



Cultures, Citizenship and Human Rights

Research focus area at Utrecht University

Organisation

Coordinators

- Humanities: Prof. R.L. Buikema
- Law, Economics and Governance: Dr A.C. Buyse
- Social Sciences: Prof. A. Robben

Coordinating Dean

- Prof. Wiljan van den Akker, Humanities

Participating research programmes (with programme leader)

Humanities:

- ICON (Institute for Cultural Inquiry): Gender studies (Buikema), Media and Performance Studies (Bleeker), Musicology (Kügler), Textual Culture (Rigney)
- Research Institute for Philosophy and Religious Studies: Religious Studies (Meyer)
- Research Institute for History and Art History: Cultural History (Van Eijnatten), Medieval Studies (Mostert); Ancient History (Rutgers), Centre for Conflict Studies (Hellema/Demmers)

Law, Economics and Governance:

- Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (Goldschmidt/Buyse)
- Montaigne Centre for Judicial Administration and Conflict Resolution (Hol/Schueler)
- bEUCitizen-FP7-project (Sybe de Vries)

Social Sciences:

- Cultural Anthropology (Robben)
- Interdisciplinary Social Science: European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations (Verkuyten)

Description

1. BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

Focus:

Citizenship is established in a public arena where law and culture interact. It offers a forum where diverging values encounter each other, where culture influences the way human rights are constituted both locally and globally, where the question who belongs, who is protected by the law and whose voice counts, is subject to renegotiation and redefinition using both cultural and legal resources.

The focus area *Cultures, Citizenship and Human Rights* will bring together first-rate scholars from the Humanities, Law and Governance, and the Social Sciences who have a common concern with identifying the cultural factors that are shaping citizenship in Europe today. More insight into the convergence, but also the tensions between the cultural and the legal foundations of citizenship is vital to the understanding of inclusive and resilient societies.

Why now?

- In Europe today, migration, global communication, and transnational integration are calling into question the assumed convergence between cultural and political belonging that underpinned citizenship within the framework of the nation-state.
- New media are facilitating social and cultural participation at local, national and transnational levels; at the same time new media may also be imposing new limitations on possibilities for integration, the exercise of rights, and open debate.
- New developments like community arts, participatory performance and artistic activism take art to public space to engage with issues of cultural and political belonging, integration, and citizenship through artistic processes.
- New forms of social contestation, instrumentalised inter alia through the discourse of human rights and using new media, indicate the erosion of states as privileged sovereign powers but also the interrelated emergence of new formal and informal types of authority and legitimacy, including religious ones, that transcend national boundaries.
- As the Horizon 2020 programme of the European Union shows, this transformation of our cultural environment is crucially important to the future of Europe, which both as an idea and as a practical project faces challenges that range from the crisis of legitimacy to the problems posed by mass migration. We urgently need research into the cultural factors that underlie and limit opportunities for achieving inclusive and robust forms of citizenship.
- Research on citizenship hitherto has been predominantly quantitative. More qualitative and historically-informed research into changing practices and understandings of citizenship is badly needed and calls for new lines of interdisciplinary cooperation.

Research Lines:

CCHR will develop interdisciplinary projects at the intersection of the following three research lines:

- **Mediation:** how have media, past and present, generated patterns of identification, of inclusion and exclusion? How do they produce legitimacy as well as critical reflection? What cultural and media literacies are needed to participate fully in public life? How are the cultural differences arising from migration negotiated in a highly mediated public sphere? What has been the role of the arts in generating and contesting shared narratives?
- **Sovereignty:** how are the borders between the rights of individuals, states, and supranational bodies defined and when do they shift? Do new forms of governance generate new notions and practices of citizenship? Why has a gap emerged between Europe as an institutional project and the willingness of citizens to identify with it? How have cultural habits informed the discourse and exercise of human rights, especially of vulnerable people?
- **Contestation:** through what cultural and legal practices are dissent and claim-making performed? Do the arts have a role to play in channelling contestation? Which cultural factors are involved when (legal) contestation turns into (violent) conflict, and how do human rights fuel and/or channel such contestations? When does collective memory and cultural identity become a divisive issue in the public sphere, and why?

2. INTERDISCIPLINARITY

CCHR brings together a distinctive combination of scholars from the Humanities (media and the arts, gender, religion, history), Law and Governance (human rights, citizenship rights) and the Social Sciences (cultural anthropology, interdisciplinary social science) working at the interdisciplinary crossroads and interfaces of issues related to representation and discourse, sovereignty, migration, cultural diversity, and human rights.

CCHR will develop interdisciplinary projects within and among the three research lines: mediation, sovereignty and contestation. Processes of mediation involve agency, representation, and regulation whose social, cultural and political manifestations are of scholarly interest to all participating research programs. An illustration of such interdisciplinary research focus would be the study of the visual mediation of illegal migration in Europe, and its multiple consequences. What seem to be objective images of migrants crossing the Mediterranean in small boats are pictorial representations with a particular aesthetics and semiotics whose multiple messages are employed by national states, the European Union, and NGOs to bring to public attention either Southern Europe's permeable borders, insufficient surveillance, humanitarian crises, human rights violations or the world's failure to combat poverty and unemployment in nonindustrial societies. The combined analytical efforts of fields of international law, conflict resolution, cultural studies, media studies, and anthropology will raise a different and more comprehensive understanding of the visual mediation of illegal migration than any of the disciplines can by themselves. A similar interdisciplinary approach can be used in the analysis of sovereignty. Citizenship is more than a collection of rights and privileges held by the individual members of a state, but involves cultural and historical interpretations, legal contestation and regulation as well as an active engagement with national, regional and local state institutions about the boundaries of those (implicitly gendered and raced) rights and privileges. Finally, contestation is a foundational process in human development, social interaction, and cultural and norm creation whose study can benefit from an interdisciplinary approach. For example, the consequences of surveillance technologies that monitor people's holiday travel can be analyzed through people's cultural notions of privacy, their transnational social networks, and the legal frameworks that regulate such security practices.

Interdisciplinarity is also realized in the epistemological and methodological approach of the participating research programs. CCHR has a distinctive, although not exclusive, emphasis on qualitative methods and an interpretational approach to the social and cultural world. Individuals are not primarily seen as behaving according to structures, formal organizations and patterned regulations but are understood as actors who create meaning through agency, contestation, and materialization. Such actor-based and artefact-based analyses enable the development of historical and cross-cultural comparisons of ideas, practices and objects, using the expertise about Europe and other regions of the world that exists in the participating research programs of the Humanities, Law and Governance, and the Social Sciences.

3. LINKAGES WITH THE STRATEGIC THEMES OF UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

Cultures, Citizenship and Human Rights (CCHR) relates closely to Utrecht's strategic theme *Institutions*. Two of the subthemes of the Strategic theme *Institutions* are "Institutions for Democratic Governance, Citizenship and Trust." And Equality, Inclusion and social Mobility". Whereas these themes look at what institutions can contribute to open societies, equality and inclusion, the Focus Area emphasizes the diverse roles of citizens themselves in creating open and inclusive societies, at times by *contesting* what institutions want or require from them. This implies a more bottom-up and qualitative analysis. It looks at citizens as active participants in society and culture (*agency*), for example by invoking their human rights through activist or artistic practices. It acknowledges their *diversity* and the role art and culture play. It explicitly analyses the symbolic elements of citizenship (*representation* in various forms of art for example). By approaching citizenship as an essentially contested, gendered and raced concept and from the perspective of cultures in transition, as well as by providing a platform for qualitative methods, CCHR offers an invaluable complement to the research being carried out within *Institutions* and will feed indirectly into its long-term goals.

CCHR also connects, albeit more loosely and not as an issue as such, to the strategic theme of *Youth and Identity*. Again the approach is complementary: the Focus Area will help to yield a greater understanding of changing literacies, changing concepts of authority, and the cultural conditions under which children develop identities as 'citizens.' This may complement the psychology-based approaches of the strategic theme.

In short: CCHR will provide a distinct platform with a unique profile, but one whose results will have long-term relevance for these strategic themes with whom synergies will be developed where appropriate.

4. SOCIETAL RELEVANCE [top sector, societal challenges, Horizon 2020]

Key challenges formulated in Horizon 2020 relate to the creation of a future Europe that is *inclusive, reflective, innovative*, as well as *secure*. Cultures, Citizenship and Human Rights feeds directly into these aims, and will ensure that UU researchers are well-placed to answer calls, specifically in the sub-area "Reflective Societies: European Values and Identities," and "Inclusive and Sustainable Europe for the Young Generation."

The focus area is also well-placed, through its track record in the field of cultural heritage management and digital media, to contribute to the top sector Creative industries.

Research outcomes should lead to recommendations on how teaching and learning should be organised in the 21st century to help create critical, well-informed, articulate and involved citizens with both a global and a local outlook, and with equality of access to public life. We plan to seek partnerships for the production and development of new educational approaches.

5. PARTNERSHIPS [academic and non-academic; present and projected]

Humanities: existing collaboration multiple international partners as well as strong connections with non-academic partners in the Netherlands (most notably in the field of heritage management, gender equality, inter-cultural relations, and new media; a.o Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision; NIOD; de Waag; Imagine IC; NICHE; SPRING Festival, International Community Arts Festival (ICAF)). (An extensive list can be found in the final report of Cultures & Identities.)

Social Sciences: existing collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and HealthNet TPO (NGO training mental health workers in post-war countries). The *European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic relations* has working relations with various Ministries, Municipality of Utrecht, newspaper Trouw, Forum Institute for Multicultural Affairs, and anti-discrimination organizations (Radar).

Law, Economics and Governance: existing collaboration with the Association of Human Rights Institutes; Council for the Judiciary; Nationaal College Rechten van de Mens; European Inter-University Centre on Human Rights and Democratisation.

As *Cultures, Citizenship, and Human Rights* develops, we will consolidate and extend these partnerships; in the longer term we will also seek new partnerships in the field of educational policy.