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Changing Identities in the European Enlargement Process

The paper refers to the preliminary outcomes of the EC 5th FP project CULT-PAT (Cultural Patterns of the European Enlargement Process). The overarching objective of the research was defined as an attempt to reconstruct those cultural patterns that, in the new political surroundings, frame the European enlargement process and thus influence the redefinition of the EU as well. The EU enlargement process intensifies the redefinition of national and regional identities as well as of European identities from the perspective of both the European institutions and the countries involved.

Framework for Research

The collapse of the “Iron Curtain” as a clear political demarcation line between Western and Eastern Europe indicates a historical turning point: The change of the European political landscape in the wake of “1989/90” and the ongoing process of European enlargement force the European nation states to partially redefine their identity concepts along with their position within the new political surrounding.

The enlargement process of the Union is perceived as a process of reconfiguration of the European architecture with the EU at its core. The ensuing construction of a new European identity alters the political game by changing the conditions of policy-making at a supra-national level. The different perspectives for the further political development of the EU, expressed by the member states and, in the definition of their aspirations, by the candidate-countries will lay a decisive role in the ongoing process of reshaping the common political and institutional structure of the continent.

Cultural Patterns

Current political debates on European enlargement and the resulting political challenges refer to underlying and discourse imprinting cultural patterns that structure the perception of politics and shape discourses on legitimacy, political confidence, and on the question of European democratic deficits. The perception of the respective roles of supra-national, national, regional and local political structures is closely linked to the different (political) cultures involved in the process of constructing a new European political system. The use that policy makers and institutional representatives as well as public opinion and media discourses are making of these concepts, underscores the importance of reconstructing those cultural patterns that are used in political argumentation with regard to their influence on the Eastern enlargement process of the EU. Therefore, a closer look to those discourse shaping political themes, that indicate conflicting policy options emerging from the reference to overlapping and interfering cultural patterns, is essential to allow for a better understanding of the current debates on the enlargement process.

CULPAT focuses on the period after the changes of the European political landscape in the wake of 1989/90, particularly on the Central European region, closely affected by these political changes. Country studies include EU-members, one candidate country and one associated country as well as European institutions, and are completed by cross-country problem oriented case studies.

The countries that are included in the comparative analysis do not only represent different "stages" of membership or accession within/to the EU but they also represent different regions of the European political landscape.

The respective countries are:

Four representatives of the Central European region

- *Switzerland*, due to its image as a stable liberal democratic system – also during World War II - clearly belonging to Europe but taking a position on the periphery of the European integration process and therefore raising the question whether a long-term associate status might be possible. Switzerland serves as an example for the particular importance of the transit

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problem when linked to the sovereignty of the national territory on the one hand, and for the meaning of rewriting national political history (the role of Switzerland during World War II);

- *Austria* as a relatively “new” EU member; currently “border country” of the EU, facing the Central Eastern enlargement region; temporary “outsider” due to internal political developments related to the problematic attitude of the country towards its national-socialist past; Austria figures as well as an example for the discourse of endangerment of national and/or regional interests and identities (atomic power stations, transit problem, etc.);
- *Hungary*, currently a member of NATO and EU, identified as a country with relatively unproblematic path to the EU membership; Hungary is an example for the notion of land-property and farmland, that has become a main identity factor of the country, it has got an emotional and emphatic role in political propaganda against illegal contracts with foreign land-owners and has taken over the function of a symbol of national independence;
- *Slovakia*, currently a member of NATO and EU, representing an example for a problematic or protracted integration process, whose integration was postponed during the years of the Meciar regime due to democratization problems; Slovakia faces the problem of a close link of the minority question to the notion of territory;

One state belonging to the Southeast European enlargement region, respectively the Balkans

- *Bulgaria*, a representative of a group of countries with which negotiations about EU membership have not been definitively finished yet; Bulgaria on the one hand stands for the notion and meaning of local and regional territories in the frame of the enlargement process, on the other hand for the functionalising of the national past to prove the European-ness of the country by taking recourse to the salvation of the Bulgarian Jews during World War II;

One state representing the Western European region

- *France*, a founding member of the European Community with a traditional leading role within the European Union; France figures as example for the notion and meaning of territory when using it in trans-border agricultural projects.

Methodological Approach

The project is methodologically based on a comparative, trans-disciplinary approach to the analyses of discourse imprinting cultural patterns – emerging

from political cultures, mentalities, popular cultures and cultural expressions outside the field of the political – that are made in political argumentation and debate. This approach allows for an analysis of the cultural patterns shaping political discourse as well as a selection of field studies reconstructing the reference to civil society involved (on the example of territory) and the reference to selected cultural manifestations, that are used in the construction of these patterns (on the example of memory).

The research teams of the participating countries - already involved in an ongoing concern for these questions and in several research co-operations among them - therefore use a multidisciplinary approach that unites analytical instruments deriving from anthropology, history and political science under a research perspective developed in the trans-disciplinary field of cultural studies.

In addition to the existing research on the development of political opinions influencing the enlargement process, that show moments of the public discourse, the proposed project extends this focus on the ongoing construction of these opinions.

In order to extend the knowledge base regarding the cultural and mental dimensions of the process of European integration and enlargement, it therefore seems necessary to add an interpretative approach to the existing quantitative data on value systems and opinion trends. Therefore, the project focuses on the analysis of the cultural framework and the changes within this framework that play an important role within the enlargement process and cannot sufficiently be analyzed on the basis of quantitative methodology.

Beyond that, the trans-disciplinary methodological approach (combining cultural analysis of political sciences, cultural sociology, political anthropology and history of intellectual ideas) of the research design allows for a multi-dimensional reconstructive analysis of selected cultural patterns.

The research therefore stresses the analysis of those political representations that appear in political discourses and key political deliberations in the debate on supranational versus national or regional interests and, in turn, indicate competing identity constructions. The political discourses and deliberations will be reconstructed by means of analyzing political and public documents, political advertising, symbols, myths and images, on the other hand by means of expert interviews with political and institutional actors on both, the national and European level. The references, these political representations make to problem concerns in civic society as well as in the field of culture are reconstructed in selected case studies, thus allowing a closer look to the cultural patterns used in policy making. The confrontation of these case-studies with the use political discourse makes of the problems they ad-

dress, in turn allows for more differentiated description of the problems of mutual understanding between the policy-makers and a broader public. This approach attempts to contribute to a better understanding of the cultural patterns involved in the ongoing discussion on the problems of governance on a European level. This enables a comparative view on European, national and regional political cultures, imprinted by underlying cultural patterns and for identifying the relationship between political arguments that are used in current political debates on enlargement and those cultural patterns they are based on.

The trans-disciplinary approach of the research consortium led to the idea that the work of the second project phase should be concentrated around central notions («meta-categories») that can be found in all the different areas, disciplines and themes covered by the relevant research packages. The general agreement of the research consortium was to focus on the different patterns and practices that emerge in the larger Europe (as opposed to a monolithic European culture), and to analyze differences rather than the common or abstract aspects.

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Preliminary Findings of the Project

During the first research period the central political fields in debates on the European enlargement process that were identified were the *notion of territory*, perceived as focusing on problematic and conflicting political themes, and *political memory*, providing an example of the construction of a common political space.

The research in the second year confirmed the academic validity of the chosen research topics while emphasising the main elements around which the comparative analyses should be based. The research consortium approved two broad notions as « meta-categories »:

- The perception and representation of *us and them* (constructed memory, external/internal borders, minorities, foreigners, the wider Europe, Turkey, political discourse...)
- The redefinition of *norms and European and national standards* (in legal and technical terms; in terms of participation, representation, and competition; comparison of different parties' positions on the EU)

The substantive basis of this phase included integrating the work done during the first year and preparing for a more differentiated perspective on the similarities and differences of the comparative cultural patterns of the enlarged Europe.

The objectives of integrating research results on *notion of territory* and *political memory* were to show them as central metaphors which are closely linked to concepts of local and national identity/sovereignty in EU member states and, particularly, in accession countries.

The research was concentrated around the perception of *us and them* as constructed through the *notion of borders* and *memories*. The main objective of the team was to discover and interpret the emerging patterns of perception as well as the practices resulting from it. The research was focused on qualitative sociological and anthropological case studies. The objective was to compare the production/obliteration of borders and the *construction of new senses of belonging*. The main findings can be summarized as follows: after the crisis of the nation state we become witnesses of the construction of the local. Different local places like regions and even small towns start to implement their own strategies, and to create their own sense of belonging and even their own identity to cope with their problems. The strategies included *the construction of trans-border regions*, based either on common interests, the conscious need for common policies and practical projects (e.g. in Switzerland the Franco-Valdo-Genevoise region), or created through European programs and funds (e.g. in Bulgaria Gotze Delchev). The interesting phenomenon here is that the construction of the new regional identities happens simultaneously on a symbolic and a practical level. The second strategy for inventing the local was studied through *the debate on land ownership*. In this case we can analyze the differences that appear on the different levels, e.g. the central and local one. The research carried out by all the national teams shows that the question of land ownership emerges during the accession process when all the nation states have to regulate it under the European pressure. Since the countries in our project are in different stages of accession we can trace the different phases in dealing with the problem. When the question arises initially, strong nationalistic and anti-European sentiments emerge. The economic practice changes the fears expressed in the discourse.

The case studies demonstrated that the symbol of homeland is not only the land itself, but the (ancestral) community as well. We can argue that the emergence of a *new local sense of belonging* actually creates new boundaries within the territory of the nation state. The perception of "us and them" constructed through territory was also studied through *the nuclear debates* that occurred in the different countries. The research proved at least two different

approaches to dealing with this issue: the first one is peaceful coexistence with a great measure of confidence and without nationalist arguments (e.g. among Switzerland, Germany and France); the second is the case of Temelin in the Czech Republic, where the “nuclear power topic” is one of the best examples of an identity-founding discourse, constructed by the media and politicians, whereby Austria is permanently faced by imminent danger from abroad.

The perception of ‘us and them’ constructed through narratives includes analyses of political memories of the Holocaust, National Socialism and Communism, selected as cases of a divisive past. The teams also focused on strategies for reinterpreting the past in a European perspective as a political tool for coping with it, and to serve as a base of new identities. The focus on the traumatic past can serve as a cultural pattern for the construction of European identity. The political strategies for dealing with the past are dif-

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ferent but a sense that the past is important is found in all the European countries studied. The reinterpretation of national narratives in a broader European context is more important for the new (and future) members of the EU than for the old ones. Thus, there are clearly different strategies. France and Austria construct their European identities through the position of their states in the present world; the newcomers need to invent a European past of their

own. Hungary, Slovakia and Bulgaria reinterpret the past in the perspective of the new catchwords – diversity, democracy, citizenship and Christianity. Feeling somewhat marginal, Bulgaria and Hungary launch a notion of culture sanitized of all possible political connotations that has to convey a message of uniqueness.

The next objective was to integrate the *European perspective* and *national political discourse* from the perspective of perceptions and representations of *us and them* and the re-definition of European and national norms and standards.

The abovementioned perspectives were studied by looking at the discourse on European “values” and the debate on the problematic issues of accession.

The researchers aim to clarify the notion of values under consideration, and how such values are defined and propagated by political discourse. In doing so, they identify a few areas that remain problematic at a European level after accession, such as the European Parliament elections and the ref-

erendums on the treaty establishing a European constitution. A comparative analysis provides mutual understanding of the data and the concepts and the methodology used by the researchers, accounting for the contextualization of the discourse (direct observation, second-hand data; time and space references; the political spectrum; the opportunity of the event, etc.).

The central points of the analysis were the ideological standpoints and opinions of political parties – seen as institutions contributing to the formulation of values – in some substantial issues concerning the long-term future of Europe. A comparative approach was used to identify patterns of similarities and differences in the way in which issues are dealt with in certain countries, which issues are ignored, and how they are expressed and mediated. The most relevant issues were:

- The borders of Europe and the European Union.
- The debate on EU issues, especially the Constitution, with an analysis presenting the points of ideological rupture between the “yes” and “no” camps in France, and the European Parliament Elections in the Central European countries.
- Problematic issues after accession: the differences in influence among accession countries, and between accession and EU-15 countries, the “democratic deficit” of the EU, participation in EU decision-making from the perspective of states and the citizens they represent, the reception of new norms and standards, the situation of minorities.
- The models of Europe, the symbolic representation of the EU, the image of the EU.

The aim to compare research results focusing on the *European perspective* and *political memory* with the history of European intellectual ideas in order to add a historical perspective to the question of cultural patterns in the enlargement process represents further outcome of the research.

From the general discussion of the research consortium there appeared to be two conceptions of what it means to write the history of Europe: one vision focuses on a history of the European ideal and its progressive realization emphasizing the history of the concept of Europe itself and its essential core; and the other focuses more on the social practices around history (historiography, museums, textbooks, etc.), on the way European history is staged and narrated to form a coherent trail of events.

Since both approaches are interesting and correspond in their particular way with the CULPAT objectives, the work here was organized in two sub-parts:

- the idea of European integration and its evolution, whereby Europe is traditionally defined as a distinct civilization of its own and, since the beginnings of the European integration process, as a group of countries with common traditions, values and aspirations that moves, in some key areas of life, towards a greater measure of unity;
- the second approach refers to the analysis of the representations of the history of Europe in terms of European construction as a space for pacifying relationships between people and political traditions within a common normative frame. Research conducted on 20th Century War History Museums or Terror Museums offers particularly fruitful empirical fieldwork for comparing narratives and their effects in terms of European integration.

The preliminary results partly answer the questions about different images that influence the discourse in old member states in comparison to the newcomers and applicant country. The intensive co-operation within the research team contributed to opening up a more differentiated perspective on the similarities and differences of the national and the European discourse on the pros and cons of the enlargement of the EU and identified the most problematic topics that play a decisive role in the public perception of the EU enlargement. The second year research activities have been documented by the collection of structured empirical material, case studies and a database which are to be used in the next project period, and can be found in part on the project web site <http://www.univie.ac.at/cultpat>.