Relationships between travel habits and European identity formation

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Abstract

For the first time in the history of the EU, the Lisbon Treaty, which entered into force in 2009, established direct legal base for Community measures with supporting competence in the area of tourism (European Commission, 2007a). This new political framework may mark a major shift in the approach of the Community to tourism (Panyik and Anastasiadou, 2013). However, the prolonged financial crisis has led to a crisis of European identity and has fuelled Euro-sceptic tendencies and calls for re-nationalising policies across the region (Leonard et al., 2013; Henley, 2014).

The potential of tourism in developing and sustaining a European identity has been argued in Commission documents (see for instance, CEC, 2001; 2003; 2006; 2007b; 2010; 2012). It has also been suggested (Verstraete, 2002; Anastasiadou, 2011) that the message of unity in diversity that the EU proposes is expressed in the promotion of cultural tourism and through the creation and support for supranational initiatives such as the Cultural Routes.

Perhaps now more than ever it is necessary to consider tourism's contribution in the creation of a shared European identity but such links have not been studied empirically so far (McIntosh, Hinch& Ingram, 2002). Moreover, although European citizenship is often enacted through tourism (Verstraete, 2002) regional identity remains fragmented even in the case of Euroregions where internal borders and physical and administrational barriers have been removed (Paasi, 2002).

To this end, the objective of this paper is two-fold. First, it aims to review the implicit and explicit linkages between tourism and European identity approaches through a systematic, in-depth analysis of selected tourism policy documents (European Commission, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2007a, b, 2010, 2012) using content analysis techniques. Next, the paper focusses on linkages between identity formation and tourism in the context of the EU, describing an ongoing empirical research, its methodological considerations and preliminary results to identify impacts of travel patterns on identity formation of young Europeans carried out comparatively in two EU member states.

In particular, the concept and measurement of supranational identity and its formation will be reflected, which will allow the operationalisation of the concept as a latent variable. Special attention will be given to European identity within the context of the EU. A survey instrument interrogating the travel habits and the levels of territorial identity will be applied during the summer of 2014 in two EU member states, namely the UK and Portugal. Considering that young people are especially attentive to and absorptive of global cultural trends (Blum, 2007), the research population comprise European University students. Multivariate statistical techniques will be used to identify the underlying dimensions of supranational identity and relationships between travel patterns and the existence and level of European identity.

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