Ulrich Schmidt-Denter

Patterns of national identity in cross-cultural comparison
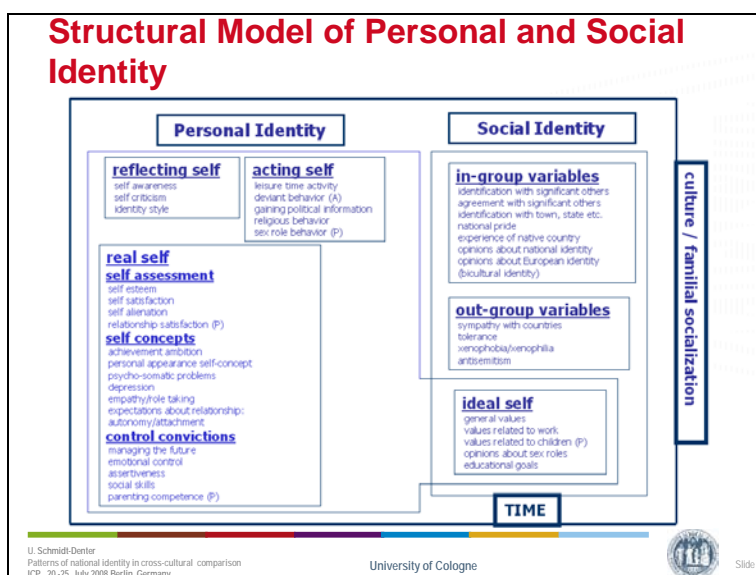

The data that I would like to present in my contribution are part of a larger cross-cultural research project, named "Personal and social identity in the context of globalization and national differentiation".


It is a questionnaire study designed to assess different dimensions of identity of European adolescents and their parents. The project's

theoretical base is a structural model of personal and social identity. Given the limited time frame, I will only mention the model without further elaboration.

Based on this model, we derived a number of research questions pertaining to the fields of developmental and educational psychology as well as cross-cultural psychology. Today, I will focus on one particular culturally comparative research question.
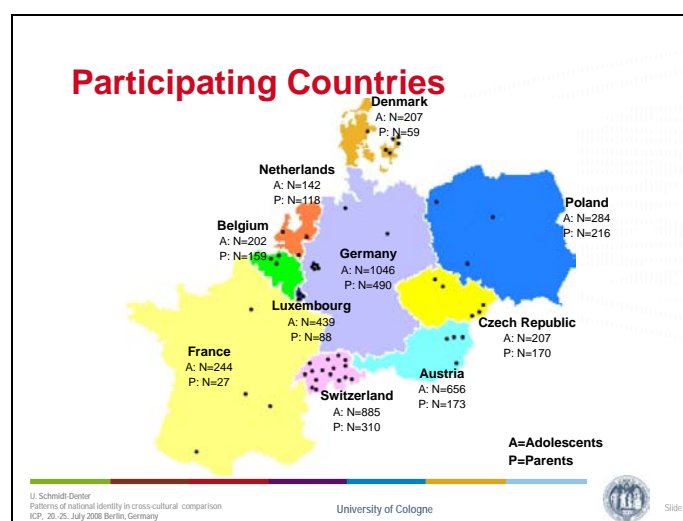
The study includes ten European countries. The samples were first drawn in Germany and then in all its neighbouring countries. In sum we investigated 4312 adolescents, aged 13 – 19 years old, and their parents (N = 1810).

One key idea of the project is that since the last decades two contradicting trends can be observed in many European countries. On one hand, there is an increasing European unification, globalization and immigration – on the other hand there is a return and revitalisation of strong national and regional identities.

Contradicting Trends in European Countries:

- Increasing European unification, globalization, immigration
  vs.
- Return of strong national and regional identities

(Esses, V. M. et al., 2005)

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How the tension between these mutually contradictory trends can be resolved, might be - as Esses et al. (2005) state - one of the most important questions of the 21st century.

So one research question of the project concerns the nationally specific identity constructions under the influence of these contradicting trends of an increased openness towards foreigners and the foreign on the one hand and the innate need for familiarity and social affiliation on the other hand.

Social Identity Theory:

Negative reciprocity in ingroup-outgroup diffentiation?

(Tajfel, H.,1981, 1982; Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C., 1986)

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In accordance with Tajfel's influential social identity theory, a lot of research in social psychology about ingroup-outgroup-differentiation starts from the assumption that attitudes towards a person's ingroup and outgroup are characterized in terms of a negative reciprocity. Ingroup preference appears to inevitably entail outgroup devaluation. The whole system seems to be a zero-sum game: Attachment and positive affect towards ingroup members may only be established at the expense of an increased distance and negative affect towards outgroup members.

This would not only constitute a tragical tradeoff but is also contradicted by a number of findings from research on attachment theory, family psychology, clinical psychology as well as studies on bicultural identity. Instead of the reciprocal patterns, most of these studies yield results indicating patterns of generalized attachment.
Furthermore, the model of negative reciprocity has not remained uncontested within the field of social psychology either. On the contrary, there are research results indicating that this supposed negative reciprocity is in fact not inevitable, as shown by Brewer (1999) or in the so-called nationalism-patriotism-debate.

Negative reciprocity not inevitable.

(Brewer, M. B., 1999, 2001)

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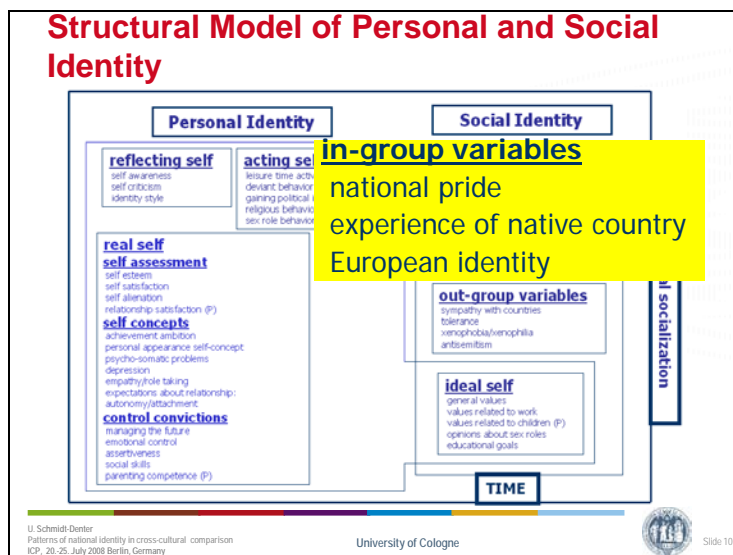
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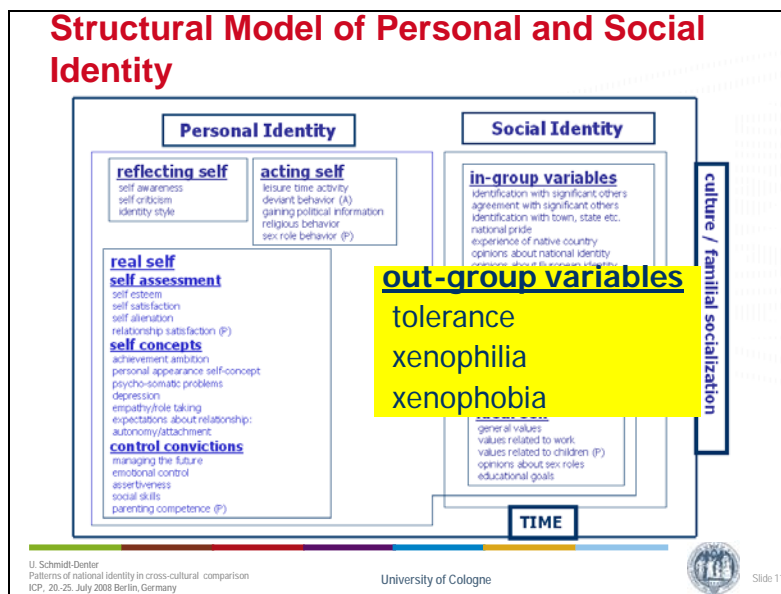
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Nationalism-Patriotism-Debate

Berry, J. & Kalin, R. (1995).
Blank, T. & Schmidt, P. (1993, 2003).
Esses, V. M. & Maio, G. R. (2002).
Feshbach, S. (1991, 1994).
Feshbach, S. & Sakano, N. (1997).
Huddy, L. & Khatib, N. (2007).
Karasawa, M. (2002).
Kostermann, R. & Feshbach, S. (1989).
Maddens, B., Billiet, J. & Beerten, R. (2000).
Mummendy, A., Klink, A. & Brown, R. (2001).

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Our approach to the problem includes the assessment of the individual profiles of different dimensions of identity related to both one´s own reference group and the others. In line with Tajfel, our structural model of identity distinguishes between ingroup and outgroup variables.

**Structural Model of Personal and Social Identity**

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The ingroup variables include "national pride", "experience of native country", and "European identification". The outgroup variables comprise "tolerance", "xenophilia", and "xenophobia". The structures resulting from the combination of these two groups of variables were investigated. Specific focus was set on the question of whether they necessarily stand in a contradictory relation or whether a high ingroup identification may also be accompanied by a high degree of tolerance and openness towards outgroups.

Hierarchical cluster analyses using Ward's method were conducted. This empirical classification is explorative in nature and was done without any restrictions in terms of a predefined structure or the number of clusters.

For the German teenagers, a 4 cluster-solution provided the best fit to the data in terms of maximally homogeneous groups.
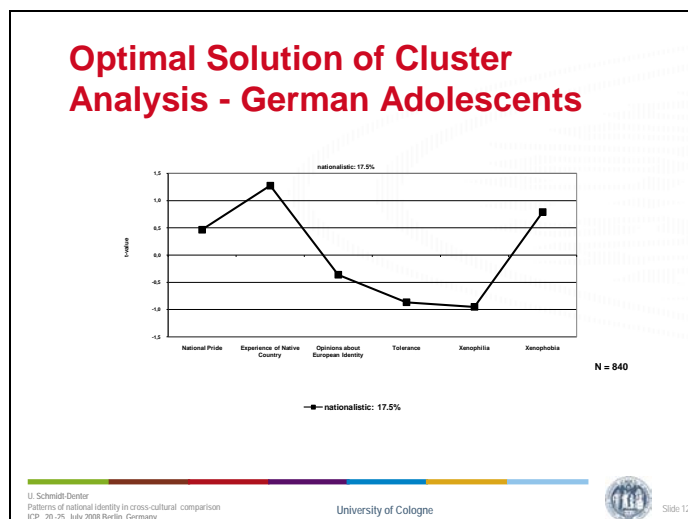
Within the first cluster the variables of "national pride", "experience of native country", and "xenophobia" were overrepresented whereas the variables of "European identity", "tolerance", and "xenophilia" were underrepresented. We refer to this group as the nationalistic type.
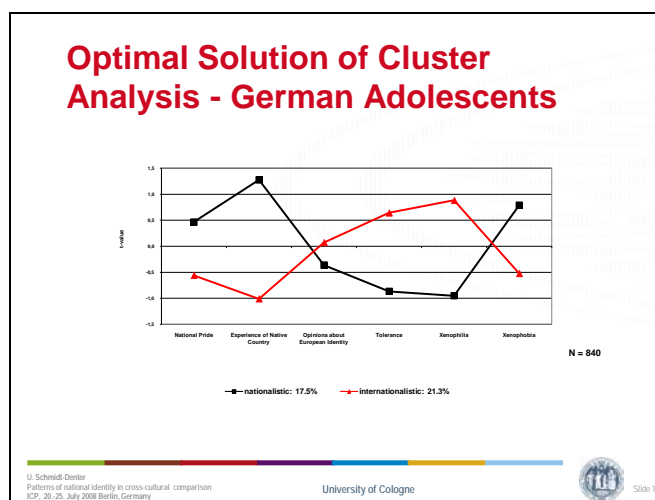
The second cluster displays the mirror-inverted pattern compared to the nationalistic type. Teenagers assigned to cluster 2 exhibit a low degree of national pride, show only a weak identification with Germany but can in turn be distinguished by their above-average levels of tolerance and xenophilia. This cluster may be characterized as the internationalistic type.
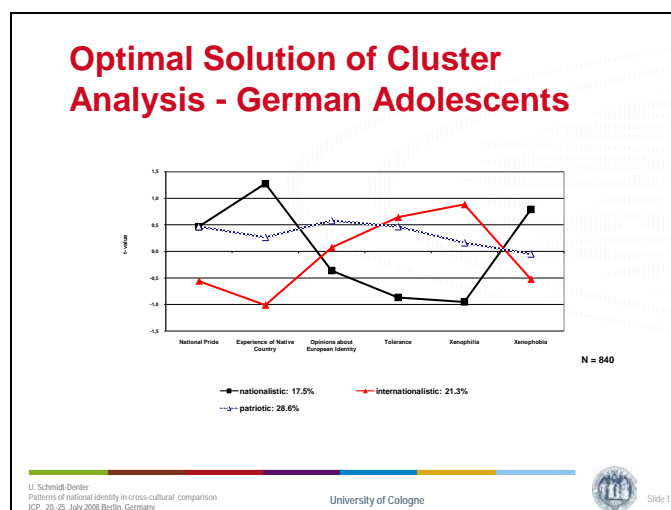
A third cluster is marked by a different combination of the relevant variables. It combines a positive attitude toward one's own ingroup including both Germany and the European Union with high degrees of tolerance and moderate degrees of xenophilia and xenophobia. Consistent with the existing terminology, we called this cluster the patriotic type.
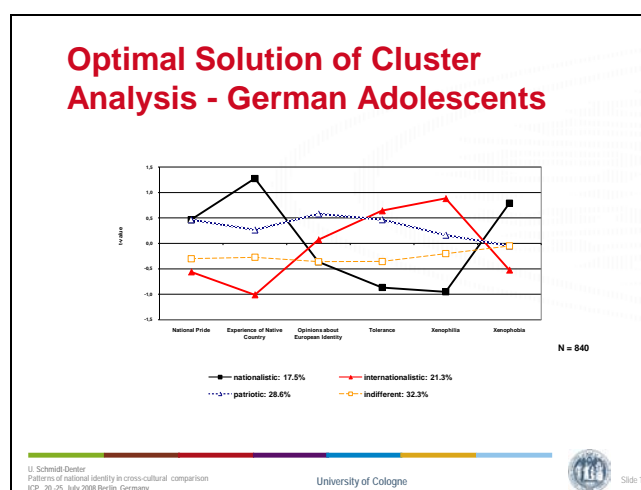
Last but not least, the cluster analysis yielded one group of teenagers which displayed an overall low level of identification and a lack of a pronounced profile. We called this group the indifferent type.

The discriminant analysis affirmed that all variables significantly discriminate the four groups. However, the variable with the highest discriminating power is the "experience of native country". The German teenagers differ most strongly with regard to their relation to their own nation.

Having obtained the described classification, the next question concerns the external validity of the classification. In a first step, we were interested in whether or not the described pattern may be generalized to the generation of the German parents.
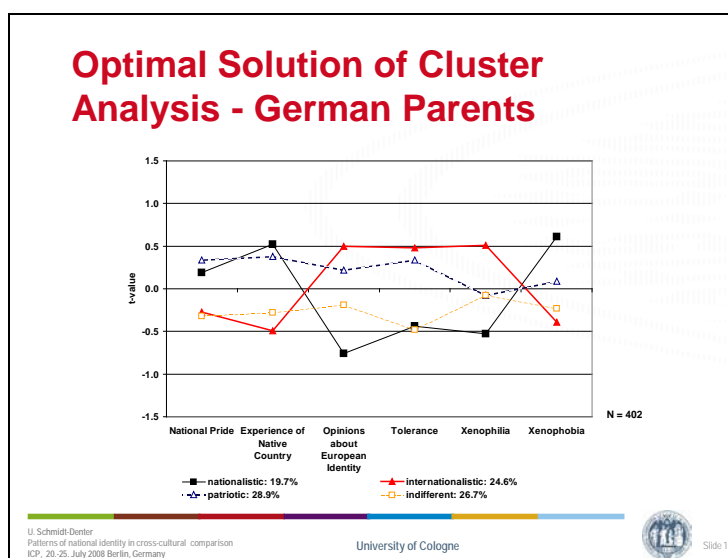

As we can see the same 4 cluster-solution proved to be optimal.

In a subsequent step, we tested the generalizability of the obtained classification for the adolescents from the other European countries. Results for the different countries are presented in an order of assumed similarity. First, German-speaking countries are discussed, followed by western-European, "old" EU-member states before the presentation of results closes with the former socialist, "new" EU-member states.
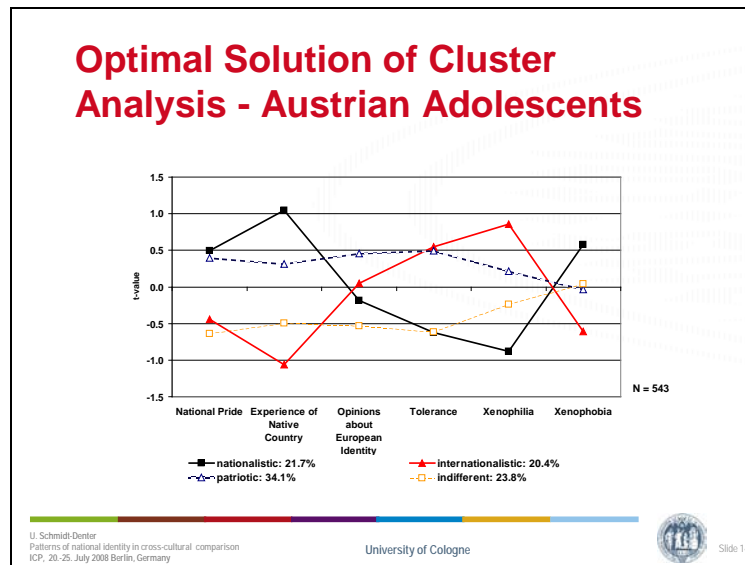
For the Austrian teenagers a 4 cluster-solution identical to the one identified for the German sample yielded the best intra-group homogeneity. The German classification pattern can be perfectly generalized to the Austrian sample.

For the analysis of the data from Switzerland the sample was split into a German-speaking and a French-speaking part.
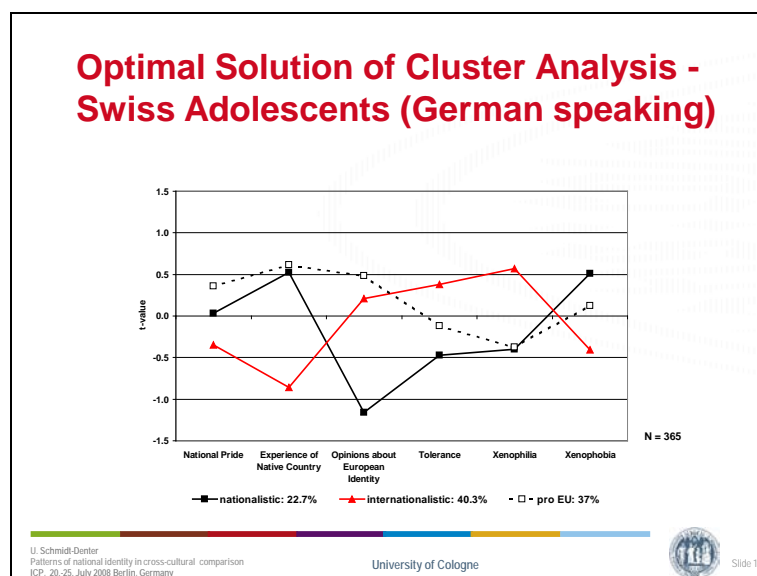
For the German-speaking Swiss teenagers (N = 365) a 3 cluster-solution was chosen as the best classification. The first Cluster corresponds closely to the nationalistic type and the second cluster to the internationalistic type. The third cluster, however, is not parallel to the patriotic type. Instead, when moving from a 2 cluster to a 3 cluster solution, the nationalistic type is further split into two variants. The first variant is characterized by a positive and the second one by a negative attitude towards the European Union. Taking into consideration that Switzerland is not a member of the EU and that a potential membership is subject to controversial discussions, this polarization is immediately conceivable.
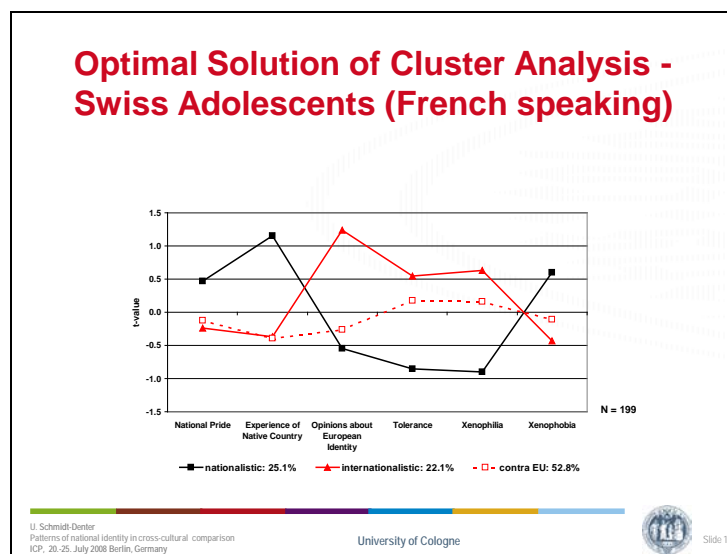
The empirical classification of the teenagers from the French-speaking regions of Switzerland (*N* = 199) also yields a 3 cluster-solution. For this sample, the third cluster emerges by splitting the internationalistic type. The attitudes towards the EU appears to polarize the internationalistic type in French-speaking and the nationalistic type in the German-speaking Switzerland.
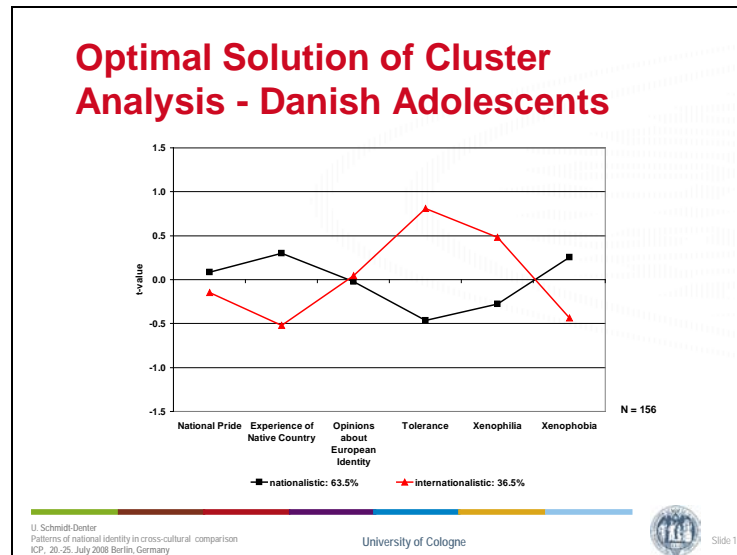
The empirical classification of the Danish teenagers led to a 2 cluster-
solution. The familiar pattern of a nationalistic and an internationalistic
type reappears. However, there are also some particular aspects that are
specific of the Danish sample. The variable "tolerance" has the highest
discriminative power whereas groups differ to a much smaller degree
than in Germany or Austria in their identification with their native country.
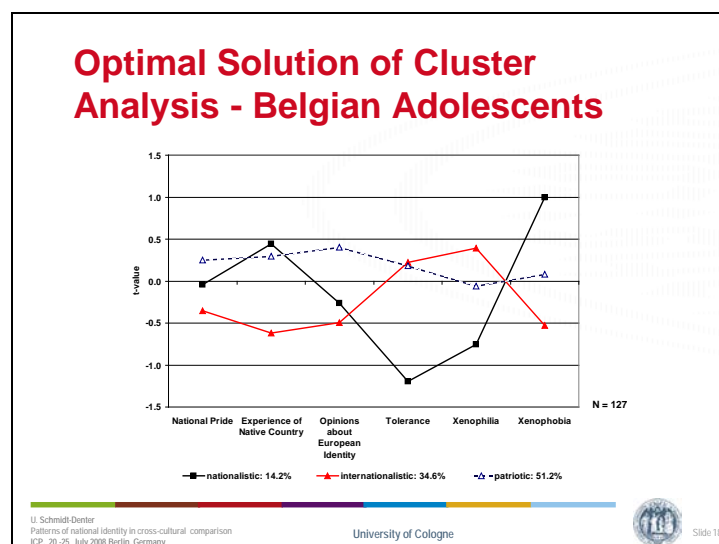

The cluster analysis for the Belgian teenagers (N = 127) yields three
homogeneous clusters. Again there is both a nationalistic and an

internationalistic type. The third cluster corresponds to the patriotic type that was also identified for the German and Austrian samples.
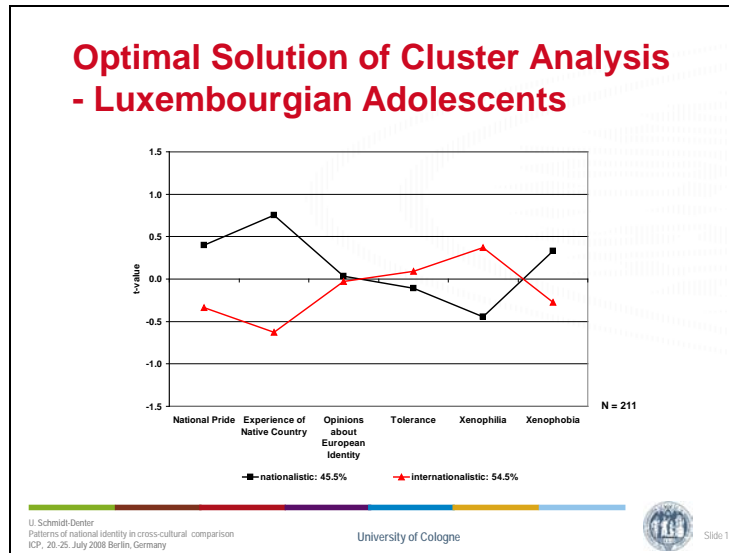

In Luxembourg, once again a solution with two clusters provided the preferable classification (N = 211). However, in Luxembourg, the identification with the native country contributes considerably to the discrimination of the two groups.
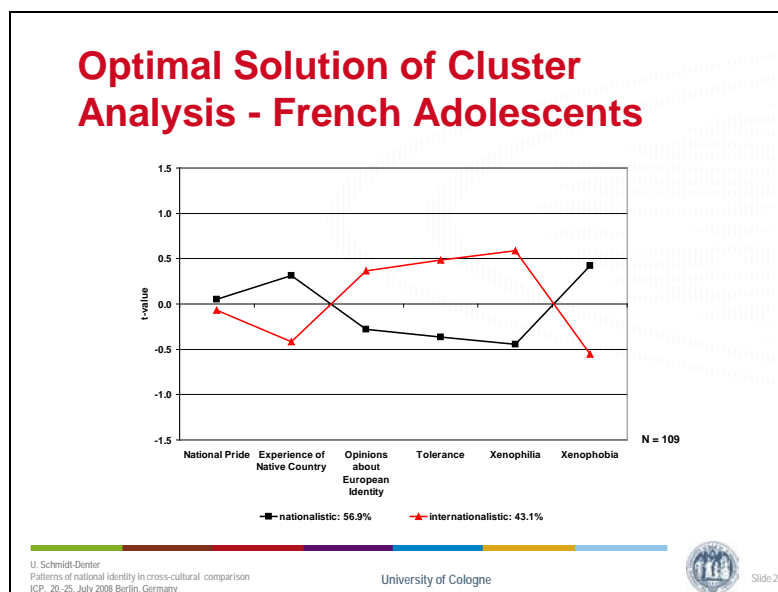
In France, the cluster analysis also yields a 2 cluster-solution (N = 109). Here, the attitudes towards the outgroup are more important in discriminating between the clusters than variables of ingroup identification.
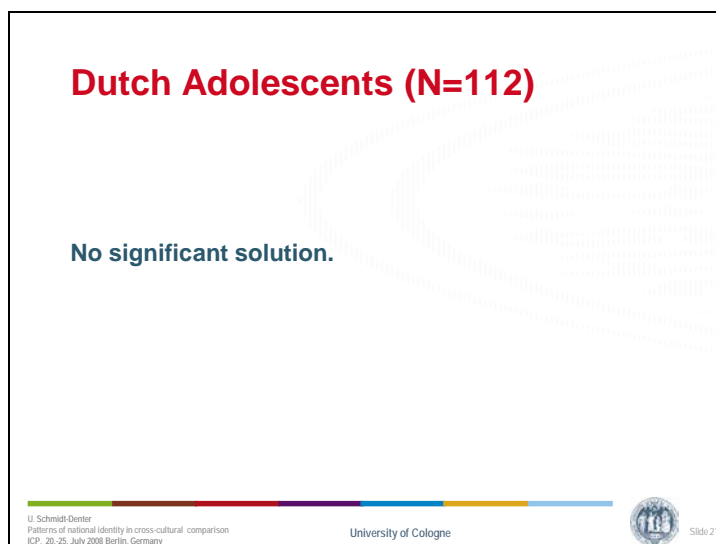
For the Dutch sample, no significant clear-cut solution resulted from the cluster analysis so that we refrained from interpreting the respective results. Following the dendrogram, a 2 cluster-solution appeared optimal. However, the resulting two clusters exhibited a rather atypical pattern which may have been caused by the low reliabilities of some variables.
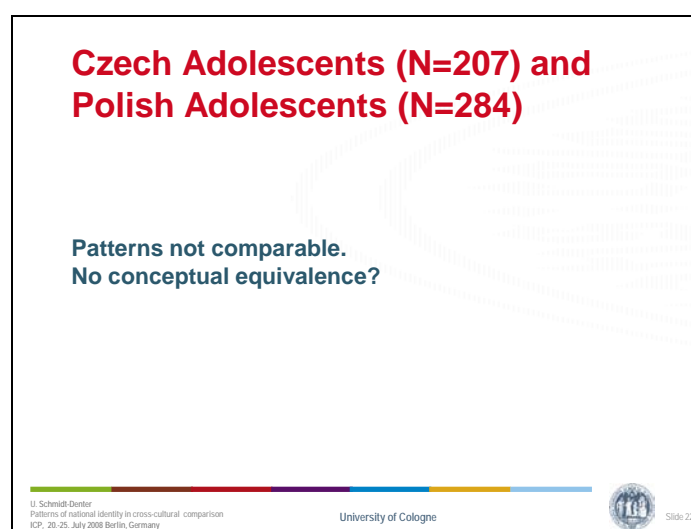
The patterns of clusters obtained for the two post-socialist countries of the Czech Republic and Poland are in no way comparable to those identified for the other countries. The profiles of the relevant variables are rather diffuse and therefore omitted from this presentation. None of the identified cluster-solutions fulfils the necessary criteria for homogeneous groups.

The questionnaire scales were translated, adapted, and used in schools by Czech and Polish native speakers. Therefore, we assume that the questionnaire was linguistically adequate. Whether conceptual equivalence may be assumed as well, however, is a different question.

It is possible, for instance, that the European identification is qualitatively different from the old EU-member states. At the time of data collection, both the Czech Republic and Poland were not yet members of the EU but candidate countries.

Similarly, more recent historical developments may contribute to differences concerning the national identity within these countries. Following the demise of the Socialism with its internationalistic orientation the countries' national identity once again provided an important frame of orientation.

The most pronounced conceptual differences are to be expected with regard to the attitudes towards outgroups however. One example is that we frequently used the term "foreigner" (Ausländer) in our items. The ethnic and religious composition of alien residents in the Czech Republic and Poland deviates considerably from the pattern in Western countries.

This may also have an influence on the relevant attitude systems, as Rother (2006) found.
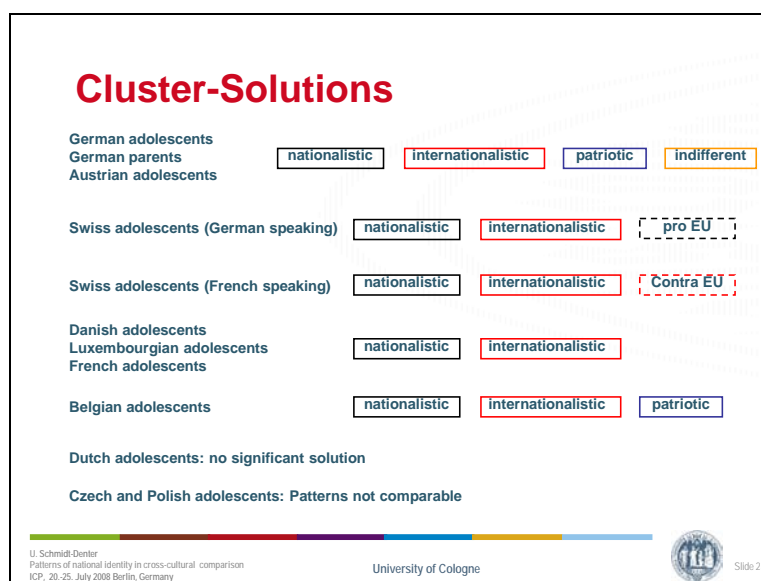

It may be concluded that the generalizability of the cluster-solution depends on the similarities of the cultural settings. In line with this argumentation, the 4 cluster-solution identified for the German sample was replicated perfectly for the Austrian sample. For the remaining western-European countries classifications with 2 or 3 homogeneous groups emerged. With the exception of the Netherlands, these cluster-solutions were well interpretable. Between countries, especially the degree to which either ingroup or outgroup variables contributed to discriminating between the clusters varied. In contrast, insufficient conceptual equivalence was found for both post-socialist countries.

Concerning the ingroup-outgroup-debate the present research demonstrated that the model of negative reciprocity was included in all interpretable cluster solutions. Across the countries it constitutes a rather stable pattern. Conversely, a generalized pattern of positive attitudes towards both ingroup and outgroup exists, but was only identified in

Germany, Austria, and Belgium. That is to say that it only formed part of the optimal cluster-solution in these countries.

It has to be critically noted that our research design has to be characterized as what Berry probably refers to as "imposed etic" (1969, 1989).
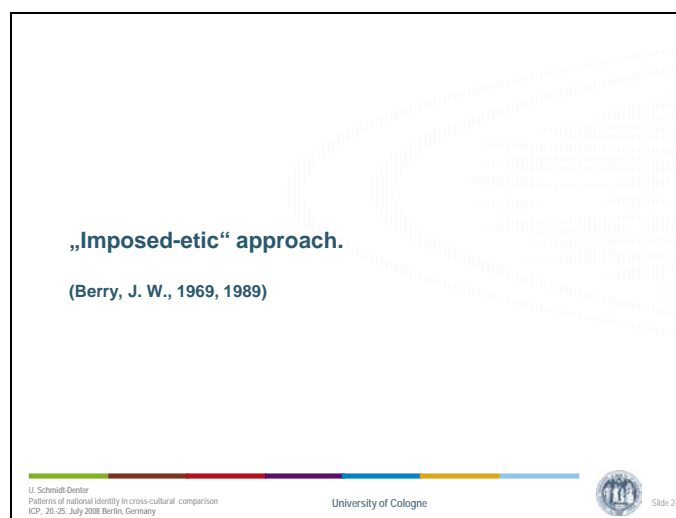
We translated and adapted survey instruments that were developed and tested in Germany. Possibly, this procedure did not consider for the influence of the different nations' particularities to a sufficient degree. However, this problem is also inherent in several Eurobarometer or other International Social Survey-programs. In these studies, certain items serve as indicators for presumably interculturally valid concepts without ever assessing whether this assumption of intercultural equivalence is justified.

In our case, more detailed information about attitude assessment and surveys in both Poland and the Czech Republic would be highly welcome. Maybe an International Congress forms the ideal platform to initiate such an exchange.

Thank You for Your Attention!