



*Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study
in the Humanities and Social Sciences*

The Construction of Local (regional) Identities through Culture and Language.

Workshop @ NIAS, Wassenaar 1 December - 4 December 2011

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From 1 - 4 December 2011 an exploratory workshop called 'The Construction of Local (regional) Identities through Culture and Language' will be held at NIAS.

Description

The practical aim of the workshop is to conduct the preparatory work and planning for a major research project examining the construction of local identity formation in the Dutch peripheral province of Limburg. Constructions of regional/local identities in Limburg took place within the formation of the Dutch nation-state. As a consequence, Limburg's otherness – its culture and language – is imagined and experienced in its difference from the Dutch dominant culture and language (Leerssen 1996) which makes it an excellent case for studying the construction of local identities. The innovatory character of this workshop lies in its interdisciplinary approach of a peripheral region as a complex cultural and linguistic system. It is only through such an interdisciplinary approach that we will be able to gain deeper insight into how Limburgians, caught up in a dynamics of centre-periphery tensions, fashion and experience local identities through cultural and linguistic practices.

In this project, we will bring contemporary social theory, ethnographic method, and sociolinguistics together. The project will study linguistic variation and variability as situated and embodied social practices through which people create and reproduce local identities. Herewith, it is our objective to go beyond conservative sociolinguistic approaches, dominant in the Netherlands as well as in most of Continental Europe, that content themselves with demonstrating correlations between linguistic and social variables.

Participants in the workshop will discuss how specific social theoretical concepts and programs could be mobilized in the project. A central concern will be to seek ways to synthesize the community of practice approach (Lave & Wenger 1991), introduced in North- American sociolinguistics by Eckert (Eckert 2000, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1999) and the idea of communities of regional belonging (Meinhof & Galasinski 2005) with Bourdieu's (1984, 1991) notions of habitus/hexis, distinction and symbolic capital. This may enable a fuller understanding of how shared practices, ideologies, and identities that transcend boundaries (class, local) come into being and are constantly refashioned. Our objective is to find methods and concepts that help us to grasp the dynamics of diversity that underlie these processes.

The following questions will be central:

- How do forces of linguistic unification and nation-state formation affect local language practices and ideologies
- How is a 'peripheral place' as Limburg imagined and constructed as 'different'? When does quotidian language become a public performance of linguistic uniqueness? When do cultural practices become statements of cultural differentiation?
- What cultural and linguistic practices do people perform in relation to their various imaginations of what it means to be a local i.e. to be a 'Limburger'?
- What are the intertwined perceptions of local languages and cultural practices as threatened heritage, as vehicles for oral/cultural traditions and expressions, and as markers of identity?

All together, the intention of this workshop is to gather (inter)national experts who irrespective of their important differences in discipline and research experience are all concerned with processes of local (regional) identity formation, a subject that becomes all the more urgent in a world where social structures constantly emerge and disappear, requiring a constant reflection, adaptation and positioning from the people concerned.