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Researchers discover what makes us feel European - and it's food

Eating at a French bistro or listening to Portuguese fado are more reliable signs of feeling European than having lived abroad, the British Sociological Association's annual conference in Leeds heard today. [Thursday 24 April 2014]

Dr Laurie Hanquinet and Professor Mike Savage analysed survey data on 6,016 people in the UK, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Romania and Spain to find out the characteristics of people who agreed with the statement 'I feel European'.

Dr Hanquinet, of the University of York, and Professor Savage, of the London School of Economics, found that characteristics most closely linked to feeling European were regularly buying items from other European countries, listening to European folk music, and eating European cuisine.

These were more likely to mark a person as feeling pro-European than having lived in another European country, or keeping in touch regularly with friends and family on the continent.

The preliminary statistical analysis found that, for example:

- People who bought goods from sellers or providers located abroad in the EU were more likely to agree they felt European than those who did not. The odds of them feeling European increased by 36%, if they did this.
- People who preferred cuisines from various European countries were more likely to agree they felt European than those who did not. The odds of them feeling European increased by 13% for each additional national cuisine they said they liked.
- The more people liked European folk music the more likely they felt European. The odds of them feeling European increased by 7% if so.

This contrasted with less significant factors, for example:

- People who had lived in another European country were not more likely to agree they felt European
- People who kept in touch regularly with friends and family in other European countries were not more likely to agree they felt European
- Only the fact of having undertaken some short trips within the EU has a significant positive effect, but relatively small compared to food and music.

The researchers also found that men were more likely than women to feel European, and the level of education of interviewees had no effect.

"Our analysis suggests interesting and possibly counter-intuitive findings," said Dr Hanquinet.

"There are only limited effects of personal mobility on European identity, whereas we could have expected mobility to have a stronger impact.

"However, one's musical tastes, and purchasing of goods and favourite cuisine are all associated with a European identity, and indeed can be seen as the most powerful of the variables we examine.

"One of our most interesting findings is the muted effects of education, which somewhat contradicts previous studies which indicate that more well educated and higher class individuals are more pre-disposed to feel European."

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Notes:

The 2014 British Sociological Association annual conference is being held at the University of Leeds from 23 - 25 April. Over 600 social scientists will present their latest research, and 750 people will attend. The British Sociological Association's mission is to represent the intellectual and sociological interests of its members. The BSA is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England and Wales. Company Number: 3890729, and a Registered Charity Number 1080235 www.britsoc.co.uk