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MASTER THESIS IN
EUROPEAN STUDIES

Building a common identity the impact of transnational EU projects

An interview study with 12 participants in Gothenburg

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Abstract

Previous research has shown that moving between European countries, interacting with other Europeans and involving in EU related matters have positive effects on the formation of a European identity. Research has also pointed to the importance of context and the changing nature of identities. This gives reason to believe that a “European experience” such as involvement in transnational EU projects would influence individuals’ sense of belonging to the EU and/or Europe. This thesis aims to study *what* the effects are and whether the involvement in these projects tends to foster a political-civic EU identity or a social-cultural European identity. Transnational EU projects include meetings with colleagues from other European countries as well as formal aspects such as learning about the EU and its funds. Characteristics from the two dimensions of identity are consequently present. The thesis is deductive and the analytical framework is created in light of the political-civic identity and the social-cultural identity. Using in-depth interviews with 12 participants in Gothenburg, their answers are analyzed in relation to the two dimensions of identity.

The major finding is that involvement in transnational EU projects mainly seem to have influenced the formation of a political-civic identity and that the respondents feel more like EU citizens when involved in the project. The interaction with European colleagues has however also increased the social-cultural identity. Furthermore, can the result show that the participation has contributed to more positive feelings towards the EU.

Keywords: European identity, transnational EU projects, European Social Fund, INTERREG, political-civic, social-cultural, participants, context, interviews

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1. Introduction

In recent years the democratic deficit of the European Union (hereafter EU) has received a lot of attention. Many connect this deficit to a more general problem of legitimacy. A way to increase the legitimacy is by both researchers and politicians to increase the feeling of a European identity and a belonging to the EU.

The EU institutions expressed concern about the lack of a common European identity and it became a political question in 1973 with the “Declaration on the European Identity”.

However, it was not until the mid 1980s that the discussions really started, mainly because of Jacques Delors and his new project; “The people’s Europe”.¹ Since then, the political and academic debates have intensified. The aim for the EU is to encourage the development of a European identity, which in turn can increase the legitimacy.² What many scholars seem to agree on is that a common identity is needed for a well functioning union, as well as a key to further integration.³ As Maas expresses it; “The extent to which the Europe idea becomes part of national identities will ultimately determine how successful integration can be”.⁴

A certain degree of homogeneity (real or imagined) has been seen as necessary for a sense of community to exist and to foster a notion of common identity.⁵ Numerous attempts have been made to increase the sense of being European and much have been written about the absence of the EU in the lives of “ordinary” EU citizens. This thesis focuses on the impact of a “European experience”, in other words practices that make the EU present in the life of its citizens. The efforts to strengthen the European identity are most obviously seen in the various training and educational programs such as Erasmus where the aim is to foster European citizens and a feeling of belonging.⁶ Focus in this thesis is on the less researched transnational EU projects that professionals and white-collar workers can conduct in their work. These projects, and transnational cooperation as such, are even said to be one of the

¹ Tengström (2004) *På spaning efter en Europeisk identitet*, p.15

² Bruter (2005) *Citizens of Europe? The emergence of a mass European identity* p.59

³ Ex. Moxon-Brown (2004) *Who are the Europeans now?* p.71, Delhey (2004) *European Social Integration, From convergence of countries to transnational relations between people*, p. 22, Maas (2007) *Creating European citizens*, p.113, Goldmann (2008) *Identitet & Politik*, p.86

⁴ Maas (2007) p.113

⁵ Castano (2004) “European identity: A social-psychological perspective” in Herrmann, Risse, Brewer (eds) *Transnational identities, becoming European in the EU*, p. 42-43

⁶ Maas (2007) p.112

cornerstones of the European project in that it contributes to shaping a European perspective and way of thinking. It is supposed to give “a true European mindset”.⁷

These projects involve millions of persons all over the EU, only in Sweden the European Social Fund should be available (2007-2013), in different forms, to at least 450 000 persons and finance around 2000 projects.⁸ The participants in the project groups do not belong to the EU elite in Brussels which often have been studied but to the less researched “European middle class”.⁹ Checkel and Katzenstein argue that too much focus has been put on elites and EU institutions. Bottom-up perspectives and the local level need attention.¹⁰

A large amount of money is generated for the local level and that is where the focus usually lies. How the projects influence the individuals remains unclear. This is a group of people, working at the local level, which reunites in projects transcending borders. This implies travels, communicating in foreign languages and interaction with colleagues in other EU countries. Despite these factors that are assumed to have positive effects on the creation of a European identity, there has been little focus on the outcomes.¹¹ Importance is given to these “cornerstone projects” but deeper knowledge of effects seems to be lacking.¹²

Different approaches are taken to explain the identity formation, partly depending on theoretical perspective, method and academic field. Academia tends to talk about cultural, social, civic and political dimensions of identities. This relates to the *how* of the study and to the fact that EU can be seen as a political system as well as a social space.¹³ The participation in the project has an impact but it is unclear whether the participants relate to the political-civic aspects of the EU and/or to the social-cultural aspects of Europe in general. These definitions can be used to understand whether people identify with the EU as a relevant

⁷ Swedish ESF-council (2010) *Knowledge information tools*, p.2

⁸ Swedish ESF-council (2012) *Tid att skörda*, p.3

⁹ Medrano (2008) “Europeanization and the emergence of a European society”, p.13

¹⁰ Checkel, Katzenstein (2009) “The politicization of European identities” in Checkel, Katzenstein (eds), *European identity*, p.3

¹¹ For example, King, Ruiz-Gelices (2003) “International Student Migration and the “European year abroad”

¹² Ad hoc working group of Member States on Transnational and Interregional cooperation (2006) *The principle of Transnational and Interregional cooperation in the new ESF-programme*, p.3

¹³ Breakwell (2004) “Identity change in the context of the growing influence of European Union institutions” in Herrmann, Risse, Brewer (eds), *Transnational identities, becoming European in the EU*. p.33

institutional context defining them as citizens, or to Europe as a more general social-cultural community.¹⁴

Since there is a connection between the identification with the EU and the support it gets it is of great importance to understand people's ideas about what make them feel attached to Europe and the EU. Fligstein means that a person with some kind of European identity is more likely to see the EU as something positive.¹⁵ Rother and Nebe argue that experiences related to EU policies or contact and exchange with other EU citizens may affect pro-European attitudes and identities.¹⁶

Much previous research has been focused on comparing European to national identity and results are often based on the semi-annual survey Eurostat or the European Value Study, however there are no specific surveys concerning, or relating to, transnational EU-projects. Fligstein writes that one of the difficulties of proving the story that interaction between people from different European societies produces European identity is finding appropriate data.¹⁷ To get deeper insights and understanding of the phenomenon and to avoid repeating findings from Eurostat discussed by others, my own primary data will be produced through interviews.

The purpose of the study is hence to explore the effects on the identity formation from participation in a transnational EU project. In particular, the aim is to obtain a deeper understanding of the participants' view of the experience, how the participants are influenced, and what they identify with.

The main question is whether the participants in the transnational EU projects identify with the social-cultural European identity or the political- civic EU identity. To answer that question it is necessary to understand how the participation in the project influences the respondents' identification with Europe and the EU.

¹⁴ Bruter (2004) "Civic and cultural components of a European identity : A pilot model of measurement of citizens' levels of European identity." in Herrmann, Risse, Brewer (eds), *Transnational identities*, p.191

¹⁵ Fligstein (2009) "Who are the Europeans and how does this matter for politics?" in Checkel, Katzenstein (eds) *European identity*. p.151

¹⁶ Rother, Nebe (2009) "More mobile, more European" in Recchi, Favell (eds), *Pioneers of European integration: Citizenship and mobility in the EU*, p.120

¹⁷ Fligstein (2008) *Euroclash, The EU, European identity and the future of Europe* p.140

1.1. Definition of concepts

1.1.2. European identity

Identity is a broad term and there is probably no definition that all scientists or politicians would agree on, not when it comes to identity in general nor when it concerns the European identity in particular.¹⁸ There is no intention to examine all dimensions or components of the European identity, focus is on certain aspects and the two particular dimensions.

The European identity is in this paper seen as complementary to other existing identities. People can thus, at the same time, have a sense of belonging to Europe, their country, their city and so on. How the different identities are interrelated is however outside the scope of this paper as well as the relationship between European identity and national identity. Further I assume that there is some kind of identity evolution implying that a person may over time feel more or less European, thus move between their multiple identities depending on context.¹⁹ An adult involved in a transnational project can feel more European, at least at a specific point in time.

As Risse points out people might feel a sense of belonging to Europe in general, while feeling no attachment to the EU, and the other way around. This distinction is drawn from Bruter's argument that political identity relates to the EU whilst cultural identity is linked to Europe in general.²⁰ The concepts tend to be used synonymously but attention needs to be given to whether people talk about Europe in general or the EU in particular.

To narrow the concept of European identity this paper will focus on the collective political-civic dimension and the social-cultural dimension. Collective identities are individual perceptions of belonging to a larger community, in this case the EU and/or Europe.²¹ It often refers to the definition of "the other", thus the person who does not belong to the group. This "other" is not the focus of this study. The political-civic dimension of identity relates to participation and citizenship while social-cultural identity relates more to Europeans as group and a common legacy. This implies that there is a distinction between having a sense of being European and those feelings derived from being a citizen of the EU.

¹⁸ Walkenhorst (2009) *The conceptual spectrum of European identity* p. 1

¹⁹ Bruter (2005) p. 59

²⁰ Risse (2010) *A community of Europeans? Transnational identities and Public Spheres* p.51-52

²¹ Petersson (2003) "Intervjubarade studier av kollektiva identiteter" in Petersson, Robertson (eds) *Identitetsstudier i praktiken* p.35

1.1.3. Transnational EU projects

When talking about transnational EU projects I refer to projects funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), two of EU's Structural Funds. Within ERDF lies the program INTERREG with projects aiming at interregional cooperation. ERDF aims to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the EU and an INTERREG project builds on the exchange of experiences among partners who are responsible for the development of their local and regional policies.²² The ESF funds local, regional and national employment-related projects. They address a variety of target groups and focus on supporting jobs and investments in Europe's human capital. Projects aim at an exchange of ideas at the same time as they stimulate cooperation and joint solutions.²³

The Gothenburg region is eligible for support from these and there are several ongoing or just ended projects in the region. As an example, the EU gave 100 million Swedish kronor to support about 150 different development projects in the city of Gothenburg in 2011, around 40 of these were ESF and INTERREG projects.²⁴ Western Sweden got 1384 million kronor for the years 2007-2013, more than any other region and Gothenburg and its surroundings are consequently very active when it comes to conducting these projects.²⁵

INTERREG projects are as mentioned based on transnational cooperation, while it is not obligatory in projects supported by ESF. Despite this, some ESF projects do engage in transnational activities.

The specific projects involved in this study are introduced in chapter three but for more detailed information about them see Appendix I.

1.2. Disposition of the thesis

The thesis has the following structure. The next section presents previous research concerning identity formation and transnational EU projects. Chapter two contains the theoretical framework based on political-civic identity and social-cultural identity. Chapter three explains the method and analytical approach applied in this study. The choice of interview as method is argued for as well as the sampling procedure and the analytical framework. Chapter four

²² European Regional Development Fund (n.d.) "About the programme"

²³ European Commission (2012) "What is the ESF?"

²⁴ Göteborgs stad (2012) *Nya insikter genom EU-projekt – utblick över Göteborgs stad*, p.4

²⁵ Svenska ESF-rådet & Processtödet för strategisk påverkan och lärande i Socialfonden (2012) *Socialfonden i siffror 2012*, p.10

consists of the results and analysis. A discussion in relation to the questions is also presented. Chapter five ends the thesis with conclusions and recommendations for future research.

1.3. Previous research

This part presents research about collective identity formation in general and European identity formation in particular. This is important for the understanding of why and how collective identities are shaped as well as how this process is seen in this particular thesis. Research and evaluations concerning the impact of transnational activities in the European context is then addressed.

1.3.1. Collective identity formation in general

One way of looking at identity is to see it as naturally given (primordialism) and another is to see it as an action of pure will (instrumentalism). A third way, and suitable for this specific paper, is to see it as an ongoing process where individuals shape and are shaped by the reality in which they live (constructivism). This implies that the individual will define him or herself differently depending on the context and focus is on the process of change.²⁶ The context is what shapes the person together with the interplay between the structure (macrolevel) and the individual (microlevel). It is as Hammarén and Johansson put it “the bridge between the unique person and society”.²⁷

As earlier mentioned, collective identities are individual perceptions of belonging to a larger community, it puts the individual in relation to the group.²⁸ Further, it is the idea that a group of people accept a fundamental sameness that causes them to feel solidarity. This is socially constructed and emerges due to interaction.²⁹ People often start to identify with others because they share common interests. They will come to see that their counterparts are more like themselves than unlike and relate to their counterparts as part of a larger group.³⁰ Goldmann defines a collective identity as made of the values and vision of the collective that the members of it share.³¹

²⁶ Kinnvall (2003) ”Identitetsstudier – en översikt” in Petersson, Robertson (eds) *Identitetsstudier i praktiken*, p.12

²⁷ Hammarén, Johansson (2009) *Identitet* p.41

²⁸ Petersson (2003) p.35

²⁹ Fligstein (2008) p.127

³⁰ Fligstein (2009) p.135

³¹ Goldmann (2008) p.20

Petersson points out that collective identities are changing processes. They can seem rather stable over time but it is of great importance not to see collective identities as rigid.³²

Psychologists tend to stress the stability of identities but as Risse argues one can assume that weak collective identities change more frequently than strong feelings of loyalty to a community.³³ Since the European identity, along with other supranational communities, often are considered as weak it is not foolish to assume that it is more open to change, than for example the national identity.³⁴ Further, Petersson means that the ranking between different identities change. Some identities matter more at a certain point in time and the balance between them will consequently change.³⁵ Checkel and Katzenstein mean that identities can be seen as social processes since they are dependent on interaction and experiences. As they put it; “Identities flow through multiple networks and create new patterns of identification in daily practice and lived experiences”.³⁶ This supports the idea that participants in transnational EU-projects might feel more European, at least at a specific point in time.

It is consequently of great importance to recognize that identities are shaped in a social context of meetings and interaction. Identities are thus seen as changing, multifaceted and as dependent on context.

1.3.2. European identity formation in particular

There is an ongoing struggle between those who believe that the European identity puts the national identity at stake and those who believe that they can coexist. Maas points out that the European identity might compete with and even undermine national identities.³⁷ Guibernau writes that “too much Europe” potentially could weaken national identity.³⁸ However, most researchers today support the view of an overlapping or coexisting relationship between national and European identities.³⁹ Lutz et al. argue, by using data from Eurostat, that there is a slow but steady evolving feeling of identity in the European context. In 2004 there were 130 million citizens of the EU-15 who considered themselves only as nationals and 177 million as

³² Petersson (2003) p.36

³³ Risse (2010) p.31

³⁴ Goldmann (2008), p.25

³⁵ Petersson (2003) p.36

³⁶ Checkel, Katzenstein (2009) p.213

³⁷ Maas (2007) p.97

³⁸ Guibernau (2011) “Prospects for a European identity”, p.36

³⁹ Duchesne (2008) “Waiting for a European identity....Reflections on the process of identification with Europe”, p.400

having multiple identities. Most Europeans do have some sort of multi-layered identity and the European identity is one of several potential layers.⁴⁰

King and Ruiz-Gelices mean that living and studying abroad can be hypothesized to have important effects on the formation of a European identity. They can see that students who spent time abroad are more likely to see their identities as at least partly European. Such an identity might be favorable towards the idea of the EU. As mentioned in the introduction, promoters of European integration have for quite some time been aware of the benefits that mobility can bring, for example to gain support for further integration.⁴¹

Fligstein proposes that the main source of a European identity is the opportunity to positively interact with people from other European countries. This opportunity is restricted to a certain part of the population and everyone is not as likely to adopt a European identity. Those who are more likely to adopt a European identity are managers, white-collar workers, professionals, educated people and young people.⁴² The persons involved in the project groups of EU projects are consequently among the people more likely to adopt a European identity. These are people who can get to know their counterparts in other societies, through for example participation in Europe-wide business and professional associations, and begin to see themselves as having more in common. Further he argues that people who have traveled and interacted with other Europeans are more likely to have a positive view of the EU.⁴³ This process of socialization or interaction is also affected by the institutions. Frequent exposure to institutions and individual experiences with the institutions are expected to impact people's identities. Individuals come to identify with an institution to the extent that the institution is salient in their own lives. The more aspects of daily life influenced the more likely the identities will develop around that institution.⁴⁴

People who interact more frequently and more intensely across borders are consequently more likely to identify with the group and develop a sense of community.⁴⁵ Risse argues that education and class are important factors but that the causal link between education and class,

⁴⁰ Lutz. et al. (2006) "The demography of growing European identity" p.425

⁴¹ King, Ruiz-Gelices (2003) p. 230-233

⁴² Fligstein (2009) p. 133

⁴³ Fligstein (2008) p.154-155

⁴⁴ Herrmann, Brewer (2004) "Identities and institutions: becoming European in the EU", in Herrmann, Risse, Brewer (eds) *Transnational identities, becoming European in the EU*. p.14-15

⁴⁵ Risse (2010) p. 31-32

on the one hand, and the creation of “Europeans”, on the other, is probably transnational interaction.⁴⁶ As shown above many researchers highlight the transnational aspect and its great importance for the development of a European identity.

Also important to consider is the deliberate efforts undertaken by the EU to build identification through the creation of symbols of collective identity.⁴⁷ The Commission has tried for many years by using identity markers such as the flag, the anthem, the passport, the euro and the Union’s citizenship. The institutions are thus trying to act as identity producers and making Europeans aware of their belonging to a political and social common entity.⁴⁸

1.3.3. Research concerning transnational activities

Previous research, although limited, on participants in transnational EU-projects show that the participation has effects on the feelings of belonging to Europe and the EU. The research found represents both what the EU have produced in terms of evaluations and reports as well as what is presented by academia. The material presented by the EU is by large consistent with the views found in material from other sources. Previous research points to the positive impact but fails to explain what it is that the participants identify with and why.

Verschraegen et al. argue that transnational projects financed by the ESF in some cases have developed a more “European state of mind”.⁴⁹ All actors learn how to use the ESF and to work in a European context. Learning also follows through enhanced awareness of different approaches in other Member States.⁵⁰ Dühr and Nadin have explored the impact of an INTERREG project and argue that the value with transnational cooperation lies in “soft” more qualitative learning outcomes and exchanges of experiences and know-how.⁵¹ Further, the German presidency of the EU produced a report where they write that “The joint project-based work as part of the INTERREG programs help to spread the spirit of the European

⁴⁶ Risse (2010) p.48

⁴⁷ Herrmann, Brewer (2004) p.15-16

⁴⁸ Moxon-Brown (2004) p.31

⁴⁹ Verschraegen et al.(2011) “The European Social Fund and domestic activation policies: Europeanization mechanisms”, p.62

⁵⁰ibid., p. 66

⁵¹ Dühr, Nadin (2007) ” Europeanization through transnational territorial cooperation? The case of INTERREG IIIB North-West Europe”, p. 374-375

Community to the regions and the people”. They also consider INTERREG as a way to build Europe from the bottom up and allowing people to get a “real feel” for Europe.⁵²

A working group appointed by the EU claims that advantages from involvement in transnational projects include the opportunity to develop a true European mindset and to foster formal and informal European networks. They describe it as a way to help reinforce a European idea of culture, ideas, ideals and policies. A more indirect benefit is said to be the sharing of ideas and experience as well as the contribution to building Europe by providing a setting for cross-cultural debate and exchange. The projects give a European perspective on local and regional activities. This generally increases understanding for the EU.⁵³

“Integrating a transnational and interregional dimension to national or regional initiatives also contributes to the strategy of building Europe from the ground along with other initiatives like exchange of trainers, staff or students. It supports the creation of an EU identity in addition to the regional or national ones.”⁵⁴

Transnational cooperation has shown to add a European dimension to the projects in which the participants work. Being part of a transnational project made the participants aware of “belonging to a large European family”. This was seen in an evaluation of experiences from participants in projects conducted under the EQUAL initiative (2000-2008) funded by the ESF.⁵⁵ However, the survey does not state who was being interviewed, which questions were being asked or more importantly why it had an impact in the sense of being part of a European family.

The European Commission claims that European identity is an “unfinished business” and promotes collective action that stretches across borders, such as working as part of an international organization. This can promote a sense of European identity since collective action requires taking the perspective of the other. Taking the perspective of the others, and being involved in collective activities potentially strengthens notions of shared identity.⁵⁶

⁵²German Presidency of the European Union (2007) *Bringing Europe together, Transnational cooperation of cities and regions*, p.3

⁵³ Ad hoc working group of Member States on Transnational and Interregional cooperation (2006) p. 5-6

⁵⁴ibid, p.3

⁵⁵Santos (2005) *An investment in Europe's present and future: The added value of Transnational Co-operation at project level under EQUAL*, p. 2-3

⁵⁶ The European Commission (2012) *The development of European identity/identities, an unfinished business*, p.5

2. Theory

This part presents the two dimensions of identity briefly introduced earlier. It starts by placing the theory in the context of transnational EU projects and by showing how both identity dimensions are present. The political-civic dimension of identity and the social-cultural dimension are elaborated so that their meaning and significance are clear. The chapter ends with specified research questions.

2.1. Theoretical relevance

Researchers have come to use different approaches and theories to study European identity.⁵⁷

Delanty argues that there is no coherent European identity that includes all Europeans; depending on context and background people relate to different aspects.⁵⁸ To achieve the purpose of understanding the impact participation in a transnational EU project has, two broad models are used; political-civic identity and social-cultural identity. Fan, Walkenhorst, Beetham, Lord and Duchesne are among the researchers placing the political and social approach as alternative dimensions.⁵⁹ This has to be related to Bruter's division into civic and cultural identities.⁶⁰ In relation to other research, the civic identity as defined by Bruter is closely related to definitions of political identity whilst the cultural one is a form of social identity. Bruter is one of the most well-known scholars in the field of European identity studies and his definitions are important to consider. However, he has been criticized for this division as it can be considered harsh and strict. Duchesne means that the complexity of identities cannot be analyzed by using two such strict models.⁶¹

To use Bruter's definitions as well as other researchers' is a way to increase the scope of the two dimensions; by adding civic and cultural more characteristics fit into the two "models". This will be helpful during the research as the risk of having too narrow models is diminished. Narrow models would risk that many personal experiences could not be considered, as they would not fit into one of the defined models. It also shows the complexity of the field and the fact that a definition which everyone agrees upon almost is impossible to find.

⁵⁷ Fan (2008) "What makes the European identity? An empirical analysis of explanatory approaches", p.414-415

⁵⁸ Delanty (2005) "What does it mean to be a "European"?" p.17

⁵⁹ See: Fan (2008), Walkenhorst (2009), Beetham, Lord (1998) *Legitimacy and the European Union*, Duchesne (2008)

⁶⁰ Bruter (2004) p.186-187

⁶¹ Duchesne (2008) p.401

The work within the context of a given project do increase the possibilities for mobility and interaction, factors known to affect the European identity, as well as it makes participants aware of working within a European project and an EU framework. Consequently, the projects have the more formal aspects of planning, reporting and financing as well as its need to fulfill EU criteria and priorities. However, the projects also involves meetings and interactions between Europeans of a more social and informal character. The EU has thus managed to involve and create signifiers of both identity dimensions in the same project.

It is clear in the context of transnational EU projects that we deal with a political system as well as a social sphere. The prerequisites to develop a political-civic EU identity and/or a social-cultural European identity are in place due to the various aspects of the projects.

2.2. Political-civic identity

Beetham and Lord argue that a collective political identity can be achieved in the European context and base this on the construction of a citizenship and participation.⁶² This is different from social and cultural identities as it focuses on the relationship between citizens and the political entity of the EU. Political identity promoters argue that cultural values are not enough to foster a sense of collectivity. The European citizenship is instead what can and will construct the relation between people and the EU. The “citizen aspect” implies feeling formally part of a society and being accepted as a member of this society.⁶³ Fan states that it is when people start to regard themselves as not only national citizens but also begin to accept their European citizenship that the European identity can come into being.⁶⁴

The civic component of identity, according to Bruter, has to do with the identification of citizens with a political structure or system, i.e. a set of institutions, rights and rules. It is an institutional frame that has impact on their lives. He argues that the European civic identity can be understood as the degree to which they feel that they are citizens of a European political system, whose rules, laws, and rights have an influence on the daily life and determines duties and rights.⁶⁵ Symbols such as the European passport, the Euro and the

⁶² Beetham, Lord (1998) p.38-39

⁶³ Pichler (2008) “European identities from below: Meanings of identification with Europe”, p.412

⁶⁴ Fan (2008) p.414

⁶⁵ Bruter (2004) p.188-190

election to the European Parliament represent authority and are matters that the state usually handles. These are therefore more clearly related to the political-civic identity.⁶⁶

Civic identifiers will identify with European integration as a political project whether they feel a sense of commonality.⁶⁷ This could imply that people who travel between European countries without border controls experience the significance of the EU and consequently develop a more civic identity.⁶⁸ They will refer to the EU (while those with a more cultural and social identity will refer more to Europe as a whole), meaning that there is not yet a match between the civic and cultural identity. It refers to a set of institutional contexts that define the individual's values and perceptions of freedom, rights and obligations.⁶⁹ This is in line with what Habermas calls “constitutional patriotism” which signifies an attachment that arises through participation in shared institutions and a common legal framework establishing a ground for identification.⁷⁰ Habermas means that a constructed European identity would have to be civic and based on citizenship rather than for example ethnicity.⁷¹ This implies, on the individual level, identification with values such as democracy, support for the welfare state and transnational cooperation.⁷² Risse adds that the political identity refers to a modern, secular and cosmopolitan value community where there is a collective understanding for the political processes of the EU.⁷³

Fan further defines it as “a set of relations between individual citizens and various levels of political entities; the nation-state and the EC/EU”. He means that citizens’ membership in certain institutions and their political participation will affect the formation of identity. The EU will gradually involve citizens in daily activities and this will create a set of rules and traditions which in turn will forge certain values. This political identity is therefore expressed more in forms of democratic values and practices.⁷⁴

⁶⁶ Bruter (2005) p.85

⁶⁷ Bruter (2003) “Winning hearts and minds for Europe: the impacts of news and symbols on civic and cultural European identity”, p.1155

⁶⁸ Bruter (2004) p.207

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.188

⁷⁰ Citrin, Sides (2004) “More than nationals: How identity choice matters in the new Europe.” in Herrmann, Risse, Brewer (eds) *Transnational identities, becoming European in the EU*. p. 162

⁷¹ Habermas (1993) “Struggles for recognition in constitutional states” p. 153

⁷² Citrin, Sides (2004) p.183

⁷³ Risse (2010) p.51

⁷⁴ Fan (2008) p.413-415

Pichler indicates that it is when we can detect politically inspired meanings that there are signs of a political identity. This can include references to the character of the EU as a political, legal and military system. It can also relate to common rights and duties as well as specific rights of European citizens such as free movement and residence.⁷⁵ Eder points to the legal aspects which will link the citizens to a European political community and thus control the boundaries of a legal space.⁷⁶

Finally, the political-civic model implies that the EU influences citizens' lives from above, top-down, by changing national rules and regulations, and also by distributional activities.⁷⁷ This is important and summarizes this dimension of identity.

2.3. Social-cultural identity

Social identity theorists tend to criticize political accounts of European identity construction because of its neglect of the complexity of collectivization processes. Further, it is considered problematic to limit the identity to EU citizens only, as in a political-civic identity. The social-cultural identity is more of a bottom-up model reflecting the idea of a social framework which merges the political aim of an "ever closer union" with that of a "people's Europe".⁷⁸ Social integration takes place informally and at the grassroots of societies, although it can be stimulated by administrative action.⁷⁹

Many social European identity theorists are inspired by the psychological Social identity theory (SIT) developed by Henri Tajfel. Social identity theory often sees identity as responsive to context, thus fluid, but as more stable than political identity. It originates in the act of self-categorization as a group member.⁸⁰ The idea is that social categories such as nationality or team, to which one feels belonging, provides a definition of who one is. It also defines relationships between individuals. Collective identities relate to these individuals, but as a community of individuals forming some kind of unit. According to the theory,

⁷⁵ Pichler (2008) p.416

⁷⁶ Eder (2009) "A theory of collective identity", p.438

⁷⁷ Delhey (2004) p. 18

⁷⁸ Walkenhorst (2009) p.12-13

⁷⁹ Delhey (2004) p. 18

⁸⁰ Hogg, Terry, White (1995) "A tale of two theories: A critical comparison of Identity theory with Social identity theory" p.257

membership in one group can lead individuals to view their group as better than other groups as well as preferable.⁸¹

People tend to have several categories that vary in importance and these categories and group prototypes can change depending on social setting and contribute to identity shifts. One's perceived similarities to the group play a key role in the formation and development of social identity. It implies that you are like others in the group and that you see things from the group's perspective. People who perceive the group as homogeneous are more likely to identify with it.⁸² The connection between the SIT and the European identity is apparent when Europeans are seen as individuals who start to identify with other Europeans and Europe as a super-ordinate larger group.⁸³

Risse points out that social identity conceptualizes collective identities as the psychological link between individuals and social groups. It is about the part of "me" that belongs to a larger "we", meaning a social group or a community. This kind of attachment leads to a sense of obligation to the group and group welfare.⁸⁴ Attributes, symbols and values become of greater importance to describe the group.⁸⁵ Bruter puts special emphasis on the European flag, the anthem and the Europe Day as symbols used to personify a political entity and to create an image that will represent the collectivity in people's minds.⁸⁶ Social identity is by definition shared with a larger group and it is more precisely collectively shared by the members of the group. This implies that people relating to other Europeans believe that the other members of this group also share this understanding; it is a sort of mutual knowledge about the membership in a social group. What also matters is how frequently we interact with a social group in a positive way. The more frequently, the more are we likely to identify with it.⁸⁷

Bruter describes it as individuals' perceptions that other Europeans are closer to them than non-Europeans. It is the identification with the community as a human group to which he feels belonging, regardless of the nature of the political system. It has a social connotation that

⁸¹ Goldmann (2008) p. 17

⁸² Huddy (2001) "From Social to Political Identity: A critical examination of Social Identity Theory", p. 134

⁸³ Garib (2011) "Why do we feel European? Social mechanism of European identity" p. 111

⁸⁴ Risse (2010) p.22

⁸⁵ Herrmann, Brewer (2004) p.5-6

⁸⁶ Bruter (2005) p.77

⁸⁷ Risse (2010) p.22

civic identity does not have and social similarities are valued. Risse means that social identities often are based on collective perceptions of a common fate, a common history and a common culture. It is thus broader than “EU Europe” and relates more to Europe in general.⁸⁸ The perception of a shared European heritage might include any form of common history, norms and values, religion and so forth.⁸⁹ Within Bruter’s theory lies a division between identification with the EU as a distinct civic and political entity and a larger Europe as a culturally and historically defined social sphere or civilization.⁹⁰

2.4. Specific research questions

The purpose of the study is to explore the effects from participation in a transnational EU project, with focus on identification with Europe in general or the EU in particular. To be able to make this distinction one question is first needed to cover the “how” of the study. The thesis thus aims to study 1) How the participation in a transnational EU-project influences the respondents' identification with EU and Europe? 2) If this identification is consistent with a social-cultural European identity or a political-civic EU identity?

From the theoretical framework it becomes clear that the first question is needed in order to answer the second. The last question is however the main focus of the study. Furthermore, the second question can be formulated as two alternative predictions:

1. The participants in the projects will relate more to a social-cultural dimension of European identity
2. The participants in the projects will relate more to a political-civic EU identity

3. Method and analytical approach

The thesis is a qualitative interview study. This chapter presents the choice of interview as method to study identities, the two-step sampling procedure with its challenges and the issue of ethics when doing interviews. The analytical approach using categories and codes is introduced and illustrated by the analytical framework. The framework is explained and the chapter ends with a discussion concerning validity, reliability and generalizability.

⁸⁸ Risse (2010) p.52

⁸⁹ Bruter (2003) p.1156

⁹⁰ Bruter (2004) p.187-188

3.1. Interview as method

The focus in this thesis is to understand the influence transnational projects have on the participants. This implies the need for a qualitative method. The focus is not on how often something occurs but *how* a certain phenomenon appears. In-depth interviews are suitable and motivated when studying individually lived experiences of a common phenomenon. Studies of identities do not go well with more quantitative methods, since it is very hard to measure or weigh.⁹¹ The goal is therefore not to measure an identity-change but to understand the respondents' subjective experiences and the impact this can have on their identity formation.

An interview is a good choice when it is important to get access to feelings, opinions and thoughts. A questionnaire would not fulfill the objectives in this particular case. Interviews give a possibility to register the unexpected answers and to follow up with relevant questions. Esaiasson et al. point out that interviews are appropriate to use when the researcher strives for understanding the world as experienced by the person being interviewed.⁹² Petersson means that it allows the researcher to get close.⁹³

Interviews are thus the main method to collect data and the interviewees' are the objects of the study and act as respondents. As Hesse-Biber and Leavy point out, the agenda for the discussion is set by the researcher but the degree of control can vary according to the style of interviewing. As there was a need to be flexible but still use a set of clearly defined questions a semi-structured interview was appropriate.⁹⁴ The interviews were constructed around the main themes of the study; the projects, Europe versus EU and identity. These themes were the same for all interviews and the interviews followed the same structure and the same basic questions were asked to all respondents. Breadth and comparability are important when, as in this case, the interviewees are the objects of the study.⁹⁵

In the interview guide the themes were operationalized into more suitable and specific closed- and open-ended questions. A semi-structured interview style gave the privilege to let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely. When raising issues such as identity there

⁹¹ Petersson (2003) p.42-43

⁹² Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, Wängnerud (2012) *Metodpraktikan: konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad.* p 251-254

⁹³ Petersson (2003) p.41

⁹⁴ Hesse-Biber, Leavy (2011) *The practice of qualitative research*, p.102

⁹⁵ Marshall, Rossman (2006) *Designing Qualitative Research*, p. 102

is a need to be flexible and open since it is personal and hard to understand by using only strict questions with limited answers.⁹⁶ This gave freedom to change the order and wording of the questions if needed, for example if a respondent did not understand the question correctly. A completely unstructured interview would take away the opportunity to steer the conversation in the right direction.⁹⁷

The purpose has not been to be critical but to understand the respondents' perspectives on events. The challenge was to avoid ideas of what the respondent "should" be answering or what I thought they would answer. I was mindful of my own agenda and assumptions. The subjective answers are what matter.⁹⁸ Openness to other potential explanations mentioned by the interviewees was therefore important and taken into consideration. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy it is important to be objective and not influence the interview process by relating to personal perceptions or values. However, as a qualitative researcher you need to be aware of the differences between researcher and interviewee that will affect the interview situation.⁹⁹ Answers will differ some depending on the interviewer and the relationship to the interviewee. In this case I am an outsider since I have never been involved in an EU project. At the same time I am employed by the City of Gothenburg and work with international questions and this helped me to get in touch with some of the interviewees. They were all aware of the fact that I work within their field but that I required to meet them as a student. I do not think this had a negative impact, more likely it made the interviewees more motivated to help me with the research project.

It was important that the interviewees felt comfortable and it was therefore up to them to decide the location. One interview took place at the University, the others took place at the interviewees work. Each interview was recorded and lasted for about one hour. All interviews started with more general warm-up questions concerning the background of the interviewee and his or hers previous experiences from international work.

⁹⁶ Petersson (2003) p. 44

⁹⁷ Denscombe (2010) *The good research guide: for small-scale social research projects*, p. 174-176

⁹⁸ Marshall, Rossman (2006) p.102

⁹⁹ Hesse-Biber, Leavy (2011) p.111-115

A pilot interview was made with Rosie Rothstein, former international coordinator at SDF Västra Hisingen. This gave a chance to try out the questions, the order of them and what kind of responses I would get. Some changes were made afterwards, and these clearly improved the interview guide.

3.2. Sampling

Two main choices are made in this study; first the projects in which the interviewees have participated and then the specific interviewees. The two choices are explained below.

3.2.1. Sampling of projects

Since there are several projects to choose from criteria were formulated. The first criterion was that the project had a project group based in the Gothenburg region and that it had a transnational aspect, i.e. some sort of exchange with preferably two or more EU countries. Projects with cooperation between only two countries, especially two Nordic countries, were if possible avoided. The transnational impact is assumed to be bigger the more countries that are involved and I had doubts that cooperation between for example Finland and Sweden would affect the identification with EU or Europe as much as a project involving several countries.

The other criteria was that the project is financed my means from the ESF or the ERDF, the most common EU funds to use in transnational projects. The third and last criterion was that the project is ongoing, however not in the upstart period, or just ended. For the purpose of the study, it was important that the participants had fresh memories of their activities, exchanges and travels and that the transnational cooperation had the time to be implemented. The purpose and content of the projects have not been the deciding factor. The aim was to understand the impact of the transnational aspect and this can be done without regarding the content of the project in a deeper way.

From these criteria around fifteen projects were selected and positive answers were received from ten of them. These are Rom San, Projekt Hundra, IMAGEEN, Produktionsskolan, Iter, Jobbready, Måltiden en del i lärandet, Partnerskap dialog och samverkan för hållbar utveckling, Unga vuxna AB and Partnerskap Göteborg. IMAGEEN is an INTERREG project and the others are financed by the ESF.

Transnational cooperation is as earlier mentioned a part of INTERREG projects. While it usually is one or two different countries working together in the ESF projects there are about five in the INTERREG projects. This was important to keep in mind during the interview and analysis. Further, the requirement for transnationality diminished my list of suitable projects as many ESF projects are conducted without transnational partners.

3.2.2. Sampling of respondents

When it comes to sampling the interviewees time constraints did affect the sampling size. If possible, interviews would have been made with the same persons before they entered the project and in the end to see how and if they experience a change. These projects last for about three years and the timeframe made it impossible to compare the “before and after”. However, the aim is not to “measure” change but to understand the respondents’ subjective experiences.

It is difficult to decide a number in advance since an interviewer has to keep working until there is a theoretical saturation, i.e. until no new relevant aspects occur.¹⁰⁰ However, it was important to put time and effort in to the analysis of the material rather than interviewing more people. 12 persons were interviewed, this was the number of people who got back to me and were willing to help me with the project.

The ambition was to do a purposive sampling as a specific group of people was the target. This type of sampling was possible due to accessible sites and several possible respondents. Further, snowball sampling was considered helpful in that one contact lead to another contact.¹⁰¹ The choice of interviewees’ was thus decided by the purpose and research questions and was based on experience of working in transnational EU projects. As long as the projects are transnational and the interviewees’ have been in more long-term contact with colleagues in other EU-countries and preferably also been traveling to the partner-countries they had something to contribute with in this study.

Interviews were made with the coordinators, project leaders or participants in the steering groups, hence the persons most likely to have interacted with colleagues in other countries.

¹⁰⁰ Hesse-Biber, Leavy (2011) p.47

¹⁰¹ Marshall, Rossman (2006) p.71

Ten suitable projects were thus found and one person per project was interviewed. The exception was two projects where two persons participated. People from the same projects and workplace share the same experiences and that can affect their answers. With the goal of breadth in mind it was therefore better to interview people from different projects. However, in the two particular projects it was relevant since the interviewees had very different backgrounds and could contribute with interesting thoughts.

3.2.3. Challenges with the sampling

Every choice is of course a trade off which will limit the scope of the study. During the sampling I encountered some unexpected difficulties, such as a lack of men involved in the projects and less projects than originally believed to have several transnational partners were found. However, the sample represents a variety of projects, countries involved and places of work. The common denominator is the involvement in a transnational EU project and that is what counts in this specific study.

The study concerns the perceived impact of the participation in transnational projects and these effects need, to a certain extent, to be separated from the background of the interviewee. Previous studies have shown that socio-economic background as well as political view plays important roles when it comes to explaining the identification with the EU.¹⁰² These factors have not been considered in this study partly due to the fact that it would require rather unpleasant questions before and during the interview with the risk of making the interviewee uncomfortable. The second reason is that all the interviewees are working within similar fields and do not have any “visible” socio-economic differences. To avoid ignoring these factors entirely each interview started with questions about the respondents’ background. This gave some valuable insights about previous experiences from international activities and their employment. The background of a person influences the feeling towards the EU and Europe and several respondents brought up earlier experiences from living abroad and its effects.

Age has also shown to have explanatory power but even though the sites and interviewees were easily accessible I could not be sure about the possibility to interview participants in a certain age. Respondents were between 30 and 55 years old and as they all have similar experiences from working in EU projects age as explanatory factor lost much of its power.

¹⁰² For example Melchior (2006) ”Europeisk identitet styrs av klasstillhörighet och ideologi”

During the sampling process some projects had to be eliminated since the transnational cooperation they had planned for never took place. Further there was a need to be more open to projects with only one transnational partner. Several projects had the intention to cooperate with several countries but due to various problems they ended up with only one partner. For this reason there are three projects cooperating with only one country. The decision to allow the study to include projects with only one transnational partner was taken both due to time constraints and because it represents the reality. Many projects only have one transnational partner and after a few interviews it became clear that one partner is enough for the participants to feel an impact.

Another issue was the lack of men involved in these projects. It reflects the overrepresentation of women in the public sector and especially in the fields of social work, education and employability. These are the focus areas of the ESF. The efforts to target men were fruitless and since the purpose is not to study the differences between men and women in relation to European identity this is considered a minor issue.

The respondents could talk as individuals and not only as representatives of a certain workplace. This was achieved by focusing on their personal experience and opinions as well as on how the project affected them as workers. The risk of biased answers is limited since the interviewees' do not have anything to win or lose by giving certain answers. There was thus no reason to be critical to the answers of the respondents. They are my sources and their subjective stories and experiences are seen as true.

3.3. Ethics in relation to anonymity, transcribing and translating

When working with interviews the ethical aspects are in need of special attention. It was explained to the respondents that they were taking part in a scientific study and that they had the right to say no, even after the interview was made. Further, information about the research project and its effects was given. In this particular case the area of interest is not seen as sensitive or to put the respondents at risk. Anonymity was discussed as well as the demand to record the interview. The main argument was that the use of a recorder would help to "get it right" when transcribing and allow me to be more focused during the actual interview. All interviewees' accepted this request without complaints or further questions. Not one of the respondents saw a need to be anonymous but quotes were in certain cases sent to the

respondents for approval. Notes taken during the interview complemented the recorded material.

Finally the issue of translating the material from Swedish into English as well as transcribing needs to be addressed. When transposing the spoken word in one language into another language and then into a text it is important to be aware of the risks associated with interpreting and making judgments.¹⁰³ To transcribe the interview as soon as possible was important to ensure credibility and a way to make more appropriate interpretations. Careful translations were made and if there were hesitations the respondent was contacted. The interviews were transcribed word by word, leaving out certain phrases which were without significance for the research.

3.4. Analytical approach and the analytical framework

Since a deductive approach is used theory guided the construction of the analytical framework. The theories concerning political-civic identity and social-cultural identity are the basis for the analytical framework with categories and codes. The reason for applying the deductive approach was the possibility to create the analytical framework in advance, suggested by the theoretical perspectives taken, and then look at the data with the framework in hand. In this case there are two alternative predictions; that the interviewees will be influenced by their participation in the transnational projects and identify more with the political-civic aspects of the EU or that they will identify more with the social-cultural aspects of Europe. Both dimensions have certain characteristics and that is how they are recognized when analyzing the data. It is of great relevance to acknowledge that it might not be one or the other, but a bit of both. There are no values attached to either dimension and both are as likely to occur. However, being in the actual project will affect in new ways and the theories can make it clearer what it is that the respondents identify with.

To best understand the collected data it had to be categorized and coded. This is to divide the data into more meaningful parts. By labeling key features the analytical framework gave a direction on what to look for when studying the interview transcripts.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Marshall, Rossman (2006) p.111-113

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p.52

Four main categories are labeled and they represent what I will be looking for while analyzing the data (the interviews). The categories are based on the information considered valuable to focus on during the interviews as they will give a good picture of the perceived identity. This implies that they are essential features or key factors. The categories are relating to each other in that they each provide one aspect of the larger picture.

The coding scheme is then applied to the categories. There are eight different codes constructed in relation to the four categories. The codes are derived from the categories and are more specific segments. They are what give meaning to the categories. The different codes signify that the theories presented earlier have different characteristics and represent the distinction between having a political-civic identity and a social-cultural identity. As earlier mentioned, no dimension is more important or valued than the other and the respondents can possibly express characteristics from both dimensions. This would be consistent with the content and structure of the projects. While doing the analysis each code is symbolized by a number and these numbers were placed all over the interview transcripts while analyzing the data.

Categories	Political-civic identity (EU in particular)	Social-cultural identity (Europe in general)
<i>Benefits from project</i>	1 chance for mobility, participation, work in an “EU environment”, support of achieved political integration and the EU	2 interaction, learning, trust, intergroup friendships, increased feeling of being European
<i>“Europeans”, group belonging</i>	3 shared citizenship, participation, within the EU, EU as group and identifier	4 similarities, common heritage, not only within the EU, trust, solidarity, social group, collectivity of Europeans
<i>Values and symbols associated with the EU</i>	5 human rights, democracy, peace, equality, symbols related to rules and regulations (passport, EP-elections, the Euro)	6 traditions, moral, common Western values, symbols related to cultural aspects and traditions (anthem, flag, European Day)
<i>Role of the EU in the daily life</i>	7 formal aspect of the project, rights and duties, use of rights as EU citizens (such as free movement), political system,	8 social values and norms, collectivity, social space, meetings, people, informal and more social parts of the project

3.4.1 Explanation of categories and codes

The first category; “Benefits from project”, relates to the various aspects in the projects.

Interesting is what the participants consider important and beneficial with being involved in a transnational EU project. This enables to see which aspects they put most focus on and point

to in the interview. The possibility to learn about the EU, use the freedoms provided for EU citizens and other more formal aspects of the project would be signs of political-civic identity. If they instead put more emphasis on the informal aspects such as meetings and interactions there are signs of a social-cultural identity formation.

The second category; “Europeans” points to the differences between seeing Europeans as linked by the political aspects of the EU, such as sharing a common citizenship and democratic values or the more social-cultural aspects not only shared by EU citizens but with Europeans in general. The latter can be feelings derived from sharing a common legacy, history and solidarity between Europeans. Further, it relates to which larger entity the respondents see themselves as belonging to; EU as identifier or Europeans as social group. In code three the EU is seen as a formal entity and a super ordinate group. Code four implies less hierarchy but more importance to individuals as forming a group based on similarities.

The third category; “Values and symbols associated with the EU” focuses on the associations the respondents make when talking about the EU. One aspect of this is whether they see the values as “EU values” or that these values are shared in the whole Western world. Symbols are often used to make this classification and to differentiate between symbols relating to formality and rights and others relating more to culture is a common way to look at this.

The fourth category; “ Role of the EU in daily life” concerns the impact the project has on the participants daily life and if they because of this see the EU as a political system imposing rights and duties or more as a social sphere where the people within the community are what he/she identifies with. Further this relates to the fact that the EU can be seen as a social space as well as a political system and depending on experiences we tend to relate to these two in different ways.

The analytical framework is rather fixed but it still gave room to take other factors brought forward by the respondents into account. If necessary, a fifth category would have been created from the answers by the respondents. This was not needed since the majority of their answers could be placed within one of the already existing categories.

3.4.2. Validity, reliability and generalizability

To ensure validity is to answer what was intended to answer, or measure what was intended to be measured. This is done by ensuring a correspondence between the theory and the

operationalization and by the absence of systematic errors.¹⁰⁵ This study aims to explore the effects from participating in a transnational EU project. Focus is on the influence it has on the identity. To answer the research question and to fulfill the purpose interviews were used. This made sure I could answer what I intended to answer and capture things that go unseen with quantitative methods. Systematic errors are avoided by using a suitable way of measuring the influence, for example by avoiding biased questions and sampling bias. Interviews are in this case the instrument used to look at the effects.

To ensure reliability is to avoid non-systematic or random errors in the data collection phase. These kinds of mistakes can for example be unclear notes taken during the interviews or problems related to the translation. It is not enough to have correct instruments to explore what is aimed to be explored; the instrument also needs to be used in a correct way.¹⁰⁶ There was no problem related to the use of the Dictaphone and this allowed eye contact with the respondent instead of being focused on taking notes. The notes mainly consisted of comments about body language or other aspects important to remember after the actual interview. To listen to the interviews carefully several times is a way to ensure correct interpretations as well as translations. The transcribing was done as soon as possible after the actual interview. This made it easier to remember the conversation and the respondent.

While analyzing the data, i.e. recordings and notes from the interviews, I looked for evidence for the two dimensions of identity presented in the theoretical part of the study. The data came together in patterns and this was a way to organize thoughts and interpretations. During this process I challenged the explanations put forward and looked for signs of alternative explanations. This was also a part of strengthening the reliability of the study.¹⁰⁷

The question needed to be asked is whether the knowledge produced in specific interviews can be transferred to other situations. The aim is analytic generalizability which is more suitable when using small samples of qualitative data. This implies a careful and thought through judgment as to whether the results from the study can give guidance for other similar situations.¹⁰⁸ This means generalizing to a theory and that the theory can be useful when

¹⁰⁵ Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, Wängnerud (2012) p.58

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p.63

¹⁰⁷ Marshall, Rossman (2006) p. 161-162

¹⁰⁸ Kvale, Brinkmann (2009) *Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun* p.280-282

studying other similar cases.¹⁰⁹ Depending on the result, it can allow to generalize the findings about a particular sample to the population from which the sample was drawn. This has to be done with caution since generalizability to other settings can be problematic in qualitative research.¹¹⁰ A study with 12 respondents cannot be claimed to be representative for all participants working in project groups for transnational EU projects, especially not since all respondents are Swedish and identity formation tends to vary between countries. The results cannot be transmitted to the 450 000 people in some way affected by the ESF but careful conclusions can be drawn as to the staff in the project groups in the transnational ESF- and INTERREG projects conducted in the Gothenburg region. The sample represents a mix of professions, organizations and projects, which is how the reality looks when it comes to EU projects. The value of the study is still high since focus is put on a phenomenon affecting many but researched by few.

4. Results and analysis

When interpreting the material from the interviews the analytical framework is applied. This implies that the respondents might not themselves be aware of the meaning their answers have. It is in relation to the analytical framework, derived from theory, that their answers can be studied. The results are shown in relation to the four categories; benefits from project, Europeans, values and symbols associated with the EU and the role of the EU in the daily life. Quotes illustrate the results for each of the two codes within the four categories. The results are then discussed in relation to the two questions posed.

The codes for the political-civic identity prevail in three out of four cases. Important to keep in mind is however that characteristic from both identity dimensions are present with each respondent and that respondents tend to relate to codes from both categories simultaneously.

4.1. Results for each category

Category: Benefits from project

It becomes apparent that the respondents relate to, and value, characteristics from both codes, even if there are more signs of the political-civic identity. The result within this category is

¹⁰⁹ Hesse-Biber, Leavy (2011) p.53-54

¹¹⁰ Marshall, Rossman (2006) p.202

therefore not clear-cut and shows that the different aspects of the projects have effects. Interesting to see is that some of the respondents point to what they believe is the purpose with transnational EU projects; to feel more European as well as to obtain knowledge about the EU. They are thus aware of the dual impact the projects can have.

In line with previous research related to transnational EU projects the respondents have learnt to work in as well as to appreciate to be in a more European context. Verschaege et al. wrote about the development of a “European state of mind” and there are signs of this increased feeling of identification with the EU and with Europe.¹¹¹ Greater understanding and awareness of the EU and its regulations are raised as benefits as well as more soft learning outcomes such as new methods and intercultural competencies.

The respondents point to their more positive view of the EU and the value of taking part in something bigger. At the same time they clearly point to characteristics of a more social-cultural identity, such as the informal learning and interaction.

Code 1, Signs of political-civic identity

The respondents say that they have learnt new things about the EU and as a consequence they are more positive to it. The possibilities to influence, to “get money back” and to travel within the projects are benefits relating to the political-civic identity. To feel the presence of the EU in everyday life is obviously having a positive effect on the support for it.

Annica highlights that the project has made it clear that the EU provides possibilities. To be part of a transnational EU project is to get closer to the EU and feel its positive effects locally, altogether it makes you more positive to the EU. This is a formal learning that many of the respondents point to; they learn about the EU and above all about the funds they use. This formal learning is important as it has increased with the involvement in the projects. More concrete knowledge is therefore a positive effect. The respondents feel more confident and encouraged, even though many of them point to an initial negativity surrounding EU projects. Several respondents have experienced hesitations from colleagues when an EU project is planned. However, Annica, in line with other respondents, means that we should be willing to

¹¹¹ Verschraegen, et al.(2011) p.62

work with EU projects. That the respondents in this study are optimistic about the projects and ready to work in new ones seem to mean that the positive outweigh the negative.

”To a certain extent I am more positive to the EU now. It creates these possibilities. There are rules and conditions but there is nothing strange about that, I have learnt more about ESF and its function as well as about other funds. EU becomes more concrete and we get something back, we should really be up and ready for that.” (Annica, Samverkan)

Emilia was not so positive to the EU before the participation in project MEDEL. She now points to the increased involvement and appreciation for the EU as such. In this case is the background of the interviewee important. Emilia had not been involved in much international work before and this context was consequently new to her. Because of this she was affected slightly more than the others, on every level. Her opinions have changed and she is now more positive to the EU, more interested and more involved.

”I was not too positive to the EU before but I have realized that it is very exciting. Before I did not know much and I was not that interested. By being part of this project I notice and react more to news about the EU, I know more and feel more involved.” (Emilia, MEDEL)

Dima means that participants in these projects have more knowledge about the EU than colleagues who did not participate. This is already mentioned in the section about Annica but it is important to highlight. The respondents become local experts in certain fields and can conduct “EU work” as part of their own work. Dima also shows increased awareness of other projects conducted in the City of Gothenburg. Increased cooperation between different local actors is a positive effect from the increased knowledge of what others are doing.

”I know about ongoing EU projects in the city, I was not aware of them before. If you compare us and two other colleagues we probably have more knowledge about the EU and the possibilities it offers, than the other two. We have learnt how to work with the ESF for example and seen that we don’t always need to reinvent the wheel. What I have learnt is how to conduct an ESF project in Gothenburg” (Dima and Hannah, Unga Vuxna AB)

Code 2, Signs of social-cultural identity

Interaction with European colleagues is very important, especially the learning resulting from these new contacts. The sharing of ideas is an essential factor as well as the conclusion made by several respondents that “we all work with similar problems”. This is in line with previous research about collective identity formation; the value of interaction is high when it shows that we share similar interests and are more alike than unlike.

Anna-Lena took part in an INTERREG project and she values the interaction and learning. She sees it as a way to feel more European. The participants in the project she worked in met many times and created formal and informal networks. The interaction was of great personal value and also made the work easier. You start to identify with each other but you also use each other's practices and knowledge. The benefits with interaction are numerous, and Anna-Lena is one of many who see the transnational aspect as invaluable.

"INTERREG gave me so much. It creates a sense of communality, and you see each other's competencies and prerequisites. And this is important for developing new things. There is also a value in the interaction between humans; you feel more European." (Anna-Lena, IMAGEEN)

Birgitta also values the interaction and the sharing of ideas, but also the increased feeling of being alike. Meetings create knowledge and from the interaction you can relate to each other. Many respondents express how easy it was to cooperate across borders, much easier than expected. This is generating positivity and an increased appreciation of each other. There was usually no problem in understanding each other and many expressed how valuable it was to see that people in the European countries share so much, work for the same things and have similar challenges. All this contributed to a feeling of connectedness and identification.

"I knew that they were doing many interesting things in France and I have gotten it confirmed that we share a lot when it comes to how we think and how we work. We understood each other and shared ideas." (Birgitta, Projekt Hundra)

Åsa highlights European networks and that you can use these for future cooperation. The personal contacts give an extra dimension to the project and the contacts are lasting. Friendships and trust are built through these projects.

"Transnationality gives an added value. I got many new contacts and inspiration. If I would like to visit a school in one of the countries we cooperated with, I would know who to call. It is a valuable network." (Åsa, Produktionsskolan)

Category: "Europeans"

The result in this category points to that the respondents relate to the social-cultural identity. This is first and foremost because they do not see Europeans as synonymous to EU citizens. They all value the EU citizenship and the fact that EU citizens enjoy certain rights, thus

characteristics of the political-civic identity, but many respondents point to the similarities between people all over Europe, including other countries than only EU Member States. Europe is bigger than the EU and values and similarities are shared by Europeans in general.

An important part in forming a collective identity is the sharing of common interests and to see that we are more alike than unlike, this is pointed out in the previous category but here it becomes clear that identification stretches outside of the EU.

Worth to notice is that it by many is considered cliché or judgmental to talk about Europeans. Few respondents put any values into the actual term “Europeans” but many say that they do feel more European because of the project. To feel more as an EU citizen is also a result from participation in the project, even if being European is valued higher than being an EU citizen. Respondents point to the difficulties in identifying with an organization that is formal in character and has created a citizenship while it is much easier to identify with the people in the different European countries.

Code 3, Signs of political-civic identity

When the respondents relate to a political-civic EU identity it is the passport and its consequential citizenship that are brought forward. Anna, Anna-Lena and Lisa believe that the passport and freedoms represent and connect the Europeans within the EU, some Europeans are thus linked by the political aspects of the EU, but not all. This is however no evidence for that they only relate to the political-civic identity as they also bring up characteristics from the social-cultural identity.

Anna and Anna-Lena point to the duality in this category when they show that being and feeling as an EU citizen is one thing while the actual people they meet are Europeans. They feel that you become an EU citizen when you have and use the passport. The passport signifies the citizenship and it is what gives you specific rights, at the same time as it creates outsiders as mentioned by Anna. The respondents know that they are EU citizens but it is not something that describes Europeans. Being European within the EU gives additional freedoms but it does not seem to give increased similarities or closer relationships.

"It is with the passport that you become the "EU person", the thing that let you do things that others cannot. If you meet Turks it becomes very clear that we are the EU and they are not. But if I meet people from Spain or France I think that they are Europeans, not that they are EU-citizens." (Anna, Iter)

"I do not use the term EU citizen as much. It is because the EU is an institution, but I guess I am an EU citizen, but then I think about feeling connected to the institutions. The people from the projects, they are my friends." (Anna-Lena, IMAGEEN)

Lisa points to the freedoms as a factor of identification. However, also she adds that it is representative for the Europeans within the EU, there are Europeans also outside of its borders.

"The good thing about being European and within the EU is first that you can live and work wherever you want. I think that is what characterizes a European, at least within the EU." (Lisa, MEDEL)

Code 4, Signs of social-cultural identity

This code is what the respondents relate to when it comes to discussing Europeans. They bring up that they do not particularly identify with the EU but more with Europe as whole, and now more than before. Europe is easier to identify with since it is about the people; the EU is a formal institution. During the projects they interact with Europeans, not particularly EU citizens, even though it is more evident in certain situations than others that you are an EU citizen. As mentioned earlier are many respondents hesitant to put any values in the term "Europeans", despite this there are some characteristics brought up.

Tilda points to the effects of the project and that the interaction can make you see Europeans in a new way. In line with other respondents she is hesitant to put any values or signifiers into the term Europeans but the project is interestingly making her consider Europeans more as a people than before. This is probably a sign of positive interaction. Further, one can see that she does not make any differences between Europeans and EU citizens. Even if she interacts with people in other EU countries she feels more like a European, not an EU citizen.

"I think it is impossible not to feel more European when interacting with people in other EU countries. And maybe you start to see Europeans as some kind of people, even if we are not. And it is beneficial to be a European; you are trusted and free to travel."
(Tilda, Jobbready)

Birgitta sees the term European as wider than EU citizen and you start to feel European when interacting with other Europeans. She values the social aspects but also points to a common legacy, that is becoming more obvious when interacting. These projects take place at the local level and that is where the feeling of being European is created. The interaction is the key here as well, you feel European depending on how much you interact with other Europeans.

"I don't think being European has anything to do with the EU. Norway and Switzerland are not part of the EU but they are still Europeans. I can feel that we have some kind of familiarity within Europe, we have a shared history. It is when we start to work together at the grass root level that we become Europeans, when you start to get to know and understand each other." (Birgitta, Projekt Hundra)

Åsa highlights something interesting. The EU creates an arena for meetings and interactions between EU citizens but that is not what make you relate to each other. Instead it is the perceived similarities and to work together towards a common goal. Even if interaction takes place within the EU framework and between EU citizens is the result an increased feeling of being European and working with Europeans.

"Since the EU gives money for projects it becomes a natural arena for meetings between EU citizens. But you do not feel closer just because you are in the EU but because you work with similar things and are Europeans. I would not think differently about a Norwegian, so I do not think it has something immediate to do with the EU." (Åsa, Produktionskolan)

Category: Values and symbols associated with the EU

The result in this category is clear-cut and it is here that the differences between the codes are most evident. However, one aspect is in need of special attention. It is obligatory to have the EU flag on folders, websites and other handouts in EU projects. For that reason is the flag the first thing that the respondents relate to when it comes to symbols. The participants are consequently affected by the projects that they have been working within. A recurring theme is otherwise that the respondents highlight the importance of the symbols related to rules and regulations while dismissing the more cultural symbols.

This category shows that the deliberate efforts by the EU to create identity markers have worked to a certain extent. The flag is often used in these projects and it eventually becomes a symbol representing the EU. The passport and the Euro are however the identity markers

considered as most important. Democracy and the freedoms are the values most often brought up in relation to the EU.

Code 5, Signs of political-civic identity

Even though the flag comes up first it is not the symbol most valued or appreciated by the respondents. The passport, the Euro and the freedoms are the most appreciated symbols and values. Many symbols are thus specific for the EU. Values such as human rights and democracy are not what come to the mind of the respondents; focus is on the more concrete symbols.

Annica is aware of the cultural symbols but do not value or celebrate them. This is representative for this group; they are aware of the symbols, maybe more than the general EU citizen, but they are more affected by the political symbols. They raise that the Euro and the passport are more highlighted in news and that they have consequences for the daily life.

"I think about the flag first. I know about the Europe day but I don't celebrate or so, I also know the hymn. But I am more aware of the Euro and the passport, those are more in news etc. And with the passport comes liberties." (Annica, Samverkan)

Tilda also points to the more voluntary character of the cultural symbols, the use of the flag is a demand and therefore more prone to affect the participants than the hymn. With the passport comes the freedoms, it is consequently a symbol very much connected to the positive things that the EU brings.

"I think about the Euro, but the first thing I see is the blue flag. It is hard not be affected by the Euro and the elections for the European Parliament. But I can chose to take part in the Europe day. I am more affected by the political aspects, cannot avoid being. And to be able to travel is one of the most important freedoms. I value the openness and that is what makes me positive to the EU." (Tilda, Jobbready)

Birgitta is rather negative to the cultural symbols, they are forced and unnecessary. She is not the only one who expresses such skepticism. The Euro, and the passport are specific for the EU and are symbols for it. This is in line with the previous category were it is made clear that the citizenship is important to the EU and it is thus the symbols related to the citizenship that are valued.

“The passport is more interesting, it becomes more EU. I think the Euro can have the same effect, it is those things that bring us closer. I don’t think you should force it with a hymn and day, it becomes ridiculous.” (Birgitta, Projekt Hundra)

Code 6, Signs of social-cultural identity

In this code it is very clear that the project has had an effect. The flag comes up in each interview and even if the flag represents something positive and that the project is part of something bigger it is not a symbol of great personal value. The quotes by Emilia, Lisa and Maria are representative for the respondents and show that the flag basically is the only identity marker brought up within this category.

Emilia sees the flag as something that connects people and it shows that you work with something that stretches further than the city in which you live and work. The flag has a positive impact but without the project she would not have had the same feelings about it. The respondents understand the value of the flag in relation to the projects and it is also what makes the recipients of work-related actions aware of that the project is funded by the EU.

”I am proud; it is nice that we have the flag with us, it gives value to the project. It is good to show that we are part of something bigger and that it is not just happening here.”
(Emilia, MEDEL)

Maria also shows that it is in the context of the project that the flag has significance.

I think about the flag first, you have gotten a relationship to it because of the project, it has a given role since it is always there, but not otherwise. (Maria, Rom San)

Lisa is one of the few who celebrates the Europe day, but it is because of the project she is involved in. It is therefore not a voluntary action, neither is the presence of the flag.

”Free movement and the passport affects me privately and that is very important. While the flag is a requirement from the ESF. We celebrate the Europe day through the project so it has a value.” (Lisa, MEDEL)

Category: Role of the EU in the daily life

Many respondents put focus on the extra administration and paperwork that come with EU projects and this together with appreciation of the freedoms give the political-civic dimension more weight than the social-cultural dimension. Due to the project are they constantly aware

of the EU. This is in line with previous research pointing to that identification with the EU can come from an increased presence of the institution in the daily life. With these projects can the EU gradually involve citizens in its political structure and rules. This will in turn forge certain values and knowledge and affect how respondents see the EU.

Further, this category shows the dual role of the project leaders and coordinators; they are responsible for the formal aspects of the project as well as taking part in trips and exchanges. The administration is necessary but time consuming and the social-cultural aspects are more appealing. That they are more appealing do however not mean that they are more present.

Code 7, Signs of political-civic identity

The administrative work and formal aspects of the projects are raised and imply that the respondents are very much aware of that their work is conducted within an “EU context”. In their role as project coordinators are they constantly reminded of this and this affects how they feel. Many respondents can see themselves as EU citizens when working in the projects and do relate to the political system.

Anna-Lena means that the EU projects have an impact on how you work and affect the context in which you work. She sees the EU’s role as providing tools for the daily work. She points to the formal aspects of the project and that you work in a specific framework. The role of the EU in the daily life is different when in the role as employee and participant in the project compared to if you talk as a private person. Many highlight that the project influences their daily work by adding administrative tasks and new rules. This has the consequence that several respondents feel more as EU citizens at their work than at home.

”There are rules and a framework. And there are goals and purposes with EU projects. I am from Europe but I could say that I work for an EU institution. I am a European but I use tools from the EU in my work.” (Anna-Lena, IMAGEEN)

Annica points to the constant awareness of being involved in an EU project. This has to do with administrative tasks as well as an increased feeling of being an EU citizen. The EU is present in everyday life in another way than before. More focus seems to be on the duties and responsibilities related to the project while more focus is on the freedoms when the respondents talk as private persons. As participants in the project groups they experience both parts.

”When we were in Poland we were representing, we were EU citizens. I saw myself as an EU citizen and we reunited around that. So the trip affected me, but it is also the fact that the EU is there as something concrete and constant. I go to meetings, I sign papers and read protocols so the EU is present in another way.” (Annica, Samverkan)

Monica also points to the new proximity to the EU and the effect it has on her. Since the EU has clear rules and regulations regarding these projects it is in light of the EU that the projects are conducted, in accordance with the local level. Therefore can some respondents see the EU as “the highest authority” when conducting these projects.

” You become aware of the membership in the EU. I can actually consider myself as employed by the EU when in the project. So if you have ever been against the EU it is harder to be against after being involved in a project like this, even if administration takes time.” (Monica, The Bridge)

Code 8, Signs of social-cultural identity

The respondents also relate to Europe as a social space influencing their lives. They see similarities between people and this together with new contacts bring about a feeling of closeness and familiarity. Birgitta is the only one raising an actual value as important when thinking about how the EU affects her daily life and work. EU strives for equality within these projects and even if other respondents do not mention it directly they value the purpose of cohesion in the Structural Funds.

Birgitta is thus pointing to that the EU can help her to spread certain values in her daily work. She can put focus on equality in her work thanks to the EU. The values that the EU wants to promote within these projects take form in local arrangements and in the work of local employees. This is a way for the EU to spread and forge certain values all around the Union.

“One important aspect is equality. The ESF council has that in the application. I think EU money should go to as many women as men, so I keep an extra eye on that and the focus on equality from the EU helps me in this work.” (Birgitta, projekt Hundra)

Anna means that the project influences her by making her aware of similarities as well as differences between Europeans. Contact with other Europeans becomes a natural feature at work and for several years. Anna works with a project where young people are given the opportunity to spend a few months in another European country, this is how she can give others access to the larger world, which in this case is Europe. The respondents do feel like

they are spreading knowledge about the EU as they always mention that it is an EU project and what that means.

"I think you feel closer but at the same time the differences become more visible, but that does not have to be negative, more the other way around. I feel part of something bigger and that has increased with this project. And I can give others access to this large world."
(Anna, ITER)

Monica believes that the EU consists of good neighbors and the people you cooperate with in the projects are very much alike. She mentions that you find yourself in a system and when in the system you get to know people in other countries. The EU is consequently a political space defining this system but with impacts on the social life of its citizens. Monica cooperated with people in two English cities and experienced great similarities. All respondents point more to the similarities than the differences and it does not seem to matter which countries they have cooperated with.

"I feel like we are good neighbors in the EU, I could move to London because it is so similar. You are in a system and you get to know the people living there. It is exactly the same people but with a different language." (Monica, The Bridge)

4.2. Discussion of results

In this section the results are discussed in the perspective of the two questions and in relation to what has been presented in previous research. The question "How does the participation in a transnational EU project influence the respondents' identification with EU and Europe?" is answered first and "Is this identification consistent with a social-cultural European identity or a political-civic EU identity?" after.

4.2.1. Effects from the participation in a transnational EU project?

As shown by the quotes the respondents are indeed affected by the participation in the different projects. They are also experiencing it in similar ways, seen by the similar responses to the questions. The respondents are generally more positive to the EU now than before they took part in a transnational EU project. They have seen the benefits that the EU brings and they have been able to do something concrete with money from the EU. They are also more aware of the EU as their knowledge about it has increased and this is in turn stimulating the positivity. This is in line with the positive effects brought up by previous research in the field

of transnational activities. Further, long lasting informal and formal networks seem to be created between Europeans in different countries. Many of the projects do for that reason have positive effects on the European level; relations are created and maintained.

Learning is an important added value, as well as the exchange of ideas and the development of a “European mindset”. The perceived effects are in accordance with predictions about identity formation. The more you positively interact with an institution the more you will come to identify with it. The same is said for people; the more you positively interact with other Europeans the more you will come to identify with them. These projects involve interaction, and mostly positive, with the EU and with Europeans. The effect from interaction can be seen in the interview with Hannah and Dima from project Unga Vuxna AB. They did not interact as much with their Slovenian colleagues and are consequently less affected. This can be compared to Anna-Lena from IMAGEEN who have interacted with colleagues from seven countries and on a more regular basis. She has come to see the international colleagues as her friends. The more interaction, the more European the respondents tend to feel.

Interaction is consequently the key in these projects. It is what shapes collective identities. People identify with each other when they feel that they are more similar than unlike. In the interviews the respondents bring up that they have met people who work with similar things and who are struggling with similar challenges. The spoken language is what makes them “different”. This process of socialization or interaction as mentioned by Herrmann and Brewer is not to be underestimated and affects the identification both with the EU and with Europe.¹¹² There are however no signs that the respondents see Europeans as preferable or as a group better than other groups. This has to do with their overall reluctance to give any group attributes to Europeans.

The European identity seems to be very open to context, in line with Petersson and Risse.¹¹³ Being in the projects and working in situations where the EU is present influence the identity formation. The respondents generally have an increased feeling of being EU citizens and this is because they are in an environment where they constantly are reminded of the EU. This is in line with the effects from individuals’ frequent exposure to institutions. When the EU is present in the daily life the identity will also come to develop around that institution.

¹¹² Herrmann, Brewer (2004) p.14-15

¹¹³ Petersson (2003) p.36, Risse (2010) p.31

The background of the respondents does matter and affects the interpretation of the results. Emilia who did not have much previous experience from transnational activities experienced great changes in opinions and feelings towards the EU. Fligstein argues that there is certain part of the population that is more likely to develop a European identity.¹¹⁴ Many of the respondents have previous experiences from “transnational activities”, such as living abroad, previous participation in projects with international colleagues and speak several languages. This tells us something about the kind of people involved in these projects and is in line with previous research saying that some people are more likely than others to develop a European identity. This group belongs to the European middle class and consists of professionals with opportunities to develop a European identity.

Altogether the participants can be said to have an increased identification with the EU as well as with other Europeans. This is resulting in more positive opinions about the EU and more feelings derived from being an EU citizen.

4.2.2. Political-civic EU identity or social-cultural European identity?

The short answer to this question is both. The EU has managed to create projects where identity markers from both dimensions are present and are affecting the respondents. Even if the result according to the categories points to the political-civic identity the social-cultural identity is not far behind. Important is however to mention that the political-civic identity seems to increase with the participation in the project. Most of the participants have identified with other Europeans and Europe in general before, but not so much with the EU itself.

The EU is by the respondents seen as a social space as well as a political system. However, the social space is more connected to Europe in general and the political system to EU in particular. EU is considered to be a part of Europe but Europe is more than the EU only. The projects seem to have a positive effect on both dimensions of identity. The political-civic identity is the dimension that is most affected amongst this group of respondents. I would suggest that this is because it, in this case, is more open to change due to earlier “European experiences” that in turn already have created feelings of identification with other Europeans. This concrete experience with the EU could in turn keep on fostering identification with other Europeans but also foster feelings of identification with the EU. Risse and Goldmann can be

¹¹⁴ Fligstein (2009) p. 133

helpful in the understanding of this phenomenon.¹¹⁵ They argue that weak collective identities are more open to change and that supranational communities usually are characterized by weak feelings of identification. This can explain why a positive experience with the EU can affect the identification with it, at least at a certain moment. It is also in line with the social identity theorists who claim that social identities tend to be more stable than political identities. The social identity already exists due to earlier experiences. Even if many years have passed since the respondent lived in another European country they still have a feeling of being European. The impact is long lasting while the EU seems to be affecting the respondents more around the actual time of the project or in the process of using identity markers such as the passport.

This is consequently a group of people with a relationship both with the EU and with Europeans. The political-civic identity becomes a more formal identification whilst the social-cultural is more informal and takes place in the interaction between Europeans and in the private life. The political-civic EU identity seems to evolve in relation to the formal aspects of the Union and be more visible when the respondents are in a more formal context, such as their work and in an EU project. This is seen for example when respondents say that they feel more as EU citizens in the projects and at work but more as Europeans in their private life. This is very much in line with constructivism and means that the respondents are affected by the reality in which they live. Identity is seen as an ongoing process and individuals define themselves differently depending on context, which is what the respondents are doing here.

That the projects have a transnational aspect is what gives the social-cultural European identity a chance to develop. The social-cultural identity is produced in light of interaction between humans, not as much because of the cultural symbols. The flag has an impact but the other cultural symbols seem to play a less important role on identity formation. As one respondent point out can this be a result from the obligation to use the passport and the Euro whilst it is more voluntarily to celebrate the Europe Day or use the anthem. EU projects without this transnationality would probably not have the same influence on this identity dimension as it would not give the respondents the same possibility to discover one's similarities with other Europeans. Differences are also highlighted through interaction but this

¹¹⁵ Risse (2010) p.31, Goldmann (2008) p. 25

is considered as something positive. It is from the differences in methods and approaches that the participants learn. The resistance among the respondents to talk about Europeans as group suggests that the group is not perceived as completely homogenous, nor does there seem to be a need for that. Despite this do the respondents still identify with other Europeans but this is not as much depending on the vision of a shared common history or religion but on the personal meetings with other Europeans.

Within the political-civic EU identity lays the citizenship and the freedoms. The projects have impacted the participants in the way that they feel more like EU citizens now than before. According to previous research this could be because they are identifying more with the political structure and see themselves as a part of it. Despite this they add more personal value to characteristics from the social-cultural identity and Europe has a more positive connotation to them than the EU. This is important to highlight and this is something that risks going unseen when doing a quantitative study of identity.

However, even within this group is the EU citizenship not yet a natural arena of identification, in line with the European Commission labeling the European identity as “an unfinished business.” It is in the context of the projects that they become EU citizens, when using the available framework with its rules and regulations. The same seems to be the case with the passport; it is when you use it or renew it that the feelings of being an EU citizen evolve.

5. Conclusion

The thesis started by asking whether participants in transnational EU projects identify with the political-civic aspects of the EU or the social-cultural aspect of Europe. This specific group has not been subject to much previous research and the thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of the effects of these projects. The study takes research on transnational EU projects one step further as it goes deeper into the minds of the actual participants conducting the projects. It is not enough to say that the projects have effects, or even a positive effect, there is a need for an increased understanding of why some people do feel European and/or attached to the EU. There have been assumptions about the impact of the projects and the EU has ambitions with them, as with the exchange program Erasmus. The results of this MA-thesis give more information about the positive impact the projects have and how the participants experience the influence.

The result confirms the positive impact from participating in transnational activities. Mobility and interaction result in an increased attachment to other Europeans while the formal aspects of the projects lead to more knowledge about the EU and more positive feelings towards it. This can in turn increase the legitimacy of the EU as these participants come to accept the EU and are aware of the functions it can have. Projects are conducted locally and decisions about what do to with EU money are taken at the local level, this is in turn a way to diminish the democratic deficit. The possibility to influence is important in this respect and respondents point to this as one of the important positive aspects of EU projects.

The results further show that the respondents identify with both dimensions of identity, but that the political-civic identity has evolved more due to the participation in the project. Since characteristics of both dimensions are present in the projects is it reasonable to believe that participants are affected in this way. The somewhat dual result shows that one dimension of identity does not exclude the other. This is in line with previous research by for example Petersson.¹¹⁶ The result indicates that respondents have coexisting identities but also that they have coexisting dimensions of the same identity; the European identity. In this case it would be impossible to portray each respondent as having a political-civic identity or a social-cultural identity. All respondents clearly show characteristics from both dimensions and such a conclusion would therefore be misleading.

The difficulties experienced when using dimensions of identities as “either, or” give reason to question strict models of identity, and the standpoint that people have a political-civic EU identity or a social-cultural European identity. Harsh divisions, as the one made by Bruter, implies a contrasting relationship between the dimensions. For that reason was the dimensions in this thesis expanded. Despite this effort to broaden the definitions is there not one respondent who has a clearly dominating political-civic identity or a social-cultural identity.

Even though there are shortcomings with these models are the definitions still useful. They can be helpful in the understanding of what the respondents actually identify with. This becomes evident in situations where someone says that he or she feels European. This can imply that he or she feels like an EU citizen but also that he or she think about Europe or the

¹¹⁶ Petersson (2003) p.36

Western world in general. With predefined dimensions can answers be analyzed. Altogether this shows the problematic involved when studying identities.

From the point of view of the EU these projects could be considered successful. They are seen as cornerstones in the EU project and with the result that they make citizens more aware of the EU as well as more positive to it, at the same time as identification with other Europeans increases, the importance given to them seems to be just. However, there is not yet a match between the political-civic and the social-cultural identity. Context, together with previous experiences, seems to decide which of the two that will develop, even if both should be desirable. A political-civic identity implies that the identity is limited to EU citizens and could risk the exclusion of Europeans outside of the EU, whilst an exclusively social-cultural identity could weaken the support for the EU.

Supranational identities do seem to be rather fluid and open to change. However, the result shows that there are ways to influence the identity formation, both by concrete identity markers such as the passport and the flag but also by giving people the possibility to work within a European context.

From the result the importance of homogeneity as well as the significance of the cultural symbols can be questioned. The small sample do not allow me to draw conclusions as to whether these factors have less significance in general when it comes to participants in these projects but it is of less importance to the 12 respondents in this study. The cultural symbols created by the EU are not yet having a major effect, exposure to them is however changing this, as in the case of the flag. The personal interaction over borders is important whilst it is uncommon to consider Europeans as a people sharing a history and legacy. The respondents experience similarities that make them overcome potential differences but this is on the individual level. Cultural and historical homogeneity seem to play a minor role while much of the positive influence comes from working with similar things. When individual meetings are taking place the need for a perceived common and homogenous past seem to diminish.

We can still see that there are obstacles to pass for the majority to identify as EU citizens. But the result also gives indicators that can help us understand why many do not identify with the EU. The large mass does not have these possibilities to interact with the EU institutions and to work within this EU framework. However, as shown earlier, these projects are available to

relatively many in the European middle class and there are reasons to believe that similar effects can be found in this large group.

5.1. Recommendations for future research

The study shows what the respondents identify with and why this is the case. It also shows the complexity with studying identity and difficulties in classifying identities. Despite these issues is the European identity something that keeps being explored and studied. For this reason there are many ways that future research could take and many questions that are needed to be raised.

This study can be seen as a beginning of a larger qualitative study of participants in transnational EU projects. It would be of great interest to do the same study in several European countries and analyze if national and regional identities are more compatible with a European identity in some countries and why this would be the case. Since these projects and funds are available in all Member States there are many participants to be found. A much larger study would be possible to conduct and this would offer valuable insights about European identity, the added values from taking part in transnational projects and how adults are influenced by a “European experience”.

Of interest would also be to compare a group of participants' answers and attitudes towards the EU and the European identity before they enter the project and after. This could be a way to study the effects in a more concrete way. Depending on the results it could implicate that more focus should be put on transnational activities such as students going abroad through the Erasmus programme and that more local organizations should engage in transnational projects. The marketing of these possibilities then become of highest importance.

In light of the economic crisis a study could be conducted with focus on how this group of people is affected. Newspapers tend to talk about the increased negativity towards the EU but are these people who are experiencing the positive side of the EU affected in the same way? They might be less prone to change opinions as these projects are conducted despite of the crisis. Interesting would be to see how far their positivity stretches and whether they are less likely than others to turn against the EU.

As many researchers point out; these are possibilities restricted to a certain part of the population. As shown, participation has positive impacts and the local and regional levels

clearly are important starting points for fostering a European identity. Working bottom-up is possibly the only way to foster EU citizens. The opportunity to take part in transnational activities is restricted but transnational EU projects, especially ESF projects reach many. As mentioned in the introduction they reach about 450 000 persons in Sweden only. The respondents in this study are part of the projects groups but they are a minority of the people involved in these projects. The large parts are people benefiting from what the projects are offering. Target groups are the unemployed, school drop-outs, people in need of new competencies, people with psychological problems and so on. These groups are exposed to the EU flag and are given information about the project. Do they also become more positive to the EU? If yes, the European identity is being crafted at the local level all around the EU.

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Appendix I. About the projects

Måltiden, en del i lärandet – Projekt MEDEL

This is a project financed by the European Social Fund and owned by SDF Majorna Skolkök, City of Gothenburg. The project started in 2011 and ends in 2013. The purpose is increase the use of the meal as a process of learning. They have cooperation with the same type of organizations in Finland and Scotland.

<http://euprojektmedel.com/>

Iter

Iter is a project financed by the European Social Fund and owned by Social Resursförvaltning, City of Gothenburg. The project started in 2011 and ended in 2012. The purpose is to strengthen young unemployed and motivate them to take part in the European Voluntary Service (EVS). The project group cooperates with organizations in Estonia, England and France.

www.goteborg.se/iter

Jobbready

Jobbready is a project financed by the European Social Fund and owned by the high school Bräcke gymnasiet. It started in 2011 and ends in 2014. The purpose is to help students with problems become ready to take place at the labor market. The project cooperates with Germany and Poland.

<http://www.esf.se/sv/Projektbank/Behallare-for-projekt/Vastsverige/Jobbready/>

IMAGEEN

IMAGEEN is a project conducted in the framework of INTERREG IVC and is financed by the European Regional Development Fund. The project is led by Lyon and brings together seven European partners. The aim is to support new entrepreneurs, share best practices and publish a management guide. The other partners are Birmingham, Warszawa, Munich, Granada, Turin and in Gothenburg it is Business Region Gothenburg which is the project partner. The project started in 2010 and ended in 2012.

<http://www.imageen.eu/about/imageen/>

Projekt Hundra

Projekt Hundra is financed by the European Social Fund and owned by the District Council Östra Göteborg. It started in 2010 and ends in 2013. The aim is to match the need of the labor market with the workforce living in this part of the city. They have cooperation with France.

<http://www.esf.se/sv/Projektbank/Behallare-for-projekt/Vastsverige/Projekt-Hundra/>

Partnerskap dialog och samverkan för hållbar utveckling

This is a project financed by the European Social Fund and is owned by the unit of employment at the District Council Lundby. It started in 2011 and ends in 2014. The aim is to create sustainable growth and help unemployed to find employment. The project cooperates with Germany and Poland.

<http://goteborg.se/wps/portal/enheter/projekt/parnerskap-dialog-samverkan>

Rom San

The project is financed by the European Social Fund and is owned by the City Museum of Gothenburg. It started in 2012 and goes on until 2014. The aim is to create a change in attitudes towards the Roma population and help them enter the labor market. They have exchanges with Turkey, Serbia, Lithuania and Macedonia.

<http://www.esf.se/sv/Projektbank/Behallare-for-projekt/Vastsverige/Rom-san---ar-du-rom/>

Unga Vuxna AB

The project is financed by the European Social Fund and owned by the District Council of Östra Göteborg. The project started in 2011 and ends in 2013. The project focuses on young adults with psychological problems and their opportunities to get an independent life. Cooperation with Slovenian Association for Mental Health, Ljubljana, constitutes the transnational aspect.

<http://www.esf.se/sv/Projektbank/Behallare-for-projekt/Vastsverige/Unga-Vuxna-AB---aktivitetboendestod/>

Partnerskap Göteborg – The Bridge

The project is financed by the European Social Fund and owned by the City Office. It started in 2010 and ends in 2013. The goal is to strengthen the integration process with focus on sustainable and urban development. The project cooperated with Manchester and London. Within the larger project there are three projects and the Bridge is one of those.

<http://www.esf.se/sv/Projektbank/Behallare-for-projekt/Vastsverige/Partnerskap-Goteborg-/>

Produktionsskolan

The project is financed by the European Social Fund and owned by Utbildningsförvaltningen, City of Gothenburg. It started in 2009 and ended in December 2012. It is a school for 100 pupils without the possibility to start high school. Focus is on productive learning and entrepreneurship. The main cooperation is with Denmark but also with Germany, Austria, France and Finland.

<http://www.esf.se/sv/Projektbank/Behallare-for-projekt/Vastsverige/Produktionsskolan/>

Appendix II. Interviewguide in Swedish and English

Bakgrund:

Intervjupersonens bakgrund; utbildning, yrke, internationella erfarenheter, varit med i EU-projekt förut?

Berätta kort om din organisation/arbetsplats

Värdesätter man Europeiskt samarbete, hur talar man om det?

Tema: Projektet

Berätta övergripande om projektet

Din roll? Interagerat hur, när, var med EU-medborgare från andra länder?

Vad har varit positivt/negativt med projektet och deltagandet?

Vad har du lärt dig från projektet? Nya saker om EU i stort? Om Europeiskt samarbete?

Syn på de internationella kollegorna, Européer allihop? Vad delar ni? Vad skiljer er åt?

Hur har det märkts att det är ett EU-projekt?

Har deltagandet i projektet påverkat dina tankar om EU? Om ja, hur?

Vad har förändrats i och med projektet? Vilka faktorer i projektet har varit viktiga för dig?

Om du tänker på tiden innan projektet, vad tänkte du om EU då? Hur har dina tankar om EU/Europa förändrats? Har du lärt dig mycket?

Mervärde med transnationalitet?

Tema: Europa vs. EU

Vad tänker du på när du hör termen Europa? Vad symboliserar det för dig? Vilka värderingar förknippar du med Europa?

Vad tänker du på när du hör termen EU? Vilka värderingar förknippar du?

Ser du någon skillnad mellan Europa och EU?

Hur är du påverkad av EU i ditt liv?

Känner du till symboler som förknippas med EU? Vad betyder Europahymnen, Europadagen, flaggan för dig?

Vad betyder den fria rörligheten, medborgarskapet och att få rösta i valen till Europaparlamentet?

Vad av de två (hymn, dag, flagga vs. Rörlighet, medborgarskap, rösträtt) tycker du är viktigast/betyder mest för dig?

Vad karakteriserar en Europé?

Tema: Identitet

Känner du dig mer svensk än Europé? Beror det på tillfälle? När ser du dig mer som Europé?

Har deltagandet i projektet gjort dig mer medveten om att vi lever i Europa? Är EU-medborgare?

Identifierar du dig med EU, varför/vilka delar?

Med Europa?

Ser du dig i första hand som Europé eller EU-medborgare? Var ligger skillnaden mellan dem?

Identifierar du dig mer med den sociala biten eller den mer formella? Vad har påverkat dig mest?

Vill du lägga till något?

Background

Background of the interviewee; education, professions, experience from working in international projects/EU-projects?

Tell me about your current employment

Is European cooperation valued at your work? How do you talk about it?

Theme: The project

Tell me about the current project you are involved in?

Why did you enter the project? Your role? How have you interacted with EU-citizens from other countries?

What has been positive/negative with the project and taking part in it?

What did you learn from the project? New things about the EU? About Europeans? About European cooperation?

How do you see your international colleagues? Are you all Europeans? What do you share? What separates you/make you different?

Has it been clear that it is a project financed by the EU? If yes, how could you tell?

Did the participation in the project affect the way you think/feel about the EU? If yes, how?

What changes did the project bring? Which factors in the project were important for you?

If you think about the time prior to the project, what did you think about the EU? Have your thoughts/ideas about EU/Europe changed? What did you know about EU-projects before?

Added-value from transnationality?

Theme: Europe vs. EU

What do you think about when you hear the term Europe? What does it mean/symbolize to you? What values do you connect to Europe?

What do you think about when you hear EU? What values do you connect to the EU?

Do you see a difference between the EU and Europe?

How are you affected by the EU in your life?

Do you recognize the European anthem, the Europe Day and the European flag? What do they mean to you?

The free movement, the citizenship and the right to vote in the elections of the European Parliament?

Which out of the two categories mean the most to you?

What do you think characterizes a European?

Theme: Identity

Do you feel more Swedish than European? Does it depend on context? When do you see yourself as more European?

Did the participation in the project make you more aware of living in Europe? Being an EU-citizen?

Do you identify with the EU? Why, which parts?

With Europe?

Do you consider yourself to be a European or an EU-citizen? What is the difference between the two?

Do you identify more with the social part or the more formal (of the project) what affected you most? Would you like to add something?