

Identification with Europe and the European Union: The influence of tourism

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Objectives | Europe is struggling with the consequences of the global financial and economical crises at different levels. Due to the impending insolvency of several EU-member states and pessimistic future scenarios regarding the stability of European monetary union, it is not easy for European citizens to remain progressively oriented towards societal challenges. The renaissance of values, preserving order, results in an increased commitment to one's own nation and regional background. One crucial factor which is often mentioned to provide a better intercultural understanding and which may prevent those defensive reactions can be tourism. In this contribution it is assumed that active tourism (travel intensity and outbound tourism) as well as passive tourism (inbound tourism) may increase a cosmopolitan orientation and the identification with Europe and may also influence the voter turnout at European elections in certain EU-Member states.

Methodology | A theoretical model, assuming an influence of three central tourist indicators: tourism intensity, travel intensity and outbound tourism in EU-states (independent variables) on the cosmopolitan orientation and the identification of citizens with Europe (intermediate level) as well as on the voter turnout in European elections (dependent variable) was operationalized with national and regional data obtained from four data sources (Eurobarometer 258: attitudes of Europeans towards tourism 2008; Special Eurobarometer 268: Cultural Values, 2007; Eurostat Database: Tourist intensity in Nuts II regions and voter turnout at European elections based on the European Elections Database). The direct and indirect effects of tourist behaviour and tourism intensity were measured on the national and regional level using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to evaluate the proposed model empirically. Additionally multiple sequential regressions were computed to control for regional differences between Western, Eastern and Southern European regions.

Main results and contributions | At the country level a clear relation between outbound tourism and a cosmopolitan orientation of citizens and a strong correlation between tourism intensity and voter turnout at EU-elections could be found. But these results have to be carefully interpreted because of the small sample size ($n = 22$ due to the exclusion of countries with compulsory voting) and because of outliers regarding tourism intensity. Therefore the model was evaluated also on the regional level using structural equation modelling ($n = 130$ regions without outliers). A strong influence of travel intensity (increasing the cosmopolitan orientation and decreasing national identity) could be confirmed. Travel intensity also exerts a direct positive influence on voter turnout but outbound tourism leads to a negative influence. A sequential multiple

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regression model indicates that these direct effects of tourist indicators at the European level are mainly due to regional differences. Therefore only an indirect influence of tourist indicators on identification with Europe can be reported.

Limitations | The study can be seen as a first approach to operationalize the influence of tourism on European Identity and voting behaviour at European elections. Due to incomplete data, a comprehensive assessment of the theoretical model on the regional level (Nuts II data) concerning all EU 27 countries was not possible. The study highlights a clear future demand for comprehensive cross-national studies at the individual-level (European citizens) which should allow to measure the links of tourist behaviour, European identity formation and voting behaviour..

Conclusions | This study demonstrates that tourism can be seen as a fruitful explanatory factor, leading to a higher transnational orientation and European identification of EU-citizens. Contemporary European challenges, namely rapid transformations, rising inequalities between groups and insecurities (due to global and individual threats) lead to vague feelings of uneasiness. These feelings of discomfort have several negative side-effects and may erode European and democratic achievements. It is necessary to concentrate on new and unexplored factors like tourism which may have the potential to prevent tendencies of renationalization.