

Images and Identity

Or: A sense for identity by iconology for Europe?

Workshop by Martijn Kleppe: Influence of images in history education.

1. Preface

The International Conference : 'Wall charts, history and European identity', which took place from the 2nd till the 3rd April 2009 in Würzburg, Germany, served as a platform for scientists from Belgium, Germany, Latvia, Netherlands and Spain, to focus for example on questions about the connection between a culture of recollection and an European Identity.

Therefore a workshop, lead by Martijn Kleppe, a doctoral student from the Erasmus University of Rotterdam – Research Center for Media, Communication and Culture, took place on the 3rd of April 2009.

Kleppe pursued with regard to „The Dutch canon“the problem how individuals receive (incorporate) a history which is imparted by media, such as wall charts. He asks how these pictures find their way into the personal memory. He raised the hypothesis that possibly cultural identity is also emerged by the iconization of such traded pictures.

2. Outline

This workshop was structured into an introductory part, where Kleppe gave a lecture to lay a solid foundation for the following teamwork session. In this teamwork session, which was parted into similar age cohorts, the participants (4-5) should search for icons which they would judge as emerging a European Identity.

3. Content of the presentation

In the following a summary of the questions that were raised within the presentation of Kleppe should be given. Kleppe exemplified the development of the 'Dutch Canon' in the Netherlands, to resume it in regard to the personal reception of history and cultural identity.

He argued that in a Dutch sense, the ‚Dutch Canon‘ is a product which was meant for historical classes. Therefore the 50 most important events of the Dutch history were presented in a visual chronology to work as a didactic instrument in various settings to facilitate the memory of those events. The layout of this canon is based on well-tried concepts of traditional wall chart artists. In regard to the attractiveness Ising and Jetses work as models, in regard to convey information, wall charts like the periodic table of the elements by Mendelejevs.

Kleppe pointed out, that the Netherlands with its 'Dutch Canon' should only serve as an observation point in regard to the selected historical events, not as a restrictive horizon. Further guidelines for the development of the 'Dutch Canon' were merely to provide the personal involvement within the historical events and less a special kind of nationalism. The Canon does not represent a concluded 'dogma', but should work as a dynamic and open-ended concept for a variety of classes. Especially within the teaching-process in primary classes, this open-ended concept serves as an inspirational basis.

If a canon is understood in such a way, different ethnic groups have the chance to focus on their relation towards the national history as chance and not so much as a problem. Through this, the integration as well as the identification within a plural society could be enabled.

In the end of his presentation, Kleppe asked himself and the audience, if such a canon, which causes identity, might be paradigmatic for a made history by future generations.

4. Workshop

The results of the workshops were surprising; the age cohorts only found some icons for the latest European history, which they associate with the historical events and which could function as 'icons' for future generations.

The following Icons were pointed out:

- 68th/ protesting students in Berlin
- Fall of the Wall/ Wall with barbed wire: people breaking away the wall with sledges (hacked away) (Wallpecker)
- 9/11/ crash of two airliners into the Twin Towers (Counterproposal for a Change of perspective: image of a tortured in Abu Ghraib)
- EU-Enlargement 2004 / no image found
- Ecological Crisis/ no image found

5. Conclusion

The question towards an European Identity is followed by the question towards an European recollection (memory). The lack of european events, which afford images for iconization, refers to the problems of a common identity within the diverse european countries. This lack also offers a realm of possibilities and leaves space for personal and undogmatic interpretations of the European history.

Functionality and Dysfunctionality of icons, impacts and threats of a memory culture of images should always be in the focus, if one searches for a pan-European identity. If this is kept in mind, the possibility of an undogmatic European culture of images and history could be kept open.