

UACES Scholarship 2010

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Outline of project

'Imagining Europe' is a 4 year PhD research project on different imaginations (conceptualizations) of 'Europe' across national boundaries (Estonia, the Netherlands, and Italy), and across different social groups within those societies. Examples of such specific groups are working class vs. political/cultural 'elites', and ethnic/national minorities vs. majorities. 'Europe' means something different according to all of those characteristics, and the central objects of study in this project are those patterns, their relation to collective identifications, and to political behaviour. A central hypothesis is that while elites within nations tend to identify more strongly with Europeanized, cosmopolitan values over time, lower socio-economic groups become stronger oriented towards their respective national identities. The three-step empirical approach is 'mixed' (both quantitative and qualitative), and is followed up by a 'social networks' component. The project has its roots in sociology, anthropology, and political sciences.

Academic achievements

The past period in Estonia has been very fruitful despite the quiet summer months. I used my time here mostly to make new contacts that can help me in getting the data collection in Estonia off the ground. In doing so, I met with several academic staff members of Tartu University, and arranged meetings with potential team members. Especially the latter has been instrumental for the data collection process, because these team members will be conducting interviews in Estonian and Russian in the following months. After spending the last couple of months in Estonia, I therefore not only built up my knowledge of the country and a better understanding of social dynamics, but also managed to set up a small research team for data collection.

Use made of resources, facilities abroad

I regularly visited the library of Tartu University to consult books and articles, and I met with staff members of various departments of the same university. Additionally, secretariats of those departments were instrumental in finding interested candidates for team membership.

Positive and negative aspects

The quiet summer period is less than ideal for making new contacts in academia. Related to this, I would have liked to conduct more interviews before my departure, but during these months, this turned out relatively hard to do. On the positive side, however, I found Estonia to be a particularly welcoming setting, both socially and academically. The newly found team members appear to be highly motivated and very intelligent aspiring academics, and I am very much looking forward to working with them. Spending time in Estonia has improved my sense of the national context, and has taught me a lot about how to understand conceptualizations of Europe within this particular frame of reference.

UACES and the European Commission have provided indispensable financial support for the first fieldwork period conducted in Estonia.