My Home is my Identity - Effects of a threatened regional identity

Jacqueline Große & Uta Wiederhold

Theoretical Background

Proposed is a new theoretical concept of regional identification on the background of social identity approach (Social Identity Theory (SIT), Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Self-Categorization Theory, Turner 1987). The main idea is to specify regional identity not exclusively by territorial definition like residence but as a shared group membership which refers to processes of intergroup differentiation. Cognitions and evaluations about the region and social relationships create the regional identity (Lilli, 1994).

Regional identity is considered an important social category and assumptions about social identity should apply to regional identity as well. In case of a threatened or negative regional identity, people should use certain strategies (according to SIT) to maintain a positive self concept and positive self-esteem respectively. Strategies could be individual mobility (leaving or distancing from the group), social creativity (changing of relevant evaluation dimensions) or social competition.

Hypotheses

People who have a threatened regional identity will more likely
• distance themselves from the group
• change relevant evaluation dimensions (dimensions on which the outgroup performs well will be devaluated, dimensions on which the ingroup performs well will be enhanced)
than people without a threatened regional identity.

Method

To prove the hypotheses an online experiment was conducted. It took place in spring 2008 at University of Technology Dresden. The referred region in the study was Dresden. The online questionnaire contained several sections:

1. Regional Identity Scale – 15 items measuring regional identity
2. Threat manipulation: negative feedback about the social behaviour of Dresdner citizens
3. Similarity judgements of the ingroup (to measure distancing from the region)
4. Importance ratings concerning dimensions of the city

Sample

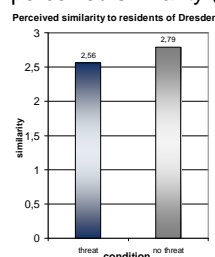|	
N	352
Age	Ø 26,7 years
Gender	♀234, ♂ 118
Duration of residency	Ø 11,8 years
Place of birth	97 in Dresden, 255 elsewhere

Results

Regional identity scale

Cronsbachs $\alpha = .93$
Concerning the regional identification there was found no effect of gender but effects of duration of residency, age, place of birth, place where partner lives and number of children. Identification increases with duration of residency (p <. 001) and age (p < .01). Furthermore subjects identified stronger with the region if they were born in Dresden (p <. 001), if they had children there (p = .012) and if the partner lived in town (p = .021).
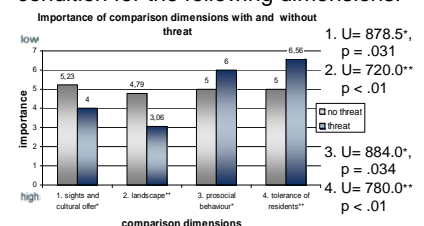
Similarity judgements

There has been found a significant effect of threatened regional identity for perceived similarity (F = 8.337**, p < .01).

Perceived similarity to residents of Dresden

The experimental group (threat condition) felt less similar to citizens of Dresden than the control group (no threat condition), but the effects have been small.

Importance ratings

Only for subsample of subjects born in Dresden significant differences were found between threat and no threat condition for the following dimensions:

Importance of comparison dimensions with and without threat

1. U= 878.5*, p = .031
2. U= 720.0** p < .01
3. U= 884.0*, p = .034
4. U= 780.0** p < .01

Discussion

Results show that regional identity is correlated with duration of residency, place of birth and number of social relationships. Social contacts are an important factor of a stronger identification with the region, proving that regional identity is a social identity. Effects of threatened regional identity also account for this assumption. Strategies of negative social identity are used like distancing from the ingroup and changing of relevant evaluation dimensions. Dimensions on which the outgroup performs well (prosocial behaviour) are devaluated and not feedback relevant dimensions (city characteristics) are enhanced. The strategy of changing dimensions was found only for the subsample of born Dresdners. Therefore further studies with focus on such groups will be necessary.

References

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