

Chapter 2

Comparative Analyses of European Identities in Business – and Every-Day Behaviour: Working and Living Together in Europe

Angela Diehl-Becker

Duale Hochschule Baden-Württemberg
Cooperative State University Baden-Wuerttemberg

Karlsruhe, Germany

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Abstract

The aim of the project “Comparative Analyses of European Identities in Business and Every-Day Behaviour” (EU-CAB) is to find out whether – regardless of the return to national state positions that has been obvious lately since the peak of the refugee movement in 2015 – a kind of European identity has been built up in the selected European nations. Furthermore, the project seeks to answer whether the perception of behaviour in these countries is similar or varies to a certain degree. The project covers the following EU member states: Finland, France, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, and Germany,¹ which were selected according to political and geographical criteria. The project’s staff is multi-disciplinary, including social psychologists and sociologists, engineers, linguists, economists, mathematicians and philosophers.

Keywords: identity, Europe, organizational behavior

1 The universities and business schools participating are: University of Lodz, Technical University of Lodz (both Poland), Budapest Business School (Hungary), University of Applied Sciences Mikkeli (Finland), Porto Polytechnic ISCAP and University Institute of Maja ISMAI (both Portugal), University of Cergy-Pontoise and Ecole de Management Strasbourg (both France), Cooperative State University Karlsruhe (Germany).

Introduction

The research questions are as follows: Are different collective identities still empirically verifiable in the participating states or is it already possible to identify a common European basis? Which different or similar behaviours can be empirically proven in business – and every-day situations? Are there systematic differences between people's perceptions depending on their nationalities? Are there systematic biases in the way they perceive their own culture and foreign environments? The results and analyses are to give some information to companies and European organisations about the potential progress the EU has already made in growing together or issues that still need to be addressed.

The project is funded by the EU-programme line Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships. The target group of the EU-CAB project are students from all the participating countries. In order to reach the outlined objectives, the students are conducting a large empirical scientific study in the area of social sciences under the supervision of professional staff. The students' empirical research will take place in each of the participating countries in joint study visits at one of the partner universities. All the participating students have the opportunity to travel to each participating country and to gain an insight into their cultures. The students are also conducting theoretical studies addressing economic, political, cultural and psychological topics, which will provide additional understanding and generate the framework for the empirical results. In addition to a scientific insight into the field of identity and behaviour, the students are expected to develop their competencies in cooperating in a European team, as well as gain an in-depth understanding and a solid knowledge base of other European countries and the functioning of Europe. They shall cooperate in mixed teams while working in a foreign country, make decisions in unstructured situations, manage situations of conflict that might potentially arise in their international teams and reach their shared goals as one group. When entering the labour market, they are supposed to offer some additional intercultural value to their future employers. In order to collect the research data, two scientific methods are applied:

- a) qualitative and quantitative data will be collected to measure behaviour, applying the systematic observation method SYMLOG (Bales and Cohen 1979). The data, based on a structured observation of behaviour in business and every-day situations, are collected by the students;
- b) self-concept data are collected to describe and compare identities throughout the participating countries using the Self-Concept Grid developed by Orlik (Orlik: 2006: 167–182), based on Kelly's grid-technique (Kelly 1995). There is a consensus in social psychology that "identity" and "self-concept" are similar ideas.² The students encourage a pre-fixed number of respondents

2 H. D. Mummendey, *Psychologie des „Selbst“*. Hogrefe, Göttingen 2006.

to participate and fill in the questionnaire to build a database containing measurement and descriptions of collective identities. The students are thoroughly trained in both methods by the participating research staff, who also supervise the analyses and research outcomes.

All the collected data will be published with an open-source access in order to hopefully start an even broader, pan-European dialogue. A website and a scientific blog should foster communication and an exchange of ideas throughout Europe, as well as ensure a high degree of dissemination. Further information about the progress of the project can be found on the website: www.eu-cab.eu. All colleagues in Europe (as well in other continents) are invited to join the initiative, to replicate the project outlined below, or to adapt it according to their needs, experience and expertise. We are also willing to share original data for further analysis.

Background and Objectives

The success of nationalist politicians and their respective parties, such as Alexander Gauland, AfD (“Alternative für Deutschland”, Germany), Marine LePen Ex-FN (“Front National”, renamed as “Rassemblement National”, France), Nigel Farage (“Brexit-Party”, Great Britain), Matteo Salvini (“Lega Nord”, Italy), to name but a few, have been the starting point of the project. They are in opposition to philosophers like Peter Sloterdijk, Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida and many others³ who underline the necessity of what they call the “European Identity”. However, does this European Identity already exist or is it just wishful thinking, while national identities are dominating in national states that strive to protect themselves against any foreign influence? The following objectives have been fixed:

- Confirm or falsify the existence of a collective European identity in the participating countries.
- Confirm or falsify the existence of a collective European identity in particular subgroups like young or elderly people.
- Confirm or falsify the existence of national collective identities in the participating countries.
- Describe the respective collective identities.
- Describe the differences between various collective identities and evaluate their potential effects on an inter-European level.

3 For a selected bibliography see www.eu-cab.eu

- Additionally, what similarities or differences can be found in the participating countries, i.e. Poland, Hungary, Finland, Portugal, France and Germany on a more superficial level of behaviour?⁴

The *perception* of identity and behavior, as opposed to “identity” and “behaviour”, can be measured and described as a matter of fact or “truth”. Two more objectives are based on these reflections:

- Explore the differences in perceptions of people with different cultural backgrounds (the six participating nations).
- Establish possible biases in perceiving one’s own and foreign cultures.

Finally, it needs to be mentioned that the author works at a university closely related to business, and all the students are already employed by a partner-company of the university. Besides the more general and theoretical objectives mentioned above, there is therefore also a rather practical one:

- Deduct recommendations for organizations like partner companies of the author’s university.

Definitions and Concepts

Identity

“Identity” has originally been an issue of philosophical discourses which defined it – generally speaking – as aspects that make one person different from another. However, speaking about national or European identities we do not address a phenomenon that differentiates between individual people, but are referring to a phenomenon that is shared between a multitude of people, the “collective identity” (Mead 1934). We shift the focus from a philosophical argumentation to a social phenomenon that is subject to reflections in social psychology and sociology. In these disciplines, it means the perception of oneself that is

- conscious in parts, but pre – or unconscious in other parts,
- closely related to the perception of our social environment and,
- closely related to language (“language games”), therefore referring to Wittgenstein (1984) “Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt“ [The limits of my language are the limits of my world],

4 Referring to the Hofstede model of culture the concept of “identity” shall be understood as the core, the inner-level of the onion, whereas the outer levels stand for “behaviour”, G. Hofstede: *Interkulturelle Zusammenarbeit*.

- relatively constant over time,
- the basis of deriving action strategies, as action is the consistent answer to the perception of a particular situation.

It is very similar to the social psychological term “self-concept” (Mummendey 2006), that has been thoroughly discussed by researchers like Cooley (1902), Mead (1934), Kelly (1955) already at the beginning and in the middle of the last century. Kelly was the first to provide tools for measuring and describing identity.

It will later be important to keep in mind that (collective) identity is developed in the course of human socialization, through processes like feedback, personal experience, and cognitive reflection of experience.

Behaviour

In the tradition of Pawlow and Watson (1927) behaviour is a response to a stimulus, a process which is known as “classical conditioning” (a dog salivates when food is presented). According to later experiments by Skinner (1958), behaviour can also be regarded as the generalized result of consequences, which has been known as “operant conditioning” since his research (a baby learns to say “mummy” after experiencing a lot of affection after having uttered some sounds that sound like this).

Regarding the concept of “behaviour” once again under the light of Wittgenstein’s “language games” (1984), it is the result of a language game, and therefore a construction of the recipient of a message or a seemingly „neutral“ observer. It can be verbal or nonverbal, overt or covert, conscious or unconscious, voluntary or involuntary. For example, when a stranger asks kindly “Can you help me, please?”, and someone turns to them saying “Sure”, somebody observing the interaction is more likely to offer assistance. This small scene represents the language game mechanism in a community where it has been agreed that the appropriate answer to the phrase “Can you help me” is to say “Sure”, that a kind smile requires a smile in return, etc. The game requires the knowledge of its rules by all participants. Behaviour is therefore the “logical” response to the perception of the preceding behaviour, which is identical with a “message”.

Behaviour is therefore not “reality”, not “true”, but only a perception. For our project this means that the behaviour of people who have learned to encode their message according to their respective cultural set of rules are observed by people who have learned to decode message according to either a similar or different scheme. Behaviour “observation” therefore gives more information about the observers than about the senders of particular messages which we call “behaviour”.

Project Design

The project is co-financed by the EU Erasmus+ programme of the European Union, it is therefore bound to meet some requirements, e.g.

- the objectives outlined above must be reached,
- the budget nor the time frame of three years can be exceeded,
- the project needs to reflect a state-of-the-art theory and methodology and has to be peer-reviewed,
- its target group are students,
- its focus is on teaching and mobility, not on basic research.

The design respects all pre-conditions by selecting methods to measure and describe collective identity and behaviour that are challenging for students who can benefit from the multidisciplinary approach of the staff, which helps them to get access to psychological tools. The first step was therefore to train staff members, as they are the first point of contact for the students in their home countries. The training of the students starts already at their universities. Next, they go through an Intensive Study Programme (ISP) that takes place in each of the participating countries. Each ISP gathers about 48 students, ideally eight from each country, and about 10 teachers/researchers, and is run in the cities of all partner universities Budapest (Hungary), Lodz (Poland), Mikkeli (Finland), Porto (Portugal), Paris/Cergy-Pontoise, Strasbourg (France) and Karlsruhe (Germany). The students' role is to collect and analyze data. The teachers' role consists of securing the quality of the data by advising and supervising the students' work and by delivering the tools for data analyses. Teachers also deliver theoretical frameworks and communication

France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • upfront: 3-5 self-concepts grids • behaviour observation: business- and every-day situations
Hungary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • upfront: 3-5 self-concepts grids • behaviour observation: business- and every-day situations
Portugal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • upfront: 3-5 self-concepts grids • behaviour observation: business- and every-day situations
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • upfront: 3-5 self-concepts grids • behaviour observation: business- and every-day situations
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • upfront: 3-5 self-concepts grids • behaviour observation: business- and every-day situations
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • upfront: 3-5 self-concepts grids • behaviour observation: business- and every-day situations

Chart 1: Research design

Source: Own elaboration.

tools that will hopefully help disseminate the project and its findings and start an even bigger European movement focusing on identities, culture, and behaviour. Each ISP consists of five days of full-time work, out of which about three (half-time) are reserved for a structured observation either in every-day or business situations. The observations take place in areas of the respective cities most likely to be populated with local residents (rather than tourists). Self-concept entries have to be collected and uploaded upfront.

In total, the number of self-concept grids is maximally $N = 6 \times 48 \times 5 = 1,440$, however, the maximum will most likely not be reached as students who participate for the second or third time only need to deliver three sets of data.

The design is shown in chart 1.

Research Methods

Self-Concept Grid

There are tools of measurement like “The Personal and Social Identity Scale” (Nario-Redmond et al. 2011) or the single-item measure of social identification by Postmes et al (1976). These tools seem to concentrate on the conscious parts of identity, whereas the definition of identity applied in this project understands identity as a phenomenon that is only partly subject to consciousness, and is unconscious in other parts. An adequate tool should therefore allow to measure both conscious and unconscious facets of social identity. Hooper (1976) suggested understanding identity by the means of analysing and categorising behaviour in order to establish the social group from which the characteristics observed in the behaviour originated (Hooper 1976). While other tools are selective with regard to their scope of interest (economic preferences (Yin and Etile 2019), entrepreneurship or scholarship), Hooper’s approach claims to offer both a general application and taking into account unconscious components of social identity. Still, a link seems to be missing: the classification of behaviour. If identity should be deduced from observing the behaviour that is characteristic for a particular group, the interconnection between certain categories of behaviour and social identities must be known. Since this knowledge is not available for the countries participating in EU-CAB, Hooper’s approach is therefore not applicable.

As “identity” and “self-concept” are very similar (Mummendey 2006), it was therefore decided to use a complex tool in the tradition of the Kelly grid (1955), Orlik’s self-concept grid (2006). It stems from over a century of psychological research, and accommodates for essential findings of researchers like Cooley’s looking-glass self (1902), Mead’s concepts of “I” and “me” (1934), Lewin’s field theory (1958), Kelly’s grid technique (1955) and Epstein’s action theory (1973). In order to measure and describe *collective* identities an additional step of analysis has to be applied, as the tool has so far concentrated on individual identities: content analyses have to be added

that examine shared meaning and allow the calculation of similarity respectively variance of the data collected.

Each person holds more than one identity: one can have an identity as a woman or a man, and, at the same time, as a grandparent, parent or student. The group of teachers therefore decided that all the collected self-concept data should include sociodemographic information like sex and age of the respondents.⁵ If the existence of national identities can be proven, there should be a high similarity across ages – however it might as well be found that there is more similarity within a particular age group (for example, generation Z who was born under in a politically unified Europe without borders and takes advantage of international student exchange programmes, etc.).

Due to the limitations of space, the selected tool for the measurement of collective identity and behaviour cannot be described in all detail. Those interested in more detailed information should contact the author.

Systematic Multiple Level Observation of Groups

There is a multitude of tools that seem appropriate for the measurement and analyses of behaviour based on the data collected in the course of field research. However, they are often limited to a certain environment and are therefore able to answer a limited range of research questions, which may not apply to our project. For example, they can be used for studying the behaviour of patients in medical environments (e.g. Luckett et al. 2007) or be restricted to workplaces (Nunamaker and Applegate 1987). In the case of quantitative tools, measurements are often based on commercial software tools analysing physiological reactions e.g. eye movements, blood pressure and circulation etc. which are inadequate too, as they do not refer to human interactions, which is the object of the structured observation in our project.

One of our researchers, who studies systematic behaviour observation of human interactions in Bales, developed two tools which can be applied by researchers and practitioners as well as – under certain conditions – even by laymen. One is the Interaction Process Analysis IPA (Bales 1950), which he developed to become the Systematic Multiple Level Observation of Groups SMLOG (Bales and Cohen 1979), an elaborated collection of various tools that allow (among others) to collect data on verbal and nonverbal behaviour through genuine observation (in real time or using pre-defined questionnaires). A classification of behaviour into 26 different categories is the basis of all the tools, whereas the observation consists of a real-time classification and requires thorough training in order for the questionnaire to be used easily. It is even recommended for self-analyses of untrained work-groups.

5 The following classification was applied: generation Z < 24 years, Y 24–37 years, X 38–58 years, baby boomers > 58.

Therefore, the use of the questionnaire seems to fit the purpose of EU-CAB. However, the students all study social sciences programmes like economics, political studies, or language studies at university level. They should thus be able to conduct observations, even if the quality of their conclusions might vary in terms of neutrality and the quantity of entries. The students are therefore asked to note as many observations as they can on special sheets, review them, and then answer the questionnaires. The questionnaires are entered into the database which calculates the results. In this sense, the observation is meant to be a tool, which helps to minimize mistakes of observation such as primacy or recency effects. In total, the number of questionnaires will be $N = 6 \times 48 \times$

Charts 2 and 3 give an overview of both of the used methods.

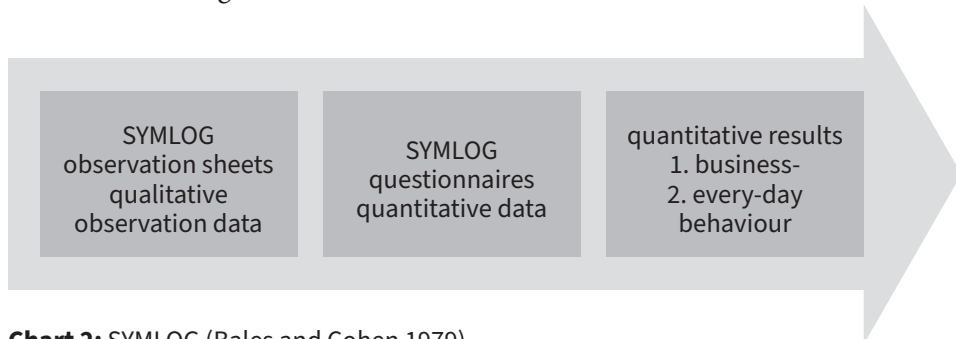


Chart 2: SYMLOG (Bales and Cohen 1979)
Source: Own elaboration.

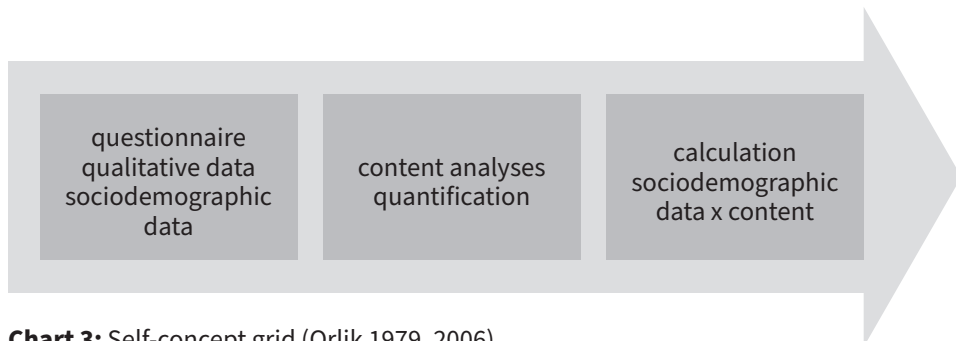


Chart 3: Self-concept grid (Orlik 1979, 2006)
Source: Own elaboration.

Initial Results

The collected data were entered into a SYMLOG. Next, the self-concept data-base, the SYMLOG-data, were calculated according to the standard procedures described by Bales and Cohen (1979). The self-concept data were additionally calculated according to Orlik (2006), and all individual entries were content-classified in order

to allow further quantitative analyses. This content analysis used the classification offered by SYMLOG.

Since so far only half of the ISPs have taken place, all our analyses are still preliminary, and conclusions are subject to change. In addition, there are some critical aspects to be taken into account which are limiting factors to the range of application of the results. Nonetheless, some preliminary comments on the results can be offered, both on the level of behaviour and identity.

Chart 4 is an example of our preliminary findings regarding behaviour. It shows business and everyday behaviour observed in Paris/France. According to the SYMLOG charts that visualize the 26 dimensions of behaviour (the so-called "field diagrammes") friendly behaviour (P=positive) and unfriendly behaviour (N=negative) is on the abscise; goal-oriented behaviour (F=forward) and emotional behaviour (B=backward) on the ordinate. There is a third dimension, the upward-oriented striving for influence (U) and its opposite, a passive head-down behaviour (D). The three axes are bipolar scales with a 0-point in the middle. The circles show what kind of behaviour the respective national group has perceived. The charts visualize the trend of all the results which have been since confirmed by two other ISPs.

They show that the students have perceived the observed behaviour in the same way. They agree on what positive, friendly behaviour is. Only two minor biases have been identified: the Finnish students tend to perceive the observed behaviour as friendlier and more influential than students of other nationalities. The French students tend to overestimate the influence which the observed French people had on others. Even though there are some slight⁶ differences in perceptions which tend to support some stereotypical views (like quiet Fins who therefore perceive more talkative people talking "a lot") the students seem to share the same perceptions. On the behavioural outer levels in Hofstede's model of culture, they seem to share behaviour.

However, looking at the self-concept data this similarity cannot be found. Chart 5 presents the examples of Finland and France, the spots represent the so-called object persons (Orlik 2006: 167–182) – these are the same for each country, but clearly differ in terms of distribution.⁷

Should these differences be confirmed by future results, the following conclusion can be drawn: Perceiving the same behaviour, classifying behaviour in a similar way, might lead us to assume that we share our self-concept and have developed a common identity. However, this is not the case. There seem to be different identities, discrepancies between what we are and what distinguishes "us" from "them", the in-group and out-group (Tajfel 1970).

6 Please note that in future work on the project those differences will be statistically calculated.

7 Statistical measures will be calculated in the further course of the project.

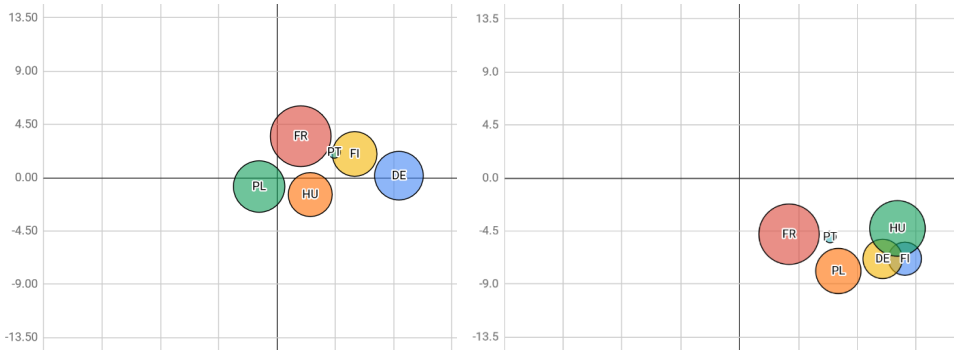


Chart 4: Business – and every-day behaviour, Paris/Cergy-Pontoise

Source: Own elaboration.

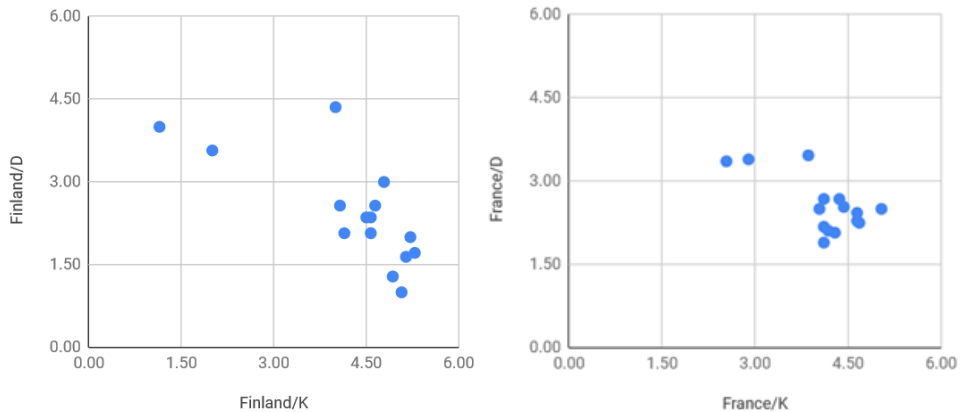


Chart 5: Finnish versus French identity (after ISP 1), spots represent object persons (for explanations, refer to the text)

Source: Own elaboration.

Consequences of the Preliminary Results

If the trend is confirmed, we would have to think about recommendations for companies like the partner organisations of the author's university and to society in general. What does it mean when, for example, Polish and German managers talk, having a sense that the other party is following the same set of rules (as the behaviour is obviously highly similar) but on a deeper, hidden level, their values and thoughts are different? Obviously, this situation would mean that the two people feel they understand each other because they behave similarly, they are e.g. both polite and perceive each other as such. However (if the preliminary results are confirmed), this would also mean that they most likely misunderstand each other: if the person I talk to behaves in the same way as myself, he or she must also have the same core

values, will strive to achieve the same thing and share dislikes. But this is – provided the results are confirmed – obviously not the case.

What could be done? A lot of useful exercises are already implemented in intercultural training programmes, such as the game *Barnaga* (or its variations), which help to understand that the knowledge of underlying rules that are not openly discussed is crucial for the ability to work together. But there are still some more measures that could be taken, such as group dynamics training methods developed by Lewin about 70 years ago in the United States, a melting pot of nations, in the context of World War 2. Bearing in mind that identity has been adopted by processes of feedback in the course of socialization, we cannot expect a sudden change. Talking to each other about thoughts, feelings, values, attitudes – changing at least attitudes and thoughts – then trying to manifest changes, often referred to as “unfreeze – change – freeze” (Lewin 1958) and later group dynamics settings, sometimes referred to as “survey feedback” (Lewin 1947). As the name suggests, the core of this method consists of giving feedback in a particular setting. As has been demonstrated identity is only partially conscious. The unconscious parts can be revealed on purpose, as there is no other access than feedback from other people who see those “blind spots”⁸ Without going into too much detail, the consequence of the preliminary results is to suggest working on giving and taking more feedback in structured settings and group dynamics situations in their true sense.⁹

Last but not Least: Some (Self-) Critical Remarks

As has been said, the results are only preliminary and require confirmation in the course of the project. Another critical point is that the data were only collected in the cities in which the partner universities are located, which reduces the scope of recommendations. The preliminary results show that students from Lodz, Budapest, Porto, Mikkeli, Paris/Cergy-Pontoise, Strasbourg, and Karlsruhe perceive behaviour observed in the mentioned cities in a similar way. The identities of participants surveyed in those cities tend to differ. Although in the case of business, most companies function in cities rather than the countryside, it might nonetheless be important for political institutions to collect data in the countryside in Poland, Hungary, Germany, France, Portugal and Finland. On the one hand, the preliminary results can be applied to companies and other organisations located in cities. On the other, it might be important and interesting to replicate the study in the countryside and to compare the results for the EU and its political institutions. This might eventually be the focus of another project either by the existing consortium or by other colleagues who are interested in European identities.

8 J. Luft and H. Ingham, *The Johari Window, a Graphic Model of Interpersonal Awareness*.

9 Please note that outdoor-training etc. is not group dynamics in Lewin's sense.

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Key Terms and Definitions

Behaviour – language game and response to a primarily decoded message.

Collective identity – concept that a particular group has formed about itself, even though it might be partially unconscious.

Identity – social phenomenon that is widely identical with the “self-concept” that an individual has formed about him – or herself.

Dr. Angela Diehl-Becker has been with Baden-Wuerttemberg Cooperative State University Karlsruhe since 2011 where she is the director of a study programme in the area of economic studies focusing on particularities in German-French business environments. She started her career as a researcher at Saarland University, Saarbrücken, where she was part of the team of Peter Orlik in social psychology and worked with Robert F. Bales and his colleagues at Harvard University. After having completed her PhD she gathered more than 25 years of practical experience in international H.R. management positions like e.g. with Merck & Co. Her research interests are centered around international topics of cooperation and social psychology, particularly German-French.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1105-5803>

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