IN VARIETATE CONCORDIA? WIKIPEDIA EDITOR DEBATES ABOUT EU CULTURE

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Abstract

This paper addresses how the Wikipedia community has debated the existence of an EU culture on a Wikipedia discussion site between 2001 and 2019. That is, a corpus of discussions among Wikipedia editors ('Wikipedians') was examined to shed light on how the Wikipedians involved argue for/against the idea that an overarching EU culture exists at present. This, combined with an examination of debates about concrete cultural elements associated with the EU, permits an insight into Wikipedians' conception(s) of the union. Drawing on argumentation analysis shows that the data examined indicates that cultural commonality across EU member states is not necessarily ascribed to the EU but to their being European countries. Additionally, even Wikipedians who argue that an overarching EU culture exists do not necessarily actually subscribe to this view but argue for reference to cultural elements in the Wikipedia article on the EU in order to signal to Wikipedia readers that the EU is "more than a set of treaties".

Keywords

European Union, Wikipedia discussions, culture, nationhood, corpus-assisted discourse analysis, argumentation analysis

1   Introduction

The EU's motto 'United in Diversity' is intended to signify "how Europeans have come together, in the form of the EU […], while at the same time being enriched by the continent's many different cultures, traditions and languages" (The European Union 2019). Thus, the motto captures two seemingly contradictory goals: unity and diversity. On the one hand, the EU declares its intention to maintain its cultural heterogeneity – to "respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and […] ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced" (Consolidated Versions of the Treaty on European Union 2012, 17) and even EU cultural policy does not aim for "any harmonisation of the cultural identities of the Member States" (Da Milano 2020). On the other hand, the EU intends "to continue the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe" (European Union 2012, 16), a process that has been understood as focused on economic and political integration but one that, arguably, also requires a degree of cultural unification across EU members (Shore 2013, Ultan 2016).

The field of tension arising from these contrasting objectives has sparked debate on a Wikipedia discussion site dedicated to the EU – the so-called 'talk page'. Each English Wikipedia article has such a 'talk page' (TP), i.e. a space that allows Wikipedia contributors (Wikipedians) to discuss the article it accompanies. The TP associated with the article on the EU contains debates from as far back as 2001, when the encyclopaedia and the article on the EU were created. Approximately 16 per cent of all the TP debate has focused on whether an EU culture exists, why (not) and what form this culture might take. As this topic is the second most extensively debated issue on this TP, superseded only by the discussion about the EU's nature (Kopf 2019), it undoubtedly deserves thorough investigation. Thus, this paper addresses the following questions:

1. On the Wikipedia TP underlying the article on the EU, how do Wikipedians argue for or against the idea that there is one overarching EU culture (or not)?

2. What conception(s) of the EU is/are presented in debates about cultural elements possibly shared across the EU?

After background information on Wikipedia, its structure and editors, I present a review of existing literature on the EU and its (cultural) identity. The subsequent method and data section is followed by a discussion of the main findings and a conclusion.

2   Wikipedia discourse and EU culture

Wikipedia, the free online encyclopaedia, ranks among the top six most consulted websites globally (Alexa 2019). Moreover, Wikipedia has begun to elicit research attention in discourse studies (e.g. Page 2014, Mederake 2016, Gredel 2017) – among other factors, the website's unique structure and modus operandi might have motivated this research interest.

One aspect that distinguishes Wikipedia from traditional encyclopaedias is that it relies on collaborative non-expert authorship. In principle, anyone who visits the site and wishes to contribute to an article may do so, as long as they follow the site's body of policies.[1] One of the most important policies is that community consensus is "the primary way decisions are made on Wikipedia" (Wikipedia:Consensus 2019). Due to this policy, an individual Wikipedian's decision to edit an article without community consensus may lead to a rejection of this editing attempt. Hence, when introducing contentious elements to an article, it is integral to engage with the community surrounding this article. In order to facilitate such collaboration and consensus-finding processes, Wikipedia articles are accompanied by discussion pages – the talk pages.

TPs consist of conversation threads – debates where Wikipedians respond to each other in the form of individual postings that are signed and timestamped.

Since successful article editing hinges on consensus, these conversations display a high degree of "responsive uptake" (Bohman 2004: 135). That is, in contrast to other online platforms where contributors may state their opinions without truly engaging with one another (e.g. Twitter), Wikipedia TPs contain genuine exchange of opinions. Moreover, as Wikipedia editing is, in principle, open to anyone who wishes to contribute, the encyclopaedia does not encourage the formation of echo chambers. While sites such as Twitter and Facebook allow users to choose whom to interact with, individuals who wish to modify a Wikipedia article have to engage with other people of various backgrounds and with various attitudes towards the subject matter addressed in an article.

It is also worth noting that the Wikipedia community is not representative of the global population as the typical Wikipedian is male, around 30 years old, holds a college degree and lives in the US or Europe (Wikimedia Foundation 2011). That is, a societal subgroup generally considered privileged and influential constitutes Wikipedia's core contributor demographic. Arguably, having its voice represented on Wikipedia further empowers this group as the encyclopaedia is a powerful tool to perpetuate one's views: Wikipedia articles, which are directly informed by Wikipedia TPs, are widely received, particularly in Europe (Alexa 2019). Moreover, they inspire more credibility than regular news media and are regularly used as the primary source of information (Menchen-Trevino & Hargittai 2011, Jordan 2014).

Arguably, this creates ideological alignment through a discursive feedback loop. In the TP debates, Wikipedians exchange different ideological leanings and engage in opinion formation processes concerning various issues (here EU culture). That is, in general, a privileged social group uses Wikipedia talk pages to negotiate and potentially agree on the dominant discourse (here understood as a "way of signifying experience from a particular perspective" (Fairclough 2010: 95)) on, e.g. the EU. Then, this discourse is perpetuated via Wikipedia – both through article page visitors who receive the dominant representation of the EU through the Wikipedia article, and through Wikipedians' opinion formation processes on the TP – their persuading and influencing each other in the TP debates. The impacted individuals then proliferate the version of reality (i.e. the dominant discourse(s) and associated ideological system(s)) that they have been exposed to throughout their respective social environments, which then feed(s) back into the encyclopaedia. Through this feedback loop, the dominant perspective(s) on, in this case the EU might become increasingly normalized. A caveat to this potential feedback loop is that the demographic information on Wikipedians relates to Wikipedia in general – the contributor group involved in the particular talk page discussions analysed in this paper might be different.

Still, this study's aim of identifying the various different perspectives and the connected argumentative strategies presented in more than 15 years of TP debates is particularly relevant as it provides an insight beyond the homogenous, tidy, seemingly uncontroversial norm represented in the Wikipedia article. Instead, it allows a glimpse into the 'messy' negotiations of different opinions, into how and what members of a rather influential social subgroup with a particular interest in the EU[2] have grappled with in connection with this entity.

On the TP accompanying the article on the EU, the Wikipedia community has debated what the encyclopaedic article on the EU ought to cover, i.e. it has addressed the overall discursive construction of the EU that ought to be presented to readers of Wikipedia. In this context, debates about the EU's culture and whether such a culture even exists are notable as cultural commonality is a crucial element of national identity and the construction of nationhood (Wodak et al. 2009: 4). Hence, examining TP debates in this regard sheds light on Wikipedians' views concerning the EU's status with regard to nationhood and whether there is a burgeoning sense of such an "imagined community" across the EU (Anderson 2016).

3   Data and methods

The entire TP that accompanies the Wikipedia article 'European Union' was sampled. That is, all discussion threads produced between 2001, when the article on the EU and the associated TP were created, to April 2019. Drawing on semantic macro-proposition theory (van Dijk 1977), the data were categorised by topic and divided into subcorpora. Semantic macro-propositions are "semantic structures of discourse whose meaning and reference is defined in terms of their constituents' meanings" and "macro-meaning [is] the unifying property of the respective meanings of a sequence of propositions" (van Dijk 1977: 7). That is, macro-propositions are "the global meanings, topics, or themes" (Bey 2015: 109) in a discourse sample, here the talk page discussions. A discourse sample's macro-propositions, i.e. topics, can be identified through the application of a number of macro-rules. In turn, the applicability of a macro-rule depends on the data set's characteristics (van Dijk 1977: 8).

In this context, two features of Wikipedia TPs are worth mentioning as they facilitate the application of particular macro-rules. First, Wikipedia TP policies state that a) each TP thread is to introduce one topic only, and b) the title of each discussion thread ought to reflect this topic (Help:Using Talk Pages Wikipedia, 2019).[3] Against this backdrop of Wikipedia policy, 'integration' was the prevalent macro-rule applied to the data, i.e. "more specific information of [a] passage may be deleted by the simple fact that its global information has already been

expressed in the text by the proposition that also serves as a macro-proposition" (van Dijk 1977: 12). Seeing as each TP thread title actually reflects the "new topic" introduced in the thread (Help:Using Talk Pages Wikipedia, 2019), the thread headings were identified as the macro-propositions, i.e. topics. As an alternative to 'integration', the macro-rule 'construction' was applied in instances where thread headings did *not* give an insight into the topic. This macro-rule stipulates that a macro-proposition can be realised by numerous micro-propositions (that is, propositions on the sentential level). In essence, applying this macro-rule means that when faced with "a sequence of propositions, replace it by a proposition that is entailed by the joint set of propositions of the sequence" (van Dijk & Kintsch 1983: 190). Application of this rule was aided by the fact that TP threads exhibit a strong topic focus, i.e. the micro-propositions are thematically closely aligned and allowed a straightforward inference of macro-propositions. All in all, Wikipedia policy (and Wikipedians' adherence to and enforcement of this policy) permitted my identification of macro-propositions for each thread. In a next step, I was able to move to an even higher level of topic identification by grouping the threads by topic focus – this was possible because the Wikipedia community repeatedly discussed the same controversial elements pertaining to the EU – the top most debated issues were the nature of the EU (see Kopf 2019 for more on this) and the issue discussed in this study – the issue of EU culture/s. The subcorpus 'EU culture' consists of 129 conversation threads and 99,600 tokens and constitutes 16 per cent of all TP data.

The corpus software AntConc was used to identify all occurrences of 'cultur*'[4 and 5]. Taking a wide-angle view on all the concordance lines of 'cultur*', I introduced alphabetical sorting to the left/right to the node to facilitate the recognition of patterns of usage (cf. e.g. Baker 2006, Partington 2010). To further deepen my understanding of how Wikipedians actually make their case for or against certain positions regarding EU culture, I applied argumentation analysis to concordance lines where Wikipedians actually present a pro or counter view[6] with respect to whether there is an EU culture or not (Toulmin [1958] 2003). The three elements indispensable for functioning arguments are claim, data and warrant. Data (D) refers to the information used to support the claim. The warrant (W) or conclusion rule (Reisigl 2014: 74-76) is the element – explicitly stated or inferred by the recipient – that establishes the connection between D and C (Toulmin [1958] 2003: 88-91).

Below, I refer to the number of concordance lines as well as to the number of postings in order to account for instances where several lines are part of one posting. Finally, to facilitate readability '[sic]' is not used to indicate typographical or grammatical idiosyncrasies.

4   Data discussion

4.1 An EU culture?

Having examined all concordance lines of 'cultur*' as embedded in extensive co-text of at least 100 tokens left and right of the node (Partington 2010: 89) showed that 46 lines (22 postings) assess if a common EU/European[7] culture exists[8]. This is indicated already by the lexis related to the semantic field 'similarity and difference' ('common', 'homogen*', 'same', 'unit*' and 'differ*' – see Table 1). Moreover, the Wikipedia community repeatedly refers to 'culture in/of/across the EU/Europe', 'pan-European Union-culture', "pan-European", "an EU culture", "an EU-European heritage" and "core identity".

1	out scope. A full treatment of European	culture belongs in the 'Europe' article, not this one.
2	or example I am pretty sure the Swedish	culture has more in common with the Norwegian cul
3	s more in common with the Norwegian	culture (non-EU) than with the Romanian culture (E
4	ture (non-EU) than with the Romanian	culture (EU)). that not-withstanding there is some ef
5	e is some effort to come to a common	culture / identity in Europe not only with the educa
6	tion and funding but also in relation to	Culture (cultural capitals), and research (the EU fr
7	ion isn't a country with a well-defined	culture and geography. It's a set of political and le
8	better or worse) over a diverse range of	cultures and places. [anonymised] 12:21, 2 February
9	. Plus, there is a EU-European heritage /	culture and it is mentioned. And for the last times : T
10	scheme are important, and that there IS	cultural aspect? Your link there above, the only t
11	However, there may be some European	culture at a higher level; perhaps a Roman-Hellenis
12	states of the EU share some significant	cultural heritage, but they're not unique in that. The
13	itage, but they're not unique in that. The	cultural and geographical entity we know as Europe
14	its predecessors, and is not a part of EU	culture, issue belongs in International relations sec
15	e can talk about all aspects of European	culture in a subsection, while cutting the EU off f
16	think we should have a link to European	culture, and don't talk about anything unless it has a
17	about a political culture??? - European	culture / history being used to bolster the EU. For ex
18	Europe's collective heritage. On generic	cultural issues though, I don't think we can claim to
19	that the EU is helping create a common	culture across Europe? Opening borders beyond the
20	rticles. AND : Of course there is an EU	culture which is present in most of the EU countries;
21	itself, lets not get into if there is an EU	culture or not, it is possible to argue in favour of it or
22	have understood there is a difference in	Culture of the EU and culture in Europe (that coinc
23	is a difference in Culture of the EU and	culture in Europe (that coincidently also is culture in
24	lture in Europe (that coincidently also is	culture in the EU). With your statement about foot
25	culture) AND Football is not part of the	culture of Ukrain and Russia (as they are Europe but
26	450 million people from diverse ethnic,	cultural and linguistic backgrounds." and "German i
27	out that? We could talk about European	culture while linking it firmly to the EU to avoid di
28	d the problem of mixing pan-European	culture and pan-European Union culture by making
29	opean culture and pan-European Union	culture by making such a link in the text. Flights! T
30	se of that leading to a greater mixing of	culture (I for one haven't had an English breakfast in
31	eutral) it comes down to: Yes sports and	culture are essential to show the EU is more than a s
32	r states, there is no specific EU sport /	culture; hence it should not be included. I think this
33	ction that there is an increasing level of	cultural interaction leading to a notable level of cu
34	interaction leading to a notable level of	cultural homogeneousness. In such a case it may be
35	ieved a similar level of homogeneous	culture. [anonymised] (talk) 10:22
36	ot is a particular example of of this	culture, as demonstrated by parallel organisations s
37	n serve as an example of the increasing	cultural connections as a by-product, and indeed in
38	ion of sport here, but something in the	cultural domain at least just to give a more human fa
39	has already merged politics, economy,	culture and interests. This has to be exemplified in t
40	hard to find things that differentiates the	culture of Europe, and the common culture of the
41	the culture of Europe, and the common	culture of the EU. But it's easy do differentiate the
42	e EU. But it's easy do differentiate the	culture of the people of the Middle-East and the p
43	a continent of stark rivals, legal system,	cultural ideas etc etc were all changing and moving i
44	is the quote : "Europeans have different	cultures but the same approach of culture"" I could
45	ent cultures but the same approach of	Culture"" I couldn't seem to log in (problem with t
46	d is no united approach towards	culture in Europe (particularly post-enlargement for

Table 1: 'cultur*' – common EU/European culture or not?

While five postings do not give opinions on whether there is an EU culture or not, they suggest that this question is indeed controversial. For instance, one poster proposes a solution that focuses on circumventing the controversy about the existence of an EU culture: "We could talk about European culture while linking it firmly to the EU to avoid disputes on its [an EU culture's] presence?" Another Wikipedian even proposes avoiding the topic altogether: "lets not get into if there is an EU culture or not, it is possible to argue in favour of it or [not]". Another editor touches upon central aspects of the controversy: "it comes down to: Yes [culture is] essential to show the EU is more than a set of treaties and a bureacracy; hence it should be included. No it is impossible to distinguish between Europe, EU and member states […]".

4.1.1 An EU culture

The view that there is a common EU culture is expressed in 13 concordance lines of 'cultur*' (seven postings). Expanding these concordance lines to allow an examination of how Wikipedians argue for this perspective shows that two postings to this effect do not present a fully developed argument, i.e. the editor makes unsupported claims, which make it difficult for interlocutors to challenge the argument and thus hinders fertile debate: "AND : Of course there is an EU culture" and "there is a EU-European heritage/culture" (lines 20 and 9 in Table 1). Interestingly, these two postings were made by one and the same Wikipedian, who is later blocked from Wikipedia editing as they are found disruptive and unwilling to engage in constructive discussion (see Wikipedia discussion: User:[anonymised] 2017).

An expanded co-text view of the remaining five postings shows that these postings employ two argumentative strategies. One Wikipedian pursues the following strategy: they posit that there is a degree of cultural homogeneity in the EU resulting from increasing cooperation across the EU. The second strategy is realised in four postings – these argue that Wikipedia readers ought to be presented with a particular image of the EU in the Wikipedia article.

Concerning the first strategy, the editor argues that there is increasing cultural cohesion due to closer cooperation/contact within the EU (lines 33 and 34 in Table 1): "due to the [EU] […] there is an increasing level of cultural interaction leading to a marked level of cultural homogeneousness". Two elements stand out here: on the one hand, the EU is portrayed as the entity that causes this increasing "cultural interaction" and, on the other hand, cultural unification across the EU is described as an ongoing process.

Even more interestingly, the postings that pursue the second strategy do *not* focus on arguing that an EU culture as such actually exists. Instead, they

claim that it is important to *mention* some cultural elements in the Wikipedia article on the EU to account for the idea that the EU is a more than mere 'bureaucracy'. Mentioning an element of cultural homogeneity in the Wikipedia article is discussed as "essential to show the EU is more than a set of treaties and a bureacracy; hence it should be included". Similarly, another posting does not argue that there is an identifiable and overarching unified EU culture per se either. Still, the poster posits that "I don't see why this article must underline that there's allegedly "no such thing as an EU identity" and argues that it is important to mention "what EU citizens have in common [culturally]" based on the data that "[t]he EU is today more than an economic community" and "the EU is more like a federation than an ordinary organisation". Altogether, the data underlying postings that employ this argumentative strategy are remarkable as they portray to the EU being 'more than' an economic community, 'more than' a set of treaties or organisation and being 'more like' a federation, i.e. the EU is depicted as highly integrated already. The implicit warrant also deserves attention as it suggests that cultural commonality is indicative of the EU's alleged evolution beyond a mere "organisation". That is, these postings imply that *cultural* integration indicates the state of EU integration in general.

4.1.2 No EU culture

Overall, 21 concordance lines encompassing 'cultur*' (ten postings) take the view that there is no EU culture at present. This claim is made on the basis of three argumentative strategies: first, one posting asserts that past EU enlargement has led to cultural diversity. Second, two postings posit that, as the EU is not a country, it does not have a shared culture. The third strategy, used in six postings, draws on the idea that an EU culture separate and distinguishable from 'European' culture does not exist. In the tenth posting, a Wikipedian rejects the notion of an EU culture without supporting their claim.

The Wikipedian who uses the first strategy remarks on the notion of a European "approach" to culture (line 46 in Table 1): "Many people would argue that there is no united approach towards culture in Europe (particularly post-enlargement for goodness sake how anybody can claim it is insane)". The first aspect that deserves attention is that this Wikipedian refers to "Europe" but then they refer to the EU enlargement process, i.e. they conflate the EU and Europe. Second, the poster uses an *argumentum ad populum* ("[m]any people") to claim that there is 'no unified culture', arguably, to increase credibility. However, the remainder of the posting shows that this claim is rather personal as indicated, for example, by the emotive interjection "for goodness sake". Then, the Wikipedian proceeds to use an *argumentum ad lapidem*, i.e. the poster dismisses pro-common-culture

claims as absurd – as "insane" – without giving support regarding why they think this is the case. Third, the claim of the whole argument is based on a minimum of data – the editor only mentions EU enlargement and readers are left to infer the intended meaning of this reference to enlargement. The warrant that connects data to claim is also left implicit: the view that the members participating in the enlargement are particularly culturally diverse and different from the culture(s) that comprised the EU until then (Figure 1). Therefore, the EU after the enlargement processes of 2004 and 2007 is depicted as particularly culturally diverse.
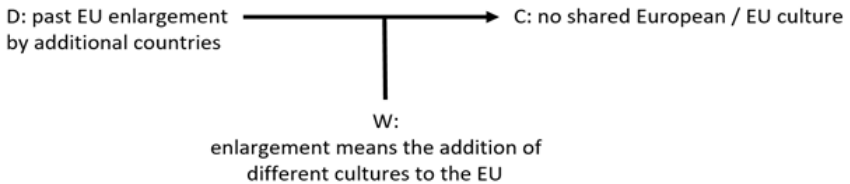
Figure 1: EU culture and enlargement

Fourth, the editor uses "particularly", which implies that the post-enlargement EU is especially non-unified but also that there was a lack of unification to *begin with*. Thus, EU enlargement is depicted as having exacerbated an existing condition although the poster does not give any data that supports this idea. Altogether, this posting represents the EU as non-unified culturally, in particular, the post-enlargement EU is presented as culturally diverse.

The second strategy used to argue against the existence of an EU culture hinges on the fact that the EU is not a country, e.g. a Wikipedian asserts that "the Union isn't a country with a well-defined culture […] It's a set of political and legal structures imposed (for better or worse) over a diverse range of cultures" (lines 7 and 8 in Table 1).

Figure 2: EU culture – the EU is not a country

The implied warrant is strikingly contentious – the implication is that countries have distinct cultures/that there is cultural homogeneity within countries. What is more, the vague phrasing "a diverse range of cultures" disguises another problematic element – it permits the poster to avoid the difficult task of distinguishing one culture from another. Concerning the general representation of the EU, it is worth noting that the editor goes beyond defining the EU as not-country, but depicts it as not even a cohesive entity as such. Instead, it is only a "set of […] structures". Moreover, these structures are "imposed" on various cultures – a term with negative semantic prosody: to name but a few of the top fifty collocates that are 'imposed' in the BNC are obligations, sanctions, penalties, constraints, restrictions and taxes (Davies 2004). The actor who 'imposes' the EU is backgrounded, which effectively hides any human element possibly involved in the EU. The addition of "for better or worse" points towards the idea that these structures (the EU) are imposed regardless of whether they do harm or good. All in all, this posting sketches a rather critical view of the EU and presents it as a set of paradigms imposed on various "cultures" – a metonymic reference to the peoples of the EU, who are passivated and thus depicted as rather helpless recipients of the action 'to impose'.

The six postings using the third strategy highlight the importance and difficulty of distinguishing between the EU and Europe. That is, these postings do not necessarily reject the idea that the peoples of the EU might possibly share certain cultural traits. However, they ascribe this to them all being located on the continent Europe rather than viewing the EU as responsible for potential cultural similarities. To give an example: "On generic cultural issues though, I don't think we can claim to an EU cutlure[9], would be rather arrogant to claim the EU as Europe" (line 18 in Table 1). Another Wikipedian rejects the notion of an overarching EU culture and argues: "I agree that the member states of the EU share some significant cultural heritage, but they're not unique in that. The […] entity we know as Europe isn't the same as the EU" (line 12 and 13 in Table 1). The data of the argument is that similarity in terms of "cultural heritage" goes beyond the EU. Therefore, one cannot claim the existence of a distinct EU culture. While the editor does not elaborate which other areas/countries/etc. might share "cultural heritage" apart from the EU members, the reference to 'Europe' implies that it is the rest or a part of Europe beyond the EU that share in this. Figure 3 illustrates the pattern underlying the postings that employ this argumentative strategy.
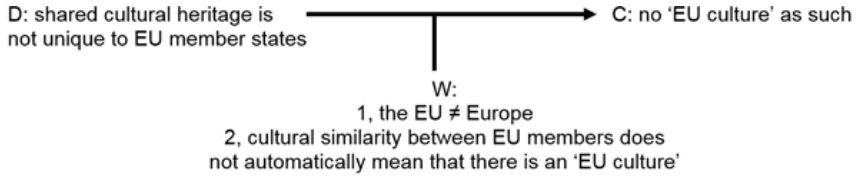
D: shared cultural heritage is
not unique to EU member states   →   C: no 'EU culture' as such

W:
1, the EU ≠ Europe
2, cultural similarity between EU members does
not automatically mean that there is an 'EU culture'

Figure 3: No EU culture since the EU ≠ Europe

4.1.3 Future EU culture

Four postings that take the view that there is no EU culture at present also consider whether there might be a common EU culture in the future, e.g. a Wikipedian rejects the notion of an existing EU culture and adds:

> I agree with [anonymised] that we have to distinguish carefully between EU and Europe (for example I am pretty sure the Swedish culture has more in common with the Norwegian culture (non-EU) than with the Romanian culture (EU)). that not-withstanding there is some effort to come to a common culture/identity.

This posting actually complements the preceding argument structure in Figure 3 by introducing backing. That is, the Wikipedian provides additional information aiming to strengthen the warrant (Kienpointner 2017: 233) (Figure 4).
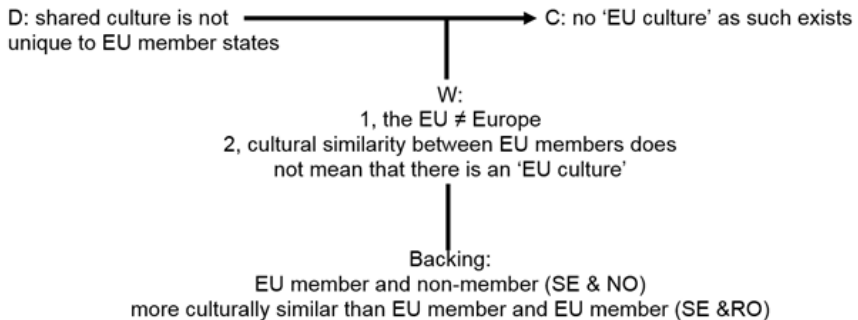
D: shared culture is not
unique to EU member states   →   C: no 'EU culture' as such exists

W:
1, the EU ≠ Europe
2, cultural similarity between EU members does
not mean that there is an 'EU culture'

Backing:
EU member and non-member (SE & NO)
more culturally similar than EU member and EU member (SE &RO)

Figure 4: Backing the warrant 'EU ≠ Europe'

Before discussing this posting's reference to future cultural homogeneity, the backing information is notable – the editor posits that a particular EU member and a non-member are more culturally similar than two EU members and thus, the editor implies cultures can be distinguished by nationality. Apart

from this striking point, the posting touches upon possible future sharedness as follows: after giving the examples of Sweden, Norway and Romania, the poster introduces contrast with the conjunction "notwithstanding" following "that", that is deixis referring to the backing. Thus, the poster builds on the idea of cultural difference in the EU. The editor proposes that, while presently there is no shared EU "culture/identity", an unknown, suppressed actor makes an 'effort' to one day arrive at such a common "culture/identity".

Another example also illustrates how the idea of an EU culture is rejected on the basis of distinguishing the EU from the continent of Europe (line 1 in Table 1). Then the editor also remarks on a possible common culture or "identity" in the future: "those elements of the institution that want closer integration are attempting to encourage a common sense of identity […]. This is an interesting development". This posting refers to an effort at present to come to a common EU culture. The topicality of this effort is expressed by use of the present progressive tense ("are attempting"). However, this posting differs from the preceding example in one point – the EU is depicted as fragmented. The EU is depicted as consisting of various parts that do not all work towards the same goals. Instead, only some "elements" push for further integration and a shared "sense of identity". Furthermore, referring to "elements" rather than an identifiable actor or group of actors evokes a rather cool, mechanical, non-human picture of the EU – the posting implies that it is not human beings who are part of the EU and who may "want" certain things.

4.1.4 Focus on EU policy and the Wikipedia article

The majority of the debate on EU culture took place in 2007. From 2008 onwards, the community considers focusing on EU cultural policy in the Wikipedia article on the EU. A right sort of the concordance lines of 'cultur*' shows that the community discusses EU policy and EU influence/action on culture in 32 lines of 'cultur*' (28 postings). Of these 28 postings, 22 postings indicate that focusing on EU policies in the Wikipedia article is the way forward, for instance: "We can certainly include EU cultural and sporting policy, and the ways in which they're implemented; they wouldn't exist as such without the EU", "[i]f there is a policy then we mention it" and one Wikipedian suggests that the editor community might "get it [the article] to work if we rewrote culture along those kind of lines EU acts which have influenced culture". Only one posting counters this apparent consensus: "The top of the section is dealing with some cultural pollicies […] we should give something more about the actual EU culture".

Indeed, the Wikipedia article on the EU predominantly focused on EU cultural policies and programmes from 2008 to 2016 (e.g. European Union 2008, European Union 2016). 2017 saw another attempt at adding more non-policy and Europe-oriented (rather than EU-focused) material to the article's culture section:

Because of the great number of perspectives which can be taken on the subject, it is impossible to form an all-embracing conception of a single European culture. Nonetheless, there are core elements which are generally agreed upon as forming the cultural and spiritual foundation of the contemporary European civilisation, from the roots of Christendom in Greco-Roman antiquity and Judaism, to the modern phenomena of the Renaissance and Humanism, the Enlightenment and human rights, socialism and liberalism[224][225].

Figure 5: The Wikipedia article on the EU in 2017 (Wikipedia 2017)

However, this paragraph was removed again and by April 2019 the culture section of the Wikipedia article had again shrunk to focus more on the EU's cultural policies and programmes. Still, the paragraph touches on some concrete cultural elements that were discussed as potentially shared on the TP.

4.2 Shared cultural elements

Revisiting all occurrences of 'cultur*' sheds light on concrete cultural elements discussed as possibly shared across the EU. Due to spatial limitations, the following focuses on two elements: history/heritage and religion.

4.2.1 History and historical heritage

In debating a common history and connected heritage as a shared aspect of EU culture, the following posting is noteworthy as it demonstrates an awareness that historical narratives play a central role in legitimising the EU's existence:

Part of the process of building a national identity for the European Union will be to produce a history of Europe that justifies the EU's existence. How about 'millenia of war'? Is that justification enough for a peaceful union?

First, this posting underscores the importance of a historical narrative for the creation of a collective "national identity". Interestingly, this presumes that a process of creating an EU *national* identity is actually underway. Second, the posting posits that the history of Europe ought to serve to justify the EU's existence, i.e. the Wikipedian distinguishes between the EU as human-made

entity versus the continent Europe. It is also interesting that the editor suggests 'producing' a history of Europe, i.e. they implicitly acknowledge that history is constructed post hoc and this construction can be used to certain ends – here to justify the EU's existence. Third, this Wikipedian already enters into creating such a legitimising narrative for the EU. Simply put, their argument is structured as follows:

D: Europe – history of war ⟶ C: existence of EU justified

W:
EU is a peacebuilder
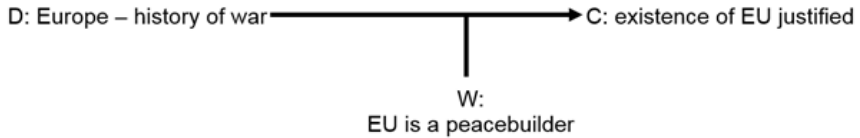
Figure 6: Legitimising the EU

The Wikipedian bases their claim on the idea that European history has been dominated by war. The warrant can be inferred from the Wikipedian's reference to the EU as "peaceful union" – the existence of the EU is justified since the EU is a peacebuilder. Overall, the EU is represented as a peacebuilding entity or even a guarantor of peace. Still, responding Wikipedians consider this representation biased and reject the inclusion of such a representation of the EU in the Wikipedia article.

Apart from postings that generally suggest the existence of a shared history, there are also Wikipedians who propose concrete aspects of history that might be shared and could possibly be mentioned in the Wikipedia article on the EU. Before discussing these elements in more detail, it is worth drawing attention to the fact that these posters consistently conflate the EU with Europe as indicated by the fact that the editors repeatedly refer to 'Europe' and 'European' when discussing EU-related matters. Even though the community is generally aware that the entity is not identical with the continent (see 4.1), apparently the discussants' understanding of the EU is closely tied to Europe as a continent – not merely geographically but also culturally.

One Wikipedian proposes that specific items/time periods characterise a "European identity": "greek democracy, latin language, roman law, middleage, christianity, reformation, enlightment, liberal tradition and pluralism". The posting consists of a listing of mostly consecutive historical developments. It incorporates elements, time periods and evolutions tied to world view: apart from 'Greek democracy' and 'Roman law' which are elements of how societies are organised, the poster mentions 'Christianity', 'Reformation', 'Enlightenment', 'liberal

tradition' and 'pluralism'. Thereby, the posting gives a particular perspective on the EU: the poster chooses to mention several historical developments rather than others and thus highlights these as particularly prominent concerning the EU and, more generally, "European identity" today. Implicitly, the EU is framed as a democratic entity with Roman legal structures. Additionally, the alleged importance of Christianity (and connected events, e.g. the Reformation) concerning the EU is emphasised (see more on religion below). The references to the Enlightenment, Liberalism and Pluralism are slightly problematic since these terms cover many different meanings, that is, leaving them undefined leaves room for interpretation and controversy regarding their intended meaning. Still, the Wikipedian's decision to mention these concepts complements their sketch of the EU as an entity that, allegedly, relies on notions of, for instance, rational-critical thought, individual liberty(ies) and the acceptance of a society consisting of individuals with diverse interests.[10] Comparably, another posting speculates about a "European culture" in the form of "a Roman-Hellenistic past; individualistic outlook". This posting could be interpreted as another generalised reference to these aspects of Graeco-Roman history and liberalism.

Another posting – aiming to rework the EU article's culture section – also discusses aspects of Graeco-Roman history but again focuses on "Europe":

- The history of Europe is heavily influenced by Greek-Roman. Many roads follow the old roman highways, the whole empirical scientific approach (as opposed to the eastern holistic outlook) is based in Roman-Greek philosophy, our law system is based on Roman law (where the state prosecutes instead of the harmed party being allowed to take revenge), the architecture especially in the renaissance is based on Greek and Roman architecture. Everybody knows or at least has heard about the Homerian stories about the Trojan Horse, the Cyclops, or the legend of Hercules (albeit the Disney version). So I think the Greek-Roman heritage is a bit more influential […]
- There is undeniable evidence the of the influence of Judeo-Christianity. The monotheistic belief system (pretty rare except Christianity, Judais, and Islam), the seven days weeks with a 'divine' resting day (Sunday). Religious holidays (Christmas, Easter). Church towers dominating many of the European landscapes.

Figure 7: Graeco-Roman culture affecting Europe

The first bullet point presents a claim-data-claim structure – the first and the last sentence state the claim. Despite some imprecision concerning phrasing[11], the intended claim can be identified as 'Graeco-Roman heritage influences Europe (and the EU)'. Figure 8 shows that the argument's data give a remarkable insight into this Wikipedian's understanding of modern-day Europe and the EU.
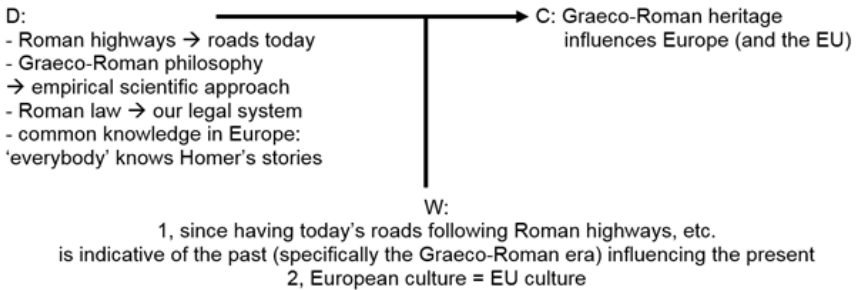
D:
- Roman highways → roads today
- Graeco-Roman philosophy
→ empirical scientific approach
- Roman law → our legal system
- common knowledge in Europe:
'everybody' knows Homer's stories

C: Graeco-Roman heritage
influences Europe (and the EU)

W:
1, since having today's roads following Roman highways, etc.
is indicative of the past (specifically the Graeco-Roman era) influencing the present
2, European culture = EU culture

Figure 8: Graeco-Roman heritage

Apart from referring to architecture and infrastructure, the poster's reference to 'Europe' as taking an "empirical scientific approach" in contrast to the "eastern holistic outlook" is remarkable. By establishing opposition, the Wikipedian grounds Europe and the EU in the West and ascribes a different "outlook" to the 'East'. Moreover, the reference to Roman law is noteworthy – here the poster assumes insider status and speaks from the perspective of 'Europe' or even the EU, which might elevate their credibility, i.e. they refer to "our" legal system. Then they elaborate on their understanding of the difference between Roman law and other legal systems: the focus is on the right to take "revenge" – an idea that conflicts with the notion of rule of law, which rejects vigilante justice and pushes for fair trials and an independent court. Lastly, pursuing an *argumentum ad populum* strategy, the poster presents their last piece of data: 'everybody' knows Homer's stories but does not detail how they presume to know that that is the case or explain how this alleged sharedness of stories/body of knowledge influences Europe. The warrant of the argument has to be inferred and deserves brief attention as it illustrates the problematic conflation of the EU and Europe (see warrant 2 in Figure 8). The editor, despite posting on the Wikipedia TP focused on the EU, refers to "Europe" when listing potential cultural traits in their contribution.[12] All in all, the poster's sketch of Europe and the EU includes a particular understanding of how to achieve insight (empirical approach) and how society is organised in terms of legal structure, i.e. in accordance with Roman law. Furthermore, the poster gives an insight into the physical appearance of Europe/the EU – Roman roads as underlying current roads – and presumes shared common knowledge among the population: Homer's stories.

Claim and data two of the posting above hint at another cultural/identity aspect discussed amongst Wikipedians – a common religion. The poster claims that 'Judeo-Christianity influences Europe'. The data to the claim consist of:

monotheism, resting day (with reference to Sunday, i.e. Christian resting day), religious holidays (reference to Christian festivities) and church towers across the European landscape. Without going into a detailed examination of this part of the posting, it is worth pointing out that three of these four listed items refer to *Christian* religious aspects. Thus, the focus here is on representing Europe/ the EU as predominantly influenced by *Christianity* both in physical appearance (church towers) and everyday life (resting day).

4.2.2 Religion and religious heritage

As the example above already illustrates, religion is another point of discussion regarding EU culture. Generally, the Wikipedians involved agree that the EU ought to be represented as secular and as a non-religious organisation, e.g. "the EU is a secular organisation". To give a more extensive example that also illustrates that the EU's secular status is not controversial, there is a brief discussion whether to include information on a Roman Catholic patron saint for the EU. The following posting argues against the inclusion on the basis of the EU's secularity:

> It would give undue weight to the arbitrary and irrelevant announcement of one religious denomination. Such an announcement […] does not affect the state, actions or the sources/motivations of actions of the organization we are describing.

The poster argues that a patron saint should not be mentioned. This is based on the data: 'EU and its actions and motivations are not affected by a religion's representatives' actions'. The warrant is also made explicit: since mentioning the announcement would unduly tie the EU to Roman Catholicism. The community does not challenge this posting, which illustrates that the Wikipedians involved in the TP debates agree that the EU, in principle, ought to be understood and represented as a secular entity. In spite of this apparent consensus, it is important to highlight that the community repeatedly focuses on (strands of) Christianity when discussing religion (see Example above in 4.2.1 and the discussion below).

While there is no extensive controversy concerning religion, in the course of the debate, the Wikipedia community touches upon another issue that deserves to be examined briefly. When discussing cultural elements, the Wikipedians debate the potential effects of members' religious heritage on the EU and, in this discussion, explore potential sources of tension within the EU. One posting proposes that religious heritage is such a source of tension but this is met with:

> I personally don't believe that religious heritage is a particularly significant source of division between member states. The EU has three dominant religious heritages – Catholicism, Protestantism and Eastern Orthodoxy – and I don't really see any evidence of relationships between EU states based on these heritages. Many Catholic-heritage countries have more in common with Protestant-heritage countries than with other Catholic-heritage countries.

This Wikipedian claims that religious heritage is *not* a significant divisive factor. Then they introduce the first part of data where they focus on the three presumably "dominant" *Christian* strands. Then, they restate and narrow their claim: no impact of *these* heritages, i.e. the mentioned Christian ones, on the relationships between members. The subsequent sentence on commonality and difference between member states is the second part of the data "[m]any Catholic-heritage countries have more in common with Protestant-heritage countries" – incidentally, this data statement also incorporates the idea that each member country has one identifiable religion. Altogether, this Wikipedian represents the EU in terms of religious past, again, as predominantly shaped by *Christian* religious strands. Furthermore, the editor minimises the role of the religious past on intra-EU relations and, interestingly, these relationships are limited to nation state's relations and do not, for instance, move to the level of societal subgroups' or even individuals' relations with one another. It is also striking that the Wikipedian attributes particular religions to specific member states and does not consider the breadth of religions present within members.

The remainder of the posting sketches a remarkable picture of the EU and points towards another potential source of tensions within the EU. After rejecting religious heritage as a source of division, the Wikipedian presents their idea of what might actually be divisive factors – past political systems of members and religious versus non-religious member states:

> […] significant determinant of relations between EU member states is political heritage, manifested in the divide between the old and new member states as well as (arguably) the divide between those states which had authoritarian regimes up until the 1970s and those which have an entrenched history of democracy. Another source of division is that between the more secularised and irreligious members of the Union, and those where religion plays a more significant role.

The data underpinning the claim are relatively vague and present dichotomies of one versus another, even though representation is slightly weakened by gradation in the form of 'more' in the last sentence.
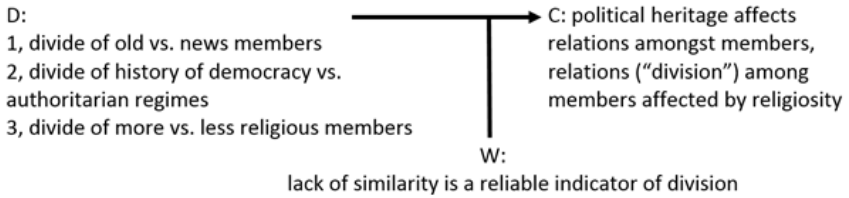
D:
1, divide of old vs. news members
2, divide of history of democracy vs. authoritarian regimes
3, divide of more vs. less religious members

→ C: political heritage affects relations amongst members, relations ("division") among members affected by religiosity

W:
lack of similarity is a reliable indicator of division

Figure 9: Another reason for perceived division

The 'old' and 'new' members are not specified, which might serve to strengthen credibility of the main claim but hides the fact that EU enlargement is a gradual process and there are no absolutes regarding which are 'old' and 'new' members. The Wikipedian also does not specify states that have, presumably, an "entrenched history" of democracy versus a non-democratic past or the ones that are perceived as more or less secular. By leaving these members unspecified, the editor again avoids the complex reality, e.g. the fact that democratic versus non-democratic history does not always align with today's state borders[13] or that democracy might be a relative concept itself. Moreover, their use of "entrenched history" is conveniently vague – no period is specified that qualifies the use of "entrenched". Another point worth noting briefly is that this Wikipedian apparently considers "authoritarian regimes" in the past, i.e. EU members do not have such forms of governance anymore. The warrant can be inferred, namely that the existence of differences amongst EU members is indicative of a "divide".

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the Wikipedians involved in this TP debate do not challenge the general focus on Christianity, nor do they challenge the broader idea that there is indeed division in the EU on the level of the member states.

5   Conclusion

The analysis presented in this paper showed that in the examined postings, Wikipedians do not fully reject the idea that EU members exhibit some cultural homogeneity. However, the postings analysed also suggest that the editors do not attribute this to the existence of an EU culture, but rather connect cultural similarities to Europe, as an entity separate from the entity EU. As this idea of a common culture is an integral part of national identity (Wodak et al. 2009: 4), it may thus be concluded that, predominantly, the Wikipedians involved in the analysed TP discussions do not view the EU as having such an identity now, but they do consider possible future developments in this regard (see 4.1.3). Interestingly, some postings suggest that TP contributors confirm Wodak et al.'s

point regarding cultural commonality – these postings argue for the inclusion of references to EU cultural commonality on the basis that the EU is, allegedly, 'more than' a mere bureaucracy, organisation or a set of treaties (see 4.1.1).

Overall, the examined TP debates may be viewed as manifestations of how the part of the Wikipedia community involved in this TP debate grapples with the connection between the EU as an *entity*, its *constituents* and their relationships. As a number of postings raise the point that while the EU's member states might exhibit cultural similarity, they do not do so because of their being EU members but because they are European countries, the editors resort to focusing on EU cultural *policy*. That is, the community resorts to focusing on the EU as an entity separate from its constituents, i.e. the people/peoples that live in EU territory (though influencing them via policy).

In their discussions, the Wikipedians touch on ideas of possible commonality across the EU in terms of religion and history. Here, the community frames the EU in terms of elements associated with Christianity and Graeco-Roman history. Additionally to defining the EU against the 'East' ("as opposed to the eastern holistic outlook" – see Example above), certain philosophical approaches are cited as potentially shared across the EU (e.g. the view that insights can be gleaned through empirical study, reference to rule of law).

Generally, nation state and national identity factor heavily into the Wikipedians' discussions. The debates illustrate that the community assumes that nation states have clear-cut ("well-defined") cultures. Moreover, the Wikipedians predominantly discuss cultural similarity/difference, religion and history on the national – the member state – level.

Finally, it is worth noting that while this paper allows a glimpse into the different views and arguments presented in the context of debates around EU culture on the TP accompanying the Wikipedia article on the EU, future research should address the evolution of the article on the EU and could also examine how Wikipedians generally negotiate and reconcile different views in the course of Wikipedia TP debates.

Notes

1 Internet access, a degree of English language proficiency and digital literacy are prerequisites to contributing to the English Wikipedia.
2 Since the decision to edit an article is voluntary and arguably based on interest in the subject matter.
3 Both policies are enforced by the Wikipedia community itself.
4 i.e. all occurrences of 'cultur*' embedded in co-text.
5 The asterisk serves as wildcard to allow for different word forms, such as 'culture', 'cultural' or 'cultures'.

[6] Rather than, for instance, referring to possible cultural elements or mentioning the term 'culture' in a context not relevant to the study at hand, e.g. "Paris is a city of culture, not of commerce".

[7] 'EU' and 'Europe' are conflated frequently.

[8] Interestingly, the editors do not define the term 'culture', despite the fact that the lack of a shared definition of the term is identified as problematic, e.g. "Unless the term [culture] is defined, we're likely to get generalisations".

[9] As mentioned above, I do not use [sic] to indicate grammar or typographic error in the data set.

[10] My interpretation of 'Enlightenment', 'liberal tradition' and 'pluralism' is coloured by my European background.

[11] The poster claims that the "history of Europe" [italics added] is influenced when, actually, their examples refer to present-day Europe. This imprecise phrasing only makes sense in reference to Renaissance architecture as it is indeed European history that is described as affected.

[12] 4.1 shows that the Wikipedia community identifies this as problematic, highlights the importance of distinguishing between EU/Europe, and predominantly rejects the idea of a distinct EU culture.

[13] It is doubtful if, e.g. Germany can be described as a state with "an entrenched history of democracy" as parts of it were not governed democratically until 1990.

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