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**“Rediscovering Europe”:
New Zealand Public, Elite and Mass Media Perceptions of the EU”:
Launching the Project**

The aim of this paper is to offer an initial overview of the research project “Rediscovering Europe”: New Zealand Public, Elite and Mass Media Perceptions of the European Union” carried out in National Centre for Research on Europe, University of Canterbury, Christchurch. The project’s goal is to identify, measure and raise public awareness of the European Union (EU) within New Zealand. To achieve this goal the following objectives are to be met: first, to identify and expose the images of the EU endorsed through the New Zealand print and electronic media; second, to identify and investigate a wide-range perceptions and attitudes towards the EU and individual European countries at both elite (political and economic) and broad public levels; third, to propose public policy recommendations for refining and enhancing these perceptions and attitudes within New Zealand society and for informing policy-makers: finally, to disseminate the findings through publications, seminars, conferences, workshops both for academics and decision-makers.

The scope of the research encompasses perspectives on the ties of the EU and New Zealand in the field of trading relations, the euro prospects, agricultural policies, cultural affinities, political and security interests, and the implications of EU enlargement.

The relevance of the study originates from the lack of systematically collected information about the content of the most important sources of information about the EU for a majority of New Zealand citizens. In addition, there has been no previous sociological community research on NZ public and elite opinions about the EU. Consequently, there has been no studies comparing media content about the EU with relevant sociological investigations data.

The nature of the project is multidisciplinary -- the project consolidates experts and expertise in political science, European studies, sociology, media studies, journalism, and linguistics. It also draws on cooperation between the scholars from the University of Canterbury, as well as from other national and international universities.

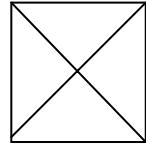
Identity Studies

Mr. McKinnon, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand, in his speech “European Union – New Zealand Partnership Briefings” in 1996 said: «New Zealanders looked for a question: Who are we? Where do we belong? I am not sure we have a complete answer yet. But we are well on the way». Echoing this idea, the project’s goal as stated before leads us to consider the whole project to be a contribution to the New Zealand identity studies -- countries’ identities are affirmed, contested and intersected by local, national, and transnational contexts and affiliations (Boer 2000). According to B. West (West 2000, 50), the members of any given nation see themselves as somehow similar to each other and different from everyone else in the world; without this conception nations would not exist. With this caveat, the interaction with the outside world, namely the acceptance or rejection of “the other”, that allows polities to develop a sense of national uniqueness (Prizel 1998).

The awareness of differentiation is the main feature of the temporary world. We are conscious of ourselves for others and because of others. The mental binary opposition “I vs. The Other” derives from distinguishing between the interior and the exterior of one’s body, with the skin as boundary one of human system» (Turner 1994). Together with other oppositions, such as “far and close”, “up and down”, “objects and actions”, the opposition “I vs. The Other” has been observed in the archaic picture of the world of our ancestors (Levi-Straus 1962). This system served human beings to survive, to “attribute meaning directly susceptible to pressures of fitness” (Turner 1994). Later those basic oppositions were projected onto the abstract invisible worlds, identifying their categorizations.

Intuitively, a nation identifies a complex nature of its identity – how a nation sees itself, how a nation sees other nations, how other nations see it, how it sees itself being seen by other nations (also known as «self-images» -- the attitudes one has towards its own cultural values ; and «hetero-images» -- the attitudes towards the other (Leerssen 1998)). Such foci actually can be analysed in terms of the semiotic model suggested by French semioticians Algirdas Julien Greimas and Joseph Courtes (1986) and known as a “semiotic square”. This model, being universal one, can be applied to analyse identity construction (see Sachno, 1991; Chaban, 1997 (1), 1997(2)). The apexes of the square in our case are formed by the meanings 1) “We about Ourselves”, 2) “They about Themselves” (in regard to Us) 3) “We about Them”, and 4) “They about Us”.

We about Ourselves



They about Themselves

They about Us

We about Them

The scope of located research falling under the general rubric “We about Us” from 1944 to 2001 articulates the New Zealanders’ self-image as the one that includes themes of “isolation”, “feeling of farawayness” and “unimportance” (see Fairburn 1944; Duff 1956; Stone 1959; Morton 1969; McLauchlan 1976; Catley 2001). Nevertheless, the New Zealanders are involved with the outside world, and are a part of the general life of the world. The benefits resulting from the involvement with the outside world have always been seen. Thus, the studies of hetero-images (“Others about NZ”, “Others about Themselves with regard to NZ”, and “NZ about Others”) are the task at hand.

The apex “We about the Other” is an important part of co-constructing the identity since it affects the self-perception and formation of identity from within. Every country has a set of “Others” against whom the nation is identifying itself, either in opposition or in alliance. Only some Others are useful when it comes to imagining the national Self (see West 2000). The New Zealand set of “Others” supposedly includes Australia, Europe, Asia, the South Pacific, North America, South Africa (see Fairburn 1944; Duff 1956; Stone 1959; Morton 1969; McLauchlan 1976; Catley 2001; Henderson 2002). We may imply that there is a degree of “Otherness” (the sense of the “Other” generally intensifies as linguistic, cultural and racial differences increase (Prizel 1998, 8)), and it would be worth an effort to model the hierarchy of “Others” for New Zealand in the further research.

The changing profile of New Zealand society, the presumed weakening of traditional ties to the UK as well as New Zealand’s discussion of it’s possible Asian “identity” (articulated in the 90s) (McKinnon 1996; Hendrikson 2002), all serve to underline the necessity of empirical analysis of contemporary New Zealand perceptions of Europe as a significant “Other”. In April 2002, Asia 2000 Foundation conducted the survey on the importance of regions to New Zealand’s futures (*Asia 2000 Foundation Research*). According to its findings, 79% of surveyed New Zealanders see Europe as an important region for NZ future. This number grew from 54% in 1997.

Europe and the EU are becoming significant “Other” for many nations in the world -- currently Europe and the EU are involved into complex political and economic

matters that rank among the most significant changes on the continent since World War II. Given the complexity and controversy of these changes, it is important for NZ to clarify the contemporary relationships with Europe – arguably New Zealand’s new dominant political and cultural counterpart. Mr. McKinnon, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, underlined “the continuing importance of Europe in New Zealand scheme of things” and assured that “Europe remains very important to us, ... and the Government continues to see our links with Europe as being so important” (1996).

Overview:

As we stated on the outset of this paper, there are four main objectives to reach the goal of the project. Those objectives outline three respective angles of research agenda: first, New Zealand mass media texts analysis; second, New Zealand public opinion survey of perceptions and attitudes towards the EU, and, third, the interviews with country’s elite representatives. Those angles involve different tools of analysis and invoke different evidence, thus, in this paper, I will elaborate on each perspective separately. However, the results of every part of the project will be consolidated in the final outcomes.

i. Media Analysis

We are surrounded by and immersed in thoroughly textualized and visually oriented societies (Boer 2000). Today’s media in its combined influence of its various components: print, broadcasting, film, video and the Internet reach millions of recipients in a short time. It has an ultimate power of forming and imposing social representations (conventional ideas and consensually validated group beliefs and attitudes) in a community. For the purposes of our research, we define mass media as those media which make available a wide range of messages and meanings related to the construction of reality through a variety of channels of communication (print and electronic) (see Marshall and Kingsbury 1996; Bignell 1997).

The focus of our attention is news texts on the EU and European affairs in the print, radio and television sectors. The pop culture media messages (advertising messages, entertainment television, and cinema), although acknowledged, are excluded from the analysis, as they involve different dimensions of reality construction. In our investigation, “news” are viewed as not just facts, but the “representations produced in language” (Bignell 1997, 81), not only the reports of events but also to such related

content as news analysis in newspapers, TV and radio current affairs programs based on events that have made or are making news (Marshall and Kingsbury 1996, 38).

News carries the visions of the world, and news coverage of foreign affairs has been found to influence public opinion more strongly than news about domestic affairs, where citizens may have a larger contextual knowledge to draw on (see Page and Shapiro 1992; Gavin 1998; de Vreese 2001). Consequently, citizens across New Zealand rely on media news for information about the foreign affairs in general, and European Union and European integration in particular. The rationale for examining aggregated news on the EU is the belief that gross exposure is associated with reception and knowledge acquisition (McGuire 1986).

Sources:

Since we should consider the visibility of the EU in mainstream news that attracts a large audience, the media texts will be collected from the print and electronic media sources with a high rate of circulation and a high public exposure.

Print Sources:

The print media is concrete and tangible. Although often quickly disposed of, it has a permanent and retrievable quality. Once obtained, the print medium is available for references on numerous occasions, and it can be read selectively. Information presented and read in print form requires the active participation of the reader in the interpretation of the linguistically highly structured information and is, therefore, likely to demonstrate a high retention rate (Marshall and Kingsbury 1996, 57, 61).

Statistics shows that more people in New Zealand are buying newspapers than a year ago -- most metropolitan dailies have put on circulation over the past year (*The National Business Review*, 17 May, 2002). *The Press* (15 May, 2002) states that for six months of 2002, the country's largest newspaper, *The New Zealand Herald*, increased its circulation 0.4% to 210,841; *The Press*, the second largest daily newspaper and the largest in the South Island, has increased its circulation 1.9% to 92,713 daily sales; *Dominion* grew 3.1% to 70,565; *The Waikato Times* is up 1.7.% and now averages 41,121 daily sales; and *The Timaru Herald* increased 2.1% to 14,308. Circulation is also on the rise for *Otago Daily Times*, *the Nelson Mail* and *Daily News*. For these reasons, the texts from the following print media will be investigated: *The New Zealand Herald*, *The Press*, *Dominion*, *The Waikato Times*, *The Timaru Herald*, *The Sunday Star Times*, *The Nelson Mail*, *The Evening Post*, *The Southland Times*, *The Daily News*,

and the magazine *The National Business Review*. All texts are located in the electronic archives available through the Newtext Database, University of Canterbury Library.

Electronic Sources:

The electronic media including both radio and television, is transient, ephemeral and (with the exception of external recording devices) irretrievable (Marshall and Kingsbury 1996, 57). Their news agenda cannot be browsed through, rather, it must be absorbed by the audience as it is delivered, while the audience is left with no option about the sequence in which the program is presented.

a. radio:

Radio is no longer the centre of attention in discussions of media power. However, the advantage of radio is that it can be listened to while attending to other matters (a “companion” status (Hobson 1980)). Radio news, being unrecoverable, requires its audience to listen to it actively in order to make sense of what is being said (Marshall and Kingsbury 1996, 58-59, 62). The provision of information through radio is technically and stylistically straightforward, it is frequent and easily updated. Radio news bulletins tend to be kept short. There are also few of them, meaning that it is only the most “newsworthy” information which is broadcasted.

For the purposes of our project, I intend to analyse *Radio NZ* National Radio Morning Report texts, the station flagship morning news and current affairs programme. Radio New Zealand is the public broadcasting organization serving listeners throughout New Zealand, and National Radio broadcasts present the most comprehensive and investigative news and current affairs available on New Zealand's airwaves (see www.radionz.co.nz).

b. television

Between radio and television there is an obvious difference that radio acts solely within the audio context, while television employs both sound and vision. The highly constructed and reconstructed nature of television news reports tends to disconnect the television report from both its original contexts, and on the part, of the audience, from identifiable or comprehensible experience (Goldman and Rajagopal 1991, 9). Thus, in television viewing, there is a low level of audience involvement and high level of passivity, especially in comparison to reading (Barwise and Ehrenberg 1988). Since television plays a “central role in culture” (Salwen & Driscoll 1995, 430) and appears to be the most powerful medium, TV news draws the largest audience. Taking into

account modern cultural habits and acknowledging the importance of television, news texts from *NZ TV 1* and *NZ TV 3* evening news programmes will be analysed.

Time Frame:

The sampling period will extend from year 2000 till year 2004. This time frame will provide enough data for a comparative perspective in time. The follow up studies could be initiated to study NZ and the EU perceptions before 2000, or after 2004.

Media Texts Focuses:

The sampled texts will focus on news about the EU, about Europe, and about individual European countries (both present members of the EU and the enlargement candidates). The relation of the researched texts to other media stories and to each other will be examined, as well as their position in the media source (e.g., central or peripheral).

Topics Covered:

The topics covered in the media texts will be enlisted. The expectation is to encounter news dealing exclusively with EU affairs, with domestic and economic news with a European dimension, and with news about individual European countries. The comparative analysis of the predominant topics in the print and electronic media will be undertaken. The character of coverage (e.g., “peaking” during the key events or on-going) will be addressed. We will also purport to determine the preferred by a majority of New Zealanders method for receiving information about the EU (print or electronic). Proactive or reactive attitudes of the NZ media in setting agenda of covering news will be considered.

External and internal factors:

Finally, we should bear in mind various external and internal to journalism factors that influence the news agenda (Shoemaker and Reese 1996; T. van Dijk 1996; Marshall and Kingsbury 1996; de Vreese 2001). External factors include the political system of a country and the political circumstances at the time this text was written. In general, images formed in media texts can be positive or negative in their valorisation, depending on the political circumstances: countries, which present a threat of political or economic rivalry, are usually described in negative terms. Internal factors are the editorial policy of news organization, its organizational, technical and legal constraints (internal political economy, deadlines, etc.), the journalistic efforts invested in covering an issue/event (in terms of staff and research), the attitude and perception of authors conveyed through their reports, etc. (Marshall and Kingsbury 1996, 44; Vreese 2000,

21). A certain unavoidable degree of subjectivity that accompanies the internal factors is the main differences between an “image” and objective information.

Methodology:

There are different approaches to the analysis of the media texts. I will seek to explicate by what means particular categorizations about the EU features took place. For that, I will focus on the “micro-level” of shared knowledge (Lau, Chiu, and Lee 2001, 352), which occurs when individuals represent their personal evaluative beliefs, e.g. about specific events, in their models while building the shared reality between themselves (to point up, the social representations produced and distributed through mass media are viewed as the “macro-level phenomena”(Ibid.)). My research interest is models by New Zealanders that are routinely constructed to understand events in Europe and EU, or political discourses about these events. Those models supposedly have a “strategically applicable schematic form” (van Dijk 1996). However, the construction of those representations, being a routine mental process, is not reserved for special purposes, and it escapes controlled and deliberate analysis by an average news consumer.

I adopted an interdisciplinary approach of «cognitive social science» (Turner 2001) in which cognitive science and social science are brought together under the umbrella of the study of meaning, reason, concept change, and concept formation. Essential for the intended approach is the integration of scholarship on the subjects of media and political studies, discourse analysis, pragmatics, semiotics, cognitive linguistics and the theory of stereotypes and myth formation. Accordingly, the articulated research methods include the analysis of prototypical categories via quantitative and qualitative tools; reconstruction of mental spaces, which involves such conceptual models as propositions, frames, scenarios and scripts; the application of cognitive semantics tools of conceptual metaphors and blending; and the use of semiotic models of the Greimas square and Necker cube gestalt (see Greimas and Curte, 1982; Gandelman, 1988; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lakoff 1987, 1991, 1993; Turner 1996, 1998, 2001; Turner and Fauconnier 1995, 1997, 1998, 2002).

Based on the propositions found out in publications and texts of broadcasted media, research will reveal the image of the EU, Europe and individual European countries. Those images could be regarded as political concepts based on the knowledge representation structures. The images result from processing the information of two kinds, the first one being related to ontological facts (the real life situations relevant for

political discourse), and the second one being related to axiology (the assessment of facts that conditions the political discourse illocution). The net models proposed to structure the ontological information within several conceptual fields: e.g. politics, economics, culture, etc. (they correspond to the predominant topics which are to be established). The prevailing majority of the media texts about the EU will present the Union through a certain input. Given that a high frequency ontological information accounts for the "prototype effect" of any concept (Gardenfors 1998, 25), I will establish the prototype zones for the EU's image representation.

The axiological (pragmatic) facets of the fields considered will be determined by evaluation attached to the literal and metaphorical categorizations specific for every conceptual field. The ultimate model that includes both the arrangement of facts and their assessment was regarded as an ideological script, which prescribes the perception of the EU image to the New Zealand reader.

Public Opinion Survey

According to Christ'l De Landtsheer (1991, 310), the more we study the messages given by the mass media, the greater the chance of getting the correct information about the social context of its users. Even though audiences hold considerable veto power in relation to media -- they can turn off a particular program or stop buying a particular publication (Marshall and Kingsbury 1996, 36), previous research has revealed that general public is more or less passive target of political discourse text or talk, sometimes uncritically soaking ideologies and stereotyped images of the social world (see Wodak 1987; Popkin and Dimmock 1997; van Dijk 1998). Citizens rarely engage in reasoning about public policy, and are moved mainly by media and elite influences. As the result, they often do not have the knowledge and beliefs needed to challenge the discourses or information they are exposed to. Guided by this assumption, we will attempt to appeal to the New Zealanders' knowledge on the world (on the EU in particular) and identify it. To pursue this objective, we will conduct the national survey of the nature, content and shifts of New Zealanders' public opinion towards the EU.

The relevance of running the survey as a core part of the project "Rediscovering Europe" is anchored in fact that there is no existing body of social research data that explores this issue within New Zealand. We acknowledge the fact that survey data entails the human factor, thus, has a subjective bias. However, the survey method still

remains the only way to get information about knowledge, attitudes and satisfaction from a broad public in a systematic way.

Methodology:

The envisioned method of question delivery is the 15-minute long structured telephone interview. We should perhaps point out that the mode of delivery imposes certain pressures: for example, you can't gauge people's reactions through visual clues, and it is often difficult to establish a relaxed rapport with a distant and disembodied voice (Deacon & al. 1999). But it is worth emphasising that the telephone run survey is considered to be the most cost efficient way to run survey with the highest response rate.

Representative Sample:

A representative sample for national size survey constitutes 1000 participants aged 18 and over. The following variables will be featured to produce the proportionate stratified sample in relation to demographic characteristics such as age, gender, educational, ethnicity, social background, location (urban versus rural), and years of living in NZ. A random sample of telephone numbers will be selected.

Design:

We anticipate that approximately half of the questions will be of pre-coded nature and the other half of an open ended format which will require the coding of responses. The pilot exercise to test the questionnaire prior to starting fieldwork proper will be undertaken. We expect four-six weeks for interviewing, and four-six weeks to provide a SPSS data-file and analyse the results. As for the actual design of the questionnaire, we will consider the achievements of some other surveys designs, e.g., the Questionnaire on the Australia -- EU relationships run by University of Melbourne, and Questionnaire on the NZ – Asia relationships commissioned by Asia 2000 Foundation.

The envisioned principle outcome of the activity is a document identifying, measuring and presenting New Zealand general public opinion towards the European Union and individual European countries will be produced. Public opinion formation will be discussed in the light of the role of news about EU affairs. The survey results will be disseminated through a web publication on the NCRE web site, hard copy publication (a booklet) distributed to national and international universities, and a professional journal publication. The outcomes will be also presented at a research seminar at NCRE.

The developed survey methodology generated as part of the project will contribute to the further sustainable research of the EU image by the NCRE scholars, as well as to the European studies program in New Zealand universities. The results of the activity will contribute to both joint projects in the field and interdisciplinary research.

Interviews of the Elite Representatives

Under the term “elite” we imply “persons with power to affect organizational outcomes individually, regularly and seriously” (Higley, Deacon and Smart 1979, 3). They are the members of intersecting circles that enclose government, parliament and the diplomatic corps representatives, academic theorists, leading corporate figures, and news practitioners. These decision-makers share national power sometimes in alliance with one another, sometimes in competition, but no one group is dominant enough or cohesive enough to justify the term “ruling class” (Marshall and Kingsbury 1996, 28).

We assume that elite and media are closely intertwined. First, elite by definition includes media owners, senior political and economic correspondent, editors and editors-in-chief (with media owners being allied with socio-political elites). Second, elite representatives are highly susceptible to pressures by mass media (“media opinion is to them public opinion” (see Graham White’s interview in Marshall and Kingsbury 1996, 18)). Third, elite itself influences the mass media directly and indirectly through performing stories to cover, as well as urging to include or devoid certain topics in media presentations or to cover a situation in a certain manner. Finally, elite members represent and express their identity as professionals, upper middle/high class, etc., and, being the social group members, they exhibit their shared social representations influenced by media in their turn. Elite also functions in interaction with the broad public – on the one hand, it influences public reasoning, on the other hand, it compels to public’s pressure.

Given the complexity of the elite’s position and role in the society, structured interviews directed to the selected elite members will be undertaken. Intentions and purposes of elites’ attitudes and perceptions towards the EU will be articulated. Although we would expect a considerable diversity of opinions among New Zealand elite in regard to the EU, Europe and individual European countries, nevertheless, the array of opinions is given a prominence in complex textual and contextual analysis of the perceptions and attitudes within NZ community.

Conclusions

Implementation of the project will let take an expansive panoramic view of the contemporary perceptions and attitudes of the European Union, Europe and individual European countries within modern New Zealand society. Data generated by the project will have the direct influence on public policy development through enhancing a more informed consideration and acceptance of different initiatives from the EU and on behalf of New Zealand. This data could also be used as a direct mechanism of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and of the European Commission Delegation to New Zealand. Right now, we are embarking on the project which is in its initial phase.

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<http://www.asia2000.org.nz/about/issues/table1.shtml>

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