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INGROUP AND SENSE OF LOCAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL, AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY IN ADOLESCENCE. A RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION IN SICILIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract - Personal and social identity, in progress during adolescence, is also based on the representation of groups each person feels to belong to (cfr. Palmonari, 1997; Licciardello, Castiglione 2008). The knowledge of reference ingroups in adolescence, referring to territorial dimensions (local, regional, national, and European), therefore, can contribute to better understand the dynamics connected to the construction of social identity. The aim of this study is to explore, in a sample of 212 Sicilian adolescents, the territorial dimensions of social identity and the representation of Self, countrymen/fellow citizens, Sicilians, Italians, and Europeans. The *European Opinion Survey* of Stefanile et alii (2003) and 5 Semantic Differentials to measure identity dimensions at personal and territorial level have been used. Results have shown that, with significant differences for sex, class and residence (village/country), participants identify themselves more with Italians and Sicilians and express a more positive representation of Self, than that of Sicilians, Europeans, Italians and countrymen/fellow citizens. The Euclidean distance between Self and countrymen/fellow citizen is the highest. Future research, also based on the analysis of emotional aspects, could clarify the complexity of these results.

Key words: Adolescents- ingroup- territorial dimensions of identity

INTRODUCTION

The scientific literature is unanimous in defining adolescence as a crucial stage in the development of each person, in particular, with reference to the construction of identity (see Erikson, 1950; Marcia, 1980) which is one of the major developmental tasks of subjects in adolescence (Havighurst, 1952). Although the construction of identity is a long and complex process that goes beyond the boundaries of adolescence, according to Erikson's perspective, at this stage of development, individuals involved in a long self-reflection that leads them to the identification of stable traits that constitute their identity, through an analysis of past, present, and projections toward the future. This process is realized through a period of experimentation which, if positively solved, reaches the acquisition of the "sense of identity" and the overcoming of the so-called "role diffusion", that is the inability to find a personal synthesis of lived experiences and tested roles.

During the phases of experimentation and construction of identity, the comparison with peers is a valuable support that provides the opportunity to play different roles in opposition to those of childhood (Baldascini, 1996). The group represents a "social entity" that helps to fill a lack during the adolescent period (Pombeni *et alii*, 1990); also, within a group constituted by peers, the adolescent has the opportunity to distance him/herself from the family group and to assess differently values and models provided by parents.

In social perspective the group is not only a facilitator of the development of personal identity but, specially, a basic element in the construction of "social identity" (Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1982; Brown, 1988; Palmonari, 1997; Licciardello & Castiglione, 2008), that is, "that *part* of the image that an individual makes of himself, stemming from an awareness of belonging to a group (or groups) social units to the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1981, p.255). The self-image of an individual is the result of the representation of the group each person feels to belong to. Therefore the subject will seek to ensure that he/she belongs to positively defined groups and, otherwise, will embark in a social action that changes the characteristics of the group or modifies the meanings attributed to such characteristics.

The link between identification with a group and self-esteem has been recently analyzed by Tarrant *et alii* (2006), who revealed that high identification with a group corresponds to high levels of self-esteem and to easy overcoming of personal and relational developmental tasks.

According to the complexity of social identity model, developed by Roccas and Brewer (2002), the social identity of an individual is not built on the basis of affiliation to a single social group but it is the result of the relationship between representations of the groups to which an individual feels to belong to. In fact, the affiliation to a group can be declined at different levels, so each person can have multiple reference groups, which may be, for example, family, friends, national and supranational groups.

According to the model of *optimal distinctiveness*, proposed by Brewer (1991), the identity can be represented as a concentric structure in which personal identity is in central position around which different social identities are related to various groups to which each person feels to belong to.

A broad field of research was focused on the study of social identity declined in relation to the dimensions of the territory, defined by Breakwell (1986) as a basic element of identity and corresponding, for example, to regional, national or European identity (Stefanile *et alii*, 2003). In this perspective, it is interesting to evoke the *nested identities* model (Breakwell, 1986, 1992) according to which there is a strong link between different levels of territorially defined identity, in the sense that, for example, national identity is not distinct and independent from the regional and local one, but it represents a more complex aspect of territorial identity, in which the different dimensions are mutually interrelated.

In an increasingly globalized world the examination of the issue concerning the territorial identity represents an interesting field of research that may help us to understand with which territorially defined ingroups adolescents identify themselves, and, finally, according to which "psychological geography" they structure their territorial identity.

Researches carried out in international context (Cinnirella, 1997) have highlighted differences between Italians and British in levels of identification with the Europeans, in the sense that the Italians

expressed higher levels in reference to the European identity than the British, that seems to represent an important component of social identity for young Italians. Studies that compared the levels of identification of the Italians with the different dimensions of territorial identity have indicated a greater identification with local and regional dimensions than European one (see Stefanile *et alii*, 2003; Eurobarometer reports 1997-2010).

Considering the complex nature of these results, it may be interesting to explore the European identity in adolescents living in Sicily, a central territory compared to the Mediterranean and peripheral one in the European context, and to compare it with territorial dimensions of Italian, Sicilian, and local (i.e. linked to the city or country of residence) identity.

METHOD

Objectives

The aim of the present study is to explore the territorial dimensions of identity (local, regional, national, and European) and the representation of Self and ingroups defined in relation to the territory (countrymen/fellow citizens, the Sicilians, the Italians and The Europeans), in a sample of adolescents living in the Sicilian context.

Participants

The sample consists of 212 adolescents aged between 13 and 20 ($M=16,8$, $sd=1,7$), attending the first, third and fifth classes of two secondary high schools of a city in eastern Sicily, balanced by sex (106 boys; 106 girls) and divided into two places of residence (106 subjects living in town; 106 subjects living in neighbouring villages).

Materials and procedures

Materials were administered individually and in small group setting, and were constituted by background questions, useful to define the age, sex, class and place of residence of participants, and also by the following instruments:

I - The Italian version of European Opinion Survey (EOS), proposed by Stefanile *et alii* (2003), consisting of four subscales to investigate the regional (Sicilian), national (Italian), and European identity, for each of which 5 items were included and valued on a 7-points scale (from "not at all" to "very much"): item1 "I'm happy to be ..."; item2 "I identify myself with others ..."; item3 "I see myself as..."; item4 "I'm like the others ...", item5 "I feel strongly involved with ...", proposed in relation to the countrymen/citizens, the Sicilians, the Italians and the Europeans. In addition, we have included a subscale for the analysis of local identity related to the country or city of residence.

II - N.5 Semantic Differentials (Osgood *et alii*, 1959; Di Nuovo & Licciardello, 1997; De Caroli, Sagone, & Falanga, 2007) to assess the representation of Self ("Me as I am"), of "countrymen or fellow citizens", "The Sicilians", "The Italians", and "The Europeans" with 36 pairs of bipolar adjectives, each evaluable on a 7-points scale (with the intermediate value equal to 4); it has been possible to measure the Euclidean distances between Self and countrymen/fellow citizens, Self and the Sicilians, Self and the Italians, Self and the Europeans representation.

Data Analysis

The examination of the statistical significance of results was carried out using the SPSS 15.0 software (Statistical Package for Social Science), using the following tests: *t Student*, One Way Anova, and analysis of correlations (Pearson's *r*).

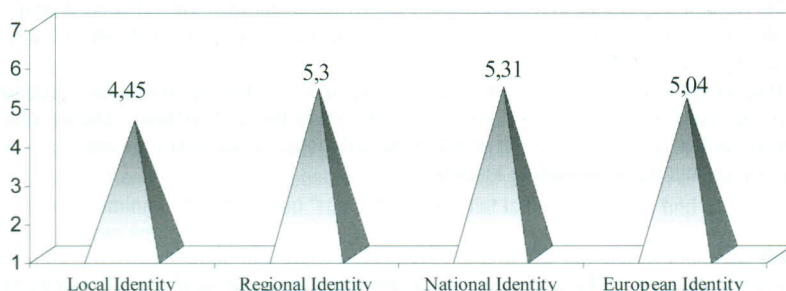
RESULTS

Territorial dimensions of identity: EOS

With reference to the territorial dimensions of the identity¹ it is possible to indicate that our sample expressed high identification with the Italians ($M=5,31$, $sd=1,37$) and Sicilians ($M=5,30$, $sd=1,36$) and, thereafter, with the Europeans ($M=5,04$, $sd=1,29$) and the countrymen/fellow citizens ($M= 4,45$, $sd=1,79$) ($F_{(3,209)}=23.53$, $p<.001$) (Fig. 1).

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Fig. 1 Dimensions of territorial identity - Means



According to the responses provided for each item of the subscales, the highest values are related to the Italians, concerning with the aspects of “geographic” identification (“I identify myself with others ...”; “I see myself as ...”; “I’m like others ...”), while those related to the emotional aspects (“I’m happy to be ...”; “I feel strongly involved with...”) are related to the Sicilians (Table I).

Table I - Dimensions of territorial identity – Means

Dimensions	Local Identity (paese/città)		Regional Identity		National Identity		European Identity		F	p
	M	sd	M	sd	M	sd	M	sd		
I’m happy to be...	5,03	1,92	5,96	1,34	5,65	1,64	5,64	1,44	15,04	<.001
I identify myself with others...	4,22	1,99	4,95	1,73	5,08	1,59	4,85	1,49	14,67	<.001
I see myself as...	4,64	2,09	5,58	1,51	5,78	1,40	5,30	1,50	25,67	<.001
I’m like others ...	3,64	2,00	4,48	1,80	4,80	1,75	4,64	1,67	26,62	<.001
I feel strongly involved with...	4,73	2,03	5,54	1,62	5,29	1,64	4,77	1,72	15,70	<.001

It seems, therefore, that the national identity is linked to aspects of formal identification while the regional one is more based on emotional connection to their land and pride of being Sicilian.

Differences for sex

Significant differences according to sex were found comparing regional identity ($t_{(210)}=2.20, p=.03$) and the European one ($t_{(210)}=-2.51, p=.01$), in the sense that boys expressed higher levels of identification with the Sicilians than girls (boys=5,50, $sd=1,19$ vs. girls=5,09, $sd=1,48$) and, in particular, in the items “I identify myself with other Sicilians” (boys=5,23, $sd=1,62$ vs. girls= 4,68, $sd=1,80$) ($t_{(210)}=2.32, p=.02$) and “I see myself Sicilian” (M=5.80, $sd=1,39$ vs. M=5,35, $sd=1,59$) ($t_{(210)}=2.20, p=.03$). However, girls expressed higher levels of identification with Europeans than boys, (M=4,81, $sd=1,45$ vs. M=5,26, $sd=1,09$), specifically in relation to the items:

“I’m happy to be European” (M=5,42, $sd=1,67$ vs. M= 5,87, $sd=1,12$) ($t_{(210)}=-2.31, p=.02$);

“I identify myself with other Europeans” (M=4,61, $sd=1,68$ vs. M=5,09, $sd=1,22$) ($t_{(210)}=-2.38, p=.02$);

"I see myself as European" ($M=5,01$, $sd=1,66$ vs. $M=5,59$, $sd=1,27$) ($t_{(210)}=-2.82$, $p=.004$);

"I'm like other Europeans" ($M=4,39$, $sd=1,82$ vs. $M=4,89$, $sd=1,48$) ($t_{(210)}=-2.19$, $p=.03$).

Finally it is possible to evidence that girls reached higher levels of identification in the item "I'm happy to be Italian" than boys ($M=5,42$, $sd=1,81$ vs. $M=5,88$, $sd=1,41$) ($t=-2.07$, $p=.04$).

Differences for class

Results for class showed that adolescents attending the first class expressed higher levels of identification with all considered dimensions than the ones attending the third and fifth classes (Table II).

Table II - Levels of territorial identification – Differences for class

Dimensions	Class	M	sd	F	p
Local Identity	I	5,19	1,54	12,26	<.001
	III	4,44	1,86		
	V	3,77	1,65		
Regional Identity	I	5,74	1,21	8,45	<.001
	III	5,36	1,33		
	V	4,83	1,38		
National Identity	I	5,90	1,05	13,16	<.001
	III	5,30	1,22		
	V	4,78	1,54		
European Identity	I	5,52	,98	7,91	<.001
	III	4,91	1,27		
	V	4,71	1,46		

Range scale from 1 to 7 intervals

Differences by place of residence

The place of residence seemed to affect on the levels of identification with the local ($t_{(210)}=2.18$, $p=.03$) and European dimension ($t_{(210)}=2.40$, $p=.02$), in fact adolescents living in town expressed higher levels of identification both with the local ($M=4,71$, $sd=1,51$ vs. $M=4,18$, $sd=1,98$) and the European dimensions ($M=5,25$, $sd=1,25$ vs. $M=4,82$, $sd=1,32$) than adolescents living in villages.

In detail, adolescents living in town showed high levels of identification with the local dimension in the following items:

"I'm happy to be ..." ($M=5,46$, $sd=1,56$ vs. $M=4,59$, $sd=2,16$) ($t_{(210)}=3.36$, $p=.001$);

"I see myself as..." $M=5,07$, $sd=1,83$ vs. $M=4,21$, $sd=2,24$) ($t_{(210)}=3.05$, $p=.003$);

and, for the European dimension in the items:

"I'm happy to be European" ($M=5,87$, $sd=1,37$ vs. $M=5,42$, $sd=1,47$) ($t_{(210)}=2.31$, $p=.02$);

"I'm like other Europeans" ($M=4,88$, $sd=1,58$ vs. $M=4,40$, $sd=1,73$) ($t_{(210)}=2.11$, $p=.04$);

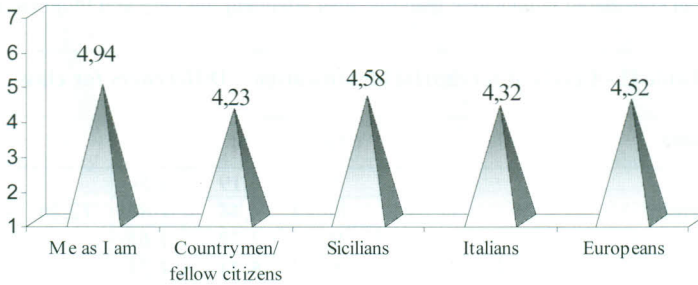
"I feel strongly involved with the Europeans" ($M=5,03$, $sd=1,65$ vs. $M=4,51$, $sd=1,76$) ($t_{(210)}=2.21$, $p=.03$).

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Self and ingroups

The subjects of our sample expressed a more positive representation of Self ($M=4,94$, $sd=.51$) than that of the Sicilians ($M=4,58$, $sd=.73$), Europeans ($M=4,52$, $sd=.73$), Italians ($M=4,32$, $sd=.70$) and countrymen/fellow citizens ($M=4,23$, $sd=.97$) ($F(4,207)=41.74$, $p<.001$) (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 - Self and ingroups – Means



Differences for sex, class, and place of residence

With reference to differences for sex it was possible to note that girls expressed a more positive representation of the Italians ($M=4,42$ $sd=.71$ vs $M=4,21$ $sd=.68$) ($t(210)=2.20$, $p=.03$) and the Europeans ($M=4,64$ $sd=.58$ vs. $M=4,40$ $ds=.84$) than boys.

Regarding to differences for class adolescents attending the fifth classes expressed a more negative representations of countrymen/fellow citizens, the Sicilians, and the Italians than the younger ones (Table III).

Table III – Self and ingroups – Differences for class

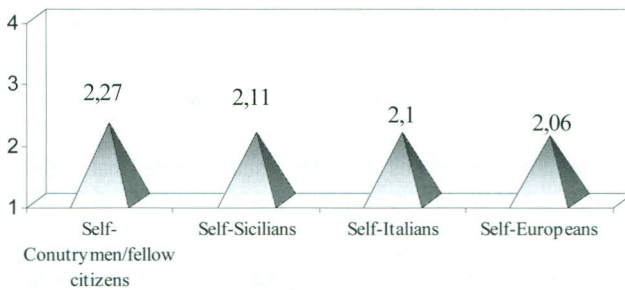
Semantic differentials	Class	M	sd	F	p
Self	I	5,06	,44	2,77	n.s.
	III	4,91	,55		
	V	4,87	,53		
Countrymen/fellow citizens	I	4,52	,80	12,03	<.001
	III	4,37	,98		
	V	3,80	,97		
Sicilians	I	4,58	,65	3,65	.03
	III	4,75	,76		
	V	4,42	,75		
Italians	I	4,46	,65	4,95	.008
	III	4,39	,76		
	V	4,11	,66		
Europeans	I	4,59	,60	,67	n.s.
	III	4,44	,83		
	V	4,52	,73		

Significant differences were found in relation to the place of residence: adolescents living in town assessed their fellow citizens ($M=4,09$, $sd=.81$ vs. $M=4,36$, $sd=1,08$; $t_{(210)}=-2.04$, $p=.04$) and the Sicilians ($M=4,46$, $sd=.64$ vs. $M=4,70$, $sd=.80$; $t_{(210)}=-2.36$, $p=.02$) more negatively than adolescents living in villages.

Euclidean distances

The analysis of Euclidean distances showed a greater distance between Self and countrymen/fellow citizens ($M=2,27$, $sd=.74$), compared to those between Self and the Sicilians ($M=2,11$, $sd=.54$), Self and the Italians ($M=2,10$, $sd=.60$), and Self and the Europeans ($M=2,06$, $sd=.59$) ($F_{(3,208)}=10,18$; $p<.001$) (Fig.3).

Fig.3 - Euclidean Distances – Means



Significant differences were found in relation to class, in fact adolescents attending first class showed a lower distance than older ones between:

Self and the countrymen/fellow citizens (first class: $M=1,99$, $sd=.69$; third class: $M=2,25$, $sd=.71$; fifth class: $M=2,53$, $sd=.73$) ($F_{(2,209)}=10,37$; $p<.001$);

Self and the Sicilians (first class: $M=1,97$, $sd=.55$; third class: $M=2,13$, $sd=.51$; fifth class: $M=2,23$, $sd=.53$) ($F_{(2,209)}=4,13$; $p=.02$);

Self and the Europeans (first class: $M=1,89$, $sd=.54$; third class: $M=2,15$, $sd=.66$; fifth class: $M=2,13$, $sd=.54$) ($F_{(2,209)}=4,29$; $p=.02$).

Regarding to place of residence, adolescence living in villages ($M=2,03$, $sd=.54$) expressed lower distance between Self and the Sicilians than adolescence living in town ($M=2,19$, $sd=.52$) ($t_{(210)}=-2,20$; $p=.03$).

No differences for sex were found.

Correlations

The analysis of correlations between the territorial dimensions of identity and the representation of Self and ingroups pointed out significant and positive relations especially between (Table IV):

local identity and countrymen/fellow citizens, in fact the more adolescents identified themselves with their countrymen/fellow citizens, the more positive the representation of the same ones ($r=.59$, $p<.001$);

regional identity and the Sicilians, that is, the more adolescents identified themselves with the Sicilians, the more positive representation of the same ones ($r=.42$, $p<.001$);

national identity and the Italians, in fact the more adolescents identified with Italians, the more positive the representation of the same ones ($r=.48$, $p<.001$);

European identity and the Europeans, that is, more adolescents identified with the Europeans, the more positive their representation of the same ones ($r=.31$, $p<.001$).

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Table IV - Correlations between territorial dimensions of identity and representation of Self and ingroups

	<i>Self</i>	<i>Countrymen/ fellow citizens</i>	<i>Sicilians</i>	<i>Italians</i>	<i>Europeans</i>
<i>Local Identity</i>	.19**	.58**	.30**	.34**	.11
<i>Regional Identity</i>	.12	.22**	.42**	.19**	-.05
<i>National Identity</i>	.25**	.20**	.20**	.48**	.17*
<i>European Identity</i>	.16*	.05	-.01	.22**	.31**

Significance levels: ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

DISCUSSION

Concerning the territorial dimensions of identity, results indicated that subjects have expressed high levels of identification in national and regional dimensions, characterized respectively by aspects related to "geographical" identification and to emotional identification.

It was also interesting to evidence that the European identity levels were significantly higher than the local ones; moreover the results for the representation of countrymen/fellow citizens were slightly above the intermediate point (value=4) and more negatively if compared to the Sicilians, the Europeans, and the Italians. From the analysis of Euclidean distances it is possible to highlight lower perceived distance between Self and the Europeans than that between Self and the Sicilians, and Self and the Italians, and especially between Self and countrymen/fellow citizens.

These results can be explained both as a result of devaluation of the local context and as the indicators of a inclination of adolescents, especially girls, to place themselves in a wider dimension than strictly local one. This phenomenon could be affected by the growth of adolescents in a political and cultural context characterized by the European Union and by the increased possibilities of communication offered by new technologies.

Differences for class in levels of identification could be explained according to the Erikson's perspective; in fact, young adolescents who are still building their identity have showed high levels of identification with all analyzed territorial dimensions.

It seems interesting to note the discrepancies arisen between the identification with the national and the European dimensions (measured with the EOS) and the representations of ingroups (Italians and Europeans). In fact, at an explicit level the subjects showed high levels of identification with the Italians, and at an implicit level they assessed the Europeans more positively, this dimension being measured by tests which were less affected by social desirability.

Finally, as far as the analysis of correlations is concerned, it was noted that the territorial dimensions of identity were strongly correlated with the representations of relative ingroups.

Future researches on adult may allow to verify if the data obtained in the current study are due to the typical characteristics of adolescence, in which the construction of personal, social and, in particular, territorial identity assumes a fundamental role.

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A RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION IN SICILIAN CONTEXT**

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¹ Internal consistency reliability was satisfactory for each sub scale: local Identity (=.93); regional identity (=.90); national identity (=.90); European identity (=.88).

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