

## **Sozialdemokratische Union Deutschlands?:**

*Die Identitätskrise deutscher Volksparteien aus Sicht ihrer Mitglieder*

Christian Junge (2012)

Many observers of the German party system find that the two major parties CDU and SPD have entered a state of "identity crisis". Often this diagnosis relates to the problems of these parties in communicating a reasonably consistent and recognizable image, wherein core and unique traits are clearly recognisable. An analysis of the media coverage reveals that communicating differences seems to be a particular problem. Often commentators draw far-reaching conclusions from the "identity crisis" verdict. For example, identity problems of parties are held at least partly responsible for the tendency of people feeling no longer associated with parties and fewer people aiming at a permanent active involvement in parties.

The book attempts to pursue these hypotheses at the level of party members. Is there empirical evidence of "organizational identity diffusion" amongst the members of the CDU and SPD? If so, how can we describe this phenomenon? Is there any empirical evidence of negative effects of organizational identity diffusion on the emotional party affiliation and/or partisan activity?

Drawing from organizational research terminology, the working concept "diffusion of organizational identity" circumscribes the difficulties of an organization member in the production of an inner sense of order in relation to the organizational image in accordance with the principles of differentiation, centrality, continuity over time and coherence.

One can speak of organizational identity diffusion in connection with parties, if partisans have difficulties in naming values that actually belong to the core of his or her own party, considering what traits actually differentiate the own party from others and what features have remained the same over time. Recent evidence of organizational research suggests that such a diffuse internal image of an organization has negative effects, at least to members' identification with their organization.

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