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EUropean attachment and meanings of EUrope. A qualitative study in the EU-15

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Abstract

The present article explores meanings of EUrope as they emerged in individual interviews and focus-groups organized around the question of European attachment. The article shows that the ways people make sense of EUrope can be divided into three major categories: cultural-national, cultural-transnational, and functional-utilitarian. Cultural-national referents describe EUrope through the prism of the nation-state and reproduce the isomorphism between territory and identity which has characterized, at least in theory, the nation-state itself. Cultural-transnational referents present EUrope as a normative model for the rest of the world, a model for 'another' globalization, more social and less liberalist, and a champion of humanitarianism and international peace. Functional-utilitarian referents address EUrope as a space which could help the individual and/or the collectivity to which the individual belongs to enhance their well-being. In this latter case, EUrope resonates with a post-national space, one which goes beyond the isomorphism between territory and identity. The article argues that the reasons why people might identify with and support EUrope are different, and not always driven by feelings of emotional attachment. As such, the article brings empirical evidence to the thesis that a EUropean *demos*, understood as a sense of collective identity, should not be considered as a necessary condition for the existence of a EUropean polity.

Keywords: Europe; territorial attachment; identity; post-national

I. INTRODUCTION

Since 1991, Eurobarometer surveys have periodically asked people living in the European Union to indicate their degree of territorial attachment to the town/village where they live, their region, their nation and Europe. Contrary to local, regional and national attachment, European attachment has clearly shown, across the years, an unstable trend. This article aims to analyze people's narratives activated by the question about their European attachment in order to explore meanings of Europe. It should be said that the notion of 'territorial attachment', besides being under-theorized, is also an ambiguous one. Some authors have equated attachment with belonging (Pollini, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006), which, in turn, has been regarded as a synonym of collective identity (Weeks, 1990; Croucher, 2004; Weedon, 2004; Buonfino and Thomson, 2007). The aim of the present article is to use both quantitative and qualitative data to map the ways in which people make sense of their attachment to Europe rather than shedding new light on the notion of territorial attachment per se. Given the emphasis on people's narratives, this article clearly belongs to what Bruter (2005: 5) defines as a 'bottom-up' approach - as opposed to a 'top-down' one, which engages Europe as an institutional object.

From a quantitative perspective, scholars have mainly focused on the notion of European support rather than attachment and have highlighted five major explanatory theories: cognitive mobilization, political values, utilitarianism, class partisanship, and support for government (Gabel, 1998). In his classic work, Ronald Inglehart (1977) posited that, given the highly abstract level of the notion of Europe and its post-national, egalitarian reformism, a person with well-developed cognitive skills and post-materialist values would be more likely to support European integration than a person with low cognitive skills and materialist values. More recently, however,

Gabel (1998) has shown that there is little statistical support for cognitive mobilization and political values and has instead stressed the relevance of a utilitarian dimension (see also Kritzinger, 2005).

Qualitative studies about European identity can be categorized into two major groups. On the one hand, there are authors who adopt what I call a 'national' perspective, which equates the process of European identity formation with the process undergone by the nation-state. This perspective maintains - either in primordial or constructivist terms – that a European identity must exist for a European polity to be viable and that this identity should resemble a national identity, i.e. an identity based on a commonality of language, traditions, history, myths, etc. Typical examples of this perspective are, among others, the works of Anthony D. Smith (1992) and Michael Mann (1998). In their views, European and national identities are 'competing identities', as Europe itself is perceived as an impending nation-state.

On the other hand, scholars have essayed to take a different view on Europe and European identity – a view, in the words of Alexander Murphy (1999: 54), "less wedded to the ideas about territory and identity that developed along with the modern state system" (see also Painter, 2001; Delanty, 2003; and Rumford, 2003). Jürgen Habermas (1992, 2001) best exemplifies this attempt to go beyond the national perspective. According to Habermas, Europe might indeed stand for a post-national polity, one which breaks the traditional isomorphism between the cultural (identity) and the political (territorial state), which has historically characterized, at least in theory, the nation-state (Appadurai, 1996; Hedetoft and Hjort, 2000). To be sure, this isomorphism does not refer to the coming together of two distinct categories, as national identity and the territorial state have been tied, at least during the last two centuries, into a mutually constitutive relationship. Yet, what the post-national

literature wants to signal is that, in the present age of increased internationalization of markets, financial and communication flows, international mobility of people, etc., this historical relationship has become problematic. That is why, for instance, Beck and Grande (2007: 69) posit that "Europe should not (and could not) become both a nation and a state".

In the present article, evidence of utilitarian, 'national' and 'post-national' perspectives emerges from the answers of the respondents, pointing to the fact that in people's views the existence of a European polity cannot be pinned down to a single rationale. The article is divided into three sections. In the first one, I offer a brief statistical description of the trend associated with European attachment, which supports the case of the uniqueness of this type of attachment in relation to the other three forms of territorial attachment (local, regional, and national). In the second section I discuss the process of data collection and analysis and in third section I explore the meanings associated with European attachment, distinguishing between 'cultural' (national and transnational) and 'functional-utilitarian' meanings. In the concluding section, I summarize the findings into a theoretical scheme which aims to visually capture the discursive forms through which people make sense of Europe.

II. EUROPEAN ATTACHMENT: A BRIEF STATISTICAL DESCRIPTION

In this section, I analyze territorial attachment drawing on the Eurobarometer survey series. Eurobarometer (Eb) is a consortium of survey firms which, since the early 1970s, has run periodical surveys on various topics on behalf of the European Union. Eurobarometer surveys cover the population of the member countries of the

European Union, aged 15 years and over. For each member state, the sample population used in Eurobarometer surveys is 1,000 people, however, in some cases this number varies slightly above or below 1,000. The sample populations of Northern Ireland and Luxembourg are respectively equal to about 300 and 600 people. Given the socio-economic and political differences between East Germany and West Germany and between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, these territories are treated as separate in Eurobarometer.

As stated above, since 1991 Eurobarometer surveys have periodically asked people living in the European Union to indicate their degree of territorial attachment to the town/village where they live, their region, their nation and Europe. Compared to the attachment to the first three territories, attachment to Europe has traditionally scored very poorly. The average value measured across the EU-15 countries during the survey period 1991-2005 shows that 28 percentage points separate European attachment (61%) from local and regional attachments (both at 89%), which in turn are only three percentage points away from national attachment (92%) (see Table 1).

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The distribution of the values across the scale ('very attached', 'fairly attached', 'not very attached', 'not at all attached') indicates that European attachment is the only one with a relatively normal distribution, i.e. the majority of the answers of the respondents localize in the middle ('fairly', 'not very'). This obviously suggests that European attachment does not generate the same intensity or emotional involvement as in the other three forms of territorial attachment (see Fig. 1).

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The uniqueness of European attachment also emerges when we observe its temporal trend. Overall, European attachment has increased significantly across the years (18 percentage points, from 47% in 1991 to 65% in 2005), while local attachment has only increased by one percentage point (from 86% to 87%), national attachment has remained stable (90%), and regional attachment has experienced a small decrease (from 91% to 88%) – small variations which are understandable given the already high original values. However, more importantly, the increase in European attachment shows a clear unstable trend (see Fig. 2).

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In terms of absolute value, distribution among the four-value scale and stability over time, European attachment clearly differs from local, regional and national attachments. Simply put, relatively few people feel attached to Europe and even those who declare to have such a sentiment express it in a rather moderate and unstable way. If 'attachment' is used as a proxy for 'identity' – a choice legitimated by the interchangeable use of these two terms made by both scholars (see introduction) and the respondents of the present study (see below) – it clearly emerges that Europe is not as strong a source of identification as the locale, the region or the nation. This does not simply suggest what is already known (i.e. the weakness of the sentiment of

European identity), but also that 'European' perhaps cannot be associated with any form of identity at all. This is an argument which can be grounded on the main tenets of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). According to Tajfel, social identity is defined on the basis of criteria which are either external ('outside' designations such as bank clerks, members of a trades union, etc.) or internal. These latter criteria refer to the notion of 'group identification', which is achieved when a person is aware both of being a member of the group (cognitive level) and of the value connotations which this membership implies (evaluative level). To these two components, Tajfel adds a third one, which he says is frequently associated with the previous two and which consists of an 'emotional investment' in the cognitive and evaluative levels (Tajfel, 1982: 2). Even though not explicitly theorized, geographers have often highlighted this emotional component in relation to people's attachment to places, as for instance shown by the humanistic literature (Tuan, 1974; Relph, 1976; Frémont, 1976). Similarly, the notion of national identity, particularly when addressed from a primordialist perspective, is also frequently associated with an emotional dimension (Connor, 1994; Sheff, 1994; Smith, 1995). Likewise, the (lack of) emotions appears repeatedly in the scholarly debate about the European *demos* (i.e. a political community built around a shared identity), whose nonexistence is indeed attributed to the absence of collective emotional feelings towards Europe (Cederman, 2001: 146 – see also Shore, 2004).

The trends observed in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 seem to suggest that people might agree or disagree with what 'Europe' is, but it clearly does not stimulate the same level of emotional attachment as other forms of territorial attachment. Europe is not (yet?) there. The relatively unstable trend of European attachment across the years seems somehow to validate this point. Broadly speaking, if today people feel attached to

Europe and tomorrow they do not, maybe Europe is not precisely an identity marker, at least from people's perspective. Here the term 'identity' seems more appropriate than 'identification', which, following the seminal work of Stuart Hall (1996), is today largely used by scholars in order to avoid being trapped into a reifying or essentializing discourse (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Jenkins, 2004). Yet, in the focus groups and interviews which I conducted, people talked of identity as a *thing* or a property which they had (or did not have), i.e. as a persisting and stable quality – an attitude also observed by Gabel (1998: 109). Thus, in this article, I prefer the term 'identity' rather than 'identification', as a way to better render the ontological character which respondents attributed to their identity.

From the trends observed above, European attachment appears to be dependent on contingent events, whereas local, regional and national attachments are much more stable and impermeable to economic or political changes. As a way of investigating further why people feel or do not feel attached to Europe, i.e. as a way to explore meanings of Europe, I will analyze a set of qualitative data collected in four European regions in the next section.

III. COLLECTING QUALITATIVE DATA ON EUROPEAN ATTACHMENT

The qualitative information used to explore the meanings associated with European attachment was collected between May 2005 and January 2006 in four European regions: Lombardia (Italy), Pirkanmaa (Finland), North-East of England (United Kingdom), and Languedoc-Roussillon (France). The selection of these four regional case-studies was based on cross-tabulating the results of a cluster analysis

(using the significant predictors from a binary logistic model on European attachment – Eb 60.1, 2003) and Eurostat data about regional GDP per capita (in Purchasing Power Parity values) for each region in the EU-15. In various statistical analyses which explain social behavior, income (both at an individual and regional level) often turns out to be a significant variable. On this basis I chose GDP per capita as a geographical factor in order to add contextual information to the personal compositional factors represented by the predictors of the model. The presence of the geographical contextual variable in the selection process aims to satisfy the traditional geographical concern about the importance of place ('place matters').

The four selected regional case-studies offer a good representation of the different socio-economic, political, and geographical conditions of the EU-15. In socio-economic terms, Lombardia is one of the richest regions in Europe and a major 'engine' of the European economy (Le Galès and Lequesne, 1998), followed by Pirkanmaa, whose regional capital, Tampere, has long been on the forefront of the knowledge economy and information society (Castells and Himanen, 2002). Down the ladder, the North-East of England is a region still heavily affected by the closure of the coal mining sector, with a relatively high level of unemployment, high numbers of people living on benefits and low level of education (Colls and Lancaster, 1992). Similarly, Languedoc-Roussillon is one of the poorest regions of France, with an economy essentially based on services for the domestic market and therefore rather impermeable to the effects of global economic competition (Giband, 2005). In political terms, Lombardia is a region traditionally conservative, at the opposite of the North East of England, which has been for long time a stronghold of the Labour Party. A unique coalition of right and left parties ('brothers in arms') characterizes Tampere, while in the Languedoc-Roussillon the long-lasting tradition of the *Midi*

Rouge (Genieys, 1998) has given way recently to more centrist and rightist (National Front) parties. Geographically, the four selected case-studies represent both the North and the South of Western Europe and reflect different attitudes towards the process of European integration, from the positive (Lombardia, Languedoc-Roussillon) to the less positive (Pirkanmaa) or overtly skeptical (North East of England).

In each of these four regions, I conducted four focus groups, with 4-5 participants in each, males and females, aged 18-26 years old. The composition of the groups used education as a 'control characteristic' (Bedford and Burgess, 2001; Knodel, 1993). As such, in each region two groups were formed by participants with a university degree (or in the process of obtaining it) and two groups by participants without a university degree (and not willing to obtain it in the future). The first group of participants was recruited through advertising the research in the universities of the towns where I was based during my field work (Como, Italy; Tampere, Finland; Durham-Newcastle, Britain; Montpellier, France). The second group proved much more difficult to recruit, despite the small monetary incentive which was equally offered to every participant. In this case, a mix of different techniques (posting leaflets in public sites, randomly 'popping-up' in shops and restaurants, and, most effectively, contacting personnel and students of 'professional' or 'vocational' schools) eventually proved successful.

Participants did not have any foreign background and each of them was a native of the selected regions. In some cases participants knew each other, which seemed to ease the discussion, particularly among the less educated participants. Overall, discussions ran smoothly, but it should be noted that in Finland focus groups were conducted by a Finnish colleague, who, despite being briefed about the techniques to

use, intervened rather frequently, preventing in some instances a free flowing discussion.

I also personally conducted about 100 semi-structured individual interviews with 'local elites' - here defined as any person with a political, institutional or social role within the local society. The guideline questions of both focus groups and interviews invited the respondents to mention the 2-3 most important things that came to their minds when they thought of themselves in relation to the four scales of territorial attachment. This expedient has been used as a way to ease the conversation, which could instead have been hampered by a direct question "please tell me what means for you to feel attached to…".

Overall, 185 respondents (108 males, 77 females) took part in this study. On the whole, data quality can be considered good. The fact that the focus groups were formed by people with different socio-demographic characteristics (education, gender, political preference, income, rural/urban place of residence, etc.) allowed for a good variety of opinions. As expected, in the case of lower educated groups, the discussion was not as rich and detailed as in the higher educated ones, which is an indirect confirmation of the good composition of the groups in relation to the adopted 'control characteristic'. This fact, however, can also be due to the younger age of the lower educated participants (median age 20) compared to the higher educated ones (median age 23).

An obvious structural limitation of the focus group data is that they do not cover the regional population as a whole, but only its youngest members. This limitation, however, is partially counterbalanced by the fact that the overwhelming majority of the elite interviewees were adults ranging from 26 to 80 years old. In this case, the fact of interviewing people across the whole spectrum of the political parties

represented in the region provided a good variety of opinions. The only two limitations here relate to the fact that in the North East of England, a stronghold of the Labour Party, only a few Conservative voices were heard, whereas in Finland, where interviews were conducted in English, few people affirmed at the end of the interviews that they did not manage to fully express their thoughts as they wished, due to the language barrier.

Qualitative data were coded following an inductive approach, i.e. codes were not generated on the basis of an *a priori* theory, but on the observation of recurring patterns (Lofland and Lofland, 1995; Silverman, 2004; Weinberg, 2002). During this 'open coding' process, frequencies were created and socio-demographic information about the respondents was also entered into the same spreadsheet. This helped to conceptually organize the materials. Data analysis, however, was not based on a mere 'enumerative' approach (i.e. the counting of frequencies associated with each code), but on what Crang (1997: 188) calls 'analytic induction' – an approach which, echoing the grounded theory method, relies on the iterative process of going back and forth between original data and theoretical concepts in order to reach successively more abstract categorizations (see also Bryant and Charmaz, 2007).

IV. MEANINGS OF EUROPE

On the basis of the analytical approach discussed above, I have categorized the answers of the respondents into two broad categories: 'cultural' and 'functional-utilitarian'. In 'cultural' terms, Europe was defined through referents (e.g. history, traditions, values, etc.) which gave Europe itself a peculiar 'identity of region' (Paasi, 1991). Cultural referents were further categorized into 'national' and 'transnational'

referents – a distinction also used by Beck and Giddens (2006). 'Cultural-national' referents describe Europe by using the same vocabulary employed to define the nation-state and therefore equate Europe with a would-be nation-state. Alternatively, 'cultural-transnational' referents depict Europe as a transnational project, idea or principle, often based on moral values and heralded as a 'normative' model (Manners, 2002) for the rest of the world. In 'functional-utilitarian' terms, Europe is simply conceived as a space which could help the individual and/or the collectivity to which the individual belongs enhance their well-being and welfare.

It should be noted that although the respondents' attitudes towards Europe reflected in each region the national trend measured respectively by quantitative studies (e.g. English respondents appeared to be more Euro-skeptic than the Italians), this regional/national factor did not emerge so clearly in the ways respondents made sense of Europe. This means that national, transnational and utilitarian meanings emerged rather equally across the four regions. This is a relevant finding, as it suggests that, despite the positive or negative attitude that a person might have towards Europe, the ways s/he understands it (i.e. the meanings of Europe) do not seem to vary considerably from region to region. Instead, socio-demographic factors seemed to play a more important role, particularly in relation to the articulation of Europe in transnational terms. In this case, political preference and education emerged as important factors, as left-wing respondents were the most prone to talk of Europe in transnational terms and lower educated respondents more frequently used a 'national' perspective to describe Europe, often in negative terms.

Finally, it should be noted that although respondents were asked to comment on their attachment to 'Europe', an overwhelming majority of them understood this term

to be a synonym of the European Union, which henceforth justifies the use of the term EUrope as a way of capturing this conceptual overlapping.

Cultural Meanings: National

The construction of EUrope in 'cultural-national' terms utilizes a repertoire of referents which clearly echoes the ones used to describe the nation-state. People, language, culture, history, traditions, religion, law, and political institutions were terms often used by respondents to define their (lack of) EUropean attachment. Yet, rather than talking of a commonality of these elements among EUropeans, respondents stressed the richness or the diversity of them. This was thought to make EUrope 'special', unique and shape its 'identity of region' (Paasi, 1991). "*EUropean identity is about diversity* – affirmed a French regional councilor (Socialist Party). *It's to acknowledge that we are all different. We are a multitude of states, with different traditions and cultures… each very respectable. We should preserve them* [stressed], *it's about richness*." The fact that a commonality of cultural traits was acknowledged along with cultural and historical diversities should not be seen as a contradiction. Indeed, both focus group participants and elite interviewees perceived EUrope as a space where both commonality and diversity of values, cultures and history coexist. In other words, as also stressed by other authors (Delanty and Rumford, 2005; Mayer and Palmowski, 2004) and as the EU itself officially acknowledges, 'commonality in diversity' is what makes the 'identity of EUrope'.

In many cases, however, this richness of cultural elements was also said to constitute a major obstacle to the sentiment of EUropean attachment. This negative interpretation, even more than the positive one, clearly relies on a national perspective. Seen through the prism of the nation-state, EUrope was said to lack a

common language, a common culture, and a common history and therefore, the respondents said, it could not trigger a sentiment of attachment or cultural belonging.

The lack of a common language was the issue which mainly captured the attention of focus group participants in particular. As one English participant observed, "*it's pretty hard to be EUropean [with] all these different countries with different languages*". Linguistic diversity is a point widely investigated in the literature (see, for instance, Bellier, 2002 and Lowenthal, 2000), besides being a major issue in the formation of a public discourse conducive to a EUropean collective identity or *demos* (Zürn, 2000). However, the point put forward by the participants was not only related to the lack of a common medium of communication. English today can certainly play this role among many EUropean citizens. Yet, as affirmed by one Italian focus group participant, the ability to communicate in another language does not trigger the same sentiment of cultural belonging as it does when people can speak the same native language:

"*Language still remains something which differentiates, in terms of belonging, those who speak your language from those who don't. Then, if a person is able to speak English and to communicate with others, it's ok. However, your language… I mean there is a greater belonging with those who speak your language*."

From this perspective, the nation as defined by those who speak the same language will always exercise a higher emotional attachment and sense of identity and belonging than a multi-national community. Together with linguistic differences, the lack of a common history was also mentioned to be a major obstacle to the sentiment of EUropean attachment: "*If there is no history* – affirmed a French focus group

participant - *there isn't a cultural belonging. Europe's history it's just about economic treaties! It's too abstract! For me, the important link is common history.*" Similar comments were also heard among the elites: "*Nobody has ever told me –* remarked a Finnish representative of the Center Party - *what does [sic] it mean to be European... some people say that [it is] because we are in the European Union, but I think that's ridiculous: it's only [a] political and economic system, [the] European Union, but it has nothing to do with identity, real identity, it comes from culture and history and those things which are common [in] between.*" In these comments, issues of attachment, contained in the original question, combine with issues of belonging and identity, thus reflecting the blurriness, reproduced also in scholarly studies, which surrounds these concepts. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the last comment highlights the use of identity in an ontological sense ('real identity') – a trait common in other respondents and which justifies here the use of the term 'identity' rather than 'identification'.

Narratives of EUrope based on a national perspective also led to the portrayal of EUrope as a threat to the pre-existing nation-states. This view clearly relies on a 'either/or' logic: either the nation-state will remain or EUrope will take over, homogenizing all national differences (Zürn, 2000: 200). When conceived as a potential nation-state, EUrope generated anxiety among focus group participants - particularly among those less educated, who were also the ones who most feared that their particular identities would disappear, crushed under an all-encompassing European identity. Interestingly, the same 'either/or' logic was also echoed by those participants who were supportive of EUrope, as for instance put by an Italian respondent: "*If we go back in time, I think that one's region - Lombardy, Campania or Sicily - was important. Now this thing has faded away. A person feels more Italian*

than Sicilian [or] Calabrese and I think that for Europe it can be the same thing."
The model of the nation-state is used here to make sense of what EUrope will be.
EUrope will become a sort of new nation-state, whereas the old nation-states will just
transform into regions. Although the participant acknowledges the continuing
existence of national identities, these are reduced to mere regional identities contained
within a new national identity, namely EUropean.

A similar anxiety was also present among the elite interviewees, but in this case it
emerged mainly as a fear of losing national sovereignty and independence. The elite
interviewees often voiced their concerns about a democratic deficit. Ironically, given
the fact that most of the elite interviewees were politicians, these concerns were
articulated in terms of a distance between 'us' (people) and 'them' (Euro-politicians
or Euro-bureaucrats). In other cases, the interviewees mentioned the lack of trust
among different EUropean nationalities (Finnish interviewees, for instance, were
skeptical about the correct functioning of the politico-administrative system in
Brussels) or EUrope's great geographical size. This latter concern, mainly boosted by
the 2004 EU enlargement, was articulated, once again, in terms of a national
perspective: "*people are worried about something which is so big* – affirmed an
English MP (Labour Party) - *and they cannot identify with and so what they identify
with again is the nation-state.*" According to a couple of interviewees, the great size
of EUrope evoked the image of an 'artificial' union of the past, i.e. the Soviet Union,
and prompted the question about the viability of democracy in such a large area – a
question also debated among scholars (Shore, 2004).

Those respondents who expressed a negative or skeptical view in relation to their
attachment to EUrope often affirmed that this positive attachment would instead
characterize their children. As it emerged in the interviews with the elites, though, the

irony of this position is revealed by the fact that when focus group participants (i.e.
the virtual 'children' of the elite interviewees) were asked about their European
attachment, they also frequently projected this attachment onto their children rather
than seeing it as characterizing themselves. In other words, EUrope as a space of
'national' identification and attachment is something that, for the majority of the
respondents, exists more in reference to the future rather than here and now – an
attitude which somehow resonates with the relatively low and unstable attachment
trend seen in the Eurobarometer data.

In all the quotes discussed above, respondents equated EUrope with a would-be
nation-state. Obviously, this triggered sentiments of attachment (or non attachment),
as EUrope was perceived to have (or not have) its own specific identity. In other
words, the definition of EUrope in 'cultural-national' terms created the figure of a
would-be national subject towards which the respondent felt like expressing (or not
expressing, if s/he thought that the 'cultural-national' requisites were missing) some
form of attachment. In this sense, attachment and identity (of EUrope) are mutually
constituted, as that the former is triggered by the existence of the latter, which in turn
is reinforced by the presence of attachment. Thus, the existence of EUrope both as an
identity subject and a source of identity for the individual generates feelings of
attachment, which in turn strengthen EUrope's identity.

Yet, it would be misleading to exclusively associate attachment to a notion of
EUrope defined in 'cultural-national' terms alone, as respondents also expressed their
attachment in connection with a transnational EUrope. Moreover, from a scholarly
point of view, focusing on this perspective alone would generate involuntary
normative effects, as it would constrain the complexity of EUrope as a social, political
and economic space within the ontological grid of the nation-state. This is exactly the

conceptual error that Agnew (1994) has labeled 'territorial trap' and that students of

nationalism calls 'methodological nationalism' (Chernilo, 2006), as social scientists

forget to consider that the nation-state is a historical product and should not be taken

for granted as a fixed unit of territorial sovereignty and an exclusive container of

society.

Cultural Meanings: Transnational

Along with culture, history, and traditions, common values were also mentioned

by the respondents. EUrope was described as a space of democracy, tolerance,

humanism, and protection of human rights. These values clearly have a cosmopolitan

or transnational character (Rumford, 2003; Beck and Giddens, 2006). They can be a

source of identification for many people, despite their national background.

Theoretically, however, the distinction between 'national' and 'transnational' should

be taken with caution. On the one hand, students of nationalism might indeed consider

these universal values as an expression of civic nationalism, i.e. a form of national

identity which relies on political rather than cultural values (Smith, 1995). This being

the case, transnational narratives about EUrope would not constitute an analytical

category per se, but they would reproduce the 'national' perspective seen above. On

the other hand, the same students of nationalism might also underline that *civicness* is

a 'culture' in itself, being the product of a specific people living in a specific region

(Smith, 1995; Yack, 1996). In this sense, EUrope as a transnational space would not

be truly… transnational, since these values would remain attached to a specific socio-

cultural space and, as such, they could potentially be perceived as 'foreign' by someone who does not belong to that space, whether defined in national terms or not.

Although theoretically blurred, the distinction between 'national' and 'transnational' is justified here on the basis of the different ways in which the respondents talked about EUrope. Respondents indeed referred to EUrope as both a would-be nation-state and as something else: a project or an idea beyond the nation-state, filled with transnational, universal principles. Consequently, in this latter case EUrope assumes the contours of a post-national space, even though the separation between the cultural and the political is here not as clearly demarcated as in the narration of EUrope as a functional-utilitarian space (see below).

The attachment to EUrope in transnational terms was expressed, especially by focus group participants, in form of a normative signifier rather than an actual socio-geographical space. Some participants talked about EUrope as an antidote against nationalism and as a space which has the duty to help foreign countries trapped in poverty. In both cases, EUrope was said to stand for a moral guiding principle in the conduct of international affairs rather than a particular territory or institution. This normative or 'metaphysical' dimension of EUrope emerges rather clearly in the following account of a Finnish focus group participant: "*The European countries are based on geography and Europe shouldn't necessarily be a geographical region. Europe could be more like a unifying way of thinking than some certain geographical region.*" From this perspective, EUrope is not a physical, bounded space, but an idea or a project which transcends the nation-state. It embodies the universality of principles against the particularism of the nation-state. From this transnational perspective, as the focus group participants explicitly affirmed, EUrope does no longer constitute a threat to the nation-state, since EUrope stands for something other

than the nation-state. In this case, as Soysal (2002: 281) states, the transnational (the universality of principles embodied by EUrope) is read as integral to the structuring of the national.

This transnational perspective emerged even more frequently among the elite interviewees, particularly among those with left-wing political views. In this case, the reference to the universal values symbolized by EUrope was used to stress EUrope's exemplary role for the rest of the world. EUrope was heralded as both a sort of champion of human rights and a laboratory for a globalization alternative to the one promoted by neo-liberal policies.

> "*[...] And then, I don't know* – observed an Italian local leader of the left-wing party PDS - *also in relation to a global role of EUrope, I would like that it would prevail that EUrope which has been successful in the construction of a democratic culture, a culture of rights – obviously an imperfect one, with many limits – but, anyhow, I think that this culture of rights, of social justice has been successful, if we look at other parts of the world.*"

A similar opinion was also shared by another Italian interviewee, a high-level representative of the Chamber of Commerce in Como, Lombardia:

> "*I think that in this context, EUrope has a special role in history, since it can work as a laboratory for other continents. For instance, China, the Chinese explosion of these past decades... but if in 20-30 years they keep going along the same path they will encounter all the problems of Western societies, maybe even*

multiplied [...]. EUrope as a laboratory for the resolution of these problems can be an extraordinary example for this world."

Those interviewees who shared a transnational perspective often pointed to the role of Europe in shaping a different globalization, one which could serve the needs of individuals rather than the interests of (global) capital. This position, although heard across all the four regional case-studies, largely characterized the individual interviews in France. In the words of a Green Party's regional councilor, EUrope was defined as "*a tool to make a different globalization, more human, more social, more peaceful, and aimed at solving conflicts without war.*" Not surprisingly, given the results on the French referendum on the Treaty for a European Constitution (May, 2005), in which the extreme wings of the political spectrum converged in a common rejection of the perceived hyper-liberalism of the EU's agenda, the demand for a social EUrope was also voiced by politically far-right interviewees. In this case, however, the demand was not exactly for an alternative globalization, rather for a protectionism which could stop global competition: "*Europe can be a rampart against globalization, whereas in reality, it has abolished all defenses which could exist* – commented a representative of the National Front in Languedoc-Roussillon. *It does not compete against large blocks like America, and also China, Japan, etc… It's more globalist than the globalists and that's why we don't like this Europe.*"

In relation to EUrope as both a champion of human rights and a laboratory for an alternative globalization, the respondents explicitly referred to the United States as EUrope's main antagonist. Contrary to those authors who suggest that the US is EUrope's Other only in economic terms (Soysal, 2002: 274-5), the respondents – both focus group participants and elite interviewees – clearly incorporated a cultural

dimension in their 'othering' narratives (a confirmation of this result also emerges in an earlier survey – see OPTEM, 2001). The identity of EUrope was constructed against the strangeness of the US in terms of cultural values and mentality, historical referents (e.g. the 'ancient' characters of EUropean cities and traditions versus the new, 'modern' American townscape), the politico-economic system (US laissez-faire versus EUropean social democracy), and conduct in foreign policy (US military interventions versus EUropean diplomacy). This last point was highly debated by respondents, certainly being prompted by the recent war waged by the US against Iraq. "*I personally would love to see a strong EUrope as a political entity to be a counter-balance against America*", affirmed a local politician (Liberal-Democrat Party) in the North East of England. A similar comment was put forward by a French Euro MP (Socialist Party):

> "*The US should not be the only police in the world. EUrope should take its responsibility. If we don't want that tomorrow this planet explodes in a conflict between the Americans, the Chinese, the Indians or others - which is possible in 10 or 15 years time - EUrope has to have a defense system and competencies.*"

This idea of EUrope as a counter-balance to the US and as a champion of human rights is today the major common 'EUtopia' (Nicolaïdis and Howse, 2002) among many left-wing intellectuals on both shores of the Atlantic (see Balibar, 2003). Yet, this discourse which implicitly heralds the superior moral and normative standpoint of EUrope in regard to the rest of the world (Therborn, 2002; see also Mikkeli, 1998) has been criticized from both the right and the left. From the right, Robert Kagan (2002) has pointed out that EUrope can live in a 'post-historical' Kantian world of perpetual

peace because the US still lives in the historical Hobbesian world of brute force and protects EUrope militarily. From the left, critiques have been made in relation to the blindness of EUrope towards its colonial and imperialist past, its normative and disciplinizing approach in international relations (e.g. the case of Turkey's EU membership), its hypocritical treatment of ethnic minorities (e.g. the *Maghrebins* in France), its protectionism in trade relations (EU agricultural subsidies), or its recently mounting anti-immigration policies. According, for instance, to Amin (2004), the risk of this 'enlightened' EUrope is to generate a 'dangerous' divide between a space of progress and superiority on the one hand and the rest of the world on the other hand. This type of EUrope would contain the seeds of a new moral, civilizational, if not even racial superiority (Alibhai-Brown, 1998; Lutz, 1997), reproducing an orientalist and supremacist ideology which already characterized Europe's past (Shore, 1996: 485 – see also Diez, 2005).

Not conceived as competing with the nation-state, but as enhancing its civic dimension and turning this into an enlightening and civilizational mission, the transnational notion of EUrope also triggered a sense of attachment among some participants, which, however, was voiced less frequently than the attachment (or lack of attachment) manifested in relation to a 'cultural-national' EUrope.

Functional-utilitarian meanings

Besides a national and a transnational perspective, respondents mentioned referents which could be categorized as functional-utilitarian. From this perspective, EUrope appears to be functional to the individual well-being of the respondent or the

society (often the nation) to which the respondent belongs. Individually, the benefits associated with EUrope mainly concerned mobility (e.g. ease of traveling, studying or living in another country) and the use of the same currency (Euro). Socially, the benefits were essentially said to be economic: EUrope can compete better on the global market than the nation-state can.

As mentioned above, the utilitarian dimension has been suggested by Gabel (1998) as the main factor which statistically explains support for EUrope. Simply put, if an individual perceives to have a personal gain from the functioning of the EU, s/he will support it. Although in the present study the evidence is only qualitative, it is interesting to observe that respondents tied their pro-EUropean attitude not only to a personal utilitarian factor, but also to a social one. In other words, positive EUropean feelings were related to the perceived benefits that the society to which the respondent belonged could obtain from EUrope. Interestingly, a confirmation of both personal (e.g. "the ability to go wherever I want in Europe") and social (e.g. "a means of improving the economic situation in Europe") utilitarian dimensions clearly emerges from Eurobarometer surveys as well (see
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/cf/subquestion_en.cfm).

The elite interviewees, in particular, stressed the idea of EUrope as a functional space which can help the nation-state to remain an effective player in the global competition. EUrope, with its critical mass, was indeed said to be the only viable tool to compete successfully against other major world economies, especially the US and Asia (i.e. China). The coming together of the EUropean countries was therefore not justified, as seen above, on the basis of some cultural (national or transnational) dimension, but on utilitarian reasons – as a way to fight global economic competition. As a representative of the Confederation of Finnish Industries stated, "*if we think that*

there is Asia, [and] the US, maybe there should be Europe as one". Similarly, a Labour councilor from County Durham in the North East of England affirmed: "*we are gonna be kicked off, if you like, if we are not strong... strong, in Europe, pan-European... political and economic clout... we are gonna be kicked off. It's a matter of need and anything else.*" These narratives, which reproduce what Weiss (2002) has named 'globalization rhetoric' – a rhetoric which finds the rationale for the existence of EUrope somewhere outside EUrope itself - are not associated with any explicit cultural dimension. EUrope is not a cultural, but a functional-utilitarian space that helps people to defend their (national) welfares.

Besides being seen as an answer to globalization, the social 'utility' of EUrope was also described by respondents with regards to specific national issues. For the Italian interviewees, EUrope could serve as a corrective to the mismanagement of the Italian state and as an incentive to ameliorate things in general – an attitude which can explain the high level of EUropean support among Italians (Kosic, 2003). For the English interviewees, EUrope played three major roles: a catalyst in the social and regional transformation of British society; a defender of British economic interests in the world; and, in the words of an anonymous civic officer, "*a milk cow [that] we can use to bring more public money*". For the Finnish interviewees, EUrope had encouraged the 'opening' of the Finnish society to cultural diversity and helped Finland to distance itself from Russia, guaranteeing that Finnish identity is not confused with an 'Eastern', i.e. 'non-EUropean' dimension (see also Arter, 1995; Tiilikainen, 1997; Moisio, 2008). Finally, for the French interviewees, EUrope, besides offering an economic advantage, particularly in terms of protecting French farmers against global competition, also offered the possibility of keeping alive the memory of France's past *grandeur*, as clearly stated by a local leader of the Radical

Party 'valoisien': "*Three centuries ago, France was still a great global country... so if we want to spread our philosophical values worldwide, France should find a bigger agglomerate and that agglomerate is EUrope.*"

In personal utilitarian terms, many respondents mentioned freedom of travel as the major advantage of EUrope. Interestingly enough, focus group participants spontaneously discussed whether traveling and being exposed to other EUropean cultures would trigger a sentiment of EUropean attachment. The majority of them thought that travel *per se* does not bring about this sentiment. Becoming acquainted with other EUropean people and places was not generally perceived as a factor which could trigger a sentiment of EUropean 'we' feeling. This seems to depend on the personal character of the respondent and her/his sense of 'openness' rather than on the act of traveling and getting to know people and places *per se* (on this point, see also Etzioni, 2007: 35).

More relevant to the purpose of this study, however, is the fact that both focus group participants and elite interviewees acknowledged the absence of any significant emotional attachment and sense of identification associated with a EUrope narrated as a functional-utilitarian space. This point can best be captured by the following account of an English focus group participant:

> "*Europe to me is… it's a bit like the GB, UK thing to me, they're kind of… not so much to do with culture and identity, they're political things, they're to do with money and economy and managing people and Europe has recently just incorporated a whole lot of new countries […]. I don't actually feel European, I just want to reap the benefits from being a European citizen […]. With modern, like, Western, capitalist kind of society and culture I think that kind of umbrella*

hierarchy, structure is basically necessary to govern and manage those aspects of life but then I want to keep, because that's all very personal, I want to keep cultural identity close to me, have it personal, have it meaningful."

EUrope is seen as a space which protects the rights of the individual and enhances his/her well-being. It is a necessary political and economic overarching dimension in the 'modern' age, i.e. in the age of globalization. Yet, it triggers neither a sentiment of emotional attachment, nor a sense of identity. This distinction between function and attachment/identity echoes the reflection initiated by Habermas (2001) on the distinction between a 'political' and a 'cultural' sphere. In contrast to the nation-state, where the 'political' (the functions of the state) and the 'cultural' (the sentiment of collective identity) have traditionally coincided, in the case of EUrope there seems to be a separation between the two – a feature which has been said to characterize the post-national era (Hedetoft and Hjort, 2000: xvi; Zürn, 2000: 188). Respondents, in fact, accept that EUrope carries out certain political, social and economic functions, but they keep their collective identity firmly attached to a narrower geographical scale (national, regional or local):

"*I am a bit EUropean* – affirmed a representative of the Finnish trade union SAK.

M.A.: *Oh, you feel European*

I am a bit… but we don't need any European identity… I am Finnish in Europe. Many of my colleagues they are from Belgium and Netherlands… they are… they say: 'we need EUropean, we need to be European', but I am a bit [skeptical] we are Finnish in the European Union, that's it.

M.A.: *What does it mean that 'bit' – a bit European?*

As I said, I can see some 'positivities' for European solutions

M.A.: *So this is why you consider yourself European*

That's right

M.A.: *It is not culturally...*

No...

M.A.: *Culturally you are Finns...*

Yes. W*e don't need any so called EUropean identity... in cultural meaning... we don't need*

The above interviewee sees, in rational, utilitarian terms, the positive aspects of EUrope as a politico-economic space and accepts defining himself as a member of this space. This belonging, though, is expressed in political rather than cultural terms. There is no clear sense of attachment here, as this functional EUrope is not seen as a source of identity. It is exactly this lack of identity, of emotional dimension associated with the notion of EUrope as a functional space, which was lamented by those respondents who privileged a 'national' perspective:

"*[Identity] is necessary* - observed a leader of the French far right-wing party National Front - *because we are made of flesh and blood and it is necessary that together with advantages, however illusive... the heart has to function at the same time with the mind.*"

Similar considerations were also made by another populist right-wing political representative, in the North East of England:

"*If people were computers I would then go for the European Union and get rid of the nation-states, but people are nationalistic, we are not computers, we are emotional things that make decisions based on... [...] people are not logical, we are animals, and instincts that drive in certain directions.*"

This 'national' perspective rejects the idea that EUropean belonging can only be based on personal or social utilitarian interests, as it needs some deep cultural elements, which in turn elicit those instinctual, primordial passions which only can cement a community as… a 'national' community.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Among the various forms of territorial attachment which have been periodically surveyed by Eurobarometer, European attachment shows the highest variation across time and the least emotional involvement. As a way of capturing the meanings associated with this particular form of territorial attachment, a qualitative analysis, conducted in four regional case-studies, has allowed me to understand EUropean attachment in relation to three different notions of EUrope: cultural-national, cultural-transnational, and functional-utilitarian (see Fig. 3). It is important to note that the three ways of narrating EUrope do not exist as separated categories, but as narratives which the same respondent can activate under different circumstances. This opens up space for a further study on the ways in which these narratives can be connected

among them and on the circumstances which privilege the activation of one narrative over the others.

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INSERT FIG. 3 ABOUT HERE

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'Cultural-national' referents narrate EUrope through the same vocabulary used to understand the nation-state and reproduce the same isomorphism between the political (territory) and the cultural (identity) which has traditionally characterized, at least in theory, the nation-state (Appadurai, 1996; Hedetoft and Hjort, 2000). Not surprisingly, therefore, many respondents who adopted this perspective claimed to have a negative attachment to EUrope. EUrope, indeed, as also suggested by scholars who implicitly champion this national perspective (Mann, 1998; Smith, 1995), lacks a common language, a common *ethnie*, and common myths. In a few other cases, however, this same perspective was adopted by respondents to describe their positive attachment to EUrope. Here, either respondents acknowledged the commonality of some cultural referents (e.g., history, traditions, religion, etc.) or they maintained that the uniqueness of the EUropean culture was based on a multitude of national and regional cultures: 'unity in diversity'.

'Cultural-transnational' referents depict EUrope as a universal project, idea, or principle, presented as a normative model for the rest of the world: a model for 'another' globalization, more social and less driven by economic neo-liberalism, and a champion of humanitarianism and international peace around the world (see also Bruter, 2004 for similar findings). What is important is that, whether narrated in

'national' or 'transnational' terms, EUrope acquires an 'identity of region' (Paasi, 1991), which potentially triggers a sentiment of attachment and identification among people. This seems to confirm that the notion of attachment is closely related to one of identity, in the sense that any socio-cultural space perceived as a source of identity also generates a form of attachment, i.e. an emotional feeling, which can therefore be used as a proxy for detecting a sense of identity. In this sense, attachment, identity, and emotion are closely interconnected and seem to mutually reinforce each other.

A different interpretation applies to the narration of EUrope in 'functional-utilitarian' terms. In this case, EUrope is simply conceived as a space which could help both the individual ('personal') and the collectivity to which the individual belongs ('social') to enhance their welfare. When narrated in these terms, EUrope no longer matters as a subject endowed with certain 'national' features or 'transnational' values, i.e. with certain cultural traits, but as a politico-economic institution that can deliver economic and social welfare. This EUrope hardly triggers any sort of attachment or identity. The absence of cultural elements which can transform EUrope into a source of identity for the individual explains the absence of attachment, i.e. of emotional commitment. On the contrary, what seems to exist is a sentiment of political belonging, which, from the answers of the respondents, can be defined as the rational commitment of a person to belong to a politico-economic space irrespectively of a sentiment of identification with and attachment to this space. This form of belonging was motivated by the respondents with a rational appraisal of their individual and/or collective interests.

This finding does not negate the structural link between politics, identity, and interests put forward, for instance, by Ringmar (1996 – quoted in Moisio, 2008). In fact, people's attitudes towards the EU can certainly be motivated by an emotional

need to defend their identity. Yet, in the case of EUrope, the identity at stake is not EUropean, but national. It is as a Finn, not as a EUropean that the respondent declares his/her belonging to EUrope, since this latter is perceived as beneficial to his/her interest, i.e. to the interest of reproducing his/her being Finnish.

The existence of political belonging in the absence of a sentiment of common identity means that EUrope today can also be described as a post-national space, one which overcomes the ideological isomorphism between the cultural and the political on which the nation-state has legitimized its existence (Shore, 2004: 29; Zürn, 2000:188). In this regard, the major point of debate is whether a politico-institutional space which is not associated with a *demos* can support a sound and stable democracy (Cederman, 2001). It can be true that, as some supporters of the post-national idea maintain, this identity will be generated ex-post, through the mere functioning of the EUropean institutions (Kohli, 2000). Some scholars also suggest that a sense of collective identity can simply be generated from the efficient functioning of a political system (Kritzinger, 2005). Yet, in both cases, EUrope would then transform back from a post-national into a national space, either civic or ethnic. Other post-national authors, however, do not consider as relevant at all the existence of a sense of collective identity to support a democracy and its redistributive policies (Føllesdal, 2000 – see also Kaelberer, 2004).

On the basis of the accounts of the respondents in this study, what can be pragmatically concluded is that when analyzed through the perspective of attachment, EUrope emerges as the product of a plurality of voices. Therefore, if the question is about popular support for EUrope, it would be misleading to espouse exclusively a 'national' approach, which maintains that in the absence of a collective sense of identity, there is neither room nor legitimacy for a stable and democratic polity.

Empirical evidence in this article suggests that positive attitudes towards EUrope can also be generated by reasons other than emotional attachment or identification. This point seems in line with the most recent attempts to capture the nature of EUrope following a post-Westphalian discourse (Zielonka, 2006). From this perspective, as EUrope would not be governed by a single political institution similarly it would also not be characterized by a single pan-European identity. Its legitimacy would consequently not be based on feelings of affection and trust which would spring out of a common identity, but on a plurality of sources spanning from multiple (national) identities to new forms of political participations, representations and accountability (Ibid: 182). However limited in scope, the empirical evidence discussed in this article seems to confirm this argument.

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