Identities and Stereotypes in Cross-Border Regions

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INTRODUCTION

Identities are socially constructed and dynamic. Some see in this a potential problem, leading in some cases to problems of individual orientation or even to identity crises. This contribution is an examination of identity in what is called the "Greater Region," a large cross-border region that encompasses Saarland, Lorraine, Rhineland-Palatinate, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, and both the French-speaking and German-Speaking communities of Wallonia in Belgium. New, multidimensional forms of identity have emerged in this region.

The meaning and relevance of space is changing. Not only territory but also economics, culture, and politics determine space (Krämer/König 2002: 280). Geographic distances can be crossed faster than ever, and personal mobility has increased. Nation states especially seem to be losing more and more functions, and their power of establishing identity is diminishing. In their place, regions are advancing to become "a projection surface of fundamental identity claims"[1] (Buß 2002: 12). Borders, too, are changing in meaning as their barrier function becomes less important. Europe presents itself increasingly as an entity without internal borders, but individual regions, as well as nations, keep their unique characteristics and distinctiveness. Recent research recognizes a connection between globalization and localization much in keeping with Robertson's glocalization thesis: that local and global processes are reciprocally dependent and influential (cf. Robertson 1995, 1998). Thus, a new perspective of the

1 | All quotations translated by the author.

local is possible as global consciousness reinvents the local (Ahrens 2001: 137).

In spite of the fact that identities are constructed, they are able to "have suddenly obvious effects as social facts" (Reese-Schäfer 1999: 7). Because the social world "is made up of actions in concrete interaction situations" (Werlen 1992: 11f.), an influence of identities on action can be assumed. Another impact on action exists through stereotypes, as identities are always influenced by extraneous ascriptions and outward self-presentation. Stereotypes are thus part of every identity and it is necessary to analyze both phenomena simultaneously. Due to increasing tendencies towards individualization and the possibility of self-determination in almost all areas of life, identities are characterized by a continuous dynamic. This "pluralization of possibilities of identity constructions" (Reckinger/Wille 2010: 15) leads to a recurring challenge and checking of existing identities. In the context of the opening of identities and acceptance of plural identities, critics perceive a potential loss of identity due to a lack of orientation. As the nation-state loses its centrality for orienting individual identities, the significance of other territorial units for this function is perceptible. Europe, for example, presents itself as a "Europe of the regions." This reflects the intention of promoting a third level of identity, in addition to the nation and Europe, in bottom-up Europeanization. The nomination of Luxemburg and the Greater Region as European Capital of Culture 2007 can be described as such an attempt.

The example of the "Greater Region", analyzed below, shows that such spaces offer new possibilities for the emergence of new forms of multidimensional identity. It harbors also threats to identity and stereotypes.

In October 1998, the "Charter of Cultural Cooperation in the Region Saar-Lor-Lux-Trier/Westpfalz" was signed. Its declared primary goal was formulated as follows: "As Europe grows together, the partners strive to raise awareness of cultural unity among the population, which is to be deepened by arrangements in the field of the common cultural and historical heritage that create identity" (Charter of Cultural Cooperation in the Region Saar-Lor-Lux-Trier/Westpfalz, 1998). More than ten years later, the question now presents itself of whether any such awareness of common cultural heritage has arisen. If so, what factors have been influential in creating identity and how does any Greater Region identity or identities effect social action, if at all? The study below is based mostly on qualitative interviews with Greater Region stakeholders from various sectors (edu-

cation, economy, culture, politics, work, and environment), conducted in 2009 and 2010.[2]

The analysis begins with a brief description of the Greater Region, after which the formation and influence of social categories and stereotypes are outlined. Subsequently, the components that contribute to identity and the effects of identifying with the Greater Region are discussed. The article ends with a typology of Greater Region identities.

The Cross-Border Area "Greater Region"

The Greater Region, as defined today, extends over an area of 65,401 square kilometers and has more than eleven million inhabitants. It is Europe's largest cross-border region. In everyday use, the term "Saar-Lor-Lux" is more frequent than "Greater Region." It owes its prominence to its long tradition, being first used in 1969. At that time, the executive of the Saar-Bergwerke introduced the term for the region to emphasize the importance of the cooperation of the three regions Saarland, Lorraine, and Luxembourg in the coal and steel industry (Glöckner 2001). Later, the Greater Region expanded, and its name changed frequently to reflect these territorial modifications. The Saar-Lor-Lux region thus became Saar-Lor-Lux-Trier/Westpfalz and then Saar-Lor-Lux-Rheinland-Pfalz-Wallonie or "Greater Region."

Categorization as a Basis for Stereotyping and as Part of the Concept of the Self

Social identity theory (SIT) in social-psychology, developed by Tajfel, applies to inter-group processes and conflicts. Its main focus lies on the individual's behavior in groups (cf. Zick 2002). An individual's social identity is based on group membership. Before the formation of groups, categori-

2 | The research was developed within the MORO-project "Überregionale Partnerschaften in grenzüberschreitenden Verflechtungsräumen" (Super-Regional Partnerships in Cross-Border Regions) of the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development and the Saarland Ministry of the Environment.

zations are made that allow individuals to define themselves in relation to social context (Hastedt 1998: 6). They serve as orientation systems (Tajfel 1982: 103). The categories become part of the self-concept (Turner 1982: 16). Due to the division of the social environment into categories and groups (ingroup and outgroups), whenever social identity overrides the salience of personal identity individuals often act not as individuals but as group members. Acting as group members, individuals tend to perceive groups as homogenous, overlooking internal differentiation to focus on differences between groups. This categorizing impact of perception is interesting because the "way we perceive others will influence indirectly how we act towards them" (Turner 1982: 29). Thus, social categorization supports stereotypes and affects our behavior towards stereotyped persons. Tajfel's experiments demonstrated that a trivial categorization into two groups "can suffice to initiate discriminatory behavior towards an outgroup" (Petersen/Blank 2008: 203).

There are four categorization bases of vital importance among stakeholders: political borders and nationality, language boundaries, geographical distance to the national border, and legal competencies. These categorization bases, as shown by interviews, often cause an interviewee to perceive another person "in the light of his belonging to a social category" (Mielke 1999: 5). Evaluating a person based on a categorization is called stereotyping (cf. Mielke 1999: 5). Perception is not passive, it is a matter of "information research" rather than "information processing" (Briesen 1994: 41).

Serving as an example for a stereotype that developed from several categorization bases, the stereotype of the different working methods of Germans and French may be mentioned. According to this stereotype, the work styles of Germans (some interviewees expand this to include "German speaking") and French (or 'French speaking') vary in terms of organization and effectiveness. The German work style is seen, depending on one's point of view, as either over-organized and thus inflexible or as well organized and thus efficient. French and French-speaking persons by analogy are perceived as less organized and less efficient or less fixed and more flexible. This is a good example of how inner-group heterogeneity is ignored and how groups and their individual members become subject to categorical ascription.

Stereotypes and their Impact on Cross-Border Cooperation

Originating in typography, the term "stereotype" is composed of "the two Greek words *stereos* (fixed, hard, firm) and *typos* (concept, fixed form, characteristic imprint)" (Petersen/Six 2008: 21). Stereotypes are opinions and probability judgments (Ganter 1997: 6). They can be positive or negative (cf. Hahn/Hahn 2002: 20), correct or incorrect (Filipp and Mayer 2005: 26). They tap into "socially shared structures of knowledge" (Klauer 2008: 23) and can be dangerous, particularly because they are used to justify behavior towards members of other groups (Tajfel 1982: 44).

Stereotypes are characterized by durability. If a stereotype is attributed to a category, in most cases it won't change even when the stereotype contradicts reality. Before a stereotype is called into question, individuals are more likely to cancel out their intellectual knowledge "on an emotional basis" (Hahn/Hahn 2002: 27).

Interviews with stakeholders in the Greater Region verified that stereotypes can have both positive and negative consequences for cross-border cooperation. As an option for individual orientation, stereotypes have a mainly positive function: "The essential cognitive function of stereotyping is thus to systematize and simplify information from the social environment in order to make sense of a world that would otherwise be too complex and chaotic for effective action" (Tajfel 1981: 148). Stereotypes facilitate dealing with a culture that has been foreign. In the best case, this stimulates interest in learning more about the unknown group and to question the stereotype. One interviewee, Ms. "O.L.," experienced the lack of stereotypes as obstructive for cross-border identity construction because stereotypes are needed to create an image of other people. She prefers having an image, even if it's probably a false one.

Apart from the positive functions of orientation, stereotypes have two other possible positive functions: positive discrimination and the stabilization of social identity. Luxembourg provides an example of positive discrimination: "Luxembourgers" are often attributed with above-average openness. The interviewee Mrs. R.I., for example, was of the opinion that they have "always" had a Greater regional identity. Positive discrimination exists when groups are attributed with positive characteristics or are more readily trusted: "discrimination is when a person treats another person

due to his group membership better or worse than a member of another group" (Förster 2007: 33).

Even when preferences have positive effects, they must still be considered an "inadmissible generalization" because the positively stereotyped person is thereby "confronted with excessive peer pressure and his individuality and singularity is denied" (Filipp/Mayer 2005: 30). Stereotyping comparison groups can strengthen one's own social identity if the ingroup is judged to be better than the outgroup (Roth 2005; Tajfel 1981, 1982). Stereotyping an outgroup can serve as a defensive mechanism if a negative stereotype about one's own ingroup is threatening: "stigmatized groups turn the negative attributions into positive qualities" (Keupp et al. 1999: 180). The reciprocal stereotyping of German and French work styles demonstrates this. Indeed, stereotypes often arise from reactions to attributions from outside. The dependence between auto-stereotypes and hetero-stereotypes is evident in this example. "Almost every time, when using a negative hetero-stereotype, the positive auto-stereotype is in mind at the same time" (Hahn/Hahn 2002: 31).

The interviews revealed three negative effects of stereotypes: justification of the status quo; social discrimination and avoidance; and the perception of threat or the weakening of social identity. Justification of the status quo is present in the stereotyping of regions situated at the geographical edges of the Greater Region. Some interviewees are convinced that the inhabitants in those areas are less interested in cooperation and do not identify with the Greater Region. Obviously, the category "inhabitant at the edge" is itself a stereotype. That stereotypes can lead to social discrimination is also obvious in the Greater Region: the idea of the "Greater Region with two speeds" was a common theme. Mummendey and Wenzel see in this a common form of social discrimination: when two categories exist as subcategories of the same overarching category, whereby one is portrayed as the better prototype of the superior category, necessarily deprecating the other (Waldzus/Wenzel 2008).

Luxembourg's special position in the Greater Region can lead to the perception of threat or a weakening of social identity. Luxembourg is the strongest economic region in the Greater Region. It also has the greatest number of in-coming commuters. It is the only nation-state completely contained within the Greater Region and thus has greater legal competencies than the other subregions. This is not regarded positively by all stakeholders. Mrs. H.S., for example, feels that Luxembourg exploits the sur-

rounding areas because it benefits from commuters with skills but does not honor social obligations to the outlying areas such as contributing to the maintenance of education systems. The positive stereotype of Luxembourg as "Greater Region's stimulation" may be evaluated negatively when other subregions feel their social identities threatened.

Identity-Creating Factors

Different factors create identity: territory, language, symbols, history, contact, functional relations, mutual interest, and education. The manifestation of each in the Greater Region is discussed below.

Starting with territory, recent approaches in the sociology of space proceed from the assumption that "social and historically relevant space is the result of human actions and perceptions" (Mein 2008: 33). Nonetheless, space remains important because of relationships to a specific geographic location, especially in the postmodern era when, as Giddens argues, people desire to re-embed themselves in reaction to the dislocation and detachment caused by globalization (Kühne 2006: 112ff.). Although the enormous size of the Greater Region is criticized by many stakeholders, few demand a rearrangement. The stakeholders are conscious of the malleability of frontiers and of their arbitrariness, yet, they accept the demarcation as it stands. The fact that all regions are located at a national border is seen as common ground by stakeholders.

That language plays an important role in creating identity was emphasized repeatedly by interviewees. One stakeholder saw in the bilingualism of colleagues a point of shared identity. Additionally, language is described as something that enables contact and provides material for conversations, for example about the same television programs. And language itself is described as an important cultural force, whereby language boundaries are considered to be cultural boundaries. High linguistic competence is said to express openness and interest, a language boundary on the other hand can serve as means of exclusion.

Symbols, both spatial symbols and space-related symbols, are important. Furthermore, the name "Greater Region" itself has a symbolic character. The name Greater Region is well known to all stakeholders and is also used as a term for the cooperation area. But most criticize its arbitrariness, its lack of significance, its ambiguity, and, finally, its interchangeability,

especially for persons outside the Greater Region. The term plays no role in creating identity. Natural geographic symbols, for example the Moselle or the Eifel, are better for establishing connections. Borders are of special importance for spatial symbolism. The opening of borders is a symbol of putting away a warlike past. The border area symbolizes values like peace and liberty and thereby an openness between cultures. Spatial symbols offer the possibility of establishing categories that are less exclusive than categories based on linguistic area, nation, or subregion. So far, there exist few space-related symbols in the Greater Region.

Memories evoked by symbols are much more important than their actual meanings. Many cross-border areas emphasize the historical commonalities of the several subregions. In general, a common history is thought to create common identity. "Memory, on the individual level, has the function of attributing consistency and meaning to [...] existence. One's own past, thereby, always serves the validation of the present" (Flender 1994: 109). Some argue that a common history should legitimate political goals or serve generally to demarcate spaces in the Greater Region, although others argue that there "can be no question of a historically grown Greater Region or a 'natural' growing together of the population in the Greater Region" (Pauly 2009: 29). Few interviewees expressed belief in a common historical legacy within the Greater Region. The border's delineation is widely held to be arbitrary. The commonality of being located on a national border seems to be more important than any historical commonality. Thus, for creating a common identity, common history is not useful, although some do mention it. Nonetheless, it does have meaning as a connecting factor for some common projects. The goal of breaking with the warlike past and preserving peace is more important than historical unity for current identity constructions.

Both personal contact across borders and informational exchange can arouse interest and reduce fears. If contact is lacking, interest is more likely to be lacking as well. The mainly positive attitude of the interviewees towards the Greater Region is probably attributable to a previous job-related interaction with the Greater Region. There is a positive correlation between information and interest. Pierre Bourdieu calls attention to persons in relations of propinquity: "They meet more often, they get into contact, sometimes in conflict, but this is also a kind of relationship [...]. Knowing each other personally becomes easier the closer you are, physically" (Bourdieu 2005: 36). But in Bourdieu's opinion, it is also quite clear that propin-

quity does not suffice to promote exchange. For contact, social space is at least as important as physical space.

Functional relations in common institutions play an important role in creating identity. Functional interdependence promotes consciousness of the meaning of the Greater Region in everyday life. Yet, stakeholders noted that border commuters, who are affected most by functional interdependency, do not necessarily identify more closely with the Greater Region. Local public transport, which is insufficiently developed, is considered to be a barrier for creating a regional identity.

Many interviewees were of the opinion that shared identity can be increased by an awareness of common goals and of the mutual profit that cooperation can bring. Lack of motivation and lack of interest in cross-border questions or in language acquisition is often considered to be the result of a lack of awareness of these advantages. Cross-border cooperation is not only a matter of philanthropy with the goal of "building of areas of solidarity," it is also a "material, lucrative goal" (Gaunard 1999: 119).

Finally, lack of knowledge of other educational systems has negative effects on intercultural communication. Learning about and understanding other educational systems increases sympathy, tolerance, and cooperation even if differences persist. In the Greater Region, there are at present several cross-border schools including the Schengen-Lyzeum in Perl or the Deutsch-Französisches Gymnasium in Saarbrücken. Furthermore, young people have the possibility to attend cross-border programs of study at the University of the Greater Region.

Typology and Conclusion

Multidimensional subidentities or patchwork-identities are gaining in importance. This postmodern trend is recognizable in the Greater Region. National identities are still clearly fundamental for most ingroup and outgroup categorizations, but different identities can be activated and are relevant to action in several contexts. A Greater Regional identity, if it emerges, is going to be composed of many patchwork identities. This would possibly reduce group conflicts if "either-or" identities become weaker and if "as well as" identities become more predominant (cf. Beck 2004). There are rudiments of a regional awareness or a regional identity in stakeholders' minds. Which identity is activated at any particular time

depends on the group with which individuals identify themselves at the moment. The "Greater Region" category is rarely salient; other categories such as language or nationality are more fundamental.

The Greater Region's stakeholders can have multidimensional identities. It might seem like a patchwork-like coexistence at first glance, but it is in fact a patchwork-like cooperation because, even when there is no hybridization of identities, mutual interaction takes place. The borders within the Greater Region have a constitutive effect for Greater Regional identities. Diversity is considered to be characteristic of the region, and heterogeneity is expressly desired. So borders continue to be important to identity, but they become more permeable. As described in postmodern thought, residents think of themselves as belonging to several groups, and these groups are not always mutually exclusive. Clear delineations are hardly possible today. The Greater Region shows that delineation does not require exclusion. Borders continue to be important, especially symbolically, but a there is no demand for clear contrast.

The study suggests a typology of identities, all of which can exist in combination with the others. The first type, *Territorial Greater Region identity*, is very similar to national identity. This identity form has yet to arise, and it can be assumed that it never will due to the diversity of national and Greater Regional or cross-border identities. Cross-border identities are not comparable to national identities. There are intended to be non-exclusive. Greater Regional identities cannot be described with national terminology, thus, nation-like symbols and identities do not and will not exist. "But Europe is still considered national as an 'uncompleted nation,' an 'uncompleted federal state,' and it is treated as if it must be both – nation and state. Not least, it is this inability to comprehend and understand this historically innovative reality of Europeanization that causes the European malaise. And this is an essential reason why EU-institutions, which should help people, are considered unreal and even threatening to the population" (Beck 2005: 7). Beck's idea is transferable to the Greater Region. It is impossible, either from the inside or the outside, to sense the Greater Regional reality.

One can talk of *advantage-identity* in the Greater Region because the promise of advantage through cooperation motivates many stakeholders to contribute to the success of the Greater Region. Some justify their group membership in terms of the advantage it brings. The form of advantage need not be clearly defined.

The type *sub-identity of European identity* is characterized by the idea that the Greater Region is a model for Europe. It lacks a unique value and serves only as a model. This type is very similar to *value-identity* because general European values are very important for both. It seems to be obvious that the progress of cross-border identities requires strong European identities.

For *cross-border identity*, borders themselves play an important role. Experiences of borders in everyday life, together with the advantages and disadvantages associated with them in the past and present, create a feeling of togetherness.

Cultural identity with cultural commonalities, focused on feelings of togetherness, is as common as *value-identity*, which is characterized by common general values like peace, tolerance, or liberty. Cultural-identity and value-identity are often closely tied to language and are thus not completely inclusive.

The two final types, *transnational identity* and *cosmopolitan identity* require closer examination because they have a special meaning in cross-border regions.

Transnationalism is characterized by long-term, pluri-local, structured relations across national borders (Pries 2008). The importance of national identities is maintained. According to Ludger Pries, a transnational social world is a world characterized by cross-border phenomena that are everywhere identical (Pries 2008). Transnationalism may be more pronounced in cross-border regions than in the midlands. Many interviewees mentioned personal transnational networks in addition to professional linkages. The continuing significance of space and the nation-states stands, according to Pries, in no contradiction to transnationalization.

Cosmopolitanization "is a non-linear, dialectical process, where the universal and the contextual, the homogeneous and the heterogeneous, the global and the local aren't cultural dualisms, but connected, interacting principles" (Beck 2004: 113). Contrary to nation states, where the foreign is delimited, "the cosmopolitan era is based on a *dialogue-based imagination of the internalized others*" (Beck 2004: 122). Rudimentary indications of the idea of the equality of all and of interdependence was observable in the content of the interviews, although differences were not abolished. The stakeholders feel enriched by "others." Ingroups and outgroups influence each other and appreciate this mutual influence. In spite of this, there is no unification and no desire for standardized culture. Outgroups have a

constitutive effect on ingroup identity. In the case of the Greater Region, this means that every subregion continues to be a unique area for culture and identity, but each is influenced by the other, even as subregional and national identities continue to be important. The influence of subregions will not be liquidated in a unified identity. Rather, neighboring subregions will become integrated into subregional identities as the significance of relations to the "other" is recognized.

Identities in the Greater Regional community are far from an ideal cosmopolitanism where "the acknowledgement of otherness becomes a maxim of thought, common life, and action [and where] differences aren't considered hierarchical nor are they liquidated, but they are accepted and considered positive" (Beck 2006). But even if stakeholders emphasize the positive features of diversity and do not seek to abolish them, a hierarchical order can be noticed. The best illustration of this might be the commonly used phrase of the "Greater Region of two speeds." Even if social cosmopolitanism does not exist in its pure form yet, the interviews leave the impression that cross-border regions may be taking on a pioneering role. "Unity in diversity" is the one idea that enjoys the greatest consensus among the stakeholders. This is no completely hybridized society but a society that allows differences without ordering them hierarchically and that enables sub-identities (national, local, cultural etc.) to continue to exist.

The interviews show that postmodern concepts of identity need not lead to rootlessness and instability. All respondents give the impression that a patchwork of plural identities is possible. Their social identities are strong enough to allow other sub-identities in addition to the "classic" identities. But it should be remembered that the interviewees are not representative of the Greater Region's general population. The postmodern patchwork-identity, which recognizes the search for identity as a creative process of self-organization, where the self "is to be recreated continuously in a process of self-reflection and self-stylization" (Eickelpasch/Rademacher 2010: 22), does not affect everyone equally. Individuals need "sufficient material security, relationship skills, communication skills, negotiation skills, and creative structural competence" (Eickelpasch/Rademacher 2010: 29) to take advantage of a flexible identity. Social, economic, and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1987) is, in certain ways, a prerequisite for the formation of Greater Regional identities. The identity-types demonstrated here are more permeable than, for example, national identities, but resource inequality limits many individuals' access to these new identities.

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