

■ Tekst 5

## AS OTHERS SEE US

### The British are deemed worthy but rather dull

- 1 The past, apparently, is a foreign country – which may explain why nations adopt such outmoded notions of one another. Identity depends in large part upon differences. Countries define themselves by their contrasts. Once established, the stereotypes are hard to shift. The average Englishman is no longer a rubicund oddity who, nurtured in a climate that produces nothing tastier than mangelwurzels, boils everything he eats except perhaps his bacon and eggs. He no longer warms his beer and chills his baths or has a hot water bottle where everyone else has fun. But such fond illusions linger on from the days of Empire.
- 2 Or do they? A MORI poll conducted on behalf of the British Council among the young people of 13 nations reveals that the British are respected but regarded as unexciting. Where are the doughty dowagers of the Edwardian age, the corseted matrons who quelled fierce foreigners with one steely glare through a raised pince-nez? Alive and well, albeit largely in our imagination, is the answer. The world may be a Coca-Colanised planet, trade blocs may expand and markets merge, multinationals may control economies and food and fashions may increasingly be shared, but a fully developed sense of individual-
- ity remains essential to self-respect. The British should now seek to recapture their idiosyncratic image abroad.
- 3 But attempting to define oneself is as difficult as trying to bite one's own teeth. That is why nations depend upon the perceptions of their neighbours for their sense of identity. These may be provocatively exaggerated and almost entirely untrue, but they help to promote nonetheless a playful sense of self. Of course, life in Spain is not one long siesta occasionally punctuated by the roar of disembowelled bulls. Naturally Austrians are not always frolicking through edelweiss, lederhosen-clad. Nor does anyone really imagine that the average Italian man spends his waking hours looking for someone to shed tears over – whether in love or in war. Everyone knows that such stereotypes are teasing generalisations, that modern society is multicultural, that customs and character traits are more and more shared.
- 4 But these old-fashioned images do add a certain *joie de vivre* and variety. They prevent nations merging into a bland landscape. After all, who really wants his country's character to be represented by some grey-suited Eurocrat? Would British men be happy if the average foreigner's idea of them was forged by certain politicians?

*'The Times'*

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- 1p **6** ■ Which of the following is in line with paragraph 1?
- A A nation's true character is reflected in the eccentricities of its population.
  - B Countries are eager to live up to the image other nations have of them.
  - C Nations shape their identity by focusing on the milestones in their history.
  - D People tend to hold on to the image they have developed of other nations.
  - E True international understanding begins where stereotyped ideas are abandoned.
- 1p **7** ■ For what reason does the writer ask the question 'Where are ... pince-nez?' (paragraph 2)?
- A To call to mind the time when the British still ruled the world.
  - B To highlight the phenomena colouring the image of the British.
  - C To illustrate the fact that the British have lost their image of eccentricity.
- 3p **8** □ Geef van elk van de onderstaande beweringen aan of deze, gelet op de inhoud van alinea 3 en 4, juist of onjuist is.
- The writer feels that stereotyped ideas about nations
- 1 are mainly exploited for the purpose of tourism.
  - 2 are obstacles on the road to a united Europe.
  - 3 contribute to a nation's awareness of what makes it unique.
  - 4 generalise about nations without regard for their true ambitions.
  - 5 lead to many misconceptions.
  - 6 should not be taken too seriously.
- Noteer het nummer van elke bewering, gevolgd door "juist" of "onjuist".
- 1p **9** □ Wat bedoelt de schrijver met het woord "blandscape" (laatste alinea)?