

The Power of Contact: Europe as a Network of Transnational Attachment

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Abstract. In times of multiple crises and a looming partial breakup of the European Union, the question of what binds Europeans together appears more relevant than ever. In this article, we propose *transnational attachment* as a novel indicator of sense of community in Europe, arguing that this hitherto neglected dimension is substantially and structurally different from alternative ones such as cross-border trust and identification. Combining Eurobarometer 73.3 data on ties between all EU-27 countries with further dyadic data, we show empirically that the European network of transnational attachment has an asymmetric core-periphery structure centered around five extremely popular countries (the UK, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain). In line with transactionalist theory, cross-border mobility and communication are strongly related to transnational attachment. Furthermore, we demonstrate that the network of transnational attachment is much denser among those with a higher than among those with a lower level of education. Our results suggest that offering European citizens incentives to travel to peripheral countries may help counterbalance the current asymmetric structure of transnational attachment, thereby increasing Europe's social cohesion.

Keywords: European integration, transnational attachment, sense of community, social network analysis, MRQAP

Introduction

This article sets out to enrich our knowledge about the European Union (EU) as a political community by means of a novel approach, a *network analysis of transnational attachment*. In times of multiple crises and with Brexit being negotiated, the question of what binds the citizenries of the EU together is of pivotal interest. Ferrera's recent *Stein Rokkan Lecture* vividly expressed this concern, revolving around the question of 'how to "glue" the Union together' despite its 'social deficit' (2017: 3). Currently, researchers often rely on tried-and-tested concepts such as support for European integration (Eichenberg & Dalton 2007; Gabel & Palmer 1995), Euroscepticism (Kuhn 2011; Lubbers & Scheepers 2010), or European identity (Kohli 2000; Schilde 2014) to address this issue. These 'supranational' concepts have in common that they presuppose 'Europe' or the EU as a relevant and unitary entity. They cannot, however, enlighten us about the extent to which EU citizens are 'sufficiently *oriented towards*

each other' (Easton 1957: 391)—what Karl W. Deutsch termed 'sense of community' (Deutsch et al. 1957). In this article, we aim to fill this gap by investigating the attachment EU citizens feel towards other countries—in short: *transnational attachment*—as an expression of sense of community. This requires taking a truly relational perspective on the EU's political community. The corresponding methodological perspective—social network analysis—also fits the idea of Europe as a constantly evolving network of diverse relations between countries (Mann 1998) that is increasingly popular in the sociology of European integration (Delhey 2004; Favell et al. 2011; Heidenreich et al. 2012; Mau & Verwiebe 2010).

Building on transactionalist theory (Deutsch et al. 1957), it is common to differentiate between activity-based connectedness (*transactions*) and attitudinal connectedness (*sense of community*). While there is some research on activity-based networks (Choi & Ahn 1997; Heller-Schuh et al. 2011; Maggioni & Uberti 2007), studies on the attitudinal connectedness of Europeans are still scarce and relatively restricted in their focus. Some research has looked into voting patterns in the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) and interpreted them as 'friendships' between countries (Charron 2013; Dekker 2007; Yair 1995). Yet the ESC is a rather peculiar cultural event whose audience is hardly representative of the general population. Others have examined trust in co-Europeans (Delhey 2007a; Genna 2017), again building on a relatively specific form of connectedness and rarely using a full-fledged network approach. It is thus not clear whether findings from these studies are representative of attitudinal connectedness among Europeans *in general*. Hence, we propose *transnational attachment* as an alternative approach to EU citizens' orientation towards each other.

The conceptual goal of the article is to position transnational attachment vis-à-vis other forms of sense of community—such as trust or identification—and to discuss key principles and mechanisms on which attachment might be based. The empirical goal is to provide a thorough analysis of Europe as a *network of transnational attachment*. For this purpose, we use the Eurobarometer 73.3 survey in which people across all EU-27 member states were asked to state which country other than their own they 'feel attached to'. We argue that such transnational attachment constitutes a specific measure of the attitudinal connectedness of an individual based in one country to another country. In aggregated form, it can be understood as a form of sense of community between these two countries. Our analysis addresses four issues, which build on each other: (1) the geographical reach of EU citizens' transnational attachment; (2) the structure of the European network of transnational attachment; (3) the factors that influence the strength of transnational attachment; and (4) differences between educational classes in this regard.

This article makes several contributions: First, we establish that EU citizens feel attached, first of all, to other European countries, rather than to countries outside Europe. Second, the network of attachment is very uneven and centralized in that five big countries receive the strongest ties of attachment—in contrast to the regionalized structure usually found in ESC votes (e.g., Charron 2013). Third, our results suggest a pivotal role of cross-border transactions for transnational attachment. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first macro-level study to find such strong evidence. Past research has been able to show such an association at the micro level (e.g., Kuhn 2011; Recchi 2015) but rarely at the macro level (Delhey 2007a; Delhey & Deutschmann 2016; Inglehart 1991), which may highlight the added value of our novel

network-analytical approach. Finally, educational classes differ starkly in how dense their network of transnational attachment is, reinforcing the idea of the EU as a ‘class project’ (Fligstein 2008).

The article is structured as follows: We first introduce and position transnational attachment theoretically and explain how it diverges in meaning from other indicators of sense of community. We then discuss which concrete country(-dyad) characteristics may influence transnational attachment and why there might be social divides between educational classes. Finally, we describe the data and methods and present and discuss our results.

Transnational attachment as an indicator of sense of community

Positioning transnational attachment

For a long time, scholars have been debating whether the European project requires social integration alongside economic and political integration (Díez Medrano 2008; Haas 1958). It has often been argued that feelings of belonging, community, and solidarity among citizens are an integral part of any unification project (Brubaker 2010; Münch 1996). Based on this assumption, a whole variety of issues, from European identity (Kohli 2000; Schilde 2014) to trust in co-Europeans (Delhey 2007a; Klingemann & Weldon 2013) and solidarity among European citizens (Gerhards & Lengfeld 2015; Habermas 2011), have become central in European integration research. In David Easton’s language of political support, these research topics all deal with a specific object of support, the European *political community*, in contrast to its political regime and political authorities:

At this level of support, we are not concerned with whether a government exists or whether there is loyalty to a constitutional order. For the moment we only ask whether the members of the group we are examining are sufficiently oriented *towards each other* (Easton 1957: 391).

This concept is similar to what Karl W. Deutsch et al. denoted in the 1950s as *sense of community*: ‘a matter of mutual sympathies and loyalty; of “we-feeling”, trust, and mutual consideration; of partial identification in terms of self-images and interests; of mutually successful predictions of behaviour, and of co-operative action in accordance with it’ (1957: 36). In European integration studies, sense of community has most often been studied in terms of identity. European identity is commonly defined as a form of self-identification that supersedes the container of the nation state, taking the EU or Europe as its frame of reference (cf. McMahon 2013). We are going to measure Europeans’ sense of community with a different concept, namely *transnational attachment*. Measured as a subjective feeling, transnational attachment constitutes an attitudinal connectedness of an individual in country *A* to another country, *B*. When aggregated across a population, it can be understood as a specific form of sense of community between population *A* and population *B*.

Content-wise, attachment is not easy to define, since ‘territorial attachment has been both under-theorized and infrequently subjected to empirical analysis’ (Antonsich & Holland 2014:

208; cf. Herb & Kaplan 1999). In social psychology, attachment typically denotes ‘a strong feeling of affection for sb/sth’ (Hornby 2000: 65). A valuable consequence is psychological well-being experienced by the subject as a result of the mere ‘presence, vicinity or accessibility of the object’ (Giuliani 1991: 134). However, much of the social psychology literature is geared towards strong ties within primary groups, or to the place of residence. A foreign country, by contrast, is a more remote object of attachment, which makes the application of a ‘thick’ concept of attachment, built in the idea of *strong* affection, questionable. We therefore suggest defining transnational attachment in a less demanding fashion as *positive relevance*: The receiver country of attachment needs to be, first of all, somehow relevant for the sender country population (cognitive component) and, secondly, be seen positively by it (affective component).

Where to draw the line between attachment and identification? While some scholars treat attachment as identical to a subdimension of identity, e.g. the emotional one (Cram 2012), others seem to equate it with identity per se, for instance when arguing that ‘identity relates to an individual’s intensity of positive attachments’ (Carey 2002: 391). Several empirical studies have blurred the distinction by ultimately measuring European identity via the proxy of attachment to Europe/the EU (Lewicka 2008; Rippl et al. 2010; Roose 2013). Citrin and Sides, however, found that the two are not actually the same: ‘[E]ven among those whose identity is ostensibly exclusively national, roughly half of the respondents still express attachment to Europe’ (2004: 171).

We follow this latter perspective, arguing that transnational attachment differs from European identity in two major ways. First, identification entails a perceived sameness (*idem*=Latin for ‘the same’) between the ‘sender’ and the ‘receiver,’ which is not necessarily the case for attachment. Actually, it is very possible to feel attached to another country without perceiving it as similar, let alone identical. Such an emphasis on difference rather than sameness can also be observed in the general usage of the term ‘attachment.’ Often, it denotes ties that link a ‘smaller’ or ‘lower’ entity to a ‘larger’ or ‘higher’ entity. In psychology, for instance, it traditionally describes the bonding of infants with their caregivers (Bowlby 2005[1979]; Waters et al. 2005); in foreign relations, an attaché is adjoined to a larger institution such as an embassy; and in EU studies, the attachment of individual citizens to a transnational border region or to Europe/the European Union has been analyzed (e.g., Rippl et al. 2010; Tatar 2010). If it fits this general pattern, *transnational* attachment should typically constitute an asymmetric connection with a positively perceived country. Second, due to the sameness condition, identification often entails the imagination of a larger social category that both groups belong to (e.g., being European). Yet, this is not a prerequisite for transnational attachment, which refers to a strictly horizontal tie between countries.

Underlying principles and mechanisms

A further conceptual clarification is reached when considering *basic principles* on which attachment (and sense of community generally) might be based. Theoretically, three principles can play a role in creating *positive relevance*. The first principle is *proximity*. As Tobler’s (1970) First Law of Geography suggests: ‘Everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things.’ The second principle is *homophily*, the attraction

of similar entities to each other. This ‘powerful and pervasive principle’ (Baumeister & Leary 1995) is fundamental in social networks and group formation processes (McPherson et al. 2001). At the country-dyad level, various attributes may constitute similarity, be it a common culture or currency (see the discussion on concrete factors below).¹ A third principle is the exact opposite, namely *aspirational heterophily*—attraction between dissimilar entities, where attachment ties go preferably towards those with a higher status (Brass & Krackhardt 2012; Stokman & Zeggelink 1996).

Any concrete expression of sense of community may represent a *mix* of these principles.² Yet some principles might be more important than others. For identity, homophily can be considered the axial principle because of the ‘sameness’ that identification involves. For transnational attachment, by contrast, aspirational heterophily may be the central principle. Here, the emphasis is more likely on difference rather than sameness (see above). Again, this does not necessarily mean that attachment rests on just one single logic.

Another breeding condition—which, however, constitutes a mechanism rather than a principle on its own—is *cross-border contact*. Both intergroup contact theory (Allport 1954) and transactionalist integration theory (Deutsch et al. 1957) posit that sense of community can originate from intensified exchange and contact. In our case, this could involve cross-border transactions from trade to human mobility and communication. Despite mixed results from a study on border regions (Rippl et al. 2010), this relation is supported by most individual-level research (e.g., Kuhn 2011; Mau et al. 2008; Recchi 2015). Studies operating at the population level, by contrast, provide little evidence of such a link (Delhey 2007a; Delhey & Deutschmann 2016; Inglehart 1991). One reason for this might be methodological, as these studies have looked exclusively at countries or country pairs without taking the network structure per se into account. Thus, as the theoretical reasoning is convincing that cross-border transactions increase foreign countries’ relevance and build up or reinforce a positive image, we assume contact to be of paramount importance for transnational attachment.

We deliberately introduced cross-border contact as a *mechanism*, not a principle, since contact is itself to some extent influenced by proximity, homophily, and aspirational heterophily as basic organizing principles. For instance, cross-border activity is more common between nearby countries (Deutschmann 2016). As an umbrella term comprising the three principles *and* the contact mechanism, we will speak of ‘logics.’ Based on this conceptual framework (which is summarized in Table 1), we are now in a position to develop hypotheses about the geographical focus and structure of the European network of transnational attachment. With regard to the geographical reach, we assume:

H₁: *EU citizens feel more attached to European than to non-European countries.*

This hypothesis is plausible according to all four logics presented above (and in Table 1): (a) European countries are typically geographically closer to each other than to non-European countries (*proximity*); (b) European countries are on several dimensions (culture, politics, religion) often more similar to each other than to non-European countries (*homophily*);¹ (c) compared to global conditions, many parts of Europe are well-off (e.g., in terms of prosperity, rule of law, or life satisfaction), thereby embodying desirable qualities (*aspirational*

heterophily); and (d) cross-border practices of Europeans are also concentrated in Europe (Deutschmann 2017) (*contact*).

Table 1. Synopsis of conceptual considerations for transnational attachment

<i>Concept</i>	Transnational attachment as positive relevance of country <i>B</i> for the population of country <i>A</i>			
<i>Logics in assumed order of relevance (from high to low)</i>	Cross-border contact	Aspirational heterophily	Homophily	Proximity
<i>Consequence for geographical reach of attachment</i>	Predominantly European	Predominantly European	Predominantly European	Predominantly European
<i>Consequence for network structure</i>	Hierarchical	Hierarchical	Decentralized (regionalized)	Decentralized (regionalized)
<i>Consequence for concrete determinants</i>	Network structured by flows of cross-border transactions and human mobility/communication	Network structured by receiver country's status	Network structured by similarity between countries	Network structured by geographical distance between countries
<i>Assumed impact on network structure by educational class</i>	Relatively more important for high educational class	Relatively more important for high educational class	Relatively more important for low educational class	Relatively more important for low educational class

As regards the *structure* of the European network of transnational attachment, we assume:

H₂: The European network of transnational attachment is hierarchical in nature, i.e., it is characterized by a smaller number of 'stars' to which most other countries feel attached.

This hypothesis follows, on the one hand, from our assumption that aspirational heterophily is likely an important organizing principle behind transnational attachment, so that large and otherwise 'excelling' countries are more popular. This would also be in line with the general argument that small groups inevitably have more exchange with large groups than vice versa

(Blau 1977), making large groups more relevant. On the other hand, it is nurtured by our assumption that contact between countries is key for transnational attachment combined with the observation that cross-border transactions are often themselves hierarchically structured (e.g., Barnett & Park 2005). In contrast, proximity and homophily would tend to produce less hierarchical, ‘regionalized’ networks. Yet, as described above, we assume that these two principles are secondary in structuring transnational attachment.

Concrete determinants of transnational attachment

Our conceptual part would be incomplete without pondering on *concrete factors* that may influence attachment. We arrange them in four groups, ordered roughly from ‘primordial’ (Inglehart 1991) and fixed to more temporary and fluctuating: (a) geographic factors, (b) historical and cultural factors, (c) economic and political factors, and (d) cross-border practices. In turn, each concrete factor is linked back to one of the underlying principles/mechanisms introduced above (Table 2).

Geographic factors. The physical distance between countries covers the proximity principle. Additionally, distance may reflect information asymmetries: People know more about neighboring countries and perceive them as more familiar (Portes & Rey 2005), which feeds into the homophily principle as well. Empirically, Berezin and Díez Medrano (2008) showed that EU support decreases with distance from Brussels. A second geographic factor is territory size. All else being equal, large countries may be more salient in people’s minds (Gerritsen & Lubbers 2010) and may thus receive more feelings of attachment than smaller countries. This would be a different effect than in the case of trust, where *smaller* countries are seen as more trustworthy (Delhey 2007a)—likely because they do not pose a threat (Kleiner 2016).

Historical and cultural factors. Cultural similarities in terms of religion and language may shape transnational attachment according to the homophily principle (Deutsch 1953; Inglehart 1991). Empirically, speaking the same language increases transnational trust among Europeans (Delhey 2007a; Guiso et al. 2009; Inglehart 1991), more so than a common religion. Collective experiences such as wars represent a historical dimension of international contact. A history of military conflict might reduce attachment, as in the case of transnational trust (Guiso et al. 2009). Another cultural factor to consider is a country’s presence in the media. Classical news value theory (Galtung & Ruge 1965) argues that foreign newscasts are often from and about prominent (and to a lesser extent culturally close) countries. Thus, media presence predominantly stands for a nation’s salience and cultural prestige, which makes transnational attachment more likely due to aspirational heterophily.

Political and economic factors also relate to all four principles/mechanisms. Aspirational heterophily may be at work regarding the length of EU membership, since long-standing member states could be perceived as being ‘key players.’ In trust research, however, a positive impact of membership years is controversial (pro Klingemann & Weldon 2013, contra Delhey 2007a). According to the same logic, wealthier societies may receive more attachment, especially from less affluent countries. A common currency (the euro) is widely seen as a binding symbolic factor (Bruter 2005). This mainly fits the homophily principle, although a common currency can also facilitate exchange between countries (Deutsch 1953). Finally, trade

flows represent cross-border contact in the economic realm. Economic transactions seem to foster trust (Delhey 2007b; Klingemann & Weldon 2013), and perhaps also transnational attachment.

Table 2. Factors influencing transnational attachment and their main underlying logic

Factors →	Geography	Culture and history	Politics and economy	People's social practices
<i>Proximity</i>	Contiguity			
<i>Homophily</i>		Common language Religious proximity Former union	Common currency (euro)	
<i>Aspirational heterophily</i>	Territory size (receiver)	Media presence (receiver)	EU membership length (receiver) Standard of living (receiver) Difference in standard of living	
<i>Cross-border contact</i>		Former conflict (-)	Trade flows	Migrants Tourists Students Online friendships

(-) denotes a negative influence on transnational attachment.

People's cross-border practices. The last set of factors we consider includes transnational human activities such as migration, student exchange, tourism, and online friendships. Since these practices result almost by necessity in contact across borders, we assume them to breed transnational attachment.

As argued in the previous section and Table 1, transnational attachment is probably more based on contact and aspirational heterophily than on homophily and proximity. Accordingly, transferring this assumption about the varying relevance of basic principles/mechanisms to the sets of concrete factors described here, we expect that:

H₃: *Transnational attachment is most strongly driven by factors representing aspirational heterophily and cross-border contact and to a lesser extent by factors representing homophily and proximity.*

Social divides in transnational attachment

So far, we have considered populations as a whole. But what about inner-societal divides? Transactionalist research shows that cross-border practices in Europe have a social gradient (Delhey et al. 2015; Kuhn 2016). Given the expected role of contact in transnational attachment, we assume that the structure of transnational attachment and its determinants will also differ by social strata. To explore this idea further, we focus on education as an indicator of social stratification. Education not only correlates with socioeconomic status—providing opportunities and necessary resources for transnational involvement—but also boosts people’s cognitive abilities in general and foreign-language proficiency in particular (Gerhards 2014). These resources and abilities allow the well-educated to build transnational skills, to engage with other cultures (*contact*), and to develop EU-favorable attitudes (Inglehart 1991; Mau 2009). Empirically, higher education levels strongly predict transnational practices (Kuhn 2015), less Euroscepticism (Hakhverdian et al. 2013), and more trust in other nations (Gerritsen & Lubbers 2010). Moreover, if aspirational heterophily is indeed a basic principle of attachment while the highly educated form the ‘aspirational class,’ as Currid-Halkett (2017) has argued, then it seems reasonable to expect that:

H₄: *The more highly educated feature higher levels of transnational attachment than the less educated, resulting in a denser network.*

As for determinants, we do not expect *major* differences between educational classes in which factors structure their network of attachment. Yet there might be minor differences, stemming from cognitive abilities and the accessibility of information. Assuming that information on proximity and the similarity of countries is more easily available and requires less cultural and economic capital than information related to aspirational heterophily and cross-border contact, we hypothesize that:

H₅: *In comparison to the more highly educated, the network of attachment of the less educated is more strongly structured by factors representing proximity and homophily, and less strongly structured by factors representing aspirational heterophily and contact.*

Research design

Data

Our main data source is the Eurobarometer 73.3 from 2010, which covers all EU-27 member states, with 500 to 1,481 respondents per country. We employed this survey to obtain the dependent variable, transnational attachment, using a total of 26,602 individual observations,

which we aggregated by country. The resulting macro-level matrix covers the entire network of country-to-country ties between the EU-27 member states ($27 \times 26 = 702$ connections). Subsequently, we augmented the data set by adding explanatory variables. These data stem from a range of sources, including the United Nations, the World Bank, and the World Tourism Organization (see Table 3). There are no missing values.

Dependent variable

We derive *transnational attachment* from the following Eurobarometer 73.3 question: ‘Which country other than your country do you feel the most attached to?’⁴ To answer H₁, we consider all named receiver countries, grouping them into EU-27 member states, European countries in a broader sense, and non-European countries (see Supplementary Material, Table S2 for a full list). For the network analyses needed to test H₂-H₅, we disregard mentions of attachment to countries outside the EU-27 so that the resulting network is *complete*, containing information on each country as a sender *and* potential receiver of attachment. This is an important precondition, because several of our measures would be noncomputable or biased in an incomplete network. Moreover, by focusing on the EU-27, the network is congruent with an existing political community. A further justification is that the lion’s share of EU citizens name another member state as the country they feel attached to, as our results on H₁ will demonstrate. The aggregated variable contains, for a given country pair $A \rightarrow B$, the number of respondents of the sender country A who feel attached to the receiver country B , divided by the total number of respondents from A .

Independent variables

As *geographic factors*, we use contiguity (1=yes) and the territory size of the receiver country (in km²). *Historical and cultural factors* include whether two countries have ever formed a union (1=yes) and whether they have been in conflict in the past (1=yes), whether their citizenries speak the same language (1=at least 9 percent of both populations do), and whether they are close in religious terms (measured as the probability that two randomly selected people from two countries share the same religion). A further cultural factor is the media presence of the receiver country in media outlets.⁵ *Economic and political factors* comprise trade flows, use of the same currency (euro, 1=yes), the logarithmized⁶ GDP of the receiver country, the GDP difference between sender and receiver country, and the receiver country’s length of EU membership (in years). As measures of *cross-border practices*, we include three forms of transnational mobility (migration, tourism, and student flows) and one form of communication (Facebook friendships). Human mobility flows are calculated relative to the population size of the sender country to control for the influence of the stock of potentially mobile people. For further specifics, see Table 3.

Table 3. Independent variables and their sources

Factor	Description	Source
Geographic factors		
Contiguity	1=common border, 0=otherwise	CEPII <i>GeoDist</i> Dataset (Mayer & Zignago 2011)
Territory size (receiver)	Log(territory of receiver country in km ²)	World Bank (2013)
Historical and cultural factors		
Historical union	1=have been same country in the past, 0=otherwise	CEPII <i>GeoDist</i> Dataset
Former conflict	1=military conflict (war) in the past, 0=otherwise	CEPII <i>Gravity</i> Dataset
Common language	1=common language is spoken by at least 9% of the population in both countries	CEPII <i>GeoDist</i> Dataset
Religious proximity	Probability that two people at random from two countries share the same religion. Runs from 0 (no proximity) to 1 (closest)	CEPII <i>Language</i> Dataset (Melitz & Toubal 2014)
Media presence (receiver)	Number of mentions of the receiver country in diverse media (2010)	East West Communications (2017)
Economic and political factors		
Trade flows	Trade flows (in 1,000,000 US dollars) per 1,000 sender-country inhabitants	UN (2016)
Standard of living (receiver)	Log GDP per capita (purchasing power parity) in current US dollars (2010)	World Bank (2013)
Difference in standard of living	Difference in GDP per capita (ppp) between sender and receiver country (2010)	World Bank (2013)
Common currency	1=belongs to the eurozone, 0=otherwise	CEPII <i>Gravity</i> Dataset (Mayer & Zignago 2011)
EU membership length (receiver)	In years (from 2010)	
Cross-border social practices		
Migrants	per 1,000 sender-country inhabitants (2010)	UN (2012)
Students	per 1,000 sender-country inhabitants (2010)	UNESCO (2013)
Tourists	per 1,000 sender-country inhabitants (2010)	UNWTO (2014)
Online friendships	Runs from 1=receiver country with which sender country has the fifth-highest number of Facebook friendships to 5=receiver country with which sender country has the highest number of Facebook friendships, 0=otherwise	Transnational Facebook Friendship Dataset, v1.0 (Deutschmann 2016)

For the third analytical step (the analysis of the attachment network by educational class), we split Eurobarometer 73.3 respondents into three classes according to their educational attainment. We use the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) scheme, treating ISCED0-1 as the lowest educational class ('primary education'), ISCED2-3 as the middle educational class ('secondary education'), and ISCED4-6 as the highest educational class ('postsecondary/tertiary education').

After recoding, 12 percent of respondents have a low education, 59 percent a medium-level education, and 29 percent a high education. These differences in class size are accounted for since the aggregated attachment strength is calculated by dividing the absolute number of attached persons in a given educational class by the total number of respondents in this educational class.

Methods

To *describe* the structure of transnational attachment, we draw on several network-analytical measures: *Centrality* captures how central a node's (=country's) position is in a network. Here, we use degree centrality, i.e., the sum of the node's weighted outgoing and incoming ties. *Reciprocity* measures the share of all dyads in a network with at least one tie present that is symmetric, i.e., that is connected in both directions. *Density* describes how connected a network is overall and can be measured by calculating either (a) all existing ties as a share of all theoretically possible ties (=density Δ) or (b) the average tie strength in the network (=average degree) (Borgatti et al. 2002: 151). *Centralization* is generally understood as the extent to which a network is dominated by a single node. However, this operationalization may not be very meaningful in some networks, for instance when several nodes occupy central positions. Therefore, we used the variance of the degrees instead, which has been suggested as a more accurate measure of the centralization/hierarchization⁷ of a network (Wasserman & Faust 1999: 180-182). To corroborate our findings on the network structure, we conducted several additional calculations using nonmetric multidimensional scaling, hierarchical clustering, and faction analysis (see Supplementary Material).

To *explain* the network structure revealed by these measures, we cannot use conventional OLS regression models since they are based on the assumption that observations are independent. In network data, however, observations are by definition *interdependent*. To solve this issue, we draw on the multiple regression quadratic assignment procedure (MRQAP) via Double Dekker semi-partialing (Dekker et al. 2007). MRQAP takes the relational structure of network data and the resulting interdependence of observations into account (Biggiero & Basevi 2009; Krackhardt 1988). To do that, it first runs a standard multiple regression analysis across the cells of the dependent and independent data matrices. It then randomly permutes the rows and columns of the dependent matrix many (here: 2000) times. This permutation procedure enables estimation of unbiased standard errors and is thus robust to the autocorrelation between rows and columns (i.e., interdependence of observations) that arises in network data (Tsai & Ghoshal 1998). A further advantage of this method is its robustness against multicollinearity (Dekker et al. 2003). We show standardized coefficients, which has the drawback that the interpretation of coefficients is less straightforward than for unstandardized coefficients (just as in usual OLS regressions) but the benefit of allowing effect sizes to be compared across independent variables. All analyses were conducted in UCINET 6 (Borgatti et al. 2002).

Results

The regional focus of Europeans' transnational attachment

How widespread is transnational attachment? A slight majority of EU-27 citizens (51 percent) say they feel attached to another country. Of these respondents, three quarters (74 percent) name another EU-27 member state as the country they feel attached to. Only 4 percent of all respondents name a country or territory that is European in a broader sense but not an EU-27 member state. Ten percent of all respondents name a non-European country (see Table S2 in the Supplementary Material). Overall, these figures strongly support H₁: EU citizens clearly favor European over non-European countries in their transnational attachments.

The structure of the European attachment network

Figure 1 illustrates the intra-EU-27 network of transnational attachment. The size of the nodes represents the countries' degree centrality. The thickness of the ties equals the strength of attachment towards the receiver country, to which the arrowhead points. The map reveals a highly asymmetric network. Five extremely popular countries with weighted indegrees >95 constitute its core: the United Kingdom (weighted indegree: 150.8), France (138.1), Germany (132.1), Italy (126.5), and Spain (97.6). Greece, which ranks sixth, is also quite popular (weighted indegree: 90.0), but its popularity results largely from one exceptionally strong incoming attachment tie from Cyprus. The top five countries, by contrast, receive attachment from a much broader set of countries. At the other end of the attachment scale (with weighted indegrees <10), there are nine countries, mostly small and/or situated on the eastern and southern outskirts of the EU: Romania (9.6), Bulgaria (6.2), Latvia (3.0), Estonia (3.0), Cyprus (2.8), Lithuania (2.5), Luxembourg (1.8), Slovenia (0.8), and Malta (0.4).

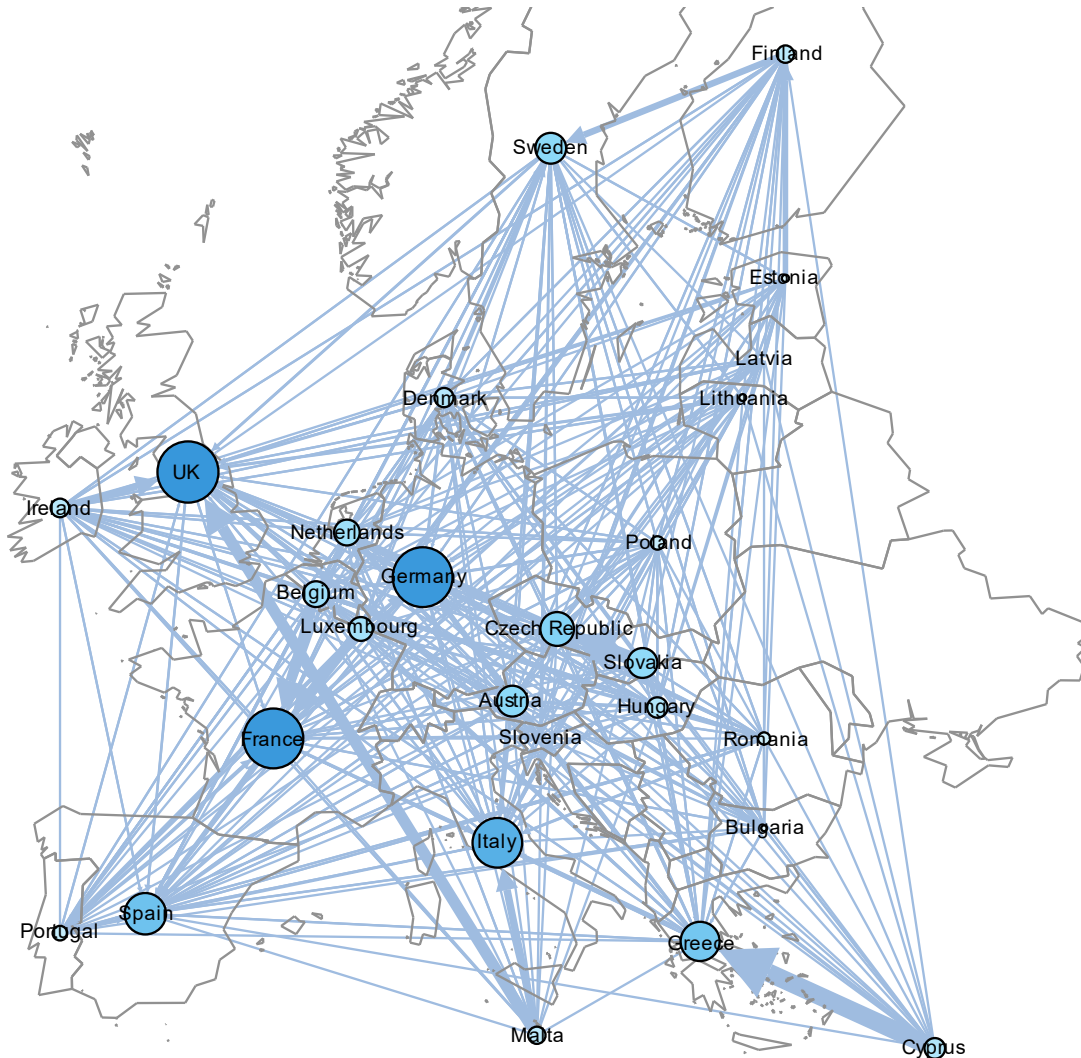
In line with H₂, there is thus clear evidence of an asymmetric structure. There is no evidence of larger regional clusters with strong reciprocal ties comparable to the voting blocs in the ESC (cf. Supplementary Material). Nevertheless, strong and sometimes reciprocal links do exist between a few specific country *pairs*. The five dyads with the highest transnational attachment (>22 percent of the sender-country respondents) are Belgium→France, Luxembourg→France, Malta→UK, Cyprus→Greece, and Czech Republic↔Slovakia. Only this last dyad is strong in both directions. Overall, reciprocity is also rather low (cf. Supplementary Material). These descriptive insights already suggest that, as expected, neither proximity nor homophily are dominant principles behind transnational attachment.

Correlates of transnational attachment in Europe

Table 4 presents the results of several MRQAP models that indicate whether and how various sets of factors influence the strength of attachment between countries. Model 1 contains only geographic factors as independent variables. It reveals that Europeans are more attached to neighboring countries (standardized coefficient: .339, $p < .001$) and to large countries (.225,

$p < .001$). The latter finding is the opposite of what trust research suggests, potentially due to a diverging underlying logic (aspirational heterophily vs. threat perception).

Figure 1. Europe as a network of transnational attachment



Note: Sizes are standardized and thus comparable across all graphs (incl. Figures 2 and S2).

Model 2 adds historical and cultural factors. Having been part of a union in the past has only a weak positive (and tentatively significant) effect, while former conflicts play no significant role at all. An explanation might be that historical unions and former conflicts mainly occur between neighboring countries, a factor that is already accounted for and that retains its significance in Model 2. Countries do feel a lot more attached to each other when their populations speak the same language (indicating homophily), whereas the positive effect of religious similarity is much weaker and only tentatively significant. Finally, countries that are prominent in the mass media receive dramatically more attachment (indicating aspirational heterophily).

Model 3 additionally includes economic and political factors, most of which turn out to play a minor role in comparison. Trade flows are the big exception—a first indication that contact is key for transnational attachment. The influence of geographic, historical, and cultural variables remains relatively stable as economic and political factors are amended.

Table 4. MRQAP regression models (DV: transnational attachment)

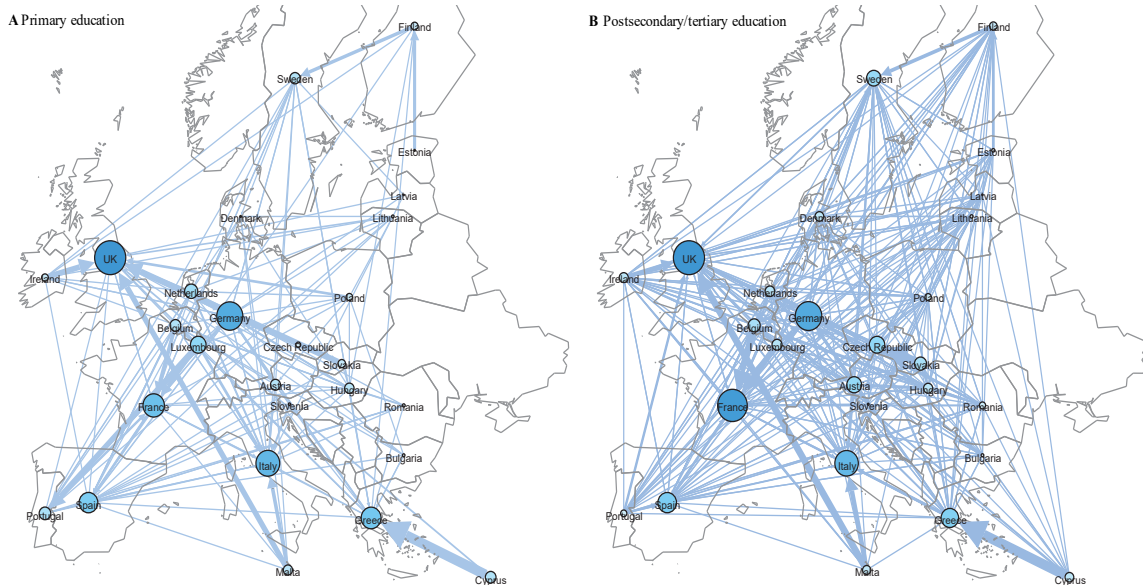
	M1	M2	M3	M4
Geographic factors				
Contiguity	.339***	.264***	.031*	-.119
Territory size (receiver)	.225***	.173***	.140**	.094**
Historical and cultural factors				
Historical union		.053°	.093°	.084°
Former conflict		-.014	.025	.004
Common language		.203***	.175**	.001
Religious proximity		.061°	.073°	.058*
Media presence (receiver)		.231***	.164***	.009
Economic and political factors				
Trade flows			.315***	.167**
Standard of living (receiver)			.028	.003
Difference in standard of living			.011	-.033
Common currency			-.001	.036
EU membership length (receiver)			.031	.080
Cross-border practices				
Migrants				.043°
Students				.387***
Tourists				.100*
Online friendships				.372***
Intercept	.000***	.000***	.000***	.000***
Adjusted R ²	.175	.271	.325	.619
Obs.	702	702	702	702

Note: Coefficients are standardized. °p<.1, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Adding to the importance of trade, people's cross-border practices, introduced in Model 4, are highly influential. Student flows and online friendships stand out with exceptionally strong effects. Tourism and migration (tentatively significant) are also conducive to attachment, but to a lesser extent. The strong impact of cross-border practices is also evident from the explained variance (R²) in transnational attachment, which almost doubles from Model 3 to 4, rising from 33 to 62 percent. Moreover, including cross-border practices reduces the impact of several other hitherto relevant variables: Contiguity, common language, and media presence are all rendered insignificant, and the influence of territory size and trade flows is reduced. This suggests that contact constitutes an essential transmission belt between country-pair attributes (that capture either proximity, homophily, or aspirational heterophily) on the one hand, and feelings of transnational attachment on the other. Territory size does, however, retain its significance,

indicating that, in line with H₃, aspirational heterophily also plays a direct role in the creation of transnational attachment next to contact.

Figure 2. Transnational attachment in Europe by level of education



Social divides between educational classes

We finally look at educational classes separately. Our data reveal that better-educated EU citizens are more likely to feel transnationally attached: Moving from the lowest to the highest educational class, the proportion of those feeling attached to another country rises steeply from 34 percent to 48 percent to 66 percent. To get further insights, we map the European network of transnational attachment separately for the lowest (Figure 2A) and highest educational class (Figure 2B).⁸ As the images suggest, the network of the more highly educated is significantly ($p < .001$) denser ($\Delta = .529$) than that of the less educated ($\Delta = .235$).⁹ Thus, H₄ is fully supported.

Does the *structure* of the network also differ by education? The attachment of the better educated is more centralized (indegree variance: 3487.2) than that of the less educated (1263.1), but the top five countries are identical. In terms of correlates, Table 5 shows MRQAP models that contain the same variables as the full model in Table 4, yet this time run separately for each educational class. Overall, there is a great deal of similarity in which factors play a role in transnational attachment, with the greatest similarity being between the middle and the higher educational class. In contradiction to H₅, cross-border practices and trade flows are most conducive to attachment across *all* educational classes. Having said that, there are interesting differences within this set of factors: Migrant flows have the strongest impact on attachment in the lowest educational class, whereas they are nonsignificant among the most educated, perhaps because the less educated are more affected by labor migration. In turn, trade flows and student exchange have smaller effects among the less educated.

We further hypothesized in H⁵ that attributes representing homophily and proximity play out more strongly for the less educated. Indeed, common language and currency breed attachment

solely in the lowest education class, which lends some support to H₅. Proximity, however, does not matter more to the less educated. Somewhat surprisingly, a historical union between countries slightly decreases attachment in this class, whereas it has a (tentatively significant) positive effect in the upper two educational classes. Furthermore, large countries attract more attachment among the better educated, indicating a greater role of aspirational heterophily for this group in line with H₅. As the last notable difference, the explanatory power (R²) of the models differs strongly, ranging from .48 for the lowest educational class to .81 for the highest. Thus, the attachment network of the more highly educated is not only more tight-knit and centralized, but also more explicable.

Table 5. MRQAP regression models (DV: transnational attachment by level of education)

	Primary	Secondary	Postsecondary/ Tertiary
Geographic factors			
Contiguity	-.092	-.112	-.111
Territory size (receiver)	.049	.095*	.105*
Historical and cultural factors			
Historical union	-.060**	.087°	.085°
Former conflict	.029	-.009°	.016
Common language	.046°	-.013	.009
Religious proximity	.054°	.062*	.054°
Media presence (receiver)	.048°	-.002	.070°
Economic and political factors			
Trade flows	.085°	.156**	.196***
Standard of living (receiver)	-.050	.008	.014
Difference in standard of living	.041°	-.030	-.042
Common currency	.087**	.048	.021
EU membership length (receiver)	.062	.065	.084
Cross-border practices			
Migrants	.123**	.036°	-.015
Students	.320**	.397***	.388***
Tourists	.076*	.093*	.097*
Online friendships	.317***	.385***	.315***
Intercept	.000***	.000***	.000***
Adjusted R ²	.484	.612	.810
Obs.	702	702	702

Note: Coefficients are standardized. °p<.1, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Summary and discussion

This paper introduced transnational attachment—the feeling of attachment towards a country other than one’s own—as an underresearched type of sense of community in the tradition of Karl Deutsch’s transactionalist paradigm. It also explored the European network of transnational attachment empirically. We want to highlight four findings:

1. Half of all EU-27 citizens feel attached to another country, and three quarters of this attachment goes to other EU-27 countries (confirming H₁).
2. The European network of transnational attachment is highly asymmetric and centered around five extremely popular countries (the UK, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain) to which most other countries feel attached (confirming H₂).
3. Transactions in general—and people’s cross-border practices in particular—are strongly correlated with transnational attachment (largely confirming H₃).
4. Transnational attachment is considerably higher among the better educated (confirming H₄). While cross-border contact matters for all educational classes (partly disconfirming H₅), migration (trade) influences the less (better) educated more.

These findings are novel and relevant in several respects. First, *conceptually*, we add to the political-science literature on EU-related public support and the sociological literature on ‘horizontal Europeanization’ (Heidenreich et al. 2012) by showing that transnational attachment is a specific type of sense of community with features that make it distinct from conventional indicators such as European identity, transnational trust, or ESC votes. For while flows of goods, people, and communication matter only somewhat for trust, they matter a lot for attachment; and in contrast to ‘friendships’ between European countries based on ESC votes, the network of transnational attachment is not regionalized but centralized. Our finding that EU citizens are clearly more attached to European than to non-European countries is also novel as previous research on attitudinal connectedness did not find evidence of such a clear-cut preference for Europe (Delhey et al. 2014).

Our analysis also allows a fresh look at Deutsch’s transactionalist theory of regional integration. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to demonstrate a *strong* relationship between cross-border transactions and sense of community at the aggregate level. One reason could be the nature of transnational attachment, which may simply be more contact-driven than trust or identification. Another reason could be methodology, as previous studies neglected the relational structure of transnational connectedness. Our study thus illustrates the added value of using social-network methodology in research on European integration, where this approach is still rarely used.

From a *policy perspective*, our results suggest that the European project can draw upon a certain sense of community flowing ‘horizontally’ between countries. From an Eastonian perspective, a political community with a stock of transnational attachment is better off as it is more resilient. Nevertheless, future research needs to explore for which political actions or common causes transnational attachment can be mobilized. The asymmetric structure of the network invites controversies, too. One interpretation could hold that the heavily centralized structure of transnational attachment provides the five core countries with a certain degree of legitimacy and political leverage to lead Europe. In terms of trust, Genna (2009) has found that hierarchically distributed trust can strengthen support for European integration. Another interpretation, however, could be that a truly *European* sense of community may require a more evenly knit network. The case of Brexit seems to support this latter interpretation: The UK is extremely popular among other countries (ranked first by weighted indegree; see Table S1), but

hardly reciprocates this attachment—even back in 2010 (ranked 19th by weighted outdegree). Such ‘one-sided love’ may constitute a problem for the social cohesion of Europe, and consequently for its political integration process. To strengthen cohesion, policymakers may thus aim specifically at consolidating those ties in the European network of transnational attachment that are currently weak or nonexistent. Our findings suggest that providing incentives for personal mobility to peripheral countries (e.g., via free Interrail tickets to young Europeans) may help counterbalance the current unequal distribution of transnational attachment in Europe. Doing so might be most effective among the less educated, who are currently least attached and may thus have a lot of upward potential (cf. Kuhn 2012). These steps may contribute to ensuring that the EU’s official goal of creating ‘an ever closer union among the peoples and Member States of the European Community’ is retained—beyond the ranks of the more privileged groups in society, which are both more involved in cross-border activities and benefit more from a cosmopolitan Europe (Fligstein 2008).

Our research has several limitations that must be noted. First, the data for the network analysis were limited to a politically defined ‘version’ of Europe (EU-27) instead of a more comprehensive, geocultural one. Second, the item formulation forced people to name only one country. Taking only people’s first-choice country into consideration can intensify a ‘winner-takes-all’ pattern, which might partially be responsible for the hierarchical structure of transnational attachment found here. It would thus be interesting to either take people’s second choice into consideration (see footnote 3) or to survey attachment differently to see whether the structure becomes more balanced. On the other hand, if respondents had been asked to assess how strongly they felt attached to each and every European country (as commonly done in transnational trust surveys), the outcome might have been biased through forced expressions of opinion on issues that people are actually rather disimpassioned about. Thus, the way our dependent variable was assessed ensures that it actually measures what it is supposed to measure. While we can be relatively certain that people actually feel attached to the countries they name, we do not know exactly why some countries are rarely named, e.g., whether it is because they are unpopular or unknown. Third, with regard to the tight-knit relation between human cross-border activities and transnational attachment we found, the possibility of reverse causality should be acknowledged. It may well be that people go to countries they feel attached to in the first place. Yet it is important to note that we are speaking about a relationship at the aggregate level, which makes reverse causality less likely. Nevertheless, longitudinal or experimental research designs would help to identify cause and effect.

Further research should try to resolve these and other issues. If the transnational attachment item were contained again in a future Eurobarometer, longitudinal comparisons would allow light to be shed on the *development* of the European network of transnational attachment over time and across the current EU crisis. In the recent Stein Rokkan Lecture mentioned in the Introduction, Ferrera expresses deep worries about a crisis-induced loss of sense of community ‘among EU governments, and especially among citizens of different nationalities’ (2017: 7). Currently, however, we can only speculate about the extent of this issue. It could also be worthwhile digging deeper into what defines transnational attachment at the psychological level within individuals. The more we know about transnational attachment, the better we may be able to understand what exactly it is that binds the people of Europe together and how we can

strengthen these bonds. Doing so will be a vital task in the coming years if European integration is to succeed in times of popular headwind.

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Notes

1. Some argue that the homophily principle works best among moderately similar countries. In countries that are too similar, the ‘narcissism of minor difference’ may impede the formation of positive attachment (Helbling 2011).
2. Empirical analyses of transnational trust, for instance, find that while wealthier, politically stable, and more secure Scandinavian and Western European countries are trusted the most (aspirational heterophily), linguistic similarity (homophily) and trade flows (contact, see below) also increase trust (Delhey 2007a; Genna 2017; Inglehart 1991).
3. Some authors argue that a common European culture does not actually exist, at least not to an extent that would be comparable to the cultural homogeneity that can be observed *within nation-states* in Europe (e.g., Delanty 1998). We would argue, however, that when the *global* rather than the national scale becomes the frame of reference (as in our case), it is not unreasonable to assume that two randomly selected European countries are on average culturally more similar than a random European/non-European country pair. For instance, religious differences between Catholic Italy and Calvinist Switzerland may appear large in isolation, but are dwarfed when seen in relation to extra-European countries like Buddhist Thailand or Shiite Iran.
4. Respondents were given the chance to provide a first (QB10a) and a second (QB10b) choice. To keep the analysis parsimonious, we focus on the first choices.
5. The data unfortunately do not allow us to distinguish between a country’s presence in global, European, or specific national media. *General* presence of the receiver country in media around the world thus serves as a proxy for presence in media that are consumed in the sender country.
6. GDP p.c. data are logarithmized to reduce the influence of the outlier Luxembourg (see Supplementary Material).
7. From a network-analytical standpoint, a highly centralized network is always highly hierarchical (Coleman 1964: 434), independently of what this hierarchy is based on (economic power, political leadership, etc.).
8. The graph for the middle class is available in the Supplementary Material.
9. Based on a dichotomized network in which only ties with values >.25 percent (=the median tie strength in the overall network) are counted. Table S1 (Supplementary Material) shows that the average degree is also larger in the network of the more highly educated (50.2) than in that of the less educated (27.4), confirming a difference in density also for the original, valued versions of the networks.

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