Local Identities and Politics

Negotiating the Old and the New

Kees Terlouw, University of Utrecht, Netherlands

This book studies the importance that local communities attach to their local identities. In particular, it examines the way in which ‘local identities’ react to pressure to amalgamate municipalities in the Netherlands, which have often existed independently for hundreds of years. Focusing on two case studies, it provides a detailed analysis of how different stakeholders use and adapt their identity discourses to deal with changing circumstances. This book provides a rich empirical analyses of the use of local identities in the Netherlands and situates the discussion within the wider international context through comparisons with studies from other countries.

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About the Book

The relation between identity and space is strong and generates many conflicts. Most people attach great importance to their local community and its identity. The possibility of change can cause turmoil and become fertile ground for staking new identities. Understanding how these changes can take place is important to the future of community cohesion across the world.

This book gives a detailed analysis of how different stakeholders in two Dutch municipalities use and adapt their identity discourses to deal with changing circumstances, situating this work within a wider international context through global comparisons. The growing spatial interdependence and political pressures for municipal cooperation or amalgamation creates not only threats, but also opportunities for stakeholders in local communities to transform their local identities. By studying how local communities attach to local identities, a new conceptual framework can be formed, informed by lively accounts from residents on the rich and varied use of identity in their communities and their concerns over future developments.

This is valuable reading for students, scholars and researchers working in geography, politics, sociology and cultural studies.

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Kees Terlouw is a political geographer who studies and conceptualises the different ways in which identities are used in politics. His work focuses on how identity discourses in local and regional politics help or hinder the pursuit of policies. These identities are not fixed, but are constantly adapted to changing circumstances. He has extensively published on this and has advised several Dutch ministries and associations of local administrations on how to handle different identities.