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Determinants of the Formation of a European Identity among Children: Individual- and School-Level Influences

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Abstract

While a growing number of studies have been conducted on European identification, very few of them have examined how children form their sense of European identity. This article investigates the impact of individual- and school-level characteristics on children's formation of a European identity. Multi-level analyses of data from 2,845 pupils (aged 10–14) in 68 Belgian primary schools revealed that family socio-economic status (SES), ethnicity, gender and the school's SES make-up influence the extent to which children identify as European; age, religion and school sector do not. The study clarifies the importance of examining how children form their European identity.

Introduction

Since the 1970s, the idea of European citizenship and the concept of a 'People's Europe' has been widely promoted by politicians, intellectuals and administrators involved in the European Community (Shore and Black, 1994). However, since the rejection of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 by the Danes (Niedermayer and Sinnott, 1995; Liebert, 2001), discussion of the construction of a European identity has become increasingly popular. The rejection of several other European treaties in referendums (the Nice Treaty, the Constitutional Treaty and the Lisbon Treaty), the continuously decreasing voter turnout at the European parliamentary elections and the democratic deficit have prompted the European Union (EU) to search for new ways to bond with its citizens (Boyce, 1993; Majone, 1998). For instance, one of the three goals of the 'Citizenship Policy; Europe for Citizens' programme of the European Commission is to 'allow citizens to develop a sense of European identity' (Commission, n.d.).

This apparent disconnect to the EU among its citizens has prompted scholars to try to understand why a sense of European identity has been so slow to emerge (Laffan, 2004). A substantial number of studies on European identity have examined the theoretical/political issues behind the notion of European identity, such as its definition, its place and function in the European integration process, and the relationship that exists between European identity and national identities (for example, Inglehart, 1970, 1977; Smith, 1992; Mayer and Palmowski, 2004; Risse, 2003, 2005). Other researchers have identified various determinants that can inform whether people feel a sense of European identity, such as gender, age and income (for example, Medrano and Gutiérrez, 2001; Citrin and Sides, 2004; Green, 2007; Boehnke and Fuss, 2008). However, we still know little about the reasons why some individuals feel more European than others. With this in mind, this study was conducted to attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the social determinants of European identification (Bruter, 2008).

Our findings offer a unique contribution to this understanding, in four distinct ways. First, all of the previous studies that have been conducted on the determinants of a European identity focused primarily on adults. However, it has become clear that childhood and adolescence are decisive periods for developing a (supra)national identity (Ross, 1999; Barrett *et al*., 2003). For instance, Ross (1999) found that the average age that an individual will begin identifying with Europe is 11 years. In our study, the data set consisted of 2,845 children, aged between ten and 14. For this reason, this study is exceptionally appropriate for understanding how individuals begin to form an identity with Europe.

Second, despite the fact that most European countries are becoming increasingly ethnically diverse because of rising levels of immigration, studies have rarely paid attention to the formation of a European identity among immigrants and ethnic minorities living in an EU Member State (for a notable exception, see Cinnirella and Hamilton, 2007). Therefore, in addition to examining the formation of an individual sense of European identity with variables such as age, gender and socio-economic status (SES) in mind, in this study we also investigate the effect of ethnic background (operationalized by country of origin) on an individual's identification with Europe.

Third, while a significant number of scholars have argued that European identification is context-dependent, few authors have investigated the precise *way* that contextual factors affect European identification (see Mols *et al*., 2009). Indeed, our study paid special attention to how an individual's school context might affect their sense of being European as we examined characteristics of an individual's school context that might be related to pupils' sense of European identity.

Finally, this study is unique in that it examines data from Flanders, the Dutch-speaking northern part of Belgium. While the Eurobarometer data show that the European identification of Belgians is very high (see Eurobarometer 2008, 2009), few studies have conducted a detailed examination of the sense of European identity among people in Belgium specifically (Licata and Klein, 2002; Huyst, 2008).

I. European Identity and Children

Defining 'European identity' is a daunting task since no single definition has yet been proposed with which all scholars agree. Two theories have found favour with a significant proportion of those who study European identity: the social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel and Turner, 1986) and the self-categorization theory (SCT; Oakes *et al*., 1994). A number of scholars argue that a SIT and SCT approach should be used to understand the European identification process (for example, Rutland and Cinnirella, 2000; Flockhart, 2005; Mols *et al*., 2009). From a SIT perspective, European identity is regarded as a part of an individual's social identity – that is, their sense of themselves as members of different groups. This idea of social identity is further developed by SCT, which asserts that social contexts in particular provide the necessary conditions under which people's identities become salient. From a SIT perspective, Tajfel (1981, p. 255) defines social identity 'as a part of the individual's self-concept which is derived from his knowledge of membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership'. We adopt this definition in our study to conceptualize and measure European identification (see the Variables section below).

Very few studies have been conducted on European identification among children and young adolescents (see Jamieson, 2005); many of those that have examined this topic have been conducted by Martyn Barrett and his colleagues, and draw mainly upon SIT and SCT (for example, Barrett, 1996; Barrett *et al*., 1999; Reizabal *et al*., 2004; Philippou, 2005). In his study examining the sense of European identity among English children (aged six to 14), Barrett (1996) found that their sense of European identity tended to emerge between the ages of six and ten. The same study also found that this awareness of belonging to the European supranational group seemed to peak around the age of ten, and stayed relatively stable between the ages of ten and 14. In another study that examined European identity among English children (ages 6–12), Barrett *et al*. (1999) demonstrated that, in terms of forming their sense of identity, European identification was less important for children than their gender, their religion or their national identity. This was also found in several other studies, including those conducted with children in the Basque Country (Reizabal *et al*., 2004), with children in Greek Cyprus (Philippou, 2005) and with young adults (aged 18–24) across six European countries: Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Slovakia, Spain and United Kingdom (Boehnke and Fuss, 2008).

II. Determinants of European Identification

As mentioned earlier, the determinants of European identification have mostly been studied using an adult data set (for example, Medrano and Gutiérrez, 2001; Green, 2007; Mols *et al*., 2009; Fligstein, 2009). The social determinants that tend to be examined are demographic factors, such as SES, age and gender. SES is usually measured according to indicators such as income, occupational status and/or educational level. A higher level of SES has consistently been found to be related to stronger European identification (Medrano and Gutiérrez, 2001; Citrin and Sides, 2004; Fligstein, 2009).

When it comes to the impact of *age* on an individual's sense of identity, the effect of generation on the construction of attitudes and identity has been widely examined. Inglehart (1977) had already claimed in the 1970s that there are attitudinal differences between generations. Green (2007), for example, found that younger people are less likely to feel European (along with the older cohorts). This contradicts the findings of Citrin and Sides (2004) and Fligstein (2009), who claim that young people are, on the contrary, more likely to see themselves as European than old people.

With respect to gender, studies have found that men are more likely to exhibit higher levels of European identification than women, although this correlation is rather weak (Green, 2007; Fligstein, 2009). Indeed, Citrin and Sides (2004) report no significant differences between men and women at all.

As was noted in our introduction, the role that ethnic differences play in whether – and to what extent – an individual identifies with the EU has rarely been studied. One study, conducted by Cinnirella and Hamilton (2007), found that Asian-British respondents exhibited a stronger sense of European identity than native white-British respondents.

Regarding the role of religion in an individual's European identification, the question over the role that Christianity can or should play in shaping a European identity has been hotly debated. For instance, the issue of whether there should be a reference to Christianity and God in the Constitutional Treaty was highly contentious. Several important figures, such as the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, believe that Christianity should play a

central role in the formation of a European identity. Merkel has explicitly stated this, as the following quote illustrates: 'We need a European identity in the form of a constitutional treaty and I think it should be connected to Christianity and God, as Christianity has forged Europe in a decisive way' (quoted in Kubosova, 2006).

The important role that Catholicism has played in the EU integration project has often been noted. Indeed, research has shown that the integration project tends to resonate better in countries with a Catholic background than those with a Protestant background and political culture. Throughout Europe, people who come from a Catholic background tend to be more pro-European, while Protestants tend to be more hesitant because of their centralistic tendencies (Nelsen *et al*., 2001). Religion still plays a significant role in how people choose to vote at European elections (Hobolt, 2009). However, no studies have yet examined whether – and if so how – an individual's religion identity (as a Christian, Muslim or atheist, for instance) might affect their sense of European identity.

A variety of other determinants of European identity have received some scholarly attention, but these vary widely and there has been very little uniformity in the approaches used to examine them, with most studies varying according to the specific theoretical approach used by the scholar. Functionalist scholars, for example, claim that citizens decide whether to identify with the EU based on a cost–benefit analysis – that is, an individual will calculate whether the EU benefits them overall, after taking into account the costs. This decision is then regarded as a result of instrumentalist/utilitarian logic (Haas, 1958; Gabel, 1998, 2003; Kritzinger, 2005). On the other hand, social constructivists claim that these collective identities – of which European identity is an example – are socially constructed; this means that they are intentionally or unintentionally the result of social interactions that occur between individuals. For instance, according to Deutsch's theory, people are more likely to construct a European identity when they associate with each other across national boundaries and experience that association in a positive way (Deutsch, 1953, 1969).

In our analysis, we will examine how these determinants inform whether – and to what extent – children identify themselves as European. More specifically, we will investigate the impact of gender, age, family SES (measured by occupational status of parents), ethnicity (measured by country of origin) and religion on children's European identification. However, we recognize that important as these factors are on the construction of European identity, they are not the exhaustive determinants of the formation of a European identity. Indeed, in the following section we present another level of analysis – a level that thus far has received very little attention: the role of school context in the formation of a European identification.

III. School Context and European Identification

Most theories on identity – and SCT in particular – emphasize that social identities are strongly dependent on the context and social environments in which an individual lives (Oakes *et al*., 1994; for an application on European identification, see Rutland and Cinnirella, 2000; Rutland *et al*., 2008). Children and young adolescents spend almost half of their waking hours in a school context. It is surprising, then, that the impact of the characteristics of the school context has rarely been investigated in regard to European identification. Moreover, the school context provides a

framework for social interactions to take place between pupils, and this framework – following Deutsch's theory (Deutsch, 1953, 1969) – forms an important basis for identity formation.

This study focuses on school-level factors because not only is there a solid theoretical foundation that justifies this approach, but also because actual political events have meant that this approach is clearly relevant and appropriate. Indeed, the EU has urged its Member States to integrate a 'European dimension to education' in their curricula (Ryba, 1995). This is something that most of them have done, but the precise interpretation and implementation of a 'European dimension' has varied significantly (Eurydice, 2009). This promotion of a European dimension is part of the EU's efforts to stimulate and develop a European identity and sense of citizenship among young people. The EU has already spent millions of euros on education, training and youth programmes in an attempt to encourage young people to enter the European professional market and to prepare them for their roles as European citizens (Karlsen, 2002). In most European countries, there are several programmes that take place in schools that have been developed to enhance pupils' European identification. Throughout the EU – and this is certainly true for Belgium – programmes such as Comenius, Erasmus and Leonardo Da Vinci are relatively popular. However, it should be noted that such programmes are not in place in all schools; indeed, it is unavoidable that these programmes should focus on only *some* schools, because they only have limited financial resources. Therefore, it is important to analyse in which types of schools pupils exhibit lower/higher levels of European identity.

In this study, we will first investigate whether school context matters in people's sense of European identity by examining to what degree the extent of children's European identification differs across schools. However, as Mols *et al*. (2009) noted, it is not sufficient to merely assert the importance of context in the construction of identity; rather, analysis should be conducted into *which* contextual factors matter. In our analyses, the impact of three school characteristics on the extent of pupils' sense of European identity are examined: the SES make-up of the pupils in schools (hereafter: SES-composition); the ethnic diversity of the student body (hereafter: ethnic school diversity); and the school sector (Catholic versus non-Catholic schools). The inclusion of SES-composition and ethnic diversity is inspired by and based on the theory of Deutsch (1953, 1969), who proposed that European identity is partly constructed through the social interactions that occur between different people. SES-composition and ethnic school diversity are indicators of who pupils interact with while they are at school. We include the school sector category in our study because of the specific educational situation in Flanders, where most schools are Catholic (Brutsaert, 1998). We test the assertion that some scholars have made about the links between Catholicism and European identity and examine whether pupils in Catholic schools identify more strongly with Europe than those in non-Catholic schools.

IV. Methods

Sample

We used data gathered between 2008 and 2009 from 2,845 pupils from a sample of 68 primary schools in Flanders (Agirdag *et al*., 2011). Multistage sampling was conducted.

First, three cities in Flanders with ethnically diverse populations were selected. Second, based on data gathered from the Flemish Educational Department, 116 primary schools in these selected cities were asked to participate; this yielded a positive response of 54 per cent. The schools in the data set encompassed the entire range of ethnic composition, from those that had almost no (non-western) immigrant pupils to those that were composed entirely of non-western immigrant pupils. In all of the schools that agreed to participate, our research team conducted a questionnaire with all the fifth-grade pupils that were present at the school during our visit. If there were fewer than 30 of these pupils present, then we also surveyed all the sixth-grade pupils as well. The pupils completed the questionnaires in class in the presence of one or two researchers and a teacher. A total of 2,845 pupils (with a mean age of 11.61) completed the questionnaire. The questionnaires were anonymous and were analysed in complete confidentiality.

Research Design

Because the data set was made up of a clustered sample of pupils nested within schools and involved data at different levels – namely, school characteristics at the school level, pupil characteristics at individual level and European identification as outcome at individual level – the use of hierarchical linear modelling was deemed most appropriate (SAS 9.2, PROC MIXED; see Singer, 1998). As is common in multi-level analyses, we began by estimating unconditional models to determine the amount of variance that occurs among schools regarding European identification. The determinants were then added together. In the first model, we considered individual-level variables, and in the second model we examined school-level variables. In the third model, we added the variables at both levels together.

Outcome

To assess the levels of European identification among the children in our sample set, we used a scale based on five items from the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luhtanen and Crocker, 1992). Similar items had already been used successfully in previous studies conducted in the Netherlands, where the participants were children of the same age as those in this study (see Verkuyten, 2001). The items on the scale were 'I consider myself a European', 'I often regret that I am a European' (reverse scored), 'I am glad to be a European', 'I often feel that Europe is worthless' (reverse scored) and 'I feel good about Europe'. There were five answer categories, ranging from *absolutely do not agree* (score 1) to *completely agree* (score 5). Responses to these five items were averaged (Mean = 3.98; standard deviation = 0.92; see Table 1) and this scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.79.

Individual-Level Independent Variables

Six individual-level variables were included in the analysis. The sample was then divided equally with regard to gender, with 51.2 per cent of the respondents being female (male = 0, female = 1). The *age* of our respondents ranged from ten to 14 and most of them were aged 11 (about 49 per cent) or 12 (about 36 per cent) in 2009. See Table 1 for the descriptive statistics.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for All Variables

	N	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Mean or %*	*Standard deviation*
Individual-level					
Gender (girl)	2,827	0	1	51.54%	
Age	2,793	10	14	11.615	0.745
European identification	2,498	1	5	3.977	0.920
SES-composition					
Blue-collar and unemployed	2,823	0	1	39.36%	
Technicians	2,823	0	1	15.23%	
Self-employed	2,823	0	1	6.91%	
Low white-collar	2,823	0	1	18.17%	
Higher professionals	2,823	0	1	20.33%	
Ethnicity					
Native-Belgian	2,845	0	1	46.71%	
European	2,845	0	1	17.93%	
Turkish	2,845	0	1	12.97%	
Moroccan	2,845	0	1	15.61%	
Non-European	2,845	0	1	6.78%	
Religion					
Christian	2,825	0	1	45.20%	
Atheist	2,825	0	1	20.11%	
Muslim	2,825	0	1	32.46%	
Other	2,825	0	1	2.23%	
School-level					
SES-composition: % working class	68	2.63	100	34.476	22.749
Ethnic diversity	68	−1	−0.21	−0.041	0.189
School sector (Catholic)	68	0	1	47.06%	

Source: Authors' calculations.
Notes: Descriptive statistics: frequencies (N), range (minimum and maximum), means or %, standard deviations (SD).

We measured the SES of the origin of the pupils by assessing the occupational prestige of the father and mother (Erikson *et al*., 1979). The highest-prestige occupation of the parents was then used as an indicator of the SES of the family. We identified five distinct groups: unemployed and blue-collar workers (39 per cent); technicians and supervisors (15 per cent); small proprietors and self-employed workers (7 per cent); lower-grade white-collar employees (18 per cent); and higher-grade professionals and entrepreneurs (20 per cent) (see Table 1).

With regard to ethnicity, the principal criterion was the country of origin, which was measured by the birthplace of the pupils' grandmothers. If these data were missing, the mothers' and fathers' birthplaces were used instead. We identified five distinct groups: Native Belgians – that is, children whose grandparents or parents were born in Belgium (46.71 per cent); Europeans – that is, children of European descent (17.93 per cent); Turks (12.97 per cent); Moroccans (15.61 per cent); and Non-Europeans (6.78 per cent).

With regard to religion, four distinct groups were identified: Christians (45 per cent); atheists (20 per cent); Muslims (35 per cent); and others (3 per cent). We could not include Protestants as a separate category because there were not enough Protestants to warrant

Table 2: Variance Components

Component	*Variance*
Within-school variance σ^2	0.110***
Between-school variance τ_0	0.739***
% Variance between schools	12.97%***

Source: Authors' calculations.
Notes: Variance components from the unconditional models for European identification. *** significant at 0.001 level.

such a category (N = 25). It should be noted that there is a high association between *religion* and country of origin (Cramers' V = 0.524; $p < 0.001$). Therefore, when both religion and country of origin are entered together in the models, a test was conducted for multicollinearity.

School-Level Variables

The school's SES-composition was measured by assessing the proportion of pupils in schools that came from a working-class background (according to the SES group 1, see above). The SES-composition ranges between 2.63 and 100 per cent, with a mean of 37.48 per cent (standard deviation = 22.75 per cent, see Table 1).

The second school characteristic was *ethnic school diversity*, expressed as the total number of different ethnic groups, corrected by their size. We used the Herfindahl Index (HI) as a measure of ethnic diversity, in line with Lancee and Dronkers (2011). The HI is calculated as $(p_{\text{ethnic group 1}})^2 + (p_{\text{ethnic group 2}})^2 + \ldots + (p_{\text{ethnic group n}})^2$. The five ethnic groups listed above were included.

Finally, the variable *school sector* identified 36 non-Catholic schools (mostly public schools; score 0) and 32 Catholic schools (score 1). See Table 1 for the descriptive statistics. It should be noted that in the Flemish educational system, no distinction is made between public schools and private schools with respect to state support.

V. Results

Unconditional Models

To assess whether the school context influences children's European identification, Table 2, which presents the variance components from the unconditional models, should be examined. Of particular interest is the variance at the school level, computed as the between-school variance component divided by the sum of within-school and between-school variance ($\tau_0 / (\sigma^2 + \tau_0)$). As other studies on school effects research have found (for a review, see Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000), most of the variation occurs within schools and between pupils. Nevertheless, justifying the need for a multi-level analysis, these figures indicate that a significant amount of the variance in European identification can be explained at the school level. More specifically, Table 2 demonstrates that 12.97 per cent ($p < 0.001$) of the explained variance in European identification lies between schools. Hence it is clear that the school environment is an important context in the formation of an individual's European identification.

Individual-Level Determinants

The first model of Table 3 presents the individual-level factors that influence children's European identification. *Age* was not found to be significantly influential on the extent to which children identified themselves as European, indicating that identification with Europe remains relatively stable between ten and 14 years of age. This finding is consistent with Barrett (1996). With respect to *gender*, Table 3 indicates that girls exhibit significantly lower levels of European identification than boys (standardized gamma coefficient (γ^*) = –0.080; $p < 0.001$; Table 3). The *SES* of children's parents has been found to be considerably influential. Children from higher-grade professionals (service class) were found to identify significantly more strongly with Europe than children whose parents were blue-collar workers ($\gamma^* = –0.167$; $p < 0.001$), technicians and small proprietors ($\gamma^* = –0.069$; $p < 0.01$) or self-employed workers ($\gamma^* = –0.058$; $p < 0.01$). However, the difference in the extent to which children identified themselves as European between children whose parents were lower-grade white-collar workers and those whose parents were higher-grade professionals was found to be only borderline significant ($\gamma^* = –0.038$; $p = 0.09$; Table 3). Hence, it is clear that gender and SES seem to determine whether children identify themselves as European much to the same extent that previous studies found among adults (see Green, 2007; Fligstein, 2009). This is an important finding which will be discussed in greater detail in the concluding section of this article.

Regarding *ethnicity*, Table 3 shows that for west-European, south-European and east-European children region of origin was not found to significantly affect European identification. However, children who have origins in Turkey reported significantly less European identification than did native-Belgian children ($\gamma^* = –0.110$; $p < 0.01$). This was also found to be the case for children from other non-European countries ($\gamma^* = –0.127$; $p < 0.001$). Children with Moroccan roots were even less likely than children with Turkish origins to identify with being European ($\gamma^* = –0.184$; $p < 0.001$; Table 3). In contrast, children's *religion* was not found to be related to their identification with Europe; no significant differences were found between children in the four main categories of 'Christian', 'atheist', 'Muslim' and 'other'. Because there was a high correlation between ethnicity and religion, we calculated the Variation Inflation Factor (VIF) for Model 1 to examine whether multicollinearity problems occur. However, the VIF for both variables remained below 5.0, indicating that multicollinearity is not a severe problem when both variables are added to the same model. It is also important to note that in the third model of Table 3 (that is, when school-level variables are considered as well) no remarkable changes occur with respect to these individual-level coefficients.

School-Level Determinants

The second model (Table 3) presents the significance of school-level factors. With respect to the *SES-composition*, our results indicate that in schools that have higher proportions of working-class pupils, the children exhibit lower levels of European identification ($\gamma^* = –0.256$; $p < 0.001$). However, in the third model, when individual-level effects are included, the size of this effect shrinks remarkably but it is still significant ($\gamma^* = –0.074$; $p < 0.05$; Table 3). This indicates that the initial effect of the SES-composition is primarily due to selection effects and that the family SES of pupils is a more important determinant of European identification than the school SES-composition.

Table 3: Individual-Level and School-Level Effects on European Identification

		Model 1	*Model 2*	*Model 3*
Individual-level				
Age	γ	0.006	–	0.009
	(SE)	(0.026)	–	(0.027)
	γ*	0.005	–	0.007
Gender (ref = boy)	γ	–0.148***	–	–0.150***
	(SE)	(0.035)	–	(0.035)
	γ*	–0.080***	–	–0.081***
SES-composition (ref = service class)				
Blue-collar and unemployed	γ	–0.315***	–	–0.277***
	(SE)	(0.057)	–	(0.059)
	γ*	–0.167***	–	–0.147***
Technician	γ	–0.178**	–	–0.152**
	(SE)	(0.062)	–	(0.062)
	γ*	–0.069**	–	–0.059**
Self-employed	γ	–0.210**	–	–0.196**
	(SE)	(0.076)	–	(0.077)
	γ*	–0.058**	–	–0.054**
Low white-collar	γ	–0.093	–	–0.082
	(SE)	(0.055)	–	(0.055)
	γ*	–0.039	–	–0.034
Ethnicity (ref = native-Belgian)				
European	γ	0.000	–	0.031
	(SE)	(0.052)	–	(0.053)
	γ*	0.000	–	0.013
Turkish	γ	–0.301**	–	–0.273**
	(SE)	(0.101)	–	(0.102)
	γ*	–0.110**	–	–0.100**
Moroccan	γ	–0.467***	–	–0.432***
	(SE)	(0.097)	–	(0.098)
	γ*	–0.184***	–	–0.171***
Non-European	γ	–0.466***	–	–0.450***
	(SE)	(0.080)	–	(0.080)
	γ*	–0.127***	–	–0.123***
Religion (ref = Christian)				
Atheist	γ	0.034	–	0.017
	(SE)	(0.050)	–	(0.052)
	γ*	0.015	–	0.007
Muslim	γ	–0.115	–	–0.101
	(SE)	(0.087)	–	(0.088)
	γ*	–0.058	–	–0.052
Other	γ	–0.012	–	–0.011
	(SE)	(0.120)	–	(0.120)
	γ*	–0.002	–	–0.002

Table 3: (*Continued*)

		Model 1	*Model 2*	*Model 3*
School-level				
% SES-composition: % working class	γ	–	–0.010***	–0.003*
	(SE)	–	(0.001)	(0.001)
	γ*	–	–0.256***	–0.074*
Ethnic diversity	γ	–	–0.332°	–0.252
	(SE)	–	(0.179)	(0.156)
	γ*	–	–0.066°	–0.050
School sector (ref = non-Catholic)	γ	–	0.024	–0.009
	(SE)	–	(0.061)	(0.055)
	γ*	–	0.013	–0.005

Source: Authors' calculations.
Notes: Results of multi-level regression analysis for European identification. Gamma coefficients (γ), standard errors (SE in parentheses) and standardized gamma coefficients (γ*). ° Significant at 0.10 level; * significant at 0.05 level; ** significant at 0.01 level; *** significant at 0.001 level.

Ethnic school diversity was found to only be borderline related to pupils' identification with Europe in the second model ($\gamma^* = -0.066$; $p = 0.06$), and this small effect disappears after controlling for individual-level variables in Model 3 ($\gamma^* = -0.050$; $p = 0.11$; Table 3).

In both the second and the third models, the *school sector* is not related to the extent of identification with Europe: pupils' European identification does not significantly differ in Catholic and non-Catholic (mostly public) schools ($\gamma^* = 0.013$; $p = 0.68$; Table 3; Model 2).

Conclusions

The findings of our study add to the understanding of the formation of a European identity in three distinct ways. First, while most of the previous studies that have been conducted into the extent of an individual's identification as European have examined adults, this study focused on children. Second, we examined the impact of several variables at an individual level (for example, ethnicity and religion) which, until now, has received very little attention. Third, given the importance of social context on European identity formation (see Rutland and Cinnirella, 2000; Rutland *et al*., 2008), we investigated the impact of contextual school characteristics (that is, SES-composition, ethnic diversity and school sector) on the extent to which children form a European identity. The results of our multi-level regression analyses indicated that children from families with a high SES and boys identify more strongly with Europe than working-class children and girls. This finding is in accordance with the findings of studies on adults (for example, Green, 2007; Fligstein, 2009), and clarifies that the disparity between the European identification of men and women, and between people with low and high SES, has already been formed by the ages of 10–14. Our results also indicate that Turkish, Moroccan and non-European immigrants identify less with Europe than native-Belgian children. This finding that the non-European origin of people can be a determinant to (not) feel European has not been described often in literature or empirically studied. It should be noted that this finding is not as obvious as it might seem because most immigrants in Flanders are second- and third-generation. They have frequently been born into Belgian nationality and, as such, are

European citizens too (Agirdag, 2010). These immigrants constitute an ever-growing part of society in many EU Member States. They are as much European citizens as those who had Belgian-born grandparents, and how they feel about and perceive the EU should be taken into account. A potential explanation for the lower level of European identification among non-European immigrant children is that the lack of welcome to immigrants as Europeans is being internalized by these pupils and a European identity is perceived mostly in ethnic or racial terms. This might result in making them feel less European. Moreover, the impact of country of origin on the formation of a European identity is independent of the religion of these children; no significant differences were found between the European identification of Christian children, and children from other religious backgrounds.

This article also examines the impact of school characteristics on children's formation of a European identity. Specifically, we found that children have a weaker sense of European identity if they attend a school that has higher levels of working-class pupils. The SES-composition of the school was found to be influential on children's formation of a European identity, even when we controlled for children's individual ethnicity and family SES. Nonetheless, the influence of SES-composition is found to be less important in the formation of European identity than these individual-level variables. Two other school-level variables – the ethnic diversity of the student body and the school sector – were not found to have a significant impact on the extent to which children form a European identity. Thus, our findings show that individual-level variables are more influential than school-level characteristics in developing children's European identity. Although this might surprise policy-makers, it should be noted that this finding is in accordance with previous studies that have pointed out the limited influence of school characteristics on non-cognitive outcomes like political and religious attitudes (for a review, see Dronkers, 2004). However, this does not mean that school characteristics are irrelevant as others have argued that these small influences are more long-term (Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000). Moreover, policy-makers can more easily change school characteristics such as SES-composition than the individual family SES of the pupils. This can be done, for instance, by developing a school desegregation policy.

It is important to keep in mind a few weaknesses of this study. First, this article only looked at a limited number of individual- and school-level effects. For instance, we did not examine the possible effects of attitudes of school administrators and teachers on the European dimension in education because our data did not include such measures. Hence, future research should further investigate other individual- and school-level influences on children's formation of a European identity. Second, further research should explain in more detail *why* some individual-level variables have an impact. In accordance with studies on adults, we have shown that the social class background of pupils has an influence, but we were not able to fully explain this finding. One potential explanation is given by Fligstein (2009), who argues that people from higher social classes, who generally have a higher sense of European identity, are more exposed to other Europeans (through travel, work and speaking second languages). Subsequently, their children are also more likely to be exposed to other Europeans as well. Third, our data are limited to Belgium, which is a very interesting setting as previous studies have shown that the European identification level of Belgians is generally very high (see Eurobarometer, 2008, 2009). Nevertheless, our results show that there is a considerable variability in European

identification between individual pupils which makes the identification of various determinants such as gender and SES possible. As this study confirms the general theoretical suggestions that European identity is gender- and SES-related (see Kaina & Karolewski, 2009), these results from Belgium are likely to be valid in other countries as well. However, some of our results might differ in other settings. For instance, we found that immigrants have a lower sense of European identity than native Belgians – a finding that contradicts the results of a study in the United Kingdom (Cinnirella and Hamilton, 2007). This result might be a reflection of the high European identity in Belgium and a generally lower level of European identity in the United Kingdom. Moreover, these contradicting results make clear that the ethnic differences in the level of European identification are not static, but are also dependent on the specific macro-level context. Hence, future studies should be conducted on children in other countries and in a variety of different study settings as well to ensure that our findings reflect an overall trend.

Childhood and early adolescence are decisive periods with regard to social identity formation (Barrett *et al*., 2003). Therefore, we suggest that both policy-makers and scholars pay closer attention to how children develop their own sense of European identity. However, it should be noted that childhood is not the only formative stage of life. For instance, King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) have shown that graduates who had spent a year abroad in another European country with Erasmus or Socrates programmes had higher levels of European identity than the control sample that did not go abroad. Therefore, this article suggests that policy efforts to develop a stronger sense of European identity should focus more intensively on primary schools while maintaining investment in higher education programmes like Erasmus. Moreover, policy efforts should focus on promoting a more inclusive European identity that also appeals to immigrants and their children as our results suggest that this is currently by far not the case.

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