A more-dimensional approach to measuring European identity

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Contents

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

2. Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................... 2
   2.1 Conceptualisation of collective identities ................................................................. 2
   2.2 Dimensions of identification with a collective .......................................................... 4

3. Empirical Analysis ..................................................................................................... 7
   3.1 Data and Method ...................................................................................................... 7
   3.2 Operationalization ................................................................................................... 8
   3.3 Empirical Results ................................................................................................... 9
      3.3.1 Exploratory factor analysis ................................................................................ 9
      3.3.2 Confirmatory factor analysis ............................................................................. 11

4. Conclusion ................................................................................................................. 13

Literature ....................................................................................................................... 14
1. Introduction

European Identity is one of the most prominent subjects in research about public opinion in the European Union. The concept has come to the forefront of scholarly attention ever since the “permissive consensus” - the passive support for European integration and European politics by a rather inattentive public – began to erode with the treaty of Maastricht 1992 (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970, Dalton and Eichenberg 2007). Recently, the economic crisis in Europe has renewed the interest in European identity again, since it can be seen as a test for its depth and strength and the existence of a “solidarity amongst strangers” (Risse 2013) in Europe.

Over the last decades, there has been considerable progress in research about European identity both theoretically and empirically. European identity has been identified as one of the core explanatory factors for support for the European Union and European Integration (Carey 2002, Citrin and Sides 2004, Weßels 2007, Fuchs 2011) and as a source of positive attitudes towards Europeans in general as well as towards foreigners and immigrants (Fuß 2006, 2007). As for the determinants of European identity, Fligstein (2009) identified education and profession as core factors with a positive impact on European identity. In general, people who experience a benefit (culturally or economically) from Europe are more prone to feel European and not only national. However, people rarely express an exclusive identification with Europe but are mostly attached to both, their Nation and Europe as well. In this sense national identity is in most cases compatible to European identity (Duchesne and Frognier 2008, Risse 2010) and does not prevent people from identifying with Europe1.

However, most of these studies did rely on Eurobarometer data and therefore on the indicators provided by Eurobarometer which capture the concept of identity in a rather straightforward way which has often been criticized as being imprecise and conceptually flawed2 (Bruter 2005, 2013). In general, the measurement of European identity at the micro-level has proven to be a difficult and challenging task. Not only is European identity a diffuse concept but also its meaning and content have not yet been established yet. Especially in mass surveys such as Eurobarometer, European identity is rather measured – and conceptualized – as self-categorization which lacks important aspects of the concept of identification with a collective such as a “we-feeling” or “togetherness” and the perception of shared group similarities.

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1 McLaren (2002: 555) hold a different view in this respect arguing that citizens in Europe are “socialized to accept the power and sovereignty of the national-state” making them reluctant to transferring sovereignty and/or their loyalty to the European level.

2 Eurobarometer question: “In the near future, do you see yourself as [NATION] only, first [NATION] than European, first European than [NATION], only European.”
Therefore, in this paper, a more-dimensional approach to the measurement of European identity is presented which tries to capture not only individual self-categorization but also the significance of these categories and the individual perceptions of shared group similarities. It is then analysed how this model can be operationalised and measured empirically using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. The model will be tested empirically using data from a quantitative survey specialised on capturing identities in Germany which was conducted in May 2014 at the University of Mainz. Finally, the results are discussed.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Conceptualisation of collective identities

Before talking about the dimensions of European identity, there need to be some clarifications on the term itself. Most commonly, European identity is referred to as “collective identity”. However, the concept of collective identity is still rather imprecise and ambiguous, which usually leads to misunderstandings and misleading conclusions. Mostly, in research on European identity the terms collective identity, social identity, identification or just identity in general are used more or less interchangeably even though they tend to describe very different phenomena in different studies. In this sense Brubaker and Cooper (2000) speak of an “identity crisis in the social sciences” and suggest to abandon the concept as an analytical category altogether.

Confusion about collective identities stems mainly from two misunderstandings: the first being between empirical and normative approaches to collective identities and the second one originating from their two-level nature (Kaina 2013: 185-186, Fuchs 2011: 35). As for the first misunderstanding, Bruter (2004, 2005) differentiates between two perspectives in the study of collective identities in order to provide a clearer picture. The “top-down” perspective on the one hand analyzes identities on an aggregate level. Here, identities are analyzed from an ‘objective’ perspective with a focus on normative arguments and the ‘nature’ of collective identities (Bruter 2004: 23). On the other hand, a “bottom-up” perspective (Bruter 2004: 23-24) can be adopted according to which identities are analyzed on an individual level and are treated as individual characteristics. Hence, they are conceptualized basically as a psychological construct.

Moreover as to Fuchs (2011: 35), the second common misunderstanding stems from a “two-level-problem” in analyzing collective identities. This means that, on the one hand, individuals that identify with a certain group are a subjects of collective identities and on the other hand the groups

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3 In contrast a “top-down” perspective analyzes identities on an aggregate level. As to this approach identities are analyzed from an ‘objective’ perspective with a focus on normative arguments and the ‘nature’ of collective identities (Bruter 2004: 23).
themselves can be analyzed as subjects of collective identities as well (Figure 1). Whereas the individual level of collective identities is mainly about the self-categorization and personal attribution to a collective or a group, the collective level is mostly about the self-definition of the group and the reasons for being a collectivity. In other words, studies on the individual level deal with the question: “Who am I?” while studies on the collective level address the question: “Who are we?” (Kaina 2013: 188-189). In other words collective identity on the group level can be viewed as a characteristic of a group and entails cognitions shared by the member of a group, collective identity on the individual level is an individual characteristic and refers to the process of identification of individuals with a collective.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Collective or group level</th>
<th>Individual level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Object</td>
<td>a group of people</td>
<td>individual(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a group of people</td>
<td>a group of people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own graph based on Kaina 2013: 187.

It needs to be added, however, that although both levels of analysis refer to different subjects and address different questions about the concept of collective identities, they cannot easily be separated and treated as independent from each other. Much to the contrary, both levels are connected to each other in multiple ways. Collective identity on the individual level and the collective level do often coincide because people tend to adopt the collective self-understanding and the reasoning about “Who are we?” when identifying with a collective on the individual level (Klandermans and de Weerd 2000: 74-75). This connection between the individual and the collective level of collective identities can be explained by the existence of a vertical relationship between the individual and the group and a horizontal relationship between the members of a group (Westle 2003: 120-130). As for the vertical relationship, the individual feeling of belonging to a group needs the collective recognition by the group. Moreover the horizontal relationship between group members means that they mutually accept each other as legitimate members of a certain group and share a sense of belonging together (Kaina 2013: 189).

The concept of collective identities at an individual level is most famously studied in Social Identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel 1982, Tajfel and Turner 1986). Social Identity Theory provides insights into the effects of the psychological and social processes concerning group affiliations (Lilli 1998: 140). Social identity is defined as “that part of the individuals’ self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional

4 As to Brown (1995: 9-11) move from “individuals acting as individuals” to “individuals acting as group members” by identifying with (or by viewing themselves as members of) a certain group. This is to say that they judge others and build attitudes towards other based not on individual characteristics but on group-membership and perceived group-characteristics.
significance of that membership” (Tajfel 1982: 24). Therefore collective identities at an individual level can be integrated into the framework of SIT as a sub dimension of social identity, which feeds into the broader framework of the self-concept of an individual. According to SIT, individuals identify themselves with a certain group if the psychological membership in that group contributes positively to the individual self-concept. Otherwise individuals just “leave” the group and “de-identify” themselves (strategy of social mobility) (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Positive differentiation is achieved by comparisons with others on dimension which are important to the self-understanding of a certain group, individuals strive to detect similarities between the members of the collective and differences to people that are not part of the collective which are beneficial to one’s self-concept. This homogenization of the ingroup is in line with Anderson’s famous definition of the nation as “imagined community” (Anderson 1991). In this sense, individual characteristics are depersonalized and transferred to the group level which then suggest a feeling of in-group homogeneity.

In sum, collective identities exist on two levels: the collective level and the individual level. Both levels of analysis should carefully be separated to avoid misconceptions and misunderstandings. Whereas collective identity at the individual level is an individual characteristics and is about an individual’s relationships to groups, collective identity at the collective level is a collective characteristic which deals with the self-understanding and definition of the group in question. However, both levels also relate to each other, since the object of identification is always a group with its specific self-understanding, self-definition, norms and rules of integration. Individuals seek the recognition by the group as legitimate members of the groups and thereby tend to adopt the self-definition of the group. In the following section a more-dimensional framework of identification with a collective is presented, which draws on the theoretical considerations outlined above.

2.2 Dimensions of identification with a collective

Research on European identity mostly seems to be focused on a rather straightforward concept of collective identification. Studies which focus on the individual level of collective identity often rely on Eurobarometer data and use the question “In the near future, do you see yourself as…“ to measure national and European identification. However, this operationalization only captures identities in the sense of self-categorization or self-labelling as European or national. Cram (2012: 72) refers to such a conceptualization of identity as “identification as”, indicating that there is no feeling of togetherness or community involved and Citrin and Sides (2009: 147) conclude: “[O]n can call oneself an American without feeling strongly patriotic or believing that nationality is fundamental to one’s self concept” stressing that such a concept might miss the point of SIT. In a Social Identity Theory inspired framework, however, it is important to only speak of identification with a group,
if these group-membership are a “fundamental to one’s self-concept”. Therefore, in order to arrive at a more meaningful concept which can be referred to as “identification with” (Cram 2012) or “belonging together” (Kaina 2013) the concept of identification with a collective should also include affective and evaluative orientations towards the group in question. In this sense collective identities – in the sense of identification with a collective – can be defined as an individual’s knowledge about the belonging to social groups and the evaluation and emotional significance which is assigned to these belongings (Westle 2003: 119, see also Fuchs, Guinaudeau and Schubert 2009: 96). This definition of collective identities at the individual level makes clear, that identification is more than just self-categorization but also entails a certain perceived significance of the group which is to say a “we-feeling” or a feeling of togetherness. Affective and evaluative orientations are also already included in the definition of social identities by Tajfel (1982: 24), who highlights the “the value and the emotional significance of […] membership.”

Fuchs (2011) claims that identification with a collective entails – on the one hand – the subjective assignment to a collective as well as – on the other hand – the affective attachment and the evaluation of the attachment. These orientations reflect the definition of collective identities on an individual level by Westle (2003) outlined above. Individuals do not only need to know about their group-membership and subscribe themselves to a certain collective, they also need to make it an important part of their self-concept by adding some positive evaluations and affections to a group-membership. Moreover, a meaningful concept of identification should also be accompanied by positive emotions about the group-membership. Klandermans and de Weerd (2000: 75) put it as follows: “[…] what it means to an individual to belong to the group in point will thus implicitly or explicitly refer to the pride of being a member of the group […]”

Besides the cognitive, affective, evaluative orientations, and the emotional significance of group-membership, Fuchs (2011: 37) also stresses the importance of the subjective assumption of shared similarities within a collective and the positive evaluation of the assumed similarities. Kaina (2013: 187-192) refers to this dimension as “reasons” for identification and states that collectives only become valuable to individuals if their members perceive to share precious commonalities that make them different to out-group members. Moreover, identification is facilitated if there are some exclusive characteristics which are perceived to be prototypical for the in-group members (Kaina 2010). Risse (2010: 21) also highlights the content dimension when he concludes that: “In studying social identities, however, we have to take the self-understandings of group members seriously and

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5 These perceived dimensions, on the other hand, do not need to be the dimensions which are shared by a majority of in-group members or which are the defining dimensions of a collective in political or historical debate. It is enough if members assume that they share precious similarities with other group members and assume that they have something important in common. This is in line with Andersons (1991) idea of “imagined communities”.

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make them an inherent part of the explanatory story”. Moreover, the necessity to integrate such a “content dimension” into the framework of identification with a collective becomes even more evident when bearing in mind that social comparison in SIT only takes place on “relevant dimension”. Individuals use these dimensions to demarcate the in-group from the out-group in order to detect similarities between the members of the collective and differences to people that are not part of the collective. However, they are only used for social comparison if they are perceived as important for the conception of the in-group (Reicher and Hopkins 2001: 33). That means they need to be important aspects of the self-definition of a group and important to those who claim to identify with a certain group. Therefore, the content of identification with a collective needs to be taken into consideration.

Abdelal et al. (2009) have presented a comprehensive framework about the contents of collective identities. They distinguish between (1) constitutive norms, which are defined as formal and informal rules for group-membership, (2) social purposes, which refer to the shared goals of the group members, (3) relational comparisons, which are similar to the “relevant dimension” for social comparison in SIT, and (4) cognitive models which refer to worldviews and general understanding about material and political conditions within a group. Besides that they introduce the concept of “contestation” which tries to make sense of the degree of agreement within a group over the content and meaning of a collective identity (Abdelal et al. 2009: 19). As for the subjective assumption of shared similarities in an SIT inspired framework of collective identities especially constitutive norms and relational comparisons seem to be of relevance for the concept. In this sense Eisenstadt and Giesen (1995) stress the importance of “codes of distinction” which are paramount to the construction of collective identity since they help to differentiate the in-group from the out-group. Eisenstadt und Giesen (1995) differentiate between primordial (or ethnic), cultural and civic codes of distinction depending on how inclusive or exclusive they are in respect to group boundaries. While inclusive characteristics can easily be adopted by outsiders, that thereby gain access to the in-group, exclusive characteristics seem to be natural properties of a group which can only be achieved by fate of birth. Bruter (2004) defines the inclusive, civic type of identity as the “identification of citizens with a political structure, the state, which can be summarized as the set of institutions, rights and rules that preside over the political life of a community”. As to Shulman (2002: 559) the characteristics which make up the civic content of collective identity are: attachment to

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6 For example, when distinguishing between the social groups “male” and “female”, comparisons in terms of eye- or hair-color are unlikely to be regarded as “relevant dimensions” to differentiate between both categories.
territory, ownership of citizenship, the feeling of being part of a nation, approval to a certain political ideology, and respect for the political institutions. As for the exclusive, ethnic content of collective identity he identifies race, decent and ancestry as the core characteristics.

Figure 2: Dimensions of “Identification with a collective”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Identification with”</th>
<th>Emotional Attachment</th>
<th>Meaning /Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cognition affection evaluation</td>
<td>emotional significance of a group</td>
<td>subjective assumptions of shared similarities and their positive evaluation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own graph based on Fuchs (2011).

In sum, identification with a collective is conceptualized using three dimensions (see Figure 2). The first is the “classic” concept of “identification with” which tries to capture identification as a meaningful concept to individuals. Affective and evaluation orientations towards the group are also taken into account. Second is the emotional attachment to a group. Collectives and groups need to be of some emotional significance to individuals and thereby evoke positive emotions if we are to speak of identification. A third dimension is the content or the meaning of a collective, which is to say that we should pay attention to the subjective assumptions of shared similarities within a group. When identifying with a group people automatically have a certain configuration of that group in mind and assume certain – more or less – precious commonalities which they share with other group members. In a next step, the concept is tested empirically using data from a telephone survey about European and national identity in Germany from 2014.

3. Empirical Analysis

3.1 Data and Method

The data presented in this paper have been collected in a telephone survey carried out in May 2014. A total of 1215 Interviews have been collected using CATI in the weeks before the European parliamentary election. The survey took around 20 minutes and was specialized on measuring national and European identity in Germany. The phone numbers (only German landline) were selected randomly by GESIS using the Gabler/Häder procedure (Häder und Gabler 1998). Thereby it was possible to include numbers into the sample which are not listed in telephone books. In order to identify a randomly selected respondent on the household-level, the birthday method was used. The response rate was around 20 per cent while the majority of respondents refused to take part in the survey or could not be contacted after ten call attempts. The concept is tested with data for European identity in Germany. In order to test the concept, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses are applied using Mplus7. The operationalization of the concept is presented in the following chapter.
3.2 Operationalization

The three dimensions of identification with a collective are operationalized using multiple questions and statements. The first dimension – “identification with” is measured by four statements (Figure 3). It needs to be added, that the interviewees were instructed by the interviewers before the interview, to think about Europe in general and not just about the EU. All answers were given on a five-point-scale where the lowest value (1) always indicates a rejection or a negative answer and the highest value (5) indicates an approval or a positive answer.

Figure 3: Measurement of “Identification with”

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>v1</td>
<td>I feel attached to Europe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v2</td>
<td>I take it personally, if someone talks badly about Europe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v3</td>
<td>I have many similarities with other Europeans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v4</td>
<td>It is important to me to be recognized as European.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The statements refer to cognitive as well as affective and evaluative orientations towards the group. While the cognitive orientations are more or less implied in all statements, v1 and v2 measure affective orientations whereas v3 and v4 measure evaluative orientations towards the group. The measures have been tested before in a student survey at the University of Mainz and were found to form a single scale with good reliability.

The second dimension “emotional attachment” is operationalized using different emotions which can be either apply to an individual when thinking about Europe or not. Respondents were asked: “Different people feel different emotions when thinking about Europe. Please tell me if you feel...” and could claim to feel three different emotions: pride, satisfaction and happiness. The stronger these emotions are expressed by the respondents, the stronger is their emotional attachment to Europe (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Measurement of “emotional attachment”

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>v1</td>
<td>Pride in Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v2</td>
<td>Satisfaction with Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v3</td>
<td>Happiness with Europe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The subjective assumptions of shared similarities, however, are operationalized using the standard item battery which is often used to measure civic and ethnic nationalism for example in ISSP 2003. However the question has been changed a little in order to make sure that people understand that
it is their opinion about important characteristics for being European and not just a general assessment of a perceived – normative – reality. Therefore the statements were introduced by saying: “In my opinion a real European should…” After that the following statements were presented (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Measurement of “subjective assumptions about shared similarities”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>exclusive similarities</th>
<th>inclusive similarities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>v1 share Christian values</td>
<td>v4 have respect for democracy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v2 be born in Europe</td>
<td>v5 be tolerant and open-minded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v3 have European ancestry.</td>
<td>v6 participate in political life in Europe.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The items reflect the dichotomy between inclusive and exclusive characteristics which are used to define the in-group. It is expected that they form two factors, the first consisting of v1 to v3 and the second one consisting of v4 to v6. It is then further analysed how both factors relate to the content dimension of identification with a collective in the case of European identity. In order to do so, first of all an exploratory factor analysis is conducted to analyse if the presented items somehow reflect the more-dimensional structure which is expected by the presented concept above.

3.3 Empirical Results

3.3.1 Exploratory factor analysis

First of all an exploratory factor analysis is conducted in order to analyze if the items presented above actually can be analytically separated into different concepts. From the theoretical considerations it can be expected that four factors can be extracted from the items. One referring to the dimension “identification with”, a second one which refers to the “emotional attachment”, and a third and fourth one which differentiated between inclusive and exclusive assumptions about shared similarities.

The exploratory factors analysis indeed suggests that four factors can be extracted from the data and that this four factor solutions best fits the data. The Eigenvalues of four factors exceed the threshold of 1.00, meaning that they are separate from each other and both able to add significantly to the explained variance by all factors. Moreover the model-fit statistics of Mplus also suggest that a four-factor solution should be preferred to two- or three factor solutions which were also tested. Only for the four factor solution does the RMSEA reach the 0.05, which is considered to be the threshold for a satisfactory model fit.

As can be seen in Table 1, in line with the theoretical expectations all items seem to load on the correct factors. As expected the items “I feel attached to Europe”, “I take it personally, if someone talks badly about Europe”, “I have many similarities with other Europeans” and “It is important
to me to be recognized as European” load on one factor (F3). The same goes for the three items supposed to measure “emotional attachment” (F4) and the three items supposed to measure exclusive (F2) and inclusive (F1) subjective assumptions about shared similarities respectively.

Table 1: Exploratory factor analysis of items measuring “identification with a collective” in Europe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>F1</th>
<th>F2</th>
<th>F3</th>
<th>F4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel attached to Europe.</td>
<td>.081</td>
<td>-.150</td>
<td>.645</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I take it personally, if someone talks badly about Europe.</td>
<td>-.101</td>
<td>.082</td>
<td>.619</td>
<td>.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have many similarities with other Europeans.</td>
<td>.081</td>
<td>-.090</td>
<td>.578</td>
<td>-.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important to me to be recognized as European.</td>
<td>-.044</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.733</td>
<td>.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>share Christian values</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>.409</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td>.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be born in Europe</td>
<td>-.036</td>
<td>.737</td>
<td>-.035</td>
<td>-.057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have European ancestry</td>
<td>-.030</td>
<td>.801</td>
<td>-.032</td>
<td>-.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have respect for democracy</td>
<td>.584</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>-.042</td>
<td>-.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be tolerant and open-minded</td>
<td>.631</td>
<td>-.075</td>
<td>-.044</td>
<td>-.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participate in political life in Europe</td>
<td>.396</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride in Europe</td>
<td>-.046</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td>.185</td>
<td>.540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with Europe</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>-.049</td>
<td>-.011</td>
<td>.659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness with Europe</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>-.050</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>.751</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Entries represent factor loadings from an exploratory factor analysis using Mplus7 with Promax rotation method. Bold numbers indicate the highest loading.

However, not all items show equally strong loadings on the respective factors. Especially the item “participate on political life in Europe” shows a quite low loading on the “inclusive factor”. On the other hand, there are no significant cross-loadings between factors which suggests that the item structure does not need to be changed.

Another interesting finding of the exploratory factor analysis is the factor correlations. As can be seen in Table 2 not all factors do correlate with each other. The highest correlation is between “emotional attachment” and “identification with” indicating that respondents feel a strong commitment to their group are also more emotionally attached to this group. The same goes for the high correlation between “identification with” and “inclusive similarities”. This is especially interest when compared to the lower correlation between “identification with” and “exclusive similarities”. It seems that while “identification with”, “emotional attachment” and “inclusive similarities” might be considered to be different dimension of wider concept, “exclusive similarities” are not part of that concept and do not resonate with the concept of identification with the European collective.

Table 2: Promax factor correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>F1</th>
<th>F2</th>
<th>F3</th>
<th>F4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F1</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2</td>
<td>-0.048</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F3</td>
<td>0.416</td>
<td>0.215</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F4</td>
<td>0.372</td>
<td>0.178</td>
<td>0.628</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In sum, the exploratory factor analysis leads to the expected results in terms of factor and item structure. Moreover it seem like some of the factors might integrate into a wider concept. However, these assumptions need further investigation and a more detailed test. Therefore – in a second step – confirmatory factors analysis is applied.

3.3.2. Confirmatory factor analysis

After the theoretically expectations about the measurement of the different dimension of identification with a collective could be confirmed using exploratory factor analysis and data for identification with the European collective, these finding need to be confirmed and further analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis. Unlike exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis takes the item structure and the distribution of the items to different factors as given. It is then tested, how good the suggested model fits the data. Therefore at first, the exact same item structure in order to measure the different latent factors is used as it resulted in the exploratory factor analysis. Moreover, it is analyzed if the factors form a common latent second order factor as the exploratory factor analysis and the theoretical framework suggest.

Figure 6: Confirmatory factor analysis of identification with the European collective

The complete model can be seen in Figure 6. However, the model tries to capture the theoretical framework presented above. The conceptualization suggests that “identification with (ident)”, “emotional attachment (emo)”, and “shared similarities” (incl. sim / excl. sim) are three different dimensions of the same wider concept which is “identification with a collective“ (collec. ident). This is reflected by the second order factor in Figure 5. In order to adapt the model to identification with the European collective and to integrate the findings from the exploratory factor analysis, it

Note: Standardized estimates, Estimator: MLR. RMSEA (0.062) SRMR (0.066), CFI/TFI (0.898/0.868).
was assumes that only “inclusive similarities” should resonate with the concept of identification with the European collective. Therefore “exclusive similarities” were left out which is supported by the low correlation (.138).

However, even though the results seem to match the findings from the exploratory factor analysis, they are not stable. The model fit statistics show that the RMSEA value (0.062) as well as the CFI/TFI (0.898/0.868) indicate a rather unsatisfactory model fit, which means that the structure, presented in the model, is not sufficient so far. Therefore, in order to arrive at a more stable model, one adjustment had to be introduced. It needs to be added, however, that such modification to the original model should not be applied only to improve model fit but only if they can be theoretically justified. In this case, model fit can be improved considerably if a relation between the latent factor “collect. ident” and the manifest variable “be Christian” is allowed (Figure 7). Whereas it seemed reasonable to exclude “exclusive similarities” from the more dimensional structure of “collective identification with the European collective” due to the low factor correlations (Table 2), it seems that the item “share Christian values” does relate to the concept in a significant way

Figure 7: Confirmatory factor analysis of identification with the European collective

Note: Standardized estimates, Estimator: MLR. RMSEA (0.049) SRMR (0.046), CFI/TFI (0.942/0.932).

In general the results from Figure 7 suggest that the subjective assumptions about shared similarities are mostly framed in inclusive terms as far as identification with the European collective is concerned. Whereas people who are strongly committed to the European collective are very emotionally attached to Europe also seem to perceive inclusive characteristics as important shared similarities by the group of Europeans, this is not the case with exclusive similarities. They do relate to neither emotional attachment nor “identification with” and are (obviously) negatively correlated to inclusive similarities. These results suggest, that exclusive similarities are not a part of the concept
of identification with the European collective. The only exception, however, being the item “share Christian values”. Even though it has loads the highest on the exclusive similarities factor it cannot be ignored when measuring the concept of identification with the European collective. Apparently, unlike exclusive characteristics such as “European ancestry” or “to be born in Europe”, Christian values seem to be quite an important part of European identification. This result suggests that the community of European is not only based on soft and inclusive characteristics in people’s minds but is grasping for a more cultural self-definition in terms of Christian heritage and values. At least in the German case.

4. Conclusion

In sum, the empirical results show that the three dimensions of identification with a collective can be measured in a meaningful way. They can be separated analytically and seem to form a common second order latent factor as the confirmatory factor analysis suggest. However, especially in terms of the content dimension, the framework be rigorously applied but needs to be adjusted to different collectives. In the European case, the content dimension is dominated by inclusive similarities with the exception of Christian values. This, however, could be completely different in terms of German or French or British national identity. If an identity is more “contested” – as Abdelal et al (2009) suggest – and there is no clear dominance of either inclusive similarities or exclusive similarities, it might even be possible that the content dimension is separated from the other two dimensions.

Nevertheless the presented more dimensional framework seems to be a useful way to address the concept of identification with a collective. It aims at analyzing collective identities at the individual level without being ignorant to its collective dimension. Therefore it tries to measure collective identification not only as self-categorization, but as “we-feeling” or feeling of togetherness. Instead of “identification as” the concepts refers to “identification with” and incorporates the individual relations to the group / collective – which is the object of identification into the analytical framework. Furthermore the integration of an content dimension in the sense of subjective assumptions about exclusive or inclusive similarities it because possible to assess the meaning of a collective and to dig deeper into the question of what kind of group is meant exactly when claiming to identify with a certain group. The value of the concept could be demonstrated in the case of identification with the European collective.
Literature


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