Creating regional identities? Theoretical considerations

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1. Introduction
The paper is based on the assumption made by social-capital theory that the existence of functioning social networks within regions is favorable for the economic development and the institutional performance of a region (Putnam 1993: 152-176). What looks like a clear advantage for long established regions with a broad range of traditions and culture could prove to be an obstacle for the economic development in artificially built regions or in states where a regional level does not have any tradition (cf. Figure 1). The connection between social capital and regional identification needs to be explained. Social networks and political participation may work on the level of the constituting localities of the region, but this does not necessarily mean that these mechanisms are at work for the regional level, too. Both, political participation and social networking are correlated to trust and therefore to identification. If the inhabitants of a region only identify themselves with the local or the national level, the benefits of the social capital will not occur on the regional level. Therefore it might be necessary to establish regional identifications.

The regionalization or devolution processes due to Europeanization processes or in order to promote economic development in a number of Eastern and Western European states with only a modest or non-existent regional tradition could, therefore, lead to the opposite of the intended results. If the promoters of the social-capital thesis are right – which is assumed here – it seems to be necessary for the new regions to create identifications or loyalties among the population and economic actors.

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1 Putnam’s approach has been widely discussed – and criticized. The critics refer especially to methodological questions like the attempt to draw conclusions from contemporary Italy to the Middle Ages, or to his statistical approaches (see for example Sabetti 1996, Tarrow 1996).
2 For a discussion of these topics with reference to culture see (Keating 1998).
The question of regional identifications is of double interest. The contemporary situation gives social scientists the opportunity to observe different approaches of regional actors/elites in a laboratory-like setting and at the same time they have the opportunity to influence the regional conditions.

The question discussed here is not whether it is possible to build identifications at new political levels but rather how this can be achieved in order to neutralize the competitive disadvantage of new or re-established regions.\(^3\)

In order to answer the initial question how to create regional identities it seems to be useful to start by defining both terms, “region” and “identity”. Once we know how identities are defined we can begin to ask how identities emerge. This will be done by looking at already existing identities at the national or sub-national level. Knowing how identities have emerged in the past and integrating assumptions from other disciplines like psychology or sociology we can gather a theoretical framework for the creation of new identities.

Figure 1: The hypothetical effect of regional identity on population migration behavior

Source: (Raagmaa 2002: 61).

\(^3\) A question which is not covered in this paper is the relationship of decentralization and identity-building and democracy. For this paper I assume that the covered processes are democratic. In authoritative systems there might be some other instruments available to enforce identification, but their sustainability is not likely to persist when the pressure is reducing as the examples of Former-Yugoslavia or the USSR show.
The first problem the paper faces is that both of the central terms are rather vague and inexact. There are many understandings of the concept of “regions” and there is even more confusion about the meaning of “identity”.

In general understanding the dimensions of regions may vary significantly. Regions can be as big as a whole continent or as small as a little area around a couple of communities. For this paper regions are defined by functional and territorial means. Regions are territorial units located between the municipal and the national level. At least administrative devolution has been given to the region and they are equipped with an elected representational body responsible for the decentralized tasks and to the voters of the specific region. The quality of the devolution or decentralization and the powers of the regional parliaments may vary. Like this we can cover French regions, Spanish Autonomous Regions, German Länder or Czech kraje as well as any similar construction within decentralized or federal states.

The concept of identity has a long history and covers a broad range of meanings, therefore it is necessary to clarify its contents. Identity is a term with more than one point of reference. It usually refers to a subject and to its surrounding environment. Hall describes identity as follows: “Identity is formed in the interaction between self and society: The subject still has an inner core or essence that is the ‘real me’, but this is formed and modified in continuous dialogue with the cultural worlds ‘outside’ and the identities which they offer” (Hall et al. 1992 cited in Van 't Klooster/Van Asselt/Koenis 2002: 111).

Bringing together the understanding of region and identity we can define regional identity. Like the national identity regional identity implies a territorial and a population base. Individuals or groups share a regional identity if they refer to the region as a place or institution where they belong to. The founding elements of national identities apply in the same way. It is even possible that people living in one region see themselves as a nation but that requires a national tradition which has been built in the same way as other national identities. It is very unlikely to be found in new regions or in regions of states without any regional tradition. A good example for the coincidence of region and nation is Scotland, where devolution took place because of the perception of Scotland as a nation and because of strong political entrepreneurs who fought for political recognition of that identity (Sturm 2003, Sturm 2004).

Regional identity can either be considered as equal to the national identity or being perceived as subordinated to the national identity as some scholars assume (Archilés/Martí 2001: 781). This definition still leaves room for interpretation. Mühler and Opp (2004: 23) for example hypothesize that the identification with a region is dependent on whether a person was born and has grown up within the region or outside of the region. The idea of identification is related to the concept of “Heimat” and refers therefore to mechanisms of primary socialization. This hypothesis has serious implications. First it means that regions with a high degree of migrants – regardless whether these migrants come from another region in the same country or from another country – are disadvantaged concerning the development of regional identifications. Generally speaking regions with a good economic performance attract more migrants than underdeveloped regions (see figure 1 and Putnam
1993), which would – on the long run – lead to a decrease of social capital in well developed regions. Up to now we do not have empirical evidence for such a process.

Instead of referring to this extremely narrow and unpracticable definition I will use the more flexible concept applied by social constructivism. Regional identities can be equally regarded as imagined identities and as constructed as it is the case for national identities. They are constructed by elites and the regional population. Both groups can take an active part in this process. Whether these people have been born and grown up in the region is of no importance as the example of Kurt Biedenkopf, the former minister-president of the German Bundesland Saxony shows. Biedenkopf became minister-president of Saxony at a late stage of his professional/political career. He was one of the “Wessis” going East. He was neither born nor did he grow up in Saxony, but he put some effort in (re-)establishing a Saxonian identity (Luutz 2001) and unlike other “Wessis” he was widely accepted and valued as a leader in this region until his, in democratic and republican understanding somehow unorthodox, way of equating public and (his) private goods became known. Both, Biedenkopf’s strategy of creating a Saxon identity and his demonstration of his own identification with the region, disprove Mühler’s and Opp’s hypothesis. Further evidence for disproving the hypothesis is given by the data Mühler and Opp themselves collected in Saxony. The data shows that the primary socialization and the birth within the region is much less significant for the development of regional identification than other factors (Mühler/Opp 2004: 94-97).

Furthermore, the definition Mühler and Opp proposed neglects the process of identity formation. It is not evident why an individual should identify himself with a geographical unit. As we will see for identity-building processes on the national level, there must be incentives to identify with something or someone.

The following chapter shows how history, psychology, sociology and political science explain the nation-building and identity-building processes. Instead of giving a detailed picture of each discipline, it seems to be much more promising to structure the concepts of the different disciplines along the main topics or definitions. A broad range of the studies on nations or nationalism can be classified as social constructivist as they share the idea that nations are somehow constructed. This will prove to be helpful for the question of the creation of regional identities which can be understood “understood as an assertion of an ‘indigenous way of life’ distinct from that of the rest of the state” (Batt 2002: 3).

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4 The dichotomy ,,Wessis”/“Ossis” is also a pattern of identification. After the German unification, people of the former GDR have been named as “Ossis” (easterners) and those from the FRG as “Wessis” (westerners). Some of those westerners who went to the former GDR in order to re-organize the civil service or to do business have been called “Besser-Wessis” (know-all westerners) because of their attitude of lecturing the “Ossis”. “Besser-Wessi” is therefore an imposed identification by “Ossis” on “Wessis” because of shared attitudes and in order to disassociate the groups.
2. How and why do national identities emerge? Key-concepts

In order to set up a theoretical framework for the creation of regional identities it seems promising to study historical processes of nation-building. The nation-building processes of the past cannot be entirely compared to the building of regional identities. But to a certain extent we can draw useful conclusions from studying nation-building processes, which enabled the development of national identities. Especially in the 1960s and 70s many scholars of a broad range of disciplines have been fascinated by modernization theories and nation-building and therefore by identity-building processes. Their findings are still valuable and will be taken into account here. Although there is variance in the conclusions these scholars have drawn, it is most interesting that the variance between the disciplines is comparatively small.

As the early works of social-scientists like Stein Rokkan, Gabriel Almond, Lucian Pye or Karl Deutsch show, nation-building processes are not equal all over the world but, however, bear some common features at least as long as one compares these processes within the same world region. The nation-building processes vary significantly concerning the amount of time they took. Furthermore, it seems to be relevant for the identity-building how the analyzed territories and nations have been developed at the take-off of nation-building (Deutsch 1966). At the time nation-building processes were going on, the emerging identities – the future national identities – were new concepts. People or groups of people who did not perceive themselves as communities took over national identities during the nation-building process.

More recent research has shown that individuals are able to internalize multiple social identities. An individual can easily see herself as Belgian, European and as a member of the national soccer team. That identities are not zero-sum games has also been shown for the development of a European identity (cf. for example Duchesne/Frognier 1995; Martinotti/Steffanizzi 1995).

In order to give a clearer picture, the emergence of national identities will be divided in constitutional elements – or preconditions for the development of identities and in influencing factors which will both be discussed in the following sections.

2.1 Constitutional elements of identities

Identity-building as dissociation

As identity is a way of positioning oneself in distinction to others, the building of identities can either occur in a pro-active or in a reactive way. The background is usually the same: the dissociation from others. Identity-building might even take place in a faster way and with stronger results if there is pressure from outside on an existing community. Belgian history demonstrates an example for the interdependent defensive creation of identities. While Belgium was a creation of a French speaking bourgeoisie as a reaction to the Dutch-rule in the early nineteenth century this also enabled or forced the emergence of Flemish and Walloon identities whereas the Walloon identity emerged as defensive strategy against
the Flemish movement (Lecours 2001: 52). Bowie states for the Welsh case that “it is in opposition to Englishness that Welshness is defined” (Bowie 1993: 190). This again is an example of the distinctive function of identity-building.5

The role of a common language, culture and ethnicity

The study of nation-building processes through the lens of various disciplines shows that identity-building depends on the existence or development of factors like a common language, ethnicity, culture, memory, and symbols. The significance of these factors varies across and within the disciplines according to the theoretical schools the authors belong to and how they consider identity-building.

Some authors like Stein Rokkan regard the existence of a common language as one of the founding factors of nation-building. The argument is that other constituents such as common values and a common culture can only be expressed if the individuals speak the same language. But there is no agreement on the importance of a common language as a necessary condition for nation building. The example of Switzerland shows that a nation can develop despite of speaking different languages. The French theologian Ernest Renan claimed in the 19th century that the potential explanatory variable “common language” is in line with the concept of ethnicity as founding factors for nations and therefore not valid: “La langue invite à se réunir : elle n’y force pas. Les États-Unis et l’Angleterre, l’Amérique espagnole et l’Espagne parlent la même langue et ne forment pas une seule nation. Au contraire, la Suisse, si bien faite, puisqu’elle a été faite par l’assentiment de ses différentes parties, compte trois ou quatre langues. Il y a dans l’homme quelque chose de supérieur à la langue : c’est la volonté”6 (Renan 1882).

This view is challenged by Rokkan who considers language as fate (Rokkan/Urwin 1983: 110) and as being more important than religion: “There is still a much closer tie-in between language and territory than there is between religion and territory” (Rokkan 1977: 570). Although for Rokkan language is an important component of the nation-building process, it is not the main precondition or the single precondition for the creation of a national identity, but just one among others (Rokkan/Urwin 1983: 68). Closely related to language is culture. Culture is both a dependent and an independent variable for identity-building. Gellner states that culture reinforces structures7 in simple societies and replaces these structures in developed societies (Gellner 1978 [1964]: 154) Identity-building can be constituted by a

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5 If dissociation dominates the identity-building process, the likelihood of creating a nationalism increases. This can lead to a restrictive language policy within the regions which can be observed in regions perceiving themselves as nations as for example Québec or Catalonia (see for example Keating 1998a).

6 “Language invites people to unite, but it does not force them to do so. The United States and England, Latin America and Spain speak the same languages yet do not form single nations. In contrary, Switzerland, so well made, as it has been made with the consent of its different parts, numbers three or four languages. There is something in man which is superior to language and that is the will.”

7 In Gellner’s understanding, structures refer to assigned roles which determine their activities and their relationship within the society.
common culture but at the same time culture is influenced by the existence of identifications.

Some authors consider ethnics as a constituent for the formation of national identities. In fact the positioning of ethnics is considered in a similar way as the question of language. The same ethnicity does not hinder nation-building, but it is neither a necessary nor an exclusive element as multi-ethnic nations show. Deutsch described nation-building as dynamic processes of social mobilization and cultural assimilation that are “likely to be more powerful in uniting or destroying an emerging people or a newly-established state than are the mere static facts of the multiplicity of tribes or languages within its territory” (Deutsch 1966: 6).

The role of collective memory and of symbols

The following two elements, the collective memory and symbols are interdependent and of similar importance for the identity-building process. Within the disciplines sociology, history, psychology and political science the memory functions are considered as being fundamental for the process of identity formation. Psychologists consider “stories” as an essential part of personhood. Creating stories is seen as basic ability and need of human beings (Cooper/Rowan 1999: 2; Crossley 2003: 290). In this respect, psychologists also deal with the function of language. Social constructivists among psychologists emphasize the general meaning of language, but some of them just refer to language as the necessary tool to make up and tell stories which help to identify (Crossley 2003: 290). The existence of a common language is therefore not necessary. The focus lies on the story and the way the memory of these stories creates a pattern of identification.

What works on the individual level, can also be applied to the collective level of emerging nations. National identities are composed of shared memories and shared symbols. Both can be triggered by external events and by communication processes. Like the idea of the nation as a whole, the common memories are invented or created as memories occur in a very selective way (Gellner 1987: 17). The importance of a common memory and stories is also supported by philosophy. Hermann Lübbe states for example that identity is represented by the existence of common stories (Lübbe 1977: chapter 12).

Symbols as well as language can be considered as a means of establishing and maintaining shared “stories”, memories or values. Symbols – like national heroes – have usually a positive connotation among the people of a nation, even or especially if these heroes are seen in a much more skeptical way outside this nation, or if there is no proof for the real existence of the national hero like in the case of the Swiss hero Wilhelm Tell. Heroes and other symbols – usually positioned in the past – help to dissociate one nation from another and therefore have a unifying effect on the emerging nation or a preserving effect on existing nations. Symbols also have the function of facilitating communication processes: symbols promote the intelligibility of identifications (Gellner 1978 [1964]: 155).
2.2 The nation as an invented structure

The geographers Van ‘t Klooster, van Asselt and Koenis distinguish three different ways of identity-building resulting in three different forms of identities: essential identity, imposed identity and imagined identity. The essentialist perspective argues that identity is the basic setting of property of subjects without which the subjective – be it an individual or a group – would not exist. This implies that identity can change but that core properties persist and cannot be altered (Van ‘t Klooster/Van Asselt/Koenis 2002: 112).

The imposed identity is generated through disciplinary forces like any legitimate authorities, implicit norms and values, schools, force. It is assumed that people adopt imposed images as a means to achieve personal goals (Van ‘t Klooster/Van Asselt/Koenis 2002: 114). This way of conceptualizing identity is also part of social constructivist approaches.

While the subject has got a rather passive role in the first two perspectives, it gets a more active part in the third perspective. Here the subject not just internalizes any image or value, but chooses or rejects values and images and by doing so, constructs and maintains social structures. This process creates a division between the self and the other (Van ‘t Klooster/Van Asselt/Koenis 2002: 114). Like the perspective of imposed identities this perspective forms a part of the social constructivist approaches.

The described explanations for the emergence of national identities have in common that they do not consider identities as coming out of the blue nor as being completely unchangeable. As we can see in history, identities have grown – or have been created – and identities have changed over time. Anderson defined nations besides of being sovereign and limited as imagined political communities. The imagination relates to the fact that the members of a nation do not know each other but have an idea about the existence of a community (Anderson 1993: 15). Ernest Gellner drew a similar conclusion, but went one step further and stated that nations are not grown but invented (Gellner 1978 [1964]: 169). This assumption contains one problem and two advantages. The problem is that inventing a nation implies that this concept is artificial and that there might be more “natural” communities. This concept clearly devalues national identities (Anderson 1993: 16).

The first advantage lies in the fact that such a perception of nationhood does not lift this form of identification on a higher level than other identifications and keeps it therefore comparable to other sets of identification. The second advantage is the idea that group identities can be created or “invented” which helps to transfer the identity-building process to the regional level. The idea of invented nations dominated the discussion within history for a long period of time. Historians considered the nation states as the result of political intentions. Other identity building factors like economic transactions or communication were excluded (Mesmer 1987: 14).

These factors have been considered by sociologists and political scientists like Deutsch, Rokkan, Pye or Almond. Deutsch for example defines “nation” as the result of the transformation of a people or ethnic groups within a social process of mobilization. In this view nation-building is rather a process than a single event in history. The process
described by Deutsch focuses on economic development, trade and communication and is divided in eight phases which occur in all nation-building processes, but not necessarily in the same range or intensity. These phases are (1) the transition from subsistence agriculture to barter economy, (2) the social mobilization of the rural population in core areas with dense population and intensive exchange (3) the development of cities and the growth of social mobility within the cities and between cities and rural areas, (4) the development of fundamental communication networks, which link important rivers, cities and trade routes, (5) the accumulation of capital and social institutions, (6) the development of the term “interest” and the extension of the individual self-awareness, (7) the awaking of ethnic awareness, the conscious or unconscious adoption of national symbols, (8) the amalgamation of ethnic consciousness and the trend to impose political constraints (Deutsch 1972: 29-40). In this context, identity-building is one aspect of the nation-building process but not identical with nation-building. From Deutsch’s findings which are confirmed by the work of Gellner and Rokkan, we can conclude that identity-building and economic development correlate with each other.

The difference between the identities in Scotland and Wales demonstrates the importance of institutions. While some institutions persisted in Scotland (e.g. the Church of Scotland and the Royal Bank of Scotland) and contributed to the Scottish identity, Wales did not have such institutions and the Welsh identity is by far weaker than the Scottish. Additionally the example of the Royal Bank of Scotland shows that institutions can also have function in a symbolic way (Münter 2005).

According to the social capital theory strong identifications within an economic area promote economic prosperity (Putnam 1993). Deutsch’s work on the other hand demonstrates that – at least in the early stages of identity-building and economic development – a distinct economic development is favorable for the formation of identities within that area.

Institutions in the nation-building process

Joseph Strayer stresses that nation-building in Europe was a function of state-building whereas the existence of a state is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for building a nation (Strayer 1966). Strayer’s assumptions lead us to another important precondition for identity-building on the national level: the existence of institutions which trigger and influence the process of identity-building. According to social constructivist assumptions these institutions are at the same time influenced by the actors operating within the institutions. This creates the problem that we cannot exactly determine a starting point for the identity building, which might cause some difficulties for the analysis of the preconditions for the creation of regional identities.
Political entrepreneurs in the nation-building process

The assumption that nations have been invented (Anderson 1993) almost automatically leads to the question “who has invented nations and therefore national identities”? Applying the concept of the three different identities by Van ‘t Klooster et. al (2002), we can distinguish between three groups: First, populations who accept and also shape identities and form an in-group, second, outside-groups from whom the emerging nation wants to dissociate itself or who trigger the identity-building by applying pressure on this group, and third political entrepreneurs – or in more general terms elites – who initiate and influence the identification-building process by imposing force or by giving incentives.

The various examples of nation-building processes show that the existence of each of the groups is necessary. As Anderson, Deutsch and others have shown, nation-building is not a natural process but a process that needs initiation and organization. Therefore the existence of political entrepreneurs is an absolute precondition for the nation-building process.

3. Conditions for the creation of regional identities

In the preceding chapter the explanations of a variety of disciplines for the emergence of national identities has been demonstrated. The samples show that social constructivism covers most of the explanations of the presented approaches. Therefore, it seems adequate to start with social constructivist assumptions for setting up a theoretical framework for the creation of regional identities.

The situation on the regional level is similar to processes of identity-building on the national level. But instead of creating identities on a higher political level than originally existent, the formation of regional identities involves both, the creation of identities on a lower as well as on a higher political level. Unlike people during the nation-building processes, the population of a new region usually already has got a national identification. As in the case of nation-building there also exist identities on lower levels like families, tribes, communities, or municipalities.

The question is how regional identities fit into these already existing patterns of identifications and whether identifications are zero-sum games or not. Can subjects hold an infinite number of identities or are some identities superior to others? There is no agreement within the literature concerning this question. Some authors postulate that the national identity has got a supremacy over other identities because it is inescapable. Rokkan for example postulates that the national identity gains supremacy over other identities. Nation-building therefore does not mean that a new identity adds to former identities (quoted in Flora 1999: 67). For Rokkan the formation of identities is therefore a zero-sum game. If this assumption is applied to the formation of identities on a new political/organizational level, it causes a serious problem. It implies that the creation of a new set of identities is only possible by reducing other sets of identifications.

Comparable to the national level, identities on the regional level are linked to interest of the main actors. Sociologists like political scientists and here especially social constructivists
have shown that identities can be created and have been created during the various nation-building processes. Referring to the findings on the national level, this chapter seeks to present a framework for the creation of regional identities.

In order to initialize the building of regional identities it is necessary that the following conditions are given:

- There must be a distinct region with at least some administrative functions and an institutional framework including a regional assembly whose members belong regional elites. These elites must have an interest in promoting regional identities – if regional elites only see the region as a means to improve their own career, it is not likely that they have a long-term interest in the development of the region.

As we have seen, the concept of identity includes psychological, economic and political aspects which are interdependent. Due to this interdependence it is not possible to define a fixed starting point (Flora 1999: 67). The elements discussed below do not necessarily need to occur in the same order as discussed here. Theoretically it is possible to start with the region-building process. The easiest way to achieve regional identities within a relatively short period of time seems to be to create regions along traditional cultural boundaries. As this is no longer possible for the previously created regions, it seems to be more realistic to assume that the region has already been created. Whether this has been done in accordance with the future regional elites or without any influence from within the regions might be of short and long term relevance for the strategies of the regional main actors. If the main actors within a region seek disbanding of the region, they are not likely to invest time, money and reputation into the creation of regional identities as these would be cumbersome to their own interests.

Regional elites play a crucial role in the identity-building process. They serve at the same time as examples and have the opportunity to activate identity-building. In the French Region Rhône-Alpes this has been done among others by a specific marketing for the region and by including the regional population into the framing of the regional development plan. The regional assembly decided to discuss the mandatory development plan, “Schéma régional d’aménagement et de développement du territoire“ (SRADT) with the population in order to get input, but basically to promote the identification with the region. With a campaign “2020 Imaginons Rhône-Alpes!“ the assembly invited the inhabitants of the region to participate through surveys and discussion with members of the regional assembly. For France this is a rather uncommon approach, but it attracted quite a number of participants, whereas the participation was higher in the urban areas and here especially in Lyon, the capital of the region, where the identification with the region is further developed than in other parts of the region. The higher level of identification can be explained by the stronger “presence“ of the region due to the location of the regional administration which beside other benefits provides jobs (Zimmermann-Steinhart 2003).

The creation of identifying symbols within new regions or regions with conflicting groups seems to be a difficult task. Here examples from longer established regions show that it might be easier to fall back upon symbolic regional policy. Symbolic regional policy can consist of emphasizing appealing characteristics of the regional population. Emphasizing the appealing characteristics generates two effects. It relates to the perception of identities
from within the region and from outside (Bowie 1993): First it has an effect on the population within the region where it stimulates the people to feel sympathy towards each other and it improves the opinion of outsiders on the region which can lead to investments and/or migration.

This form of symbolical policy can be found in many regions, for example in Baden-Württemberg. This “Land” has been founded by a merger of three smaller states, whereas the population of two of them – Baden and Württemberg – strongly dislike each other for historical reasons. Nevertheless it has been possible to create common identities within twenty years. The political elites have been applying some of the positive characteristics ascribed to the population of one part of the region to the whole population. Like this, and with the help of a positive economic development the people of this region now identify with the region as a whole. This does not mean that they have given up their initial identification or their dislike for each other. The identification works along the line of the success of the region.

The examples of Baden-Württemberg and of Rhône-Alpes show that in both cases the successful economic development favored the creation of regional identities (which are much less distinct in Rhône-Alpes than in Baden-Württemberg). This leads to two questions: first, how likely is the development of identity in poorer or not developing regions? Second, what happens to regional identifications if the economic success grinds to a halt?

If there is no economic success within a new region, it might be difficult to trigger regional identification unless there are no other incentives. Alternative incentives might be found in an extraordinary landscape, but this will not last if there are no perspectives for economic development. The example of the landscape might only work if it attracts tourism which might be part of the economic development. Another possibility of creating a regional identity might be seen in the dissociation from other regions. But this again is not promising on the long run if the economic development does not improve.

This rather pessimistic hypothesis can also give a tentative answer to the second question. In regions where the identification with the region is entirely based on economic success, it is very likely that these identifications will decrease significantly if the economic performance remains poor over a longer period of time. It is very likely that the solidarity within the population reduces along with a worsening economic performance. According to the social capital hypothesis, this is likely to lead into a downwards spiral.

In conclusion, I see the creation of regional identities as a feasible task. It is a task which needs regionally dedicated actors, enforcing institutions, a certain amount of economic success within the region and time. Although the socialization-hypothesis of Mühler and Opp has been rejected, it is nevertheless evident that identification does not happen in a very short period of time. How long the period of time is, is likely to be dependent on the conditions concerning the fragmentation and polarization within the region, economic development, dedication and the strategies of political elites, and the distinctiveness from other regions.
In order to elaborate these assumptions, they need to be tested in “artificially” set-up regions across Europe. It seems to be promising to choose both, newly built regions and regions which have been existed for some decades like the already mentioned examples of Rhône-Alpes and Baden-Württemberg.

References


