Regional Identities and Communities

By

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I. Introduction

Why include identity and community in a volume on regionalism and regional institutions? After all, in some cases, such factors seem irrelevant. There is a reason we do not talk about North American regionalism or NAFTA’s (North American Free Trade Agreement) role in shaping senses of community and identity. I teach in Vancouver, British Columbia, and my students chuckle whenever they are asked about their identity as North Americans (see also Capling and Nossal, 2009).

Yet, evidence from other regions suggests that North America may be the exception. Invoking such phrases as ‘ASEAN Way’ or ‘pan-Arabism,’ leaders often advance a narrative of region building as identity construction. And then, of course, there is Europe, where political elites and scholars assume a vital connection between the evolution of the European Union and regional senses of identity and community.

So, the good news is there is clearly a need for an exploration of the roles of identity and community in a volume on comparative regionalism. The bad – or, better said, challenging – news is this is not an easy task. Part of the problem is delimiting the chapter’s empirical scope. Choosing the wrong focus – North America, say – might lead to a spectacularly (biased) null finding. Another part of the challenge is that my key concepts – identity and community – can and should be viewed in two different ways. As the independent variable, one can explore their role in helping create regional organization – my focus here – as well as their effects on design and compliance. Yet, it is equally important to reverse the causal arrow and explore how regional organizations, once formed, affect feelings of identity and community. A final challenge is disentangling discourses about identity from its expression in practice. It is one thing to document regional elites ‘talking identity’ – perhaps for purely instrumental/strategic reasons; it is quite another to trace actual impacts, where the ‘talk’ is a result of a deeper, underlying change in self-understanding.

I develop these insights and arguments in three parts. I begin (II) with a review of what we know empirically about the effects of regional institutions on identity/community, and vice versa, in Asia, Africa, and South America. In section III, the chapter zeroes-in on the case of Europe. I assess research on the institution-community-identity nexus on the continent, and how this work is crucially shaped by particular theoretical-disciplinary emphases. The findings on Europe,
especially the degree to which the European Union (EU) shapes identity, are unique; however, the inter-disciplinary set of theories invoked can and should travel across institutions and – indeed - serve as a model for scholars studying other regions. I conclude (IV) by highlighting several cutting-edge challenges for students of regionalism, regional international organizations (IOs), and identity. Theoretically, there is a need to bring politics and domestic context back in, and in a way that transcends disciplinary boundaries; we need to move beyond the tools offered by political science. Methodologically, while scholars have skillfully argued that the identity-community-IO nexus is one that develops and changes over time, they have been less successful at crafting techniques for measuring this process in their studies.

My focus in the chapter is the period since World War II, in which one longitudinal trend is clear. We have an increasing number of regional institutions, which encompass a growing number of functional areas and regions, but that would appear to have relatively little impact on identity – elite or mass. We find a similar pattern with the reverse relation. For all the identity talk among regional elites, there is little systematic evidence of any major role it plays in leading to more robust regional organizations.

These (non-) findings are explained by multiple factors. For the IO → identity connection, any possible effect is attenuated by the continuing strength of national identities. This is not a zero-sum argument, where strong national identities ‘subtract’ from any IO-generated one. Rather, it is a claim that pre-existing identities, shaped in multiple domestic arenas, are more likely than regional-level identity to be activated and reinforced in daily life.

Moreover, in a globalized and regionalized world, regional IOs increasingly must compete with other sources and arenas of identity construction. Finally, if one reflects on the experience of identity formation in nation states, then there is little evidence that regional institutions, with the possible exception of the EU, possess either the mechanisms – socialization, say – or foundational myths needed to foster a new identity.

Regarding the identity → IO relation, the analytic challenge is parsing out the precise causal role of the former. If we consider – for example – the European case, one can argue that some common identity (religion/Christian-democracy) played a role in the creation of the European Community (EC) in the 1950s. However, thinking counterfactually strongly suggests there were multiple other reasons (constraining German power, economic benefits) why the EC would still have been established even in the absence of shared elite identity.
Whichever direction one views the relation, this chapter argues it is simultaneously both over- and under-studied. For Europe and the EU, the oft-cited exemplar of the institution-identity nexus, we have a rich, interdisciplinary set of findings. We know that identity – and the shaping of it – have played key roles. For regional institutions outside Europe, we know less. Partly this is simply a reflection of weaker institutions with shorter histories. However, limited knowledge is also a function of our scholarship, where suggestive stories of identity’s role have often substituted for systematic analysis.

At the outset, I should be clear about the chapter’s use and understanding of identity, a concept which has generated a good bit of debate and controversy (Abdelal et al., 2009, chs.1-3). I understand identities as shared representations of a collective self as reflected in public debate, political symbols, collective memories, and elite competition for power; they also consist of collective beliefs about the definition of the group and its membership that are shared by most members. So defined, identities are revealed by social practices as well as by political attitudes; they are shaped by social and geographical structures and national contexts (Checkel and Katzenstein, 2009, 4).

Like the literature reviewed, I am eclectic regarding where one locates and measures identity. In some cases, it may be found in and fostered by institutions; in others, it may be constructed by a variety of everyday social practices. I consider both elite and mass identities, and – quite often – the divergence one sees between them. Finally, identities are inherently relational. There is always an ‘other’ against which they are defined, but the salience of the other varies with context. Moreover, it is an empirical question whether this other is viewed in negative, zero-sum terms - or positively (Hopf, 2002, ch.1; see also Brewer, 2007).

II. Regional Institutions and Identity/Community

As I write in late 2014, it is striking how much more literature addresses the IO-identity nexus than 15 or 20 years ago. This may be an indication that something is going on. However, it equally may be a function of the growing number of political scientists addressing the issue, thanks to the influence of a new generation of constructivist scholars who place questions of identity front and center (Adler, 2013, for an overview).
Whatever the case, it is clear that identity matters – as both independent and dependent variable - in numerous regions and regional organizations. When exploring the identity/community – IO relation, many scholars build upon the path-breaking work of Karl Deutsch over 50 years ago, so it is perhaps best to begin with him. Community and shared identity, according to Deutsch, could emerge through transactions and communication flows. The resulting ‘security communities’ would create expectations of peaceful change. While Deutsch focused primarily on transactions between states, there was clearly a role as well for IOs in his analytic schema (Deutsch, 1957).

In subsequent years, Deutsch was criticized on grounds both theoretical (why should shared transactions always lead to common identity) and methodological (can community be measured simply by counting transactions), which led a new generation of scholars to refine his arguments. In particular, Adler and Barnett (1998) offered a more rigorous theoretical discussion of security communities and added case studies to the methods used to study them (see also Acharya, 2009). Learning, they suggested, is one key way in which regional IOs might help foster collective identity (Adler and Barnett, 1998, ch.2; see also Levy, 1994). This learning mechanism, mainly operating at the elite level of policymakers and politicians, gave operational content to Deutsch’s notion of transactions, explaining just how the latter might produce collective identification.

Adler/Barnett and collaborators provide a number of suggestive studies - on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Southeast Asia, and South America - where regions or regional IOs played a role in reshaping elite identity. Collectively, these chapters demonstrate that identities were in flux. Less clear is the exact causal role played by regional IOs. Was learning at work? Or was identity change occurring via other mechanisms (arguing, elite turnover, othering)? The chapters employ neither the type of research design, nor the primary data, nor the process-based methods needed to isolate learning’s effects.

Adler and Barnett’s purpose was to establish a plausible case for learning within security communities and the role played by IOs, which they did. It would be a task for others to get down to the nitty gritty of operationalizing and empirically testing such analytic claims. As I argue in the next section, students of European regional organizations have made great strides in this regard; work on other regions and IOs less so (see also Acharya and Johnston, 2007, 277-78). It is to this latter scholarship that I now turn. As a chapter of this length cannot possibly cover all regions and regional IOs, I will focus on three regions: Asia, Africa, and South America. I first
explore work on regional identity as a prerequisite for the construction of regional IOs, looking across all three regions, and then reverse the causal arrow, examining arguments on the ability of regional IOs to reshape community and identity, again across the three regions. Unless otherwise noted, I examine political elite identity, as the bulk of scholarship focuses on it.

**Identity Shaping Institutions.** Within Asia, there is a small but important body of work that explores the identity \( \rightarrow \) regional IO connection, especially with respect to the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). On the latter, the work of Amitav Acharya and collaborators has set the standard. On identity, they argue that diversity is a core component of the identity ASEAN embraces, and this has played an important role in shaping it as a regional organization. For example, it is this identity component that explains the organization’s willingness to tolerate various regime types (Acharya, 1997; Acharya, 2009; Acharya and Layug, 2012). More precisely, given the way in which identity is measured – analysis of programmatic declarations from ASEAN documents and statements by leaders - this is an argument on how the content of elite identity shapes ASEAN. Essentially, their argument reverses Deutsch’s classic formulation in that ASEAN’s imagined community was the starting point upon which subsequent transactions occurred.

Of course, institutional development in Asia did not stop with ASEAN. In 1994, the 10 ASEAN members established a broader entity of 27 states – the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). In doing this, the leaders of ASEAN insisted that the ARF be characterized by incrementalism and a skeletal organizational structure. Acharya interprets this as evidence of the ASEAN way and regional identity at work (Acharya 2009, ch.6), with the latter helping to explain the emergence of regional IOs in the first place. The ASEAN way was a set of principles codified and reinforced in practice over many years within ASEAN; these were readily applied to the ARF, as the ‘Asian’ approach to security. But, of course, correlation need not imply causation. Perhaps the ARF took on the form it did because national political elites were playing the politics of the possible, seeking in particular to limit and regulate the roles played by the US and China in the region (see also Prieto, 2013b, 22-27). Or perhaps the ARF was strategically designed to champion diversity so it could serve as an entrance point for China (a traditional unilateralist) into the Asian multilateral community (Johnston 2008, chapter 4).

If the above suggests that elite identity at times plays a role in shaping regional organization, its absence may then hinder IO development. In fact, precisely this absence has been highlighted
to explain why Europe, in the years following WW II, saw the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) while no similar entity was created in Asia. In an intriguing study, Hemmer and Katzenstein (2002) argue that the United States wished to create both a North Atlantic and a Southeast Asian region in the aftermath of the Second World War. With its North Atlantic partners, the United States preferred to operate on a multilateral basis, while in Southeast Asia, it chose bilateralism. Collective identity was key in explaining these different choices. US policymakers saw their potential European allies as members of a shared community; the multilateralism that came to define NATO was – at least in part – made possible by this collective identity. According to Hemmer and Katzenstein, it was the absence of this shared identity that helps explain the different outcome in the case of regional organization in Asia.

I write ‘at least in part’ and ‘helps explain’ because readers cannot ultimately tell how much of the NATO–Asia contrast is explained by identity. As the authors acknowledge, material factors and efficiency considerations also played a role. Unfortunately, three causal factors within the confines of a single study leads to an over-determined outcome, where it is not possible to assess how much of it is explained by identity alone.

Turning to Africa, the creation of the African Union (AU) in 2002 – as the successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU) – is hard to explain in the absence of some prior regional identity. While the OAU to AU transformation would appear at first glance to be a story of powerful leaders (Gaddafi, Abasanjo, Mbeki) and the agenda they jointly crafted, the particular shape and content of the new organization was also driven by a shared identity, where continent-wide cooperation in the economic, political and social arenas would serve as the foundation for a new African security order (Tieku, 2004). Consistent with this shared vision, the AU’s Constitutive Act empowers the organization – for the first time in the continent’s history – to intervene, without consent, in the domestic affairs of African states to prevent war crimes or in response to a serious threat to legitimate order (Tieku, 2004).

Identity actually matters twice in this account. The post-2000 shared elite vision was a direct response to an earlier, post-colonial African identity that endowed the OAU with a strong non-intervention norm (Williams, 2007). As one analyst argues, “Africa’s states and regional organizations do not devise security policies based on material and balancing considerations alone. In practice, ethical and normative questions about what it means to be ‘African’ play an
important role” as well (Williams, 2007, 278; see also Moore, 1987; and Söderbaum, 2004). This all sounds very plausible, but design and methods issues make it difficult for readers to grasp the exact role played by identity. I have no doubt that elites such as government officials and IO bureaucrats are invoking a particular identity narrative – and changes to it over time – to explain (justify?) the emergence of (OAU) and changes in (AU) African regional organization. Much less clear is whether such elite narratives really measure identity, how widely shared they are, and how such narratives relate to other causal factors - power differentials, domestic politics, diffusion processes - that may also be reshaping African IOs (Herbst, 2007).

Regarding South America, identity as a factor promoting regional cooperation at times plays an interesting ‘negative’ role not seen in other regions. The Caribbean is a case in point. It is not a part of North America, as the United Nations often assumes for organizational purposes; nor does it have strong cultural/historical ties to Latin America. Its regional identity, in addition to a shared history from the slave trade, thus has a strong othering quality – NOT this, NOT that.

Elbow (1999) has argued that such an identity dynamic was at work behind the creation of Caricom – the Caribbean Community – in 1973. Caricom not only promised economic dividends (with the eventual goal of a single market) to this group of mostly former British colonies; it was also a platform for declaring they were not an appendage to North America or Latin America. In a similar fashion, Tussie (2009) argues a common sense of what Latin Americans were not – the US and its neo-liberal/Washington-Consensus agenda – has driven a number of efforts to construct regional organizations, including the Latin American Free Trade Area in 1960 and MERCOSUR/Southern-Common-Market in 1991.

Identity would also appear to be at work within the Andean Community, with Prieto (2012) showing that pre-existing identity played a role in its establishment in 1969. The original signatory countries - Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru – shared a similar common past and post-colonial situation. This identity was there in some form from the start, but was strengthened over time through interaction and negotiation – the latter claim being evidence of an IO → identity relation as well (Prieto, 2012).

Prieto primarily infers evidence for this shared identity directly, from extensive interview data with over 30 officials and bureaucrats. This is a welcome move as such data are more likely to capture identity than leadership or summit proclamations. Less convincingly, Prieto also infers the existence of this collective identity indirectly. That is, the Andean Community persists,
despite a manifest failure to attain its proclaimed goals. Something else – shared community for Prieto – must explain this institutional inertia (Prieto, 2012; see also Prieto, 2013a). While this is a plausible reading, it would be strengthened considerably if the author considered likely alternative explanations – sunk costs, say – as well.

**Institutions Shaping Identity**. If we now reverse the causal arrow and consider the regional IO → identity relation, it is clear this has received less scholarly attention, especially in comparison to Europe. This may simply be a function of more people studying Europe and the EU; however, it is likely also explained by the weakness or relative youth of many IOs in other world regions compared to those in Europe.

Beginning with Asia, several scholars nonetheless do hint at the ability of IOs to change identity, particularly at the elite level. Regarding ASEAN, Acharya suggests that extensive interaction over time within the organization has modified elite identities; this has occurred via a socialization process (Acharya, 2009, ch.2). However, as Acharya fails to specify fully the argument, it is not clear why interaction should lead to common group feeling and a possible change in identity. After all, it is quite possible to imagine instances of prolonged interaction where those involved end up feeling more distinct and different from one another. It thus might be more the quality of the interaction than its extent that matters (see also Sigalas, 2010), but neither Acharya’s data nor methods allow for such a parsing.

This problem of theoretical under-specification is addressed head-on in Alastair Johnston’s work on China and its relation with Asian regional – and universal – IOs (Johnston, 2008). Indeed, Johnston sets a theory-data-method standard that should become the norm in studies of IOs and their connection to identity/community. Theoretically, he provides us with three causal mechanisms that capture this process: mimicking, persuasion and social influence. In terms of data, he makes extensive use of interviews (over 120), while carefully addressing the weaknesses (misremembering, strategic dissimulation) inherent in this particular data source (Johnston, 2008, 41-43). He also does not stop with interviews, instead triangulating across multiple data streams, including public documents, Chinese academic literature, and private communications among Chinese bureaucrats.

Regarding methodology, he takes seriously the challenge of measuring a process such as identity change. Writing before the term was popularized, he rigorously employs a form of process tracing (Beach and Pedersen, 2013). This means he first operationalizes his three causal
mechanisms of identity change, asking (in the jargon) what would be the observable implications if they were at work in the Chinese case. He then presents carefully structured narratives, where readers get a real sense of what mechanisms were at work with what effects (Johnston, 2008, ch.1 and passim).²

The payoff to this up-front, well-specified theory and method is a carefully argued picture of how China’s identity was being re-shaped by its (increasing) participation in a number of regional and international organizations - as well as where identity change was not taking place despite participation. Consider the case of China’s membership in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Johnston shows how over time many Chinese diplomats internalized the ARF’s multilateral security norms - including preventative diplomacy and confidence building measures (CBMs) - and championed them vis-à-vis opponents in the state bureaucracy. They became comfortable in ARF discussion forums and culture, trusting their counterparts who shared the organization’s goals. By the end of the 1990s, China was proposing CBMs and other institutional measures that would have been unthinkable in 1993, when the process started and when these concepts were unknown or suspect in the Maoist world view of the foreign-policy elites (Johnston, 2008, chapter 4).

These changes in identity of diplomats and policy elites may seem minor, but they are important in the Chinese context. Prior to the country’s involvement in institutions such as the ARF, its own self-image was that of a realpolitik power, calculating advantage and pursuing its interests unilaterally or engaging in balancing behavior (Johnston, 2008, 32-39). Realpolitik clearly still matters – witness the wary dance between China and the US in recent years. Yet, there is now an element of multilateralism to Chinese diplomacy, an element gained from its participation in international institutions and presented in a positive light (‘responsible world citizen’) in the mass media. Such nuanced, partial claims as those Johnston makes may leave some unsatisfied. Yet, they are far better than the sweeping claims about identity’s role asserted by too many other students of regions and regional organizations.

Turning to Africa, one finds some evidence of regional IOs, once established, influencing identity. This has occurred in at least two ways. The first pathway – captured by political scientists and international-relations specialists – is that African IOs create a site for sustained interaction amongst bureaucrats and elites. Like Acharya and Johnston in the Asian cases, the claim is this interaction, by socializing, produces changes in identity, in this case, moving elites
beyond a post-colonial mentality. Regarding the OAU, Williams (2007) argues that its leaders were socialized via two routes: 1) common schooling abroad - both Anglophone and Francophone - where African elites mingled (see also Reno, 2011); and 2) through the many OAU summits and other meetings, where the heads of state lived at the same hotels and met outside the public eye.

On the AU, we see a similar process at work, where “its members are involved in a continual process of argumentation about what the central tenets of the organization’s security culture should be. The origins of this culture lie in the discourses of Pan-African identity articulated since the late nineteenth century, and its constitutive elements have been refined in the crucible of post-colonial international politics” (Williams, 2007, 278).

These are intriguing arguments, but readers will be left wondering about their validity. For one, the same design-data-methods issue arise as seen earlier. In addition, arguments of this type – where identity change is attributed to one (regional IO) arena – fail to control for an important fact. These same African elites are simultaneously embedded in additional arenas – other regional/sub-regional organizations, Francophone communities, Commonwealth meetings, national bureaucracies - where different processes of socialization may counter those experienced in just a few AU meetings a year (Checkel, 2014b, for an application of this argument to the EU/European setting).

A second way in which regional IOs in Africa have shaped identity is less direct – and likely to be missed by a political-science approach. If one again considers the AU, it is not just what occurs in the meeting chambers that may influence conceptions of identity. Beyond this, it can create spaces where a politics of memory and memorials spur socialization and identity change. For example, it has been argued that the long process through which the AU came to establish a human-rights memorial next to its headquarters in Addis Ababa enabled the formation of a new political consciousness and a new normative space for human rights (de Waal and Ibreck, 2013). This politics of memory was given a considerable boost by the fact that the old OAU and early AU headquarters buildings were situated immediately opposite the Addis Ababa central prison, where severe human-rights violations occurred under several different Ethiopian governments.

The focus here is not so much the physical memorial, but the politics around it. As de Waal and Ibreck argue, it is “the political significance of the memorialization … as both a window onto power relations between the regional body [the African Union – JC], states, and civic agencies;
and a form of symbolic power in itself, with implications for the institution’s norms and identity. … [These] memorials reflect and reinforce ideas about political community and shared ethical principles” (de Waal and Ibreck, 2013, 193). While the authors clearly document the political dynamic surrounding the establishment of the AU human rights memorial, it is less clear exactly how such mobilization led to identity change among which actors and to what degree. Moreover, given the unique and special features of this case, one wonders if this particular route through which IOs shape identity is actually quite rare.

For South American IOs producing changes in identity - and aside from Prieto (2013a) on the Andean Community - some claim to have seen a similar process at work in MERCOSUR. In particular, the organization’s revival after the 1999-2002 financial crisis is attributable in part to a common identity shaped by interaction within it since its founding in 1991 (Caballero, 2012). However, a lack of transparency in research methodology and an over-determined outcome make it difficult to evaluate this assertion.3

**Summary.** Our accounts of regional organization will be incomplete without a consideration of shared identity and community, as the above review indicates. We see evidence of two roles: (1) identity as a factor facilitating the emergence of regional organization in the first place; and (2) how these organizations, once established, affect feelings of community and identity in particular regions. Yet, these roles appear limited, at least when compared to the experience of regional organization in Europe4 – a finding consistent with Acharya and Johnston (2007, 262) when they write that “the design of regional institutions in the developing world has been more consistently sovereignty-preserving than sovereignty-eroding.” It is true that talk of an ASEAN way is a form of regional identity construction. However, this is a very shallow form of regional identity if its main intent is to shore up national identity and sovereignty.

A distinction highlighted by the editors in chapter 1 provides an explanation for this contrast between Europe and other regions. To this point, my survey has mainly covered instances of regional cooperation that do not entail transfers of sovereignty to regional institutions – and not regional integration, where region building goes beyond cooperation and involves transfers of sovereignty to regional IOs. With integration – as in Europe, for example - identity and community may play greater roles, as it is hard to see how people can accept sovereignty transfer and supra-nationalism without some minimum sense of community.
Beyond this identity as independent/dependent variable distinction, the foregoing suggests four additional points to keep in mind. First, given this chapter’s subject matter, it is all too easy to focus too much on identity, failing to ask hard questions regarding its relative importance. For example, there are world regions (North America) and successful instances of regional cooperation (NAFTA), where identity appears to have played virtually no role. The lesson is to always think counterfactually: Absent what I assume to be analytically key (identity), would the outcome (creation of regional organization; later effect of regional IO on identity) be the same?

Second, it is important to recognize that identity’s role as a prerequisite of regional IO can in principle cut two ways. Above, I highlighted instances (ASEAN, AU) where it had a positive effect on regional organization. However, there may be regions where pre-existing collective identity - particularly if it emphasizes post-colonial nationalism - leads to the creation of weak and ineffective IOs. This is the argument of Barnett and Solingen (2007) in their study of Middle East regionalism and the Arab League. As they argue, “the politics of Arab nationalism and a shared identity led Arab states … to fear Arab unity in practice.” As an expression of such (feared) unity, the Arab League was thus “specifically designed to fail at producing the kind of greater collaboration and integration that might have weakened political leaders at home” (Barnett and Solingen, 2007, 181).

Third, when exploring the influence of regional IOs on identity, analysts focus – overwhelmingly – on changes in elite identity. As a starting point, this makes sense. Those most directly affected by a particular regional IO are the elites and bureaucrats who interact within it (see also Barnett and Finnemore, 2004). An emphasis on elites is also consistent with the political science/international relations toolkit adopted in much of the literature reviewed above. However, this limited analytic and disciplinary focus may be less justifiable in the case of strong IOs with expansive policy competences that reach deeper into the societies of their participating member states – as is the case in Europe.\(^5\)

Fourth, it is important to distinguish between narratives about identity’s role and systematic analysis where the data and methods are appropriate to the causal task at hand – to measure identity’s influence. In the work reviewed above, this stands – with the partial exception of Asia - as an important challenge for future work on the regional-IO/identity nexus.

This scholarly challenge is exacerbated by what I would call elite identity talk, where regional actors explicitly invoke identity – ‘we are doing this because of our African values,’ say – for
instrumental and strategic reasons. Talking identity can – and does - serve as a legitimizing device. But this is an understanding of identity far removed from that discussed here. Perhaps repeated public invocation of identity will lead to its later internalization. To test such a claim, however, will require data that go well beyond leadership statements and methods that capture the process of identity change.

III. Institutions and Identity – The Special Case of Europe

If the previous section establishes a comparative context for what we know – and do not know – about the identity/regional-IO nexus, then, here, I use the case of Europe to explore it in more detail. Within Europe, I focus on the European Union, as it has been studied extensively. This is not to deny the importance of other European regional organizations and the role identity plays within them – NATO (Risse-Kappen, 1997; Gheciu, 2005), or the Council of Europe (Checkel, 2003), say. Rather, space constraints plus frequent use of the EU (implicitly or explicitly) as a baseline case dictate this choice. Analytically, I primarily explore the regional IO → identity relation, as the majority of scholarship emphasizes it.

To give away the intent behind the section’s subheading, the case of Europe does look different from other regions. In simple bean-counting terms, there is more scholarship focusing on identity and regional organization in Europe than elsewhere. It is also a richer literature in a disciplinary sense, with political science, sociology, political theory, media studies and anthropology all making important contributions. This richness matters, for it provides a more complete account of the IO → identity relation, one which highlights various arenas and sources of identity change without which it is impossible to understand the precise causal work being done by regional organizations. In terms of research design, data and methods, literature on the EU – for the most part – rises to the analytic challenge of moving beyond narratives about identity.

In what follows, I explore the regional IO/identity connection in Europe through three different disciplinary lenses - political science, sociology and anthropology – with an empirical focus on the European Union. I start with political science, where the study of regional organizations has been an important focus since before WWII (Martin and Simmons, 2013). I then turn to sociology and anthropology, arguing that they supplement political science accounts
in key ways. Indeed, a core take-away from this section is that a move to inter-disciplinarity is required if we are to understand fully the relation of regional institutions to feelings of community and identity across the globe.

**Institutions Shaping Identity.** Political scientists have accorded pride of place to institutions, formal as well as informal (norms), and elites acting within or through them. These agents seek actively to construct an identity; indeed, one might call this the engineering view of identity construction (Checkel and Katzenstein, 2009, ch.1). Identities and community are constructed from the top-down, as it were – from regional organizations to the nation state and individuals and organizations within it (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004).

An excellent example of this perspective in action is Judith Kelley’s work (2004a, b) on how European regional IOs – the EU, OSCE, Council of Europe – were able to reshape (partly) senses of ethnic identity and community in post-Cold War Eastern Europe. Specifically, she seeks to theorize and empirically measure the mechanisms linking IOs to state behavior and identity. If Kelley were to stop here, her study would resemble others – specifying the mechanisms between independent (regional IO) and dependent (state identity, policy) variables (Schimmelfennig, 2003; Checkel, 2007; Johnston, 2008, for example).

She goes an important step further, however, introducing domestic politics into the analysis, basically as an intervening variable, with the degree of domestic opposition (high or low) affecting the likelihood of differing mechanisms having effects on state identity (Kelley, 2004a, 32). This analytic move is to be applauded for it highlights the important point that regional IOs affect states and their identities by shaping and influencing their domestic politics.

The argument is tested through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as carefully executed counterfactual analysis. On the qualitative techniques, she explicitly invokes the process based methods - process tracing, most importantly – that are essential for capturing the IO/identity relation. The rigor and transparency of her analysis make it easy for readers to see how she is measuring changes in state identity.

Overall, Kelley makes an important contribution. She illuminates the specific conditions and mechanisms that allow regional organizations to influence state conceptions of identity and community regarding ethnic minorities. Moreover, she demonstrates that a focus on process and mechanisms is fully consistent with theoretical and methodological rigor, which is no small feat.
given that many political scientists invoke mechanisms in at best a conceptually confused and metaphorical way (Gerring, 2007; Bennett, 2013).

A related political-science argument focuses on the indirect effects of regional institutions on identity and community. In this case, they create spaces where elite actors communicate, creating security communities (Adler and Barnett, 1998), communities of communication (Bruter, 2005) or public spheres (Risse, 2010, 2014). This is a mostly a top-down view of how identities and communities are built.

Risse and collaborators’ work on European public spheres is a very good example of this political science ‘mark II’ research on the IO/identity connection, one which clearly demonstrates the value added of drawing upon a second discipline - media studies, in this case. In a nutshell, they argue that the EU has helped to Europeanize formally national public spheres, so one sees an emerging transnational sphere of communication in Europe. Theirs is a nuanced and carefully crafted argument. They recognize, for example, that power still plays a role in shaping public spheres (Risse, 2014, ch.1) – which had been a blind spot in earlier work. It is also not an either/or argument, where European public spheres grow at the expense of national ones; the relationship is one of complementarity (see, especially, Koopmans 2014).

For my purposes, what matters is the causal force of these Europeanized public spheres. They are not just talk shops, but settings “where collective identities are constructed and reconstructed and publicly displayed thus creating political communities” (Risse, 2014, 30). Thus, the EU - by facilitating the creation of these deliberative spaces - is changing senses of identity and community. Risse and collaborators do not simply assert this change, but document it through empirically rich studies employing a variety of methods (discourse analysis, surveys, frame analysis). Like the Kelley book, this is anything but identity story telling. By advancing a clear, specified argument on public spheres and then connecting it to empirics via transparent methods, the validity of the causal claims they advance is enhanced (see also Bruter, 2005; Koopmans and Statham, 2010).

This political science research on the regional IO / identity nexus often works with a nation-state analogy, where identity construction at the regional level follows a script similar to that seen in the formation of nation states over the past two centuries, with elites playing a leading role. However, the analogy breaks down at the level of tools and mechanisms. Those (elite) engineers seeking to shape identity through regional institutions lack access to many of the arenas and
mechanisms – schools, armies, foundational myths, robust national public spheres – available to the crafters of national identities. This does not invalidate the claims of a Kelley or Risse. However, it does raise an issue of scale in that the identity effects they see being produced by regional IOs may be limited to elites and actually be quite weak (Hooghe, 2005; Checkel, 2007, ch.8).

These arguments are challenged by another strand of social science literature exploring the IO → identity relation. This work is quantitative, sometimes experimental and seeks to link various aspects of the EU to identity change; most of these studies focus below the level of political decisionmakers but above mass publics. Consider work on the EU-sponsored Erasmus university-exchange program, which allows students from across the Union to spend a semester or year at a university in another member state. Erasmus increases contact among young Europeans, perhaps facilitating – as Fligstein (2009) proposes - the growth of European identity. In contradiction to my observation above of the dearth of socialization arenas at the regional level, here is an instance where the EU has seemingly created mechanisms at the level of schools to reshape identity. Unfortunately, researchers disagree sharply on whether this is indeed the outcome, a point highlighted by comparing two recent quantitative studies (Wilson, 2011; Stoeckel, 2014).

Erasmus students are the focus for both scholars, who employ surveys and panel studies to chart changing patterns of identification. Stoeckel (2014) sees participation in Erasmus as driving identity change, while Wilson (2011) argues the opposite (see also Kuhn, 2012). Stoeckel’s design (a three-wave panel) is far more sophisticated than Wilson’s. Yet, as with all quantitative work seeking to measure identity, key findings can be shaped by sample size/composition and the nature of the data. For Stoeckel, all his respondents are German, who are arguably socialized from an early age to be European. Moreover, 40% of these exchange students travel only to two countries – France and Italy. It is transnational contact (Stoeckel’s hypothesis) that is therefore fostering a collective European identity? Or is identity change simply an artefact of Germans, socialized to feel European, interacting with similarly socialized students from the EU core? More generally, is there a so-called ceiling effect (Sigalas, 2010)? That is, compared with other citizens, exchange students comprise a group that is already attached to Europe. Programs like Erasmus are thus less effective - at least when compared to an
average citizen - in changing identity because they are ‘preaching to the converted’ (Stoeckel, 2014, 10).

This quantitative work on the EU identity relation shows increasing sophistication, be it in data collection, with ever larger datasets being constructed (Bayley and Williams, 2012, for example), or in the exploitation of experimental designs (Bruter, 2003, 2005), or in the inclusion of more and better controls (Stoeckel, 2014). However, it is difficult for outside observers to discern any convergence in the results. In part, this is simply the result of the evolving, improving nature of the research.

At the same time, these divergent findings point to the limitations of using quantitative methods to measure identity change. Most important, it is difficult to capture context in such studies. Going back to the Erasmus surveys, is it any surprise that many of them find some change in the direction of European identity? After all, these are students who want to go abroad and experience ‘Europe.’ Moreover, did their stay abroad coincide with particular events/non-events involving Europe, thus increasing or decreasing its salience?

There is also an important temporal dimension. Even the most sophisticated quantitative studies claim to detect and be able to measure identity change over relatively short time spans – for example, 16 months in Stoeckel’s (2014) three-wave panel design (see also Bruter, 2005). If identities really change this fast, does this change ‘stick’? Insights from the other disciplines – to which I now turn - would suggest not.

Sociologists, in keeping with their disciplinary roots, posit a greater role for groups and societal interaction over time – years or even decades - in any regional institution / identity dynamic. Formal institutions still play a key albeit less central role than we saw above. In a masterful study, Fligstein, (2009) has applied this type of sociological analysis directly to one of the central questions motivating this chapter: Does the EU shape the identity of its citizens?

Drawing upon extensive longitudinal data – stretching back to the 1960s in many cases – Fligstein argues as follows. Through the freedoms, rules and regulations of the internal market, the EU has dramatically increased trans-border interactions in Europe. In this way, a growing – but still small in absolute terms – number of Europeans have regularized contact over many years, through trade and business associations, say. In turn, this increased contact leads to a greater sense of common identification. Here, regional institutions promote identity change not from the top down, but horizontally, as it were (Fligstein, 2009).
There is much to commend in this perspective, as it brings broader society and not just elites back into our accounts of regional IOs and identities/community. At the same time, there are limitations and possible weaknesses, both theoretically and empirically. On the former, the idea that contact leads to a greater sense of community is an old one in (experimental) social psychology. Yet, in the real world, this may not always be the case. For one, quality may trump quantity. It is not the amount of interaction, but its nature (deliberative vs. hierarchical-lecture formats, say) that leads to a greater sense of we-ness (Beyers, 2005; see also Stoeckel, 2014, 4-7). Unfortunately, the quantitative methods employed by Fligstein cannot capture this process dimension. The old saying ‘correlation ain’t causation’ is as true here as anywhere else. In the ideal design, Fligstein would therefore complement his statistical analyses with one or more case studies employing process-based methods.

Moreover, intense interaction may very well produce group norms and identity that are unintended and undesirable. Consider the United Nations and its Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Barnett and Finnemore (2004, chapter 5) have argued that prolonged interaction within it created a set of group norms and culture that in turn led to pathological behavior – the UN’s failure to act during the 1994 Rwanda genocide. There seems to be a (unwarranted) normative assumption in much of the EU → identity literature that the identities resulting from interaction will be different, but also better. There is thus a theoretical need to develop scope conditions: Under what conditions does social interaction fostered by institutions lead to ‘good’ as opposed to ‘bad’ identity?

Regarding empirical limitations, this type of sociological argument on the regional institution – identity nexus may apply nowhere except in Europe. The EU is more institutionalized and more supranational than any other regional IO, yet over 40% of its citizens never think of themselves as European, while 50% feel European only some of the time (Fligstein, 2009, 141). One can debate forever whether that 40% figure represents a jar half full or half empty. However, the implications for comparative analysis are clear. If it has taken 60+ years of institution building for the EU to have identity-shaping effects of this (limited) magnitude, then they are likely to be much less in the case of weaker and less institutionalized regional organizations in Asia, Africa or South America, a fact seemingly confirmed in section II above.

Another argument derived from sociology on the regional IO – community/identity nexus has its roots in the social movement literature, stressing frames and roles. From this perspective,
strategic actors use regional IOs to embed-promote-spread certain ways of thinking and scripts that – if they successfully diffuse – may change senses of community and identity at the regional (Barnett, 1993) or national level (Autesserre, 2010). Similar to the political science research, this is a rather top-down view in that the source of a change in community and identity resides in regional IOs (or actors within them).

Anthropology offers a third lens for exploring the regional IO – community/identity relation. In keeping with disciplinary traditions, this is a much more bottom-up perspective, emphasizing the routines and experiences of individuals who interact with rules and norms promoted by IOs. Identities and senses of community emerge and change more by what we do and experience on a daily basis (Shore, 2000) than by what we say - the political science story - or through occasional interaction – the sociological story. Put differently, in moving from political science to anthropology, we have shifted – analytically - from a top-down engineering view of identity construction to an approach that is bottom-up and processual to the core.

Adrian Favell has applied this perspective to understand the evolving identities of what he calls Eurostars – young professionals who exploit the EU’s four freedoms to live and work where they choose in the continent (Favell, 2008; see also Favell, 2009). Drawing upon 5 years of ethnographic field work plus over 60 in-depth interviews, Favell charts how the EU – indirectly, through the freedoms associated with the internal market – shapes the lives and feelings of community of these young professionals in three different sites: Amsterdam, Brussels and London.

A snapshot of Favell’s account is as follows. You are a young professional; you and your family move from Madrid to Amsterdam. How does the daily experience of shopping, getting your kids into school, dealing with the local bureaucracy, interacting with neighbors shape your sense of who you are and the narrative you build about Europe? Favell’s somewhat surprising conclusion is that instead of becoming more European, these individuals have their national sense of belonging reinforced (Favell, 2008). His extensive, ethnographic immersion reveals the social processes behind such identity dynamics, processes that cannot be captured in one-off or even more sophisticated panel surveys.

Favell’s argument thus adds a third element to the IO → identity dynamic sketched in this section. Perhaps the same individuals who create European public spheres or come into regular contact through the internal market, go – during their winter holidays - to the beaches of southern
Spain and consciously recreate their own national communities through sustained, daily interaction (schools, newspapers, gated neighborhoods). Here, identity/community is evolving outside, around and perhaps in opposition to regional institutions (see also Holmes, 2000, 2009).

**Summary.** Which of these disciplinary lenses is right? This is – of course – the wrong question to ask. When exploring the relation between regional IOs and identity/community, the approaches emphasize different actors, mechanisms of change, different methods, and – often – differing outcomes (some versus little or no identity change). To capture fully the complexity at work, future work on the regional IO - identity/community nexus needs to make two moves. First, it should think in terms of scope conditions, that is, the conditions under which one perspective is more likely to apply. The political-science approach, with its stress on institutions, might be most applicable to Europe, given the thickness of institutions there. Second, the different disciplines should not be viewed in either/or terms, but both/and. By combining their insights, we learn more about regional IOs and what they do in terms of identity and community. Quantitative studies by political scientists, say, can establish that some elements of elite or mass identity are indeed changing, while the tools of sociology or anthropology may be necessary ‘to fill in the blanks’ – that is, to theorize and measure the group, experiential, or symbolic processes at work.

The last point raises a good news / bad news dilemma. The good is that by integrating perspectives and crossing disciplinary boundaries, we will learn more about identity and how regional IOs may shape it (Checkel and Katzenstein, 2009). If we wish to understand the precise causal work being done by regional organizations on identity, the broader context captured by this disciplinary pluralism is not an option, but a necessity (see also Checkel, 2014b).

However, this is not easy to execute – which is the bad news. While popular in some scholarly circles and among key funding agencies, inter-disciplinary research is challenging. For one, it requires a commitment to graduate training that cuts across traditional disciplinary boundaries. This not only requires more time, but a willingness to master theories and methods rooted in quite different traditions. One solution may be to encourage collaborative research, but this in turn raises practical, career-advancement issues for younger scholars seeking tenure. In addition, if one wishes to advance the state of the art on regional IOs and their ability to shape identity by combining disciplinary insights, then hard questions of theory development and
cumulation require attention. Simply put, how do we do it in a way that avoids analytic mush or everything matters arguments?

IV. Conclusions: Bringing Domestic Context and Process Back In

In this concluding section, I highlight both theoretical (domestic context) and methodological challenges (process) for students of comparative regionalism and regional IOs as they think about community and identity.

On theory and the domestic, there are three dimensions to emphasize. First, there is politics as understood by political scientists. With a few exceptions - Kelley 2004a; Barnett and Solingen 2007; Herbst 2007 - it is notable mainly by its absence in the literature reviewed here (see also Mansfield and Solingen, 2010). This is odd. Under certain scope conditions, regional IOs may promote identity change among political elites behind closed doors and through consensual-deliberative means. However, this is likely the exception and not the norm. Scholars have begun to recognize this fact in the case of the EU, with their stress on politicization (Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Risse, 2014). However, further work is needed, both to explore whether politicization is only affecting regional organizations in Europe (unlikely) and – more important – to connect it with our theories of identity/community. To take just one example, today’s deeply politicized EU will complicate the story about regional IOs, socialization and identity advanced by political-science/IR scholars, who typically argue that socialization works best in de-politicized and in-camera situations (Checkel, 2014a).

Second, my broader claim here is a need to theorize various dimensions of the domestic context in studies of the regional IO – identity relation. This will require more inter-disciplinarity, as politicization or politics as understood by political scientists in no way captures all of it (see also Acharya and Johnston, 2007, 259-60). Indeed, if one wishes to explain how an IO reshapes identity among elites or conceptions of identity within a particular country, this requires not just a political-science model of domestic politics, but also a measurement of pre-existing identities. We cannot measure identity change without knowing the baseline and the ‘others’ this identity defines (see also Koopmans, 2014). And those ‘baseline identities’ reside not just in the political institutions emphasized by political scientists or in the answers to survey questions favored by quantitative scholars. They are also found in and shaped by the daily lived
experiences of individuals, which is precisely the value added of anthropological-ethnographic examinations of the IO – identity relation (Shore, 2000; Favell, 2008).

And ethnography does not exhaust the possibilities. For example, Ted Hopf has employed textual and discursive strategies to map identities in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia (Hopf, 2002, 2012). He then uses this baseline to explain Soviet and Russian foreign-policy choices, and the role of identity in them. However, his general argument could easily be extended to post-Cold War Russia’s involvement with regional international organizations and how little the latter have effected its identity – a pattern that was evident well before Russia’s annexation of Crimea in March 2014 (Pouliot, 2010).

Third, too many of our theoretical frameworks – especially in political science - for exploring the relation of IOs to identity and community put the organizations in the driver’s seat. The causal forces emanate from them, from the regional level. Is this always the case? Perhaps the research designs are being limited and truncated by the underlying positivist epistemology, which forces one to hold something constant – in this case, the properties and motivations of the agents who are the target for identity change (see also Prieto, 2013b). In the literature reviewed here, it is thus no surprise that anthropology, with its grounding in interpretivism, does a better job capturing this domestic-level interaction between regional IOs and individuals or organizations on the ground.

Regarding methods, my starting point is that regional organizations influence identity and community through some sort of process. For sure, we may employ static measures to establish that a particular IO’s actions correlate with some change in identity. However, in many cases, the real analytic concern is exactly how this change has occurred. Consistent with this focus, much of the political science and sociology literature discussed above invokes the language of causal mechanisms. This makes sense, as mechanisms are all about ‘how’ and process, tracing the connection between independent and dependent variables. However, there then appears to be a mismatch between theory and method. In some cases, this same literature relies on surveys, coding techniques and other quantitative methods that cannot measure process in the IO – identity relation. This is a clear limitation in Fligstein’s (2009) otherwise superb study of identity and the EU. In other instances, analysts hint at, but do not make explicit and transparent the process element in their study, as was seen in much of the work on regional IOs and identity in Africa.
There is thus a need for methods such as process tracing (Beach and Pedersen, 2013; Bennett and Checkel, 2014). The latter is ideally suited for measuring the mechanisms of identity change in both positivist and interpretive research. Done well, this requires explicit attention to possible biases in evidentiary sources and thinking about so-called equifinality, or the alternative causal mechanisms that can lead to the same outcome. However, the payoff will be high - as Johnston (2008) demonstrates in his process-based examination of how regional and universal IOs have reshaped elements of Chinese identity.

Many years ago, I wrote a paper on a very different topic, but whose title is relevant here: “It’s the Process, Stupid.” Measuring process can be messy, time consuming and resource demanding, but our understanding of how regional IOs shape our sense of who we are will stall without it. In turn, such moves will position comparative regionalism to contribute – in an empirically grounded way - to broader disciplinary debates over explanation and causal mechanisms (Hedstroem and Ylikoski, 2010; Bennett, 2013). The end result would be a lessening of sub-field boundaries and intellectual cubby holes, which is never a bad thing.
V. References


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**Notes**

1 For comments on earlier versions, I thank the editors; participants at three project workshops (December 2013, June 2014, December 2014), Freie Universitaet Berlin; colleagues at a Research Colloquium, Simon Fraser University, September 2014; and Inken von Borzyskowski. Amitav Acharya and German Prieto kindly shared literature suggestions, and Martha Snodgrass provided superb research assistance.

2 This analytic approach is not rocket science, but it is one adopted all-too-infrequently by students of regional IOs with interests in measuring identity change. For an excellent primer on how – rigorously – to incorporate identity in our analyses, see Abdelal et al. (2009).

3 Asking a different question, Oelsner explores how Mercosur – qua organization - has acquired an identity of its own. Oelsner (2013).

4 It is thus somewhat puzzling that Roose (2013) comes to the opposite conclusion, arguing that regional identification in Europe is no stronger than in other regions. However, this finding is likely skewed by his use of indicators and survey instruments – especially, the International Social Survey Programme – that are ill-suited for measuring identity.
It also may be less justifiable when one explores a related issue: the ability of regional organizations to create transnational spaces for mass participation - by women’s rights groups and labour movements, for example. See Duina, this volume.

The findings of other quantitative studies on the identity-shaping effects of Erasmus fall in between Wilson and Stoeckel. See Sigalas (2010) and Mitchell (2015).

Note the clear intellectual debt to Karl Deutsch. See Fligstein (2009, 16-18), as well as Deutsch (1957) and the discussion in section II above.

A sociologist by training, I include Favell here because of the deeply ethnographic, practice-oriented component to his work.

Indeed, the causal relation here is likely the reverse, with Russian identity playing a role in the shaping of various regional organizations – the Shanghai Cooperation Council, for example.

On interpretive approaches to process tracing, see Guzzini (2012, ch.11); and, especially, Pouliot (2014).