the school context. This included a discursive teaching style, social relationships with other students and teachers, and the experiences of participation in school. Further, opportunities for learning about politics or about Europe were introduced to predict national or European identity respectively. The results of the sociodemographic variables were rather similar to those presented for Hypothesis 1. Opportunities for learning about politics were positively associated with national identity in eleven countries ( $\beta_x = .08$ ). An open classroom climate was positively associated with national identity in three countries and negatively in two countries. The relationship of students with other students ( $\beta_x = .14$ ) and with teachers ( $\beta_x = .13$ ) predicted national identity in all 14 countries. Experiences of participation in school predicted national identity in six of the fourteen countries ( $\beta_x = .06$ ).

For European identity, the picture was rather similar. Opportunities for learning about Europe predicted European identity in all countries ( $\beta_x = .19$ ), discursive teaching style in three ( $\beta_x = .01$ ), and opportunities for participation ( $\beta_x = .04$ ) in six countries. In all countries, a good relationship of students with other students ( $\beta_x = .10$ ) and with teachers ( $\beta_x = .09$ ) contributed to European identity. The explained variance varied greatly between the countries. For national identity, the explained variance ranged from .07 in Sweden to .24 in Estonia. For European identity, the explained variance ranged from .08 in Sweden to .15 in Malta.

In a final step, the variables 'trust in political institutions' and 'civic knowledge' were introduced. For national identity, trust in political institutions was revealed to be an important predictor in all countries ( $\beta_x = .25$ ), while civic knowledge was a predictor of national identity in one country and less so in seven countries ( $\beta_x = -.01$ ). All other variables lost some predictive power, but the interaction of students and teachers was still significant in 12 out of 14 countries.



The explained variance ranged from .10 (Sweden) to .30 (Estonia). Trust in the European Parliament predicted a stronger European identity ( $\beta_x = .18$ ), while civic knowledge, again, remained rather irrelevant ( $\beta_x = .01$ ). Relationships of students with other students lost its predictive power in five countries, and relationships between students and teachers in two countries. In this model, explained variance ranged from .10 (Sweden) to .30 (Estonia).

## 6 Discussion

This study aims to reveal the relevance of the malleable school context in shaping national and European identities. We presented a multidisciplinary theoretical approach, which included approaches from psychology, political culture, and the CCE. Each perspective provided a relevant point of view on the matter of national and European identity. We inspected each education system separately. This enabled us to estimate population values and the associated standard errors with field data of high external validity. Overall, the relationships between variables varied little among countries, but there were some outliers. Especially the Estonian coefficients were often higher. This was probably due to the linguistic and population segregation of Estonian and Russian schools, which goes hand in hand with different orientations towards Estonia and Europe. The analyses demonstrated the relevance of formal lectures for building a European identity, and of social relationships for building national and European identities. We further found national identity to be marginally positively related to measures of tolerance in many countries, and European identity somewhat more positively correlated to those values in most countries. Overall, the correlations were rather small and therefore indicated no bivariate pull of identity towards tolerance or intolerance with the measures used.

As was expected based on previous studies, immigration background and being a girl negatively predicted both forms of identity. Socioeconomic background was of little relevance in the linear regressions. In accordance with the theory on complex identities and with earlier results, we found national and European identity to be mutually compatible for students in all inspected European countries. There was no dilemma of the national versus the European identity, and this effect was quite robust. Formal provision of relevant curriculum content proved to be relevant for identity formation. This was especially true for the European identity, where the strongest prediction could be found. Opportunities for acquiring more general political knowledge were not that universally relevant for the prediction of national identity.

We assume that questions of belonging to the country of residence are rooted to a stronger extent in everyday life, the media, and the curriculum, while questions concerning Europe still depend more strongly on explicit inclusion of the topic in school. The relevance of formal learning opportunities about Europe underlines the need for teachers to be qualified to understand, teach, and discuss the challenging and dynamic topic of Europe (Oberle & Forstmann, 2015).

We found that a discursive teaching style had little to no impact. As the study is cross-sectional, we have no information on development trajectories. Marcia (1966) suggests that a phase of disengagement follow previously held unelected identity aspects; therefore, the small regression coefficients do not refute the theory that formal and informal learning opportunities in school are important for identity formation. Similarly, participation had only marginal relevance for national





or European identity. Putnam's theory of social capital and social identity theory revealed to be fruitful for the study. The results support the relevance of social relationships for political support for national and supranational political structures. The positive relationships within the school environment seem to foster in-group cohesion concerning the nation, which is an aspect of political support.

The substantial differences of explained variance across countries indicate the importance of country-specific analyses. Results remain mostly stable after controlling for trust in political institutions as an indicator of more specific political support, and of civic knowledge as the ability to cognitively evaluate individual belonging to political communities.

There are multiple limitations to the study. First, we used cross-sectional data, which means that no causal relationships can be identified with the data at hand. Still, theoretical arguments were presented to argue which variables are appropriate for use as predictors. Further, ICCS 2016 does not include variables on exchange programmes and European foreign language education, which have long been recognised as fostering identification with European identity (Faas, 2007). Finally, many coefficients and the amount of explained variance are rather small. While this can partly be attributed to the limitations inherent in the field data, we have to assume that further variables, which may not directly be linked to schooling, would be strong predictors.

Our research questions focused on the effects of schooling, and while the variables we used cover a rich variety of important aspects of schooling, they may not be exhaustive. For instance, the quality of content and instruction are not assessed. Further analyses should include longitudinal and multi-level analyses. The latter were not in the scope of this paper but could reveal interesting further options for analysis. While the present analyses focus on the individual assessment of learning opportunities, social relationships, and the extent to which the classroom provides a climate for open discussion, multi-level analyses may yield additional insights. The role of social relationships for (supra)national identities needs further conceptual and empirical investigation.

Further, the results give us no information about the role of social relationships in school in fostering a transformative citizenship capable of promote changes for social justice. Norris (2011) and Banks (2017) believe that fundamental system attachment is productive for the critical assessment and change of institutions' democratisation. The person-centred analyses by Landberg et al. (2018) indicate that a group of students with little identification with their country of residence or Europe are very tolerant and willing to participate despite their lack of interest in political issues. Still, they find that dual-identified students are the most likely to be interested in politics and to participate. It could be fruitful to investigate if, and how many, students participate in working towards social cohesion and justice as result of their support for core values without, however, identifying with the overarching political structures. Furthermore, it should be noted that identity complexity is not conceptually linked to national nor European identity. Students who identify with neither can still develop complex identities which are linked to tolerance, especially if those identities are linked to values of tolerance.

We can deduce some implications for CCE. Overarching identities are compatible, but not inherently linked to tolerance. Teachers have the opportunity to explicitly link notions of identity to tolerance. The provision of relevant content in formal education is of great relevance if one



follows the goal of fostering a European identity. These formal learning opportunities are less important for national identity. The development of positive relationships in school is highly relevant for the formation of identities. Formal (social science) education can enable students to reflect on their identities and to develop a critical form of national identity which supports stability as well as change of the political system. Teachers should not pit different identity aspects against one another but foster identity complexity. Schools may play an important role in fostering identities which encompass tolerance, a critical perspective on institutions, and the pursuit of social justice which empowers and motivates students to participate in the changes they desire. As discussed, several scholars warn against fostering national identity as they believe it is connected to the devaluation of outgroups. Empirically, we cannot support this claim with the analyses at hand. Our results imply that students who experience a positive social climate at school—whereby it is generally agreed that a positive social climate at school is highly desirable—will develop a balanced national and European identity. These identities imply neither tolerance nor intolerance.



Table 3  
Regression analyses for national and European identity

Model 1	National Identity		Countries	European Identity		Countries
	$\beta_{\bar{x}} / b_{\bar{x}}$	SE	+ / n.s. / -	$\beta_{\bar{x}} / b_{\bar{x}}$	SE	+ / n.s. / -
Gender	-.05 / -0.85	.01 / 0.11	0 / 8 / 6	-.06 / -1.15	.01 / 0.12	0 / 6 / 8
IMB	-.15 / -3.82	.01 / 0.17	0 / 0 / 14	-.11 / -2.71	.01 / 0.16	0 / 2 / 12
SES	-.02	.01	2 / 6 / 7	.04	.01	3 / 11 / 0
R <sup>2</sup>	.04	.00	.01 to .11	.02	.00	.00 to .07
Model 2	$\beta_{\bar{x}} / b_{\bar{x}}$	SE	+ / n.s. / -	$\beta_{\bar{x}} / b_{\bar{x}}$	SE	+ / n.s. / -
Gender	-.06 / -1.12	.01 / 0.10	0 / 6 / 8	-.06 / -1.23	.01 / 0.12	0 / 4 / 10
IMB	-.14 / -3.46	.01 / 0.16	0 / 0 / 14	-.10 / -2.44	.01 / 0.16	0 / 2 / 12
SES	-.04	.01	1 / 6 / 7	.03	.01	4 / 8 / 0
CIVLRN	.08	.01	11 / 3 / 0			
EULRN				.19	.01	14 / 0 / 0
OPDISC	.02	.01	3 / 9 / 2	.01	.01	3 / 11 / 0
STUTREL	.14	.01	14 / 0 / 0	.10	.01	14 / 0 / 0
INTACT	.13	.01	14 / 0 / 0	.09	.01	14 / 0 / 0
SCHPART	.06	.01	6 / 8 / 0	.04	.01	6 / 8 / 0
R <sup>2</sup>	.13	.00	.07 to .24	.11	.00	.07 to .15
Model 3	$\beta_{\bar{x}} / b_{\bar{x}}$	SE	+ / n.s. / -	$\beta_{\bar{x}} / b_{\bar{x}}$	SE	+ / n.s. / -
Gender	-.06 / -1.04	.01 / 0.10	0 / 6 / 8	-.05 / -1.01	.01 / 0.12	0 / 8 / 6
IMB	-.14 / -3.32	.01 / 0.15	0 / 0 / 14	-.09 / -2.25	.01 / 0.15	0 / 12 / 2
SES	-.02	.01	1 / 8 / 5	.03	.01	0 / 12 / 2
CIVLRN	.06	.01	10 / 4 / 0			
EULRN				.17	.01	14 / 0 / 0
OPDISC	.03	.01	2 / 12 / 0	.00	.01	0 / 13 / 1
STUTREL	.09	.01	12 / 2 / 0	.08	.01	9 / 5 / 0
INTACT	.09	.01	14 / 0 / 0	.07	.01	12 / 2 / 0
SCHPART	.06	.01	8 / 6 / 0	.04	.01	6 / 8 / 0
INTRUST	.25	.01	14 / 0 / 0			
TRUST EU Parliament				.18	.01	0 / 0 / 14
PC_CIV	-.01	.01	1 / 6 / 7	.00	.01	2 / 7 / 5
R <sup>2</sup>	.18	.03	.10 to .30	.14	.00	.10 to .20

Note. + / n.s. / - Number of countries with significant positive / not significant / negative regression coefficients.



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