

LECTURE 3

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM AND A EUROPEAN UNION IDENTITY

- 2 perspectives about the way in which identity is produced are :

1) ESSENTIALIST

2) CONSTRUCTIVIST

1) ESSENTIALISM

- is an approach that believes in and looks for the 'essence', or 'true core', of objects, values, identities and cultures
- there are essential core values and beliefs, essential cultural characteristics, and essential aspects of a way of life that make Czechs identify themselves as Czechs
 - that make British people identify themselves as British
 - or French as French, etc.

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2) *CONSTRUCTIVISM*

- for Constructivists identities should not be seen as ‘fixed’ or static but instead they should be understood as a process of ‘becoming’ within which they are continually mediated and influenced by other factors, built up – for example, socially – or constructed.
- for Constructivists identity is fluid, often changing, and is shaped by social factors such as language, institutions and different types of power.
- for Constructivists identity can be, and constantly is, *CONSTRUCTED*
 - and *RECONSTRUCTED*
- usually what most influences and shapes these changes in identity, and identity itself, for Constructivists are social factors and social elements
 - identity is primarily ‘socially constructed’
- ‘constructivists’ repeatedly insist that constructivism is NOT A THEORY at all,
 - but rather they insist it is an
ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

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- The remainder of the lecture will therefore:
 - firstly, look a little more at Constructivism – as a framework for analysing just how identity develops
 - and finally, try and relate such a framework to the possible future construction of a European Union identity within EU citizens
 - assess how useful it might be in that process

- So, **CONSTRUCTIVISM**

- For constructivists, social interaction within social and political units (usually States) gives us our identity and in turn our ‘interests’ (our own way of living)
- the society (and State) in which we live constructs our identity
 - our identity as knowledgeable social and political citizens of that society
- the way the society (and State) in which we live constructs our identity is through rituals, symbols, norms and rules
- Our identity as citizens is ‘constructed’ every day by the social determinants of our actions

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- for Constructivists *SOCIAL DETERMINANTS* are a key element in producing, shaping, and determining identity
- Constructivism is based upon the concept of ***IDEATIONAL SOCIALISATION***
- Constructivism holds that people make society, and that society makes people
 - it is an interactive, in many ways circular process
 - a continuous, two way process
- what links the two things together – the two processes together – are rules, norms and values
 - they (*social rules*) condition the process by which society makes people and by which people make society
- constructivists argue that:
 - ideas (ideology?) shape institutions
 - those (structural) institutions in turn promote rules, values, beliefs, norms and practices which produce collective ‘identity’ (way of life citizens identify with)
 - so, ‘ideas’ about ‘identity’ matter – they have structural characteristics through State and societal institutions - and those ‘ideas’ interact with the individual citizen’s social material experiences (***IDEATIONAL SOCIALISATION***)