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# Regional Identities and Communities

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## Regional Identities and Communities

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### Abstract:

In exploring the relationship between regional identities/communities and regional institutions, political scientists (IR theorists in particular) typically focus on how established institutions affect feelings of community and identity. In contrast, area specialists and historians often ‘reverse the causal arrow,’ asking how pre-existing senses of community facilitate the emergence of regional organizations in the first place. I argue that this relationship is both over- and under-studied. For the EU we have a rich, interdisciplinary set of findings about identity and how it is shaped. Outside of Europe, we know less. Partly this is a reflection of weaker institutions with shorter histories, but it also reveals a tendency to let suggestive stories of identity’s role substitute for systematic analysis. Regardless of the region, future work on the institutions/identity nexus needs to take more seriously both domestic context and process.

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## Regional Identities and Communities

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Why include identity and community in a volume on regionalism and regional institutions? After all, in some cases, such factors seem irrelevant. There is a reason we do not talk about North American regionalism or NAFTA's (North American Free Trade Agreement) role in shaping senses of community and identity. I teach in Vancouver, British Columbia, and my students chuckle whenever they are asked about their identities as North Americans (see also Capling and Nossal 2009).<sup>2</sup>

Yet, evidence from other regions suggests that North America may be the exception. Invoking such phrases as 'ASEAN Way' or 'pan-Arabism,' elites often advance a narrative of region building as identity construction. And then, of course, there is Europe, where it seems to be a given among political elites and scholars that there is a vitally important connection between the evolution of the European Union and regional senses of identity and community.

So, the good news is that there is clearly a need for such a chapter – exploring the roles of identity and community – in a volume on regionalism. The bad – or, better said, challenging – news is this is not an easy task. Part of the problem is delimiting the chapter's empirical scope. Choosing the wrong focus – North America, say – might lead to a spectacularly (biased) null finding. Another part of the challenge is that my key concepts – identity and community – can and should be viewed in two different ways. As the independent variable, one can explore their role in helping create regional organization. Yet, it is equally important to reverse the causal arrow and explore how regional organizations, once formed, affect feelings of identity and community. A final challenge is disentangling discourses about identity from its practical effects.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a draft chapter prepared for Tanja Boerzel, Thomas Risse and David Levi-Faur, Editors, *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). For comments on earlier versions, I thank the editors, as well as participants at a December 2013 workshop held at the Freie Universitaet Berlin. Amitav Acharya and German Prieto kindly shared literature suggestions, and Martha Snodgrass provided research assistance.

<sup>2</sup> I understand identities as shared representations of a collective self as reflected in public debate, political symbols, collective memories, and elite competition for power; they consist of collective beliefs about the definition of the group and its membership that are shared by most members.

It is one thing to document regional elites talking ‘identity talk’; it is quite another to trace actual impacts.

I develop these insights and arguments in three parts. I begin (II) with a review of what we know empirically about the effects of regional institutions on identity/community, and vice versa, examining these dynamics in Asia, Africa, and South America. In section III, the chapter zeroes-in on the case of Europe. I assess research on the institution-community-identity nexus on the continent, and how this work is crucially shaped by particular theoretical-disciplinary emphases. The findings and theories on Europe are not – I argue - *sui generis*. At the same time, the degree to which they generalize to other regions is very limited. I then conclude (IV) by highlighting several cutting edge challenges for students of regionalism, regional international organizations (IOs), and identity. Theoretically, there is a need to bring politics and domestic context back in, and in a way that transcends disciplinary boundaries; we need to move beyond the tools offered by political science. Methodologically, while scholars have skilfully argued that the identity-community-IO relation is one that develops and changes over time, they have been less successful at crafting techniques for measuring this temporal/process element in their studies.

My overall bottom line is sobering and perhaps even pessimistic. If we consider the period since World War II – the focus here – then one longitudinal trend is clear. We have an increasing number of regional institutions, which encompass a growing number of functional areas and regions, but that have relatively little impact on identity. We find a similar pattern with the reverse relation. For all the identity talk among regional elites, there is little systematic evidence of any major role it plays in leading to more or more robust regional organizations.

The answer to these (non-) findings is over-determined, and explained by multiple factors. For the IO → identity connection, member states typically deny institutions any role in directly or indirectly shaping the latter. In addition, national identities remain strong and surprisingly robust. Moreover, in a globalized and regionalized world, regional IOs increasingly must compete with other sources and arenas of identity construction. Finally, if one reflects on the experience of identity formation in nation states, then it becomes clear that regional

institutions lack both the mechanisms – socialization, say – and foundational myths needed to foster identity.

Regarding the identity → IO relation, the analytic challenge is parsing out the precise causal role of the former. If we consider – for example – the European case, one can argue that some common identity (religion/Christian-democracy) played a role in the creation of the European Community (EC) in the 1950s. However, thinking counterfactually strongly suggests there were multiple other reasons (constraining German power, economic benefits) why the EC would still have been established even in the absence of shared elite identity.

### **Regional Institutions and Identity/Community**

As I write in mid-2014, it is striking how much more literature now addresses the IO-identity nexus than 15 or 20 years ago. This may be an indication that something is going on. However, it equally may be a function of the dominance of political scientists within this literature, many of whom adopt a constructivist theoretical perspective where questions of identity are front and center (Adler 2013, for an overview).

Whatever the case, it is clear that identity matters – as both independent and dependent variable - in a number of different regions and regional organizations. When exploring the identity/community – IO relation, many contemporary scholars build upon the path-breaking work of Karl Deutsch over 50 years ago, so it is perhaps best to begin with him. Community and shared identity, according to Deutsch, could emerge through transactions and communication flows. The resulting ‘security communities’ would create expectations of peaceful change. While Deutsch focused primarily on transactions between states, there was clearly a role as well for IOs in his analytic schema (Deutsch 1957).

In subsequent years, Deutsch was criticized on grounds both theoretical (why should shared transactions always led to common identity) and methodological (can community be measured simply by counting transactions), which led a newer generation of scholars to refine his arguments. In particular, Adler and Barnett (1998) offered a more rigorous theoretical discussion of security communities and added case studies to the methods used to study them

(see also Acharya 2009). Learning, they suggested, was one key way in which regional IOs might help foster collective identity (Adler and Barnett 1998, ch.2). This learning mechanism gave operational – and social – content to Deutsch's notion of transactions, explaining exactly how the latter might produce collective identification.

Adler/Barnett and collaborators then go on to provide a number of suggestive studies - on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Southeast Asia, and South America, for example - where regions or regional IOs played a role in reshaping senses of community and identity. Collectively, these chapters demonstrate that identities were in flux. Less clear is the exact causal role played by regional IOs. Was learning at work? Or was identity change occurring via other mechanisms (arguing, elite turnover, othering)? The chapters employ neither the type of research design, nor the primary data, nor the process-based methods needed to isolate learning's effects. And, to be clear, this is meant to be constructive criticism. When these authors wrote (late 1990s), learning arguments were just starting to make their way into political science and international relations (Levy 1994). Their purpose in the Adler and Barnett volume was to establish a plausible case for learning within security communities and the role played by IOs, which they did.

It would be a task for others to get down to the nitty gritty of operationalizing and empirically testing such analytic claims. As I argue in the next section, students of European regional organizations have done a good job in this regard; work on other regions and IOs less so (see also Acharya and Johnston 2007, 277-78). It is to this latter scholarship that I now turn. As a chapter of this length cannot possibly cover all regions and regional IOs, I instead focus on three of the more important regions: Asia, Africa, and South America. For each region, I first explore work on regional identity as a prerequisite for the construction of regional IOs; I then reverse the causal arrow, examining arguments on the ability of regional IOs to reshape community and identity.

### *Asia*

Within Asia, there is a small but important body of work that explores the identity → regional IO connection, especially with respect to the Association of South-East Asian Nations



(ASEAN). On the latter, the work of Amitav Acharya and collaborators has set the standard. On identity, they argue that diversity is a core component of it in Asia, and this has played an important role in shaping aspects of ASEAN as a regional organization. For example, it is this diverse identity component that explains the organization's willingness to tolerate various regime types (Acharya 1997; Acharya 2009; Acharya and Layug 2012). More precisely, given the way in which identity is measured – analysis of programmatic declarations from ASEAN documents and statements by leaders - this is an argument on how the composition of elite identity shapes ASEAN. Essentially, their argument reverses Deutsch's classic formulation in that ASEAN's imagined community was the starting point upon which subsequent transactions occurred.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, institutional development in Asia did not stop with ASEAN. In 1994, a broader entity – the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was established. In doing this, the leaders of ASEAN insisted that the AFR be characterized by incrementalism and a skeletal organizational structure. Acharya interprets this as evidence of the ASEAN way and regional identity at work (Acharya 2009, ch.6). The correlation certainly is plausible. The ASEAN way was a set of principles codified over many years within ASEAN; they were ready to be applied to a new institution like the ARF. But, of course, correlation need not imply causation. Perhaps the ARF took on the form it did because national political elites were playing the politics of the possible, seeking in particular to limit and regulate the roles played by the US and China in the region (see also Prieto 2013b, 22-27).

If the above suggests that identity at times plays a role in shaping regional organization, its absence may then hinder IO development. In fact, precisely this absence has been highlighted to explain why Europe, in the years following WW II, saw the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) while no similar entity was created in Asia. In an intriguing study, Hemmer and Katzenstein (2002) argue that the United States wished to create and organize both a North Atlantic and a Southeast Asian region in the aftermath of the Second World War. With its North Atlantic partners, the United States preferred to operate on a

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<sup>3</sup> These future transactions need not lead to a positive outcome. See *Economist* (2014), which argues that this shared identity – elevating consensus to a guiding principle - has undercut attempts to create a functioning ASEAN Economic Community in recent years.

multilateral basis, while in Southeast Asia, it chose bilateralism. Collective identity was key in explaining these differential choices. U.S. policymakers saw their potential European allies as members of a shared community; the multilateralism that came to define NATO was – at least in part – made possible by this collective identity. According to Hemmer and Katzenstein, it was the absence of this shared identity that helps explain the different outcome in terms of regional organization in Asia.

I write ‘at least in part’ and ‘helps explain’ because readers cannot ultimately tell how much of the NATO – Asia contrast is explained by identity. As the authors acknowledge, material factors and efficiency considerations also played a role. Unfortunately, three causal factors within the confines of a single study leads to an over-determined outcome, where it is not possible to assess how much of it is explained by identity alone.

If we now turn to the regional IO → identity relation in Asia, it is clear this has received less scholarly attention, especially in comparison to Europe. This may simply be a function of more people studying Europe and the EU; however, it is likely also explained by the weakness and relative youth of Asian IOs compared to those in Europe. Whatever the case, several scholars nonetheless do hint at the ability of Asian IOs to change identity, particularly at the elite level. Regarding ASEAN, Acharya suggests that extensive interaction over time within the organization has modified elite identities; this occurred via a socialization process (Acharya 2009, ch.2). However, as Acharya fails to specify fully the argument, it is not clear why interaction should lead to common group feeling and a possible change in identity. After all – and to turn an old phrase on its head – there is nothing that breeds contempt like familiarity. That is, it is quite possible to imagine instances of prolonged interaction where those involved end up feeling more distinct and different from one another.

This problem of theoretical under-specification is addressed head on in Alastair Johnston’s work on China and its relation with Asian regional - and universal – IOs (Johnston 2007). Indeed, Johnston sets a theory-data-method standard that should become the norm in studies of Asian IOs and their connection to identity/community. Thinking about identity change means to measure a process, and Johnston appreciates the analytic challenges such a perspective entails. Theoretically, it means to think in terms of specific causal mechanisms that capture this

process. He provides us with three: mimicking, persuasion and social influence. In terms of data, he makes extensive use of interviews (over 120), while carefully addressing the weaknesses (misremembering, strategic dissimulation) inherent in this particular data source (Johnston 2007, 41-43). He also does not stop with interviews, instead triangulating across multiple data streams, including public documents, Chinese academic literature, and private communications among Chinese bureaucrats.

Regarding methodology, he takes seriously the task of measuring process. Writing before the term was popularized, he rigorously employs a form of so-called process tracing (Beach and Pedersen 2013; Bennett and Checkel 2014). This means he first operationalizes his three causal mechanisms of identity change, asking (in the jargon) what would be the observable implications if they were at work in the Chinese case. He then presents carefully structured narratives, where readers get a real sense of what mechanisms were at work with what effects (Johnston 2007, ch.1 and *passim*). Thus, for example, Johnston examines China's participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and advances a nuanced, well documented argument on how such interaction shifted parts of Chinese elite identity (Johnston 2007, ch.4).<sup>4</sup>

### *Africa*

Within the panoply of regional organizations in Africa, the creation of the African Union (AU) in 2002 – as the successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU) – is hard to explain in the absence of some prior regional identity. While the OAU to AU transformation would appear to be a story of powerful leaders (Mbeki, Abasanjo and possibly Gaddafi) and the agenda they jointly crafted, the particular shape and content of the new organization was in part driven by a shared identity, where continent-wide cooperation in the economic/political/social arenas would serve as the foundation for a new African security order (Tieku 2004). Consistent with this shared vision, the AU's Constitutive Act empowers the organization – for the first time in the continent's history – to intervene, without consent, in the domestic affairs of African states to prevent war crimes or in response to a serious threat to legitimate order (Tieku 2004).

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<sup>4</sup> This analytic approach is not rocket science, but it is one adopted all-too-infrequently by students of regional IOs with interests in measuring identity change. For an excellent primer on how – rigorously - to incorporate identity in our analyses, see Abdelal, *et al* (2009).

Identity actually matters twice in this account. The post-2000 shared elite vision was a direct response to an earlier, post-colonial African identity that endowed the OAU with a strong non-intervention norm (Williams 2007). As one analyst argues, “Africa’s states and regional organizations do not devise security policies based on material and balancing considerations alone. In practice, ethical and normative questions about what it means to be ‘African’ play an important role” as well (Williams 2007, 278; see also Moore 1987; and Söderbaum 2004). This all sounds very plausible, but design and methods issues make it difficult for readers to grasp the exact role played by identity. I have no doubt that elites are invoking a particular identity narrative – and changes to it over time – to explain (justify?) the emergence of (OAU) and changes in (AU) African regional organization. Much less clear is whether such narratives really measure identity, how widely shared they are, and how such narratives relate to other causal factors - power differentials, domestic politics, diffusion processes - that may also be reshaping African IOs (Herbst 2007).

Reversing the causal arrow, one finds some evidence of regional IOs, once established, influencing identity. This has occurred in at least two ways. The first pathway – captured by political scientists and IR specialists – is that African IOs create a site for sustained interaction amongst bureaucrats and elites. Like Acharya and Johnston in the Asian cases, the claim is this interaction, by socializing, produces changes in identity. Regarding the OAU, Williams (2007) argues that its leaders were socialized via two routes: i) common schooling abroad - both Anglophone and Francophone - where African elites mingled (see also Reno 2011); and ii) through the many OAU summits and other meetings, where the heads of state lived at the same hotels and met outside the public eye. On the AU, we see a similar process at work, where “its members are involved in a continual process of argumentation about what the central tenets of the organization’s security culture should be. The origins of this culture lie in the discourses of Pan-African identity articulated since the late nineteenth century, and its constitutive elements have been refined in the crucible of post-colonial international politics” (Williams 2007, 278).

These are intriguing arguments, but readers will be left wondering about their validity. For one, the same design-data-methods issue arise as seen earlier. In addition, arguments of this type – where identity change is attributed to one (regional IO) arena – fail to control for an

important fact. These same African elites are simultaneously embedded in other arenas where the processes of socialization and identity change are likely cancelling out or over-whelming that derived from meeting a few times a year in a particular IO (Checkel 2014b, for an application of this argument to the EU/European setting).

A second way in which regional IOs in Africa have shaped identity is less direct – and likely to be missed by a political-science approach. If one again considers the AU, it is not just what occurs between its doors, so to speak, that may influence conceptions of identity. Beyond this, it can create spaces where a politics of memory and memorials spur socialization and identity change. For example, it has been argued that the long process through which the AU came to establish a human-rights memorial next to its headquarters in Addis Ababa enabled the formation of a new political consciousness and a new normative space for human rights (de Waal and Ibreck 2013). This politics of memory was given a considerable boost by the fact that the old OAU and early AU headquarters buildings were situated immediately opposite the Addis Ababa central prison, where severe human-rights violations occurred under several different Ethiopian governments.

The focus here is not so much the physical memorial, but the politics around it. As de Waal and Ibreck argue, it is “the political significance of the memorialization ... as both a window onto power relations between the regional body [the African Union – JC], states, and civic agencies; and a form of symbolic power in itself, with implications for the institution’s norms and identity. ... [These] memorials reflect and reinforce ideas about political community and shared ethical principles” (de Waal and Ibreck 2013, 193). While the authors clearly document the political dynamic surrounding the establishment of the AU human rights memorial, it is less clear exactly how such mobilization led to identity change among which actors and to what degree.

### ***South America***

As a factor promoting regional cooperation, identity in South America at times plays an interesting ‘negative’ role not seen in other regions. The Caribbean is a case in point. It is not a part of North America, as the United Nations often assumes for organizational purposes; nor

does it have strong cultural/historical ties to Latin America. Its regional identity thus has a negative quality – NOT this, NOT that. Elbow (1999) has argued that such an identity dynamic was at work behind the creation of Caricom – the Caribbean Community – in 1973. Caricom not only promised economic dividends to this group of English-speaking former British colonies; it was also a platform for declaring they were not an appendage to North America or Latin America. In a similar fashion, Tussie (2009) argues a common sense of what South Americans were not – the US and its neo-liberal/Washington-Consensus agenda – has driven a number of efforts to construct regional organizations, including the Latin American Free Trade Area in 1960 and MERCOSUR/Southern-Common-Market in 1991.

Identity would also appear to be at work within the Andean Community, with Prieto (2012) showing that pre-existing identity played a role in its establishment in 1969. The original signatory countries - Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru – shared a similar common past and a similar post-colonial situation. This identity was there in some form from the start, but was strengthened over time through interaction and negotiation – the latter claim being evidence of an IO → identity relation as well (Prieto 2012).

Prieto primarily infers evidence for this shared identity directly, from extensive interview data with over 30 officials and bureaucrats. This is a welcome move as such data is more likely to capture identity than leadership or summit proclamations. Less convincingly, Prieto also infers the existence of this collective identity indirectly. That is, the Andean Community persists, despite a manifest failure to attain its proclaimed goals. Something else – shared community for Prieto – must explain this institutional inertia. While this is a plausible reading, it would be strengthened considerably if the author considered likely alternative explanations – sunk costs, say – as well (Prieto 2012; see also Prieto 2013a).

For South American IOs producing changes in identity at later points - and aside from Prieto on the Andean Community - some claim to have seen a similar process at work in MERCOSUR. In particular, the organization's revival after the 1999-2002 financial crisis is attributable in part to a common identity shaped by interaction within it since its founding in 1991 (Caballero 2012). However, a lack of transparency in research methodology and an over-determined outcome make it difficult to evaluate this assertion.

### *Summary*

Our accounts of regional organization will be incomplete without a consideration of shared identity and community, as the above review indicates. We see evidence of two roles: (1) identity as a factor facilitating the emergence of regional organization in the first place; and (2) how these organizations, once established, affect feelings of community and identity in particular regions. Yet, these roles appear limited, at least when compared to the experience of regional organization in Europe – a finding consistent with Acharya and Johnston (2007, 262) when they write that “the design of regional institutions in the developing world has been more consistently sovereignty-preserving than sovereignty-eroding.”<sup>5</sup> A distinction highlighted by the editors in chapter 1 provides an explanation for this contrast. To this point, my survey has mainly covered instances of regional cooperation – region building that does not entail transfers of sovereignty to regional institutions – and not regional integration, where region building goes beyond cooperation and involves transfers of sovereignty to regional IOs. With integration – as in Europe, for example - identity and community may play greater roles, as it is hard to see how people can accept sovereignty transfer and supra-nationalism without some minimum sense of community.

Beyond this identity as independent/dependent variable distinction, the foregoing suggests four additional points to keep in mind. First, given this chapter’s subject matter, it is all too easy to focus too much on identity, failing to ask hard questions regarding its relative importance. For example, there are world regions (North America) and successful instances of regional cooperation (NAFTA), where identity appears to have played virtually no role. The lesson is to always think counterfactually: Absent what I assume to be analytically key (identity), would the outcome (creation of regional organization; later effect of regional IO on identity) be the same?

Second, it is important to recognize that identity’s role as a prerequisite of regional IO can in principle cut two ways. Above, I highlighted instances (ASEAN, AU) where it had a

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<sup>5</sup> It is thus somewhat puzzling that Roose (2013) comes to the opposite conclusion, arguing that regional identification in Europe is no stronger than in other regions. However, this finding is likely biased and skewed by his use of indicators and survey instruments – especially, the International Social Survey Programme - that are ill-suited for measuring identity.

positive effect on regional organization. However, there may be regions where pre-existing collective identity leads to the creation of weak and ineffective IOs. This is precisely the argument of Barnett and Solingen (2007) in their study of Middle East regionalism and the Arab League. As they argue, “the politics of Arab nationalism and a shared identity led Arab states ... to fear Arab unity in practice.” As an expression of such (feared) unity, the Arab League was thus “specifically designed to fail at producing the kind of greater collaboration and integration that might have weakened political leaders at home” (Barnett and Solingen 2007, 181).

Third, when exploring the influence of regional IOs on identity, analysts focus – overwhelmingly – on changes in elite identity. As a starting point, this makes sense. Those most directly affected by a particular regional IO are the elites and bureaucrats who interact within it (see also Barnett and Finnemore 2004). An emphasis on elites is also consistent with the political science / international relations toolkit adopted in much of the literature reviewed above. However, this limited analytic and disciplinary focus may be less justifiable in the case of strong IOs with expansive policy competences that reach deeper into the societies of their participating member states – as is the case in Europe.

Fourth, it is important to distinguish between narratives about identity’s role and systematic analysis where the data and methods are appropriate to the causal task at hand – to measure identity’s influence. In the work reviewed above, this stands – with the partial exception of Asia - as an important challenge for future work on the regional-IO/identity nexus.

### **Institutions and Identity – The (Very Special) Case of Europe**

If the previous section establishes a comparative context for what we know – and do not know – about the identity/regional-IO nexus, then, here, I use the case of Europe to explore it in more detail. Within Europe, I focus on the European Union, as it has been studied extensively. This is not to deny the importance of other European regional organizations and the role identity plays within them – NATO (Risse-Kappen 1997; Gheciu 2005), or the Council of Europe (Checkel 2003), say. Rather, space constraints plus the EU’s use (implicitly or explicitly) as a baseline case dictate this choice. Analytically, I primarily explore the regional IO → identity relation, as the majority of scholarship emphasizes it.



To give away the intent behind the section's subheading, Europe and the EU do look very different compared to other regions. In simple bean-counting terms, there is more scholarship focusing on identity and regional organization in Europe than elsewhere. It is also a richer literature in a disciplinary sense. Political science is still the starting point, but important insights now come from sociology, political theory, media studies and anthropology as well. This richness matters, for it provides a more complete account of the IO → identity relation, one which highlights new arenas and sources of identity change – without which it is impossible to understand the precise causal work being done by regional organizations. In terms of research design, data and methods, it is – for the most part – a literature that rises to the analytic challenge of moving beyond narratives about identity.

Should this scholarship serve as the baseline, setting a standard for work on other regions? The answer is 'yes' and 'no.' It is yes in that others can learn from the systematic, multi-disciplinary work done on the IO → identity connection in the EU context. However, to turn the tables, EU scholars need explicitly to draw comparisons to other regions, for it is only then that they will understand the very special scope conditions behind their analytic claims. Absent this recognition, there is a danger of offering *sui generis* insights dressed up as general arguments.

In what follows, I explore the regional IO / identity connection in Europe through three different disciplinary lenses - political science, sociology and anthropology – with an empirical focus on the European Union. While political science might seem an obvious choice – after all, the study of regional organizations has been a part of it since before WWII (Martin and Simmons 2013) – it would be a mistake to ignore insights from other disciplines, especially in an era marked by a blurring of the boundaries separating the domestic and regional-international and a politicization of all things having to do with the EU.

### ***Political Science***

In its accounts of regional IOs and identity, political science has accorded pride of place to institutions, formal as well as informal (norms), and elites acting within or through them. These agents seek actively to construct an identity, through persuasion, socialization and other

means; indeed, one might call this the engineering view of identity construction (Checkel and Katzenstein 2009, ch.1). Identities and community are constructed from the top-down, as it were – from regional organizations to the nation state and individuals and organizations within it (Barnett and Finnemore 2004).

An excellent example of this perspective in action is Judith Kelley's work (2004a, b) on how European regional IOs – the EU, OSCE, Council of Europe – were able to (partly) reshape senses of ethnic identity and community in post-Cold War East Europe. Specifically, she seeks to theorize and empirically measure the mechanisms linking IOs to state behavior and identity. If Kelley were to stop here, her study would resemble others – specifying the mechanisms between independent (regional IO) and dependent (state identity, policy) variables (Schimmelfennig 2003; Checkel 2007; Johnston 2007, for example).

She goes an important step further, however, introducing domestic politics into the analysis, basically as an intervening variable, with the degree of domestic opposition (high or low) affecting the likelihood of differing mechanisms having effects on state identity (Kelley 2004a, 32). This analytic move is to be applauded for it highlights the important point that regional IOs affect states and their identities by working through, shaping and influencing their domestic politics.

The argument is tested through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as carefully executed counterfactual analysis. On the qualitative techniques, she explicitly invokes the process based methods - process tracing, most importantly – that are essential for capturing the IO/identity relation. The rigor and transparency of her analysis are exemplary, making it easy for readers to see how she is measuring changes in state identity.

Overall, Kelley makes an important contribution. She illuminates the specific conditions and mechanisms that allow regional organizations to influence state conceptions of identity and community on ethnic minorities. Moreover, she demonstrates that a focus on process and mechanisms is fully consistent with theoretical and methodological rigor, which is no small feat given that many political scientists invoke mechanisms in at best a conceptually confused and metaphorical way (Gerring 2007; Bennett 2013).

A related political-science argument focuses on the indirect effects of regional institutions on identity and community. In this case, they create spaces where elite actors communicate, creating security communities (Adler and Barnett 1998), communities of communication (Bruter 2005) or public spheres (Risse 2010, 2014). This is again both a rather elitist and top-down view of how identities and communities are crafted.

Risse and collaborator's work on European public spheres is a very good example of this political science 'mark II' research on the IO/identity connection. Bridging several disciplines (media studies, political theory, political science), they argue that the EU has helped to Europeanize formally national public spheres, so one sees an emerging transnational sphere of communication in Europe. Theirs is a nuanced and carefully crafted argument. They recognize, for example, that power still plays a role in shaping public spheres (Risse 2014, ch.1) – which had been a blind spot in earlier work. It is also not an either/or argument, where European public spheres grow at the expense of national ones; the relationship is one of complementarity, not substitution (see, especially, Koopmans 2014).

For my purposes, what matters is the causal force of these Europeanized public spheres. They are not just talk shops, but settings “where collective identities are constructed and reconstructed and publicly displayed thus creating political communities” (Risse 2014, PAGE #). Thus, the EU - by facilitating the creation of these deliberative spaces - is changing senses of identity and community. Risse and collaborators do not simply assert this change, but document it through a number of empirically rich studies employing a variety of methods (discourse analysis, surveys, frame analysis). Like the Kelley book, this is anything but identity story telling. By advancing a clear, specified argument on public spheres and then connecting it to empirics via transparent methods, the validity of the causal claims they advance is enhanced (see also Koopmans and Statham 2010).

This political science research on the regional IO / identity nexus often works with a nation-state analogy, where identity construction at the regional level follows a script similar to that seen in the formation of nation states over the past two centuries, with elites playing a leading role. However, the analogy breaks down at the level of tools and mechanisms. Those (elite) engineers seeking to shape identity through regional institutions lack access to many of the

arenas and mechanisms – schools, armies, foundational myths, robust national public spheres – available to the crafters of national identities. This does not invalidate the claims of a Kelley or Risse. However, it does raise an issue of scale in that the identity effects they see being produced by regional IOs may be limited to elites and actually be quite weak (Hooghe 2005; Checkel 2007, ch.8).

### *Sociology*

By positing a greater role for groups and societal interaction in any regional institution – identity dynamic, sociologists potentially avoid this elite bias. Formal institutions still play a key albeit less central role than we saw above. In a masterful study, Fligstein (2009) has applied this type of sociological analysis directly to one of the central questions motivating this chapter: Does the EU shape the identity of its peoples?

Drawing upon extensive longitudinal data – stretching back to the 1960s in many cases – Fligstein argues as follows. Through the freedoms, rules and regulations of the internal market, the EU has dramatically increased trans-border interactions in Europe. In this way, a growing – albeit still small (10-15%) in absolute terms – number of Europeans have regularized contact, through trade and business associations, say. In turn, this increased contact leads to a greater sense of common identification. Here, regional institutions promote identity change not from the top-down, but horizontally and sideways, as it were (Fligstein 2009).<sup>6</sup>

There is much to commend in this perspective, as it brings real people and society and not just elites back into our accounts of regional IOs and identities/community. At the same time, there are limitations and possible weaknesses, both theoretically and empirically. On the former, the idea that contact leads to a greater sense of community is an old one in (experimental) social psychology. Yet, in the real world, this may not always be the case. For one, quality may trump quantity. It is not the amount of interaction, but its nature (deliberative vs. hierarchical-lecture formats, say) that leads to a greater sense of we-ness (Beyers 2005). Unfortunately, the quantitative methods employed by Fligstein cannot capture this process dimension. The old

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<sup>6</sup> Note the clear intellectual debt to Karl Deutsch. See Fligstein (2009, 16-18), as well as Deutsch (1957) and the discussion in section II above.

saying ‘correlation ain’t causation’ is as true here as anywhere else. In the ideal design, Fligstein would therefore complement his statistical analyses with one or more case studies employing process-based methods.

Moreover, intense interaction may very well produce group norms and identity that are bad, say in the case of rebel groups in civil war whose group bonding and sense of community legitimize the use of sexual violence and rape (Cohen 2013). There seems to be a (unwarranted) normative assumption in much of the EU → identity literature that the identities resulting from interaction will be different, but also better. There is thus a theoretical need to develop scope conditions: Under what conditions does social interaction fostered by institutions lead to ‘good’ as opposed to ‘nasty’ identity?

Regarding empirical limitations, this type of sociological argument on the regional institution – identity nexus may apply nowhere except in Europe. After all, if the densely institutionalized EU has such limited effects – remember that 12-15% figure – we are unlikely to find any impact in the case of other weaker and less institutionalized regional organizations in Asia, Africa or South America, a fact seemingly confirmed in section II above.

Another argument derived from sociology on the regional IO – community/identity nexus has its roots in the social movement literature, stressing frames and roles. From this perspective, strategic actors use regional IOs to embed-promote-spread certain ways of thinking and scripts that – if they successfully diffuse – may change senses of community and identity at the regional (Barnett 1993) or national level (Autesserre 2010). Similar to the political science research, this is a rather top-down view in that the source of a change in community and identity resides in regional IOs (or actors within them).

### ***Anthropology***

Anthropology offers a third lens for exploring the regional IO – community/identity relation. In keeping with disciplinary tastes and traditions, this is a much more bottom-up perspective, emphasizing the routines and experiences of individuals who interact with rules and norms promoted by IOs. Identities and senses of community emerge and change more by what we do and experience on a daily basis than by what we say - the political science story - or

through occasional interaction – the sociological story. Put differently, in moving from political science to anthropology, we have shifted – analytically - from a top-down engineering view of identity construction to an approach that is bottom-up and processual to the core.

Adrian Favell has applied this perspective to understand the evolving identities of what he calls Eurostars – young professionals who exploit the EU’s four freedoms to live and work where they choose in the continent (Favell 2008; see also Favell 2009). Drawing upon 5 years of ethnographic field work plus over 60 in-depth interviews, Favell charts how the EU – indirectly, through the freedoms associated with the internal market – shapes the lives and feelings of community of these young professionals in three different sites: Amsterdam, Brussels and London.

A snapshot of Favell’s account is as follows. You are a young professional. You and your family move - exploiting the EU’s four freedoms - from Madrid to Amsterdam to start a new career. How does the daily experience of shopping, getting your kids into school, dealing with the local bureaucracy, interacting with neighbors shape your sense of who you are and the narrative you build about Europe? Favell’s extensive immersion reveals what is typically missed in one-off surveys.<sup>7</sup> Instead of becoming more European, these individuals have their national sense of belonging reinforced (Favell 2008).

Favell’s argument adds a third element to the IO → identity dynamic sketched in this section. Perhaps the same individuals who create European public spheres or come into regular contact through the internal market, go – during their winter holidays - to the beaches of southern Spain and consciously recreate their own national communities through sustained, daily interaction (schools, newspapers, gated neighborhoods). Here, identity/community is evolving outside, around and perhaps in opposition to regional institutions (see also Holmes 2000, 2009).

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<sup>7</sup> For example, compare Wilson (2011) with Stoeckel (2012). Both examine Erasmus students (the EU-funded university-exchange program), both use surveys and panel studies to chart changing patterns of identification, yet they come to nearly opposite conclusions. Identities change (Stoeckel) ... or they do not (Wilson)!

### *Summary*

Which of these disciplinary lenses is right? This is – of course – the wrong question to ask. When exploring the relation between regional IOs and identity/community, the approaches emphasize different actors, mechanisms of change, different methods, and – often – differing outcomes (some versus little or no identity change). To capture fully the complexity at work, future work on the regional IO - identity/community nexus needs to make two moves. First, it should think in terms of scope conditions, that is, the conditions under which one perspective is more likely to apply. The political-science approach, with its stress on institutions, might be most applicable to Europe, given the thickness of institutions there. Second, the different disciplines should not be viewed in either/or terms, but both/and. By combining their insights, we learn more about regional IOs and what they do in terms of identity and community.

The last point raises a good news / bad news dilemma. The good is that by integrating perspectives and crossing disciplinary boundaries, we will learn more about identity and how regional IOs may shape it (see also Checkel and Katzenstein 2009). If we wish to understand the precise causal work being done by regional organizations on identity, the broader context captured by this disciplinary pluralism is not an option, but a necessity (see also Checkel 2014b).

The bad news is this is not easy to execute. While popular in some scholarly circles and among key funding agencies, inter-disciplinary research raises difficult issues. For one, it requires a commitment to graduate training that cuts across traditional disciplinary boundaries. This not only requires more time, but a willingness to master theories and methods rooted in quite different epistemologies. One solution may be to encourage collaborative research, but this in turn raises practical, career-advancement issues for younger scholars seeking tenure.

In addition, there is a conceptual challenge. If one wishes to advance the state of the art on regional IOs and their ability to shape identity and community by combining disciplinary insights, then hard questions of theory development and cumulation require attention. Leading scholars endorse such pluralism, with their calls for theory shaped by “analytic eclecticism” (Katzenstein and Sil 2010) or that goes beyond “isms” (Lake 2011), without providing operational advice on how to do it in a way that avoids everything-matters/analytic-mush arguments. If this is already a growing problem within single disciplines studying regional IOs –

political science, most importantly (Checkel 2014c) – it will likely be magnified with explicitly inter-disciplinary theorizing.

## **Conclusions: Bringing Domestic Context and Process Back In**

In this concluding section, I highlight two important challenges for comparative regionalism and students of regional IOs as they think about community and identity. These include issues of theory (→ domestic context) and of method (→ process).

On theory and the domestic, there are three dimensions to emphasize. First, there is politics as understood by political scientists. With a few exceptions - Kelley 2004a; Barnett and Solingen 2007; Herbst 2007 - it is notable mainly by its absence in the literature reviewed here.<sup>8</sup> This is odd. Under certain scope conditions, regional IOs may promote identity change behind closed doors and through consensual-deliberative means. However, this is likely the exception and not the norm. Scholars have begun to recognize this fact in the case of the EU, with their stress on politicization (Hooghe and Marks 2009; Risse 2014). However, further work is needed, both to explore whether politicization is only affecting regional organizations in Europe (unlikely) and – more important – to connect it with our theories of identity/community. On the latter – and to take just one example – politicization will complicate the story about regional IOs, socialization and identity that political-science/IR scholars have advanced (Checkel 2014a).

Second, my broader claim here is a need to theorize various dimensions of the domestic context in studies of the regional IO – identity relation. This will require more inter-disciplinarity, as politicization or politics as understood by political scientists in no way captures all of it (see also Acharya and Johnston 2007, 259-60). Indeed, if one wishes to explain how an IO reshapes identity amongst elites or conceptions of identity within a particular country, this requires not just a political-science model of domestic politics, but also a measurement of pre-existing identities. We cannot measure identity change without knowing the baseline (see also Koopmans 2014). In an important sense, this is precisely the value added of Favell's anthropological-ethnographic examination of the IO – identity relation.

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<sup>8</sup> Mansfield and Solingen (2010) make a more general call to bring domestic politics into the study of regionalism.



And Favell does not exhaust the possibilities. For example, Ted Hopf has employed textual and discursive strategies to map identities in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia (Hopf 2002, 2012). He then uses this baseline to explain Soviet and Russian foreign-policy choices, and the role of identity in them. However, his general argument could easily be extended to post-Cold War Russian involvement with regional international organizations and how little the latter have effected its identity – a pattern that was evident well before Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 (Pouliot 2010).

Third, too many of our theoretical frameworks for exploring the relation of IOs to identity and community put the former in the driver's seat. The causal forces – I use this phrase intentionally – emanate from them, from the regional level. Is this always the case? Perhaps the research designs are being limited and truncated by the underlying positivist epistemology, which forces one to hold something constant – in this case, the properties and motivations of the agents who are the target for identity change. In the literature reviewed here, it is thus no surprise that anthropology, with its grounding in interpretivism, does a better job capturing this domestic-level interaction between regional IOs and individuals-organizations on the ground.

Regarding methods, my starting point is that regional organizations influence identity and community through some sort of process. Most often, we are not simply interested in static measures – a particular IO's actions correlate with some change in identity. Rather, the analytic concern is how this change occurred. Consistent with this focus, much of the political science and sociology literature discussed above invokes the language of causal mechanisms. This makes sense, as mechanisms are all about 'how' and process, filling the gap between independent and dependent variables. However, there then appears to be a mismatch between theory and method. In some cases, this same literature relies on surveys, coding techniques and other quantitative methods that cannot measure process in the IO – identity relation. This is a clear limitation in Fligstein's (2009) otherwise superb study of identity and the EU. In other instances, analysts hint at, but do not make explicit and transparent the process element in their study, as was seen in much of the work on regional IOs and identity in Africa.

There is thus a need for process-based methods, such as process tracing (Beach and Pedersen 2013; Bennett and Checkel 2014). The latter is ideally suited for measuring the

mechanisms of identity change in both positivist and interpretive research.<sup>9</sup> Done well, this takes time, as it requires explicit attention to possible biases in evidentiary sources and thinking about so-called equifinality, or the alternative causal mechanisms that can lead to the same outcome. However, the payoff will be high - as Johnston (2007) demonstrates in his process-based examination of how regional and universal IOs have reshaped elements of Chinese identity.

Many years ago, I wrote a paper on a very different topic, but whose title is relevant here: “It’s the Process, Stupid.” Measuring process can be messy, time consuming and resource demanding, but our understanding of how regional IOs shape our sense of who we are will stall without it.

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<sup>9</sup> On interpretive approaches to process tracing, see Guzzini (2012, ch.11); and, especially, Pouliot (2014).

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