Displeasure at plurality and fear of strangers?

An empirical study among youth in Germany and The Netherlands

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ABSTRACT *Europe is on the path, though rocky, to political and cultural unity. After World War II, relatively large numbers of immigrants moved to Europe and brought with them outside cultural customs and religions. The issue of multiculturalism in society has been on the political agenda for decades, but attitudes have changed drastically since 11th September 2001. Attitudes in relation to migrants, particularly those with a Muslim background, have become more wary and critical. Islam has become associated with violence and terrorism and fears have grown that migration exacerbates this threat to society. These societal developments pose a threat to intercultural education. This article explores the societal situation in the Netherlands and Germany using empirical data and elaborates how youth in the Netherlands and Germany evaluate their relationship with migrant, especially through the dimension of religious tolerance and acceptance.*

Cultural pluralism and xenophobia

Europe is on the path, though rocky, to political and cultural unity. After World War II, relatively large numbers of immigrants moved to Europe and brought with them outside

cultural customs and religions. The issue of multiculturalism in society has been on the political agenda for decades, but attitudes have changed drastically since 11th September 2001. Attitudes in relation to migrants, particularly those with a Muslim background, have become more wary and critical across Europe. When examining cultural pluralism and xenophobia, a comparison between the Netherlands and Germany becomes especially interesting. Though close neighbours geographically and culturally, Germany has never defined itself as having a multicultural population - this in contrast to the Netherlands. We will therefore frame the further discussion by first examining the differing realities in these the two countries.

The Netherlands

After the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, Dutch media called attention to public displays of approval of the attack by Moroccan youths, even though the amount of approval was limited. A confrontation between the Muslim population and those with Dutch heritage failed to materialise on this occasion. The murder of politician Pim Fortuyn (by a non-Muslim) evoked similar sentiment among the Muslim population, primarily due to his anti-Muslim views. Fortuyn's ideas were highly controversial, yet he had great appeal among many sections of the Dutch population. The political party he represented seemed to be on the verge of becoming one of the largest political parties in the Netherlands. Fortuyn often referred to Islam a backward/retarded (the Dutch word 'achterlijk' has connotations of both) religion. Violent reactions also failed to materialise after his murder. On the other hand, positions hardened socially and politically. Nevertheless, even in this tense climate, a variety of initiatives existed to connect Muslims and non-Muslims. This reaction seems to reflect what the Dutch would see as 'typical Dutch': a sense of responsibility and an appeal for reconciliation. Is this truly a sign of what is regarded as traditional Dutch tolerance? Can we view the Dutch as tolerant people?

The Netherlands pride themselves as being a particularly tolerant country (Hoogerwerf, 2002), and there has been a long history of immigration (Ellemers, 1987). Between 1956 and 2005 alone, the number of people with non-Dutch heritage grew to over 3 million (out of a population of 16 million). This growth has been caused above all by the arrival of so-called guest workers from Turkey and Morocco, and asylum-seeking refugees from non-European countries who have been in search of a new home due to war, hunger or political terror (Penninx et al., 1998) This implies that about 3 million people live in the Netherlands who either were not born in the Netherlands themselves or have parents who were not born there. Some 1.7 million come from non-Western countries (C.B.S., 2006). In the big cities approximately 30% are non-native, and this percentage rises to 50% for youth in these cities. It is clear that this situation poses a challenge to traditional tolerance and that xenophobia can more easily emerge from the shadows.

Ultra right-wing and racist parties have never been popular in the Netherlands. However, the views of the Far Right, which were forbidden by law to be expressed in the past, have now almost become government policy. Thus there has been an obvious change in this respect. In 2004, the influential newspaper "De Volkskrant" organized a study on the feelings and attitudes of the native Dutch with regard to non-natives and Muslims. This study took place after our empirical study. The Volkskrant study showed that 47% of the native Dutch held a neutral view of Muslims, while 36% held a negative view. Those surveyed felt especially physically threatened by non-native youth on the streets and by the danger of terrorist attacks by extremist Muslims.

Is the Netherlands a special country and does it occupy a unique position when compared to neighbouring European countries (Janssen, 1998)? The Dutch like to characterise themselves as a particularly humane and tolerant country, especially when it comes to its dealings with asylum seekers (Schnabel 2000). At the same time, there is very limited expert knowledge in the Netherlands about developments in other European countries. This is perhaps a mutual phenomenon. In the Dutch press, Germany is still portrayed as an arrogant country, whose war history colours the Dutch perspective. Until now, the Netherlands has not witnessed any major right-wing radical movement which has been able to sustain itself. The impression exists that this is different in Germany. In the eyes of many Dutch, Germany is also more religious, more traditional and less pluralistic. Perceptions persist that the major religions are still dominant in Germany, also when it comes to the content of teaching in schools.

Germany

As in all western countries, society in Germany has drastically changed since World War II. The former orientation on and thinking from a nation state perspective has been replaced by an international perspective, above all in relation to Europe. Germany, like other western nationas, is a pluralistic society in cultural, ethnic and religious respects. Modernization and globalization have had so much influence that it is impossible for individuals and groups to ignore them. It is undeniable that certain aspects of plurality can pose a challenge to both individuals and communities. Coping with a changing societal and cultural landscape is not easy for many (Kessler, 1995). In 2004, approximately 6.7 million people with a migrant background lived in Germany (1.4 million of them were born in Germany). The number of migrants has increased from 4.5% in 1980, to 5.3% in 1990 to 7.3% in 2003 (see census: http://www.destatis.de/).

As far as dealings with 'outsiders' ('fremden' in German) are concerned, it was a societal taboo to express nationalistic sentiments between World War II and the 1980s in Germany. During the last couple of decades, nationalistic views and anti-immigrant sentiment have gradually re-entered the public discourse. This is illustrated by the re-emergence of the radical right-wing (Büchel, 2002; Florack, 2000). The Nationalist Party (NPD), with openly sympathetic views of Hitler and his NSDAP, can claim around 5% support levels among the general population level and is represented in two eastern German state-parliaments (Saxony 9,2% and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 7,3%). Increasing attacks against businesses, homes and houses of prayer are reported often in the media and hate crimes are on the rise according to various monitoring agencies. In the meantime, it is not only migrants that have become the targets of right-wing hatred, but German citizens as well who have shown solidarity with non-native Germans residing in the country. A study of youth attitudes in 2006 showed that 9% of young people in western Germany call themselves "right wing", and that this percentage is 13% in eastern Germany (Shell, 2006, 109 ff). A majority in both places felt that Germany should accept substantially less migrants in the future than was the case in the past (Shell, 2006, p.135).

Studies differ on who identifies with right wing extremist views. Some studies show that it is especially individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who subscribe to such views (Shell, 2002; 2006), while other studies seem to show the opposite, namely that racism is very distinct among the highly-educated (Scheepers, 1995; Silbermann/Hüsers, 1995; Hadjar 2004). In such cases, social fears seem to form the primary explanation: fear of inadequate material security during retirement, fear of social conflicts, but also fear of other lifestyles, values and/or religious beliefs and "Weltanschauungen" (world views). Such fears connect to the feeling of losing one's own identity through the arrival of 'outsiders'.

In the following, we focus on the following questions from our empirical work:
1. What attitude do those surveyed have to cultural and religious plurality?
2. What relationship do they prefer to see between religions?
3. What attitude do they have in relation to non-natives in their own country?
4. How are these attitudes to plurality, relationship of religions and xenophobia connected?
5. Are the attitudes of those surveyed different when one considers the variables of gender and Church membership?
6. Are there significant differences with respect to these questions between the Dutch and German people surveyed?

Research methods
In the following we briefly describe both the (random) sample surveys and explain the concepts which were used in the study.

Sample

The data for the research were collected at a number of secondary schools in both countries. In this chapter we shall first provide some information about the school systems in each country and describe the sample selection. A clarification of the concepts used in the inquiry follows.

The Dutch school-system and the sample

Individuals or communities in the Netherlands are free to set up a school based on religious, ideological and pedagogical, etc. principles. All these schools operate within certain boundaries, in accordance with Dutch law, and are subsidized by the government. The implication is that 60% of Dutch schools are privately governed, and most have a religious character. The overwhelming majority are Roman Catholic or Protestant, while a few are Islamic and Jewish. In addition to these confessional schools there are some that are pedagogically grounded (Dijkstra & Dronkers, 1997).

Provision of religious education according to the confessional model only exists in these Confessional schools. Public education in the Netherlands is neutral when it comes to religion, and the level of interest in religious or philosophical matters tends to be slim. However, a small minority of mostly primary schools do provide religious education, but only when parents ask for it. This happens outside the official curriculum.

There is some contradiction between the presence of so many confessional schools and the fact that the Netherlands (perhaps with the Czech Republic) is the most secularised country in Europe (Halman et al., 2005; Janssen, 1998). Of those attending confessional schools, only 40% say that they belong to a Roman Catholic or Protestant church. Especially in the larger cities there is a large population of Muslim pupils who attend confessional schools, the rest say they have no particular philosophy of life.

In these multicultural and multi-religious confessional schools, religious education can be characterised as being a multi-religious and inter-religious form of 'learning from religion'. It is no longer called religious education – the name of the subject is now 'philosophy of life'.

Instead of ignoring or resisting the impact of secularisation and plurality on society, this brand of education approaches social change more seriously and develops its task of forming/grooming students from that basis. The main object of this subject is to explore the root of all religions and philosophies within the framework of man's eternal search for meaning in life. The important aim is to make one's own religion understandable to others in order to avoid religious xenophobia. All pupils at confessional schools are compelled to attend such lessons.

Sample
Data were collected at 14 schools evenly spread across the Netherlands – both in large cities and small towns. Eight of the schools were Roman Catholic, and accounted for 579 of respondents (71%). Four schools were Protestant-Christian and accounted for 88 respondents (10%). The other two were either general (74 respondents) or ecumenical (75 respondents). In sum, the majority came from Roman Catholic schools, but this was not what pupils said of themselves. 316 pupils indicated that they did not belong to any religious community, 374 pupils said they were Catholic and 74 Protestant-Christian, while 25 of the remaining indicated that they belonged to a different religion, but did not specify. The study did not differentiate between native and non-native pupils, and this was not included as one of the demographic questions. The fact that 12 pupils voluntarily indicated that they were Muslim (1 stated Buddhist and 1 Hindu) does tell us that non-Christian belief systems were also represented in the sample. The average age was 17 and the random sample included 57% girls and 43% boys. Most of the pupils were in the last phase of the HAVO (Higher General Secondary Education) (46%) and VWO (Pre-University Education) (43%), the higher tracks in Dutch secondary education.

The German school-system and the sample

The German school system differs structurally from the one in the Netherlands. Today, 94% of all schools in Germany are state schools and 6% are private schools. However, the general tendency favours private schools. The number of state schools has dropped by 10% during recent years and the number of private schools has risen accordingly (http://www.bildungsserver.de/). The two major churches, the Roman Catholic and the Protestant, are responsible for 80% of all private schools in Germany, though all schools are subject to state supervision. Since Germany has a federal structure, supervision is administered through the ministries of education associated with the 16 states. Private schools are also required to adjust their curriculum to the respective state's syllabi.

Religious Education is a regular subject in all German schools. Usually, Roman Catholic and Protestant children receive their lessons from their respective teachers at the same time. Religious Education is a "res mixta" in Germany since it is subject to state laws as well as church guidelines. The respective church is responsible for the actual teaching (learning in religion). The German constitution states that Religious Education should be in line with the guidelines of the respective religious denominations. On the one hand, Religious Education is not in any way a proclamation by the church – it is pedagogically justified as are all other subjects. On the other hand, denominational theology, as taught at the university, is the basis for teaching. Thus the churches are (in accordance with the state) free to determine the characteristics of the curriculum. Teachers at state schools are employed by the state. However, they also need the permission of the respective church (Mission canonica or vocation) to teach religion. Pupils 14 years of age and older can opt out of Religious Education classes, but they must take an alternative subject, either Ethics or Philosophy. Some 5% to 10% of pupils decide in favour of this option. Given the rising number of non-

Christian pupils and the general process of secularisation, the issue of multi-cultural Religious Education has been repeatedly discussed in public discourse. However, the confessional approach is still favoured by the majority in Germany. There are currently efforts underway to establish Islamic Religious Education, parallel to Christian confessional Religious Education. There was a debate pertaining to Religious Education after German unification. Some eastern German states did not want to follow the West German model due to the rather low number of Christians (20% Protestants and 5% Catholics). Thus different regulations were agreed upon.

In Germany, the study took place in 53 schools (Gymnasium – highest track in secondary edeucation) in 5 western and 2 eastern German cities. A total of 1925 individuals participated in 2002. The questionnaire was given to pupils in grades 10 and 11. The average age here was 17, similar to the Netherlands. The majority (n=1470) of those surveyed declared that they belonged to a Church or religious community, while about a quarter (n=418) of those surveyed indicated they did not. The largest religious group was Catholic (n=954), followed by Lutherans (n=463). A small minority of those surveyed indicated they were Muslim (n=36), 13 described themselves as Orthodox, and less than 5 people indicated they belonged to another religious community. In the German sample, 54% were girls and 46% boys. It is obvious that German respondents from the east were less likely to have a religious affiliation than those from the west.

Both samples were part of a larger study, involving 10 countries with a total sample size of 9852. Various data from this international survey were published earlier (see. Ziebertz/Kay, 2005; 2006).

Concepts

The main focus of this contribution is on the attitude of young people to religious and cultural pluralism. Several research instruments were used in our empirical study, and here we will focus on three scales (plurality; relationship with religions; xenophobia). Each of these three scales has specific references to plurality: to cultural aspects, religious aspects as well as attitudes relating to migrants and xenophobia. First, we shall analyse these scales individually and subsequently ask to what extent different attitudes can be explained by gender and Church membership.

Religious and cultural plurality

We utilized a scale with 12 items in our study, in which pupils responded to three reactions to plurality. First, a reaction in which plurality is greeted as a positive contribution to society; second, a negative reaction in which plurality is connected with insecurity and unrest, and third a neutral position that views plurality as not having much impact on individual and collective life (whether there is actual diversity or not). Plurality was given both a cultural and religious dimension in these items. Together, the cultural and religious dimensions formed a reliable scale, so differentiation between both contextual aspects was not necessary.

In this article we will focus on three representative items. A positive attitude is reflected by agreement with the statement: "It is good that there are so many different convictions in our society". A negative attitude is reflected by: "The many different religions and convictions in our society bring unrest and tensions with them". A neutral attitude is reflected by: "The fact that there are so many religions in the Netherlands/Germany does not make a difference."

Relationship between the religions

Valuing plurality is a problem for most religions. Religions like Judaism, Islam and Christianity contain exclusivity demands relating to 'the Truth' and the nature of God. Recognizing plurality implies at least acknowledging the existence of alternative interpretations, even if one dismisses them.[1]

The concept of *exclusivity* has been operationalized as "denominational" for our study. Items included: "my religion contains the one, true light of redemption", "the only way to true salvation is revealed to mankind in my religion". *Inclusivity* refers to a "mono-religious" approach, and is operationalized by items such as "compared to other religions, my religion contains the supreme salvation", "Compared to my religion, other religions contain only part of the truth". The *equality* concept embraces the "multi-religious" approach. Items include: "Religions are equal to each other, they are all directed at the same truth", "all religions are equally valuable, they are different paths to the same salvation". The last concept can be referred to as *"inter-religious"*. Items are "the way to real salvation can only be found in a dialogue between religions", "before finding real redemption, one must enter into dialogue with different religions". The full scale, which has been used in various studies since 1994, contains 16 items, whereby every four items together represent a concept (see also Ziebertz, 2005b; Ziebertz/Kay, 2006).

Xenophobia

Xenophobia and fear of strangers is not a modern phenomenon. But xenophobia has a modern face that sometimes takes on ugly characteristics, such as when prejudice is openly voiced against migrants, or when more serious hate crimes take place. Xenophobia provides a third access to the issue of plurality in our study. The stranger, represented by fellow non-native citizens, is a concrete manifestation of plurality, in which other lifestyles, appearances, customs and religion are made visible and become part of our awareness. Specific references to xenophobia were contained on a 10-item scale, published by Nurmi (1998). The scale was adapted for our purposes in the study. Together, the 10 items formed a one-dimensional reliable scale.

Correlation of the pluralism attitude with gender and Church membership

After we analyze each scale, they will be connected with two background variables. Because of space limitations, we shall focus on gender and Church membership

Empirical Findings

Cultural and religious plurality

The question here is what young people think about cultural and religious plurality. Do they see it as a problem or a benefit? Does it lead to confusion about one's own beliefs and values? Does it not really matter to people how much plurality there is in a cultural and religious

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[1] There has been some movement in this area. During the 2nd Vatican Council, the Catholic Church adopted the position that there are other ways to heaven than through the Catholic Church. It was conceded that there can be a genuine search for God in other religions and that people *in* other religions can go to heaven, but not *through* these religions. In this respect, a Christian exclusivity demand has been maintained. These two aspects can be referred to as exclusivity and inclusivity (Ziebertz 2005a). These positions are more easily placed within a religion than outside it.

sense?

------------------Insert Table 1 here-----------

The findings (see Table 1) show that Dutch youths are somewhat more positive than negative about plurality. "Somewhat", because there is only mild agreement with the statements which contain a positive evaluation of plurality and the negative statements are neither disputed nor disapproved of. This is somewhat different in Germany. There is more approval of the positively connoted items and also the neutral position. Negative statements about cultural and religious plurality are weakly rejected. Thus the attitude of Dutch youths towards plurality is less positive than among their German peers.

The relationship between religions

-------------------Insert Table 2 here----------------

The analysis of data (see Table 2) reveals interesting national and comparative findings. Dutch youths show mild agreement with only one model: the multi-religious one. The other three are rejected - the denominational religious model is rejected the most. German youths also agree most with the multi-religious model and even more so than the Dutch. They are rather undecided about the inter-religious model, but the mono-religious and denominational-religious models are clearly rejected – more so than among the Dutch. This finding seems to show that truth claims by religious organizations are not appreciated by young people. There appears to be a general attitude that religions are equal when it comes to their claims and character. The standard deviations are not particularly high indicating that the deviating opinions might only apply to a minority. The difference between the in-group variability found among the Dutch versus German youth is striking (0.8 versus 1.55). Part of the reason could be that German youth are taking a strong oppositional stance to a view they are confronted with more regularly in Germany than in the Netherlands. Since the Netherlands is more secular, young people are less likely to be confronted with questions about their beliefs and have to defend themselves.

Xenophobia

-------------------Insert Table 3 here----------------

The data analyses reveal (see Table 3) that there are considerable differences between Dutch and German youth. The Dutch are much more willing than the Germans to agree with items that measure xenophobia (Dutch mean = 3.13, German mean = 2.55). Dutch youths slightly approved of the statements that were critical of migrants while German youths clearly rejected them. Seven individual items found support among the Dutch sample, but only three among the German sample. One can conclude that there is greater reservation among the Dutch with respect to migrants than among the Germans. Standard deviation scores on the items are above 1.00 and reach a top value of 1.33. This shows polarization in the responses.

Connection between plurality, relationship between religions and xenophobia

It can be assumed that attitudes towards plurality are related to xenophobia and to the relationships between religions. Fear of strangers is connected to a fear of 'the unknown' and

'the different'. It also suggests therefore that Xenophobia is connected with a negative attitude to plurality.

------------(insert Table 4 here)-------------

Data analysis (see Table 4) shows that level of xenophobia correlates highly with attitudes towards plurality. Those who view plurality in positive terms reject xenophobia, and vice versa. Also, those who have a neutral view of plurality are not xenophobic. However, the value judgements of those who reject plurality are weaker in strength than those who advocate plurality. The differences between Dutch and German youths are insignificant.

The relationship between perceptions of plurality and 'relationships between religions' is more varied. The denominational and mono-religious models only correlate with (lack of) support for plurality in the German sample. Here, those with a positive attitude to plurality rejects these models and vice versa. The responses of the neutrals are more in line with the plurality advocates. Dutch youth, according to the study, do not link religious exclusivity to issues of plurality. It is possible that they are so unfamiliar with the model of Christian-religious positionalism that they don't know how to connect these with other models.There are some connections when we consider the 'inter' and 'multi' models. These are strongly linked in both the Dutch and German samples to a positive attitude towards plurality..

It must be stressed that those surveyed who have a positive perception of plurality reject xenophobic models and those surveyed with a negative attitude to plurality approve of these models. Those who support notions of plurality reject exclusive claims of truth and those who reject plurality agree with such claims. With respect to the relationship of religions, those with a positive attitude to plurality are more likely to support multi- and inter-religious models. Extremely comprehensible multiple correlations exist between the different models.

Relations with gender and Church membership

Plurality, gender and Church membership

In order to be able to differentiate the foregoing attitudes more clearly, some social-demographic variables were included in the study. We will limit ourselves here to gender differences and Church membership.

There are significant gender differences in attitudes to plurality in the Netherlands. This also applies to religious affiliation (see Table 5). With respect to gender difference, Dutch girls are more positive towards plurality than boys. They are also more likely to support the neutral statements. Dutch boys tend to only agree with the negative statements regarding plurality, and reject both the positive and neutral positions.

Gender plays little or any role in Germany. Church membership, on the other hand, is relevant in two instances. Though both Church members and non-members evaluate plurality quite highly, the strength of support among Church members is somewhat weaker. The same pattern holds for opinions regarding the neutral items. The relations are weak in the Netherlands, though reversed. Those in the Netherlands who are members of a Church are more inclined to support plurality.

----------------------(insert Table 5 here)--------------
Relationship of religions,, gender and Church membership

Significant gender differences exist in both countries regarding attitudes to the relationship of religions (see Table 6) With the exception of the inter-religious model, Dutch girls and boys differentiate themselves in their evaluation of the three remaining models. Girls are more likely to approve the multi-religious model and they are more critical of the denominational model. We basically find the same patterns in Germany, though the attitudes towards the denominational model do not differentiate. Regarding Church membership, there is no difference in the Netherlands between members and non-members. This is somewhat unexpected since one might expect that Church members would be more favourable towards mono-religious and denominational models than non- members. In Germany there are significant differences in two cases between Church members and non-members. Interestingly, Church members are more positively disposed towards the multi-religious model than non-members. This could be due to the fact that the multi-religious model is also seen as pro-religious, here in the sense of religious tolerance, which rejects a superiority claim over another religion or denomination. The difference between both groups is 0.27 points. Differences in attitude with respect to the mono-religious model are considerably less pronounced (Church members are generally somewhat less negative). The question remains why Church membership does not seem to be a predictor in the Netherlands.

--------------------(insert Table 6 here)----------------

Table 7 reveals that in the Netherlands there are gender differences on all 10 items that measure xenophobic attitudes, but only in 6 cases in Germany. Church membership only leads to significant attitude differences on 3 items in the Netherlands, but in 9 cases in Germany. Among Dutch youths there is an unambiguous and clear gender separation: Boys are more likely to support xenophobic statements across the board. Gender differences are less pronounced among German youths, but the patterns are similar

With respect to Church membership, we find two rather small differences in the Netherlands: Church members are (slightly) more likely to support xenophobic statements than non-members. This is also the case in Germany. Can one interpret this result as an indication that Church members more often belong to a socially conservative central layer of society, in which a multi-cultural society is not desired?

-------------------(insert Table 7 here)-------------------

Answering the research questions

We shall now summarize the results of the data analysis. The first question concerned the attitudes of those surveyed on issues of cultural and religious plurality. We were able to show that most youths are somewhat positive towards cultural and religious plurality. The German sample was more positive than the Dutch one, however. Secondly, we examined attitudes towards 'the relationship between religions' and were able to show that overall the Dutcjh sample only approved the multi-religious equality model, in Germany the inter-religious model was also approved of. These attitudes were more pronounced and clear-cut among German youths.. The third question concerned xenophobia. The level of support for xenophobic statements was significantly higher among Dutch youth (m=3.13 versus m=2.5). This was a striking difference. Fourthly the study examined the connection between plurality, relations between religions and xenophobia. There was a clear connection: the more positive the attitude towards plurality, the less xenophobic. There is also more support for the inter-

religious and multi-religious models. The more negative towards plurality, the more support for mono- or denominational-religious models. On the whole, there are more distinctive correlations among German youth than Dutch youth. Finally, the data reveal that in the Netherlands gender is more related to attitudinal differences, while in Germany it is Church membership. In general, however, in both contexts girls are more supportive of plurality and less xenophobic than boys. Church members tend to be more reserved in their appreciation of plurality, are slightly more xenophobic and are the least negative towards the mono-religious model.

Discussion

The aim of this paper was to identify attitudinal differences between young people from Germany and the Netherlands. We formulated three expectations for this purpose. Firstly we expected that the Dutch would be more open because of their tradition of dealing with religious and cultural plurality and would have less fear of strangers than would be the case in Germany. Secondly we assumed that girls and boys would be different in their attitudes - boys more receptive to a narrower, more closed and conservative-orientated attitude. Thirdly, we assumed that because of Christian commensalisms with 'strangers' and those who have been deprived of their rights (Schillebeeckx, 1974), Christian youth would have a more open attitude to plurality and outsiders.

Only some of our expectations were confirmed. Dutch youth, especially boys, have a difficult time coping with religious and cultural diversity. They also have a more negative attitude than Germans towards migrants. Church membership does not seem to impact Dutch attitudes, while this is the case for German youth. How do we explain these findings?

Our empirical study took place after the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn had been murdered. Though his death seemed to be unrelated to his attitudes towards societal and cultural plurality, there is a connection because Fortuyn had described Islam on several occasions as a backwards/retarded religion. There has been a hardening of social, cultural and political relations since then. The results of our study show that attitudes of youth surveyed in the Netherlands reflect the language of their parents and that they use the arguments found in the public sphere. Especially among boys, a certain level of intolerance for the 'other' seems to have set in.

Religious affiliation among these youth appears to have little influence on their attitudes. For most youths, Churches as an institution disappeared a long time ago from public life. Youth rarely encounter Christian religious views as such, also not is school since the compulsory subject Philosophy of Life especially aims at communication between religions, rather than reflecting on one's own religion. One has to ask whether that kind of education, focused on dialogue and communication, neglects one's own religion/philosophy of life. Because is it not true that one can only understand and respect another person's culture and religion by knowing one's own?

Many have become familiar with images of neo-Nazis in Germany in recent years. Increased visibility of the extreme right has aroused fears of a rebirth of old forms of intolerance and persecution. Seen in this context, the results are certainly reassuring. The majority of German youth clearly approve of a cultural and pluralistic society. They also tend to favour religious pluralism, reject exclusivity demands and approve of the search for balance between religions. This applies even stronger for Church members than for others. Xenophobic statements are clearly rejected, but as is the case in the Netherlands, males tend to be more critical of

migrants than females. During the last decades there has been a growing interest in intercultural education and the discipline of RE at universities has supported this development by strengthening inter-religious learning. Intercultural education without a focus on the religious dimension misses a key component of human existence. Therefore, interdisciplinary collaboration between religious educators and pedagogues is necessary. Our data do not allow us to draw conclusions about how much the concept of RE in Germany and the Netherlands influences student attitudes towards migrants. Critics of confessional religious education in Germany comment that it includes indoctrination and can lead to a greater degree of rejecting the 'Other'. Our data, limited as they are, do not show this.

In some ways, we might have expected to find Dutch results in Germany and vice versa. Perhaps at some point in the past the results might have been reversed. The findings presented here show the value of a comparative perspective, which forces us to reflect on our pre-conceptions and realize that societies do change and so do the predominant attitudes.

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Tables

Table 1: Religious and Cultural Plurality

	Netherlands		Germany	
	Mw	sd	Mw	sd
Positive Attitude	3.22	.83	3.77	.75
Neutral Attitude	3.09	.72	3.28	.76
Negative Attitude	3.03	.75	2.96	.67

N=816 (NL), N=1907 (D); Values: 1=Rejection; 5=Approval; Mw=mean value; sd=Standard deviation

Table 2: Relations between Religions

	Netherlands		Germany	
	Mw	sd	Mw	sd
Multi-religious	3.10	.79	3.35	.99
Inter-religious	2.68	.69	3.03	.91
Mono-religious	2.45	.91	1.98	.97
Denominational religious	2.29	.90	1.80	.97

N=816 (NL), N=1907 (D); Values: 1=Rejection; 5=Approval; Mw=mean value; sd=Standard deviation

Table 3: Xenophobia

	Netherlands		**Germany**	
	Mw	sd	Mw	sd
Total scale mean value	3,13	.80	2,55	.87
1. Foreigners, who commit a crime in the Netherlands/Germany should be deported immediately.	4.01	1.15	3.57	1.27
2. Foreign nationals take work from the Dutch/ Germans, because they work for less money.	2.82	1.15	2.33	1.21
3. Many foreigners in our country have it too good.	3.08	1.21	2.61	1.27
4. Foreigners who don't want to fit in have not lost anything here .	3.93	1.10	3.22	1.28
5. The Dutch/German economy would be a lot better if there weren't so many foreigner people living here .	2.96	1.18	2.30	1.13
6. Dutch/Germans should not marry foreign nationals.	2.00	1.15	1.40	0.79
7. Most politicians in the Netherlands/Germany care more about foreigners than they do about the average Dutch/Germans.	3.26	1.14	2.46	1.22
8. There are simply too many foreign nationals in the Netherlands/Germany.	3.24	1.29	2.55	1.33
9. Foreign people should not behave so provokingly in public.	3.56	1.15	3.18	1.29
10. I try to keep as far away from foreign young people as possible.	2.49	1.21	1.93	1.09

N=816 (NL), N=1907 (D); Values: 1=Rejection; 5=Approval; Mw=mean value; sd=Standard deviation

Table 4: Connection between the areas of plurality

	Attitude to plurality					
	Positive		Neutral		Negative	
	NL	D	NL	D	NL	D
Xenophobia	-.38	-.40	-.19	-.13	.33	.36
Denominational rel.		-.27		-.14		.20
Mono religious		-.26		-.14		.21
Inter-religious	.33	.35	.21	.11		
Multi religious	.41	.35	.34	.20		-.11

Correlations: only significant values greater than .10 with p = .001

Table 5: Religious and cultural plurality, according to gender and Church membership

	The Netherlands				Germany			
	Boys	Girls	Church member	Non-member	Boys	Girls	Church member	Non-member
Attitude to Plurality								
Positive	2.93	3.43					3.75	3.86
Negative	3.18	2.92	3.02	3.05				
Neutral	2.96	3.16					3.56	3.66
Scale values: 1=low; 5=high								

Only significant values, p < .05; mean values: 1=Rejection; 5=Approval

Table 6: Relations between religions, according to gender and Church membership

	The Netherlands				Germany			
	Boys	Girls	Church member	Non-member	Boys	Girls	Church member	Non-member
Multi-religious	2.96	3.20			3.21	3.47	3.42	3.15
Inter-religious					2.99	3.05		
Mono-religious	2.59	2.36					1.97	1.92
Confessional religious	2.44	2.20						
Scale values: 1=low; 5=high								

Only significant values, p < .05; Mean values: 1=Rejection; 5=Approval

Table 7: Xenophobia, according to gender and Church membership

	The Netherlands					Germany			
	Boys	Girls	Church member	Non-member		Boys	Girls	Church member	Non-member
1. Deport criminal non-nationals immediately	4.32	3.79	4.02	4.00		3.77	3.40	3.61	3.46
2. Foreigners take work away from natives	3.05	2.65						2.31	2.40
3. Foreigners have it too good	3.33	2.89				2.70	2.53	2.65	2.49
4. Whoever doesn't fit in should go	4.07	3.85				3.39	3.08	3.29	3.01
5. A better economy without foreign nationals	3.14	2.81							
6. Don't marry foreigners	2.35	1.71						1.40	1.38
7. Politicians worry too much about foreign nationals	3.38	3.19						2.48	2.43
8. There are too many foreigners in the country	3.62	2.96				2.68	2.45	2.60	2.41
9. Foreign people should not provoke	3.90	3.31				3.35	3.03	3.23	3.00
10. Keep me away from foreigners	2.91	2.19	2.52	2.48		2.13	1.76	1.96	1.81
Scale values: 1=low; 5=high									

Only significant values, p < .05; Mean values: 1=Rejection; 5=Approval.