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The Trimarium Identity Dilemma: A Constructivist Perspective on the Social Foundations of Regional Cohesion

Introduction

What do Estonia and Greece have in common? What connects them? Undoubtedly, the correct answer may be that the Via Carpathia will connect these two countries. But can only infrastructure projects "connections"? Can "we" also be created through a shared identity?

The Three Seas Initiative (3SI) is a cooperation platform that brings together thirteen countries in Central and Eastern Europe located between the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Seas. It was initiated in 2015 by the Polish President Andrzej Duda and the Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović to boost regional development and connectivity (Popławski, Jakóbowski, 2020A). The first 3SI summit, which took place in Dubrovnik in 2016 (*The Joint Statement…*, 2016), ended with a declaration of economic cooperation in the fields of energy, transportation and communication infrastructure. From the very beginning, the 3SI was seen as a way to strengthen European unity and cohesion in the region by complementing existing European Union (EU) initiatives rather than competing with them. During the subsequent annual summits, the scope of the Initiative expanded: for example, during the summit in Warsaw in 2017, a Business Forum was established to involve the private sector. At the summit in Bucharest in 2018 a list of priority interconnection projects was drawn up and the way was paved for the creation of a special Investment Fund (*Joint Declaration of the Third Summit…*, 2018), and most recently Greece joined as the 13th member in 2023, while Ukraine and Moldova were invited as partners in the changing geopolitical conditions (*Joint Declaration of the Eight Summit…*, 2023).[2]

Despite the tangible achievements of the 3SI in terms of infrastructure and economic cooperation, the question arises as to whether "a shared regional identity" among the participating countries is needed to maintain and deepen this cooperation.[3] Previous research on the 3SI has mainly focused on the economic and political aspects of the

[2] Founding countries (2015/2016): Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia; enlargement: Greece (full member from 2023); participating associated countries: Ukraine (from 2023), Moldova (from 2023), Albania (from 2025), Montenegro (from 2025).

[3] For example: Shrepa Format – meetings between the summits of national 3SI coordinators for consultation of positions and development of documents (See more: Wilczek, Rudowski, 2021, pp. 12–13).

initiative (Orzelska-Stączek, 2019, pp. 131–155), paying relatively little attention to its theoretical foundations and identity dimension. As the 3SI evolves in a changing international environment – including shifts in EU dynamics and security challenges such as the war in Ukraine – the notion of a shared identity may become increasingly relevant.

1. Research Questions and Hypotheses

This article addresses the problem of 3SI identity (or lack thereof) from the perspective of social constructivism in international relations (IR). Constructivist IR approach emphasises the role of ideas, norms and identities in shaping the behaviour of states, as opposed to approaches that focus solely on material factors (Wendt, 1999; Finnemore, Sikkink, 1998, pp. 887–917; Onuf, 2013; Hopf, 1998, pp. 171–200; Kratochwil, 1989). From a constructivist perspective, collective identity can foster trust, commitment and mutual understanding between states, which can prove crucial to achieving the Initiative's goals.

To examine the above-established state of affairs, the analysis is based on the following research questions:

RQ1: How and why has the scope and rhetoric of the Three Seas Initiative evolved (2016–2025) in ways relevant to identity formation?

RQ2: Under what discursive conditions and mechanisms do official 3SI communications exhibit identity-building markers (e.g. first-person plural, community framing, norm invocation, role self-ascription, out-group contrast, temporal continuity), and how do these co-occur with institutionalisation cues (e.g., 3SIIF, Business Forum, Projects Progress Reports)?

RQ3: To what extent is identity discourse aligned with EU frames, and does this alignment intensify alongside institutional consolidation?

To answer these questions, the author analysed primary sources, including joint declarations at 3SI summits, reports on the implementation of 3SI priority projects, and relevant scientific literature on identity in IR. This approach allows to assess whether the discourse and activities within the 3SI indicate a need for a shared identity and how such an identity can be conceptualised.

Hypotheses marked:

H1: The salience of identity markers intensifies episodically around key institutional steps (2018→) and shocks (2022→).

H2: Identity markers co-occur with references to institutionalisation, consistent with identity-mediated cohesion.

H3: Identity framing is EU-congruent rather than bloc-separatist and becomes more explicit over time.

2. Article workflow

The subsequent sections of the article are structured as follows: first part presents research design. Secondly, the background of the Three Seas Initiative and the theoretical concept of identity from a constructivist perspective are reviewed. Then, the

results of the document analysis and the development of the 3SI were presented, examining the signs of identity building (or lack thereof) and the potential role of identity in the progress of the 3SI. These findings are then discussed in light of constructivist approach and comparable experiences. Finally, the article draws conclusions regarding whether a shared identity is necessary and what form it could take, as well as suggestions for future research.

Data and Methods (Research Design)

This study applies a directed qualitative content analysis (theory-driven) to the official Joint Declarations of the Three Seas Initiative (10 summits, 2016–2025). The corpus comprises publicly available, English-language documents adopted at each summit. I code paragraph-by-paragraph for the presence (0/1) of identity markers (M1–M6; see Operationalisation), and for their co-occurrence with (a) institutionalisation references (e.g., Three Seas Investment Fund, Business Forum, Projects Progress Reports, Innovation Fund) and (b) EU-alignment frames (e.g., Single Market, cohesion policy, Global Gateway, Military Mobility 2.0).

The approach is replicable and designed to test H1–H3 without relying on complex quantification: our inferences rest on transparent coding rules, traceable excerpts, and diachronic comparison. Ambiguous cases are resolved by second-pass self-audit. The analysis targets elite official discourse; it does not cover media or societal reception. This scope is appropriate to the article's focus on institutional identity-work and regional cohesion within the EU context.

Please, bear in mind that describes approach captures elite discourse and may underestimate societal layers. Future work should triangulate with media/civil society corpora.

I have analysed public, official documents only. No human subjects involved.

Operationalisation (Markers & Indices):

M1: Community "we." First-person plural and regional self-references signalling a shared we (e.g., "we," "our region," "together").

M2: EU alignment. Frames emphasising complementarity with EU structures/policies rather than separateness.

M3: Transatlantic anchoring. References to the US/NATO/G7 that situate 3SI within a wider community of practice.

M4: Openness/inclusiveness. Invitations to partners, status for associated states, widening participation.

M5: Resilience/security. Lexicon of resilience, deterrence, sanctions, and support to Ukraine after 2022.

M6: Institutionalisation. Mentions of 3SIIF, Innovation Fund, Business Forum, Projects Progress Reports, task forces.

C1: Discursive cohesion. Consistency/intensity of M1-type community framing across paragraphs in a document.

C2: Institutional cohesion. Density/diversity of institutional references (M6) within a document.

Literature review

1. Three Seas Initiavite and their regional context

3SI was conceived as a regional cooperation mechanism aimed at bridging the development gap between Central-Eastern Europe and Western Europe by improving infrastructure, energy independence and economic integration (Jong Seung, Yongdeog, 2021, pp. 53–80). The participating countries identified three sectors – transport, energy and digital communication – as key to levelling out development with the western EU and increasing the region's competitiveness. Strengthening these connections was also seen as a way to increase the region's political and strategic importance in Europe. Moreover, as many Three Seas countries form the EU's external borders, improving infrastructure and connections was seen as crucial for greater European security and resilience. In this sense, 3SI provides political support for investments that not only serve national interests but also complement EU cohesion policy and strengthen transatlantic ties (d'Orville, 2022, pp. 45–59; Popławski, Jakóbowski, 2020B, pp. 23–44; Reginia-Zacharski, 2020, pp. 45–63; Lorek, 2021, pp. 75–93). By increasing the region's infrastructural and economic potential and levelling out long-standing development disparities, 3SI contributes to the overall stability of European or Euro-Atlantic institutions such as the EU and NATO (Ramdani, 2022; Reginia-Zacharski, 2020).

Informal state-to-state signalling precedes corporate-to-corporate signalling, with formal state-to-state signals supporting corporate actions, indicating a complex interplay between state and corporate actors in infrastructure diplomacy within the 3SI (Grgić, Kolar, Bašić, 2022, pp. 229–249). 3SI is also a metageographical concept, known better as a Central-Eastern Europe or Central and Eastern Europe[4].

From a theoretical point of view, 3SI can be examined through multiple IR lenses. As Paweł Pawłuszko notes (Pawłuszko, 2023, p. 8), the characteristics of 3SI reflect a mixture of different approaches: the **realist perspective** presents it as a means to increase the power and significance of member states; the **liberal perspective** emphasises the merging of interests and economic interdependence; a **federalist or functionalist viewpoint** notes the involvement of professional sectors to jointly solve regional problems; and an **intergovernmental approach** indicates the coordination of actions between sovereign states to influence broader European policy. It is worth noting that a **constructivist dimension** of 3SI can also be identified – the initiative's efforts can be interpreted as creating a common regional narrative or 'story' that can serve as the basis for a shared identity, which Pawłuszko did not note in his study. In other words, beyond specific projects, 3SI may gradually foster the idea of Central-Eastern Europe as a distinct region with shared characteristics and interests. Indeed, an expert quoted in Pawłuszko's report suggested that a "dynamic regional identity" may emerge within the *Trimarium* – one that requires moving beyond historical national rivalries and engaging ordinary citizens in addition to elites. While this concept remains aspirational, it emphasises the importance of identity considerations when assessing the long-term coherence of the 3SI.

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[4] A lot of space has been devoted to considerations in the literature about the appropriate name for this part of Europe, but it is difficult to reach a consensus on this matter and the discussion itself seems to be devoid of further meaning and effects (See more: Orzelska-Stączek, 2022, pp. 78–91).

Figure 1. Applicability of IR approaches and theories to 3SI explanations

Approach or theory	3SI's lifespan fact
Realism	Increasing 3SI region's significance
Liberalism	Bringing interests together
Federalism	Professional sector engagement for resolving regional problems
Communication theory	Developing elites' communication network
Intergovernmental approach	Coordination common actions and influencing on European Union
Constructivism	Creating common story of region with potential to construct identity

Source: Own elaboration (constructivism), based on T. Pawłuszko (2023), *Trójmorze jako proces budowania region*, in: T. Pawłuszko, et al., *Trójmorze. Budowanie regionu*, Warsaw.

2. A constructivist view of the category of identity in international relations

Identity has long been recognised as a key and at the same time controversial concept in IR (Tyrrell, 2007, pp. 511–522). Put simply, identity can be understood as a set of characteristics or beliefs that define a group and distinguish it from others. Manuel Castells defines identity as a "search for meaning" based on the choice of characteristics or attributes that individuals or communities prioritise over other sources of meaning (Castells, 2004). This means that identities are multifaceted by nature: different attributes (such as language, religion, values, historical experience) can be emphasised by a community in order to build a sense of self. Identity, according to Castells, concerns how meaning is organised and expressed, not just functional roles in a system.

The application of the concept of identity to states and regions introduces additional complexity. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman described identity as a kind of "project" or conscious declaration – something actively constructed to give meaning to our existence (Bauman, 2003, pp. 17–24). In the context of an intergovernmental initiative such as 3SI, Bauman's concept would suggest that a collective identity would have to be deliberately created and proclaimed by its leaders. However, as Bauman himself points out, such identity building is challenging; in fact, it is difficult to discern any clear intentions in the official documents of the 3SI founders to articulate the common values that constitute a shared identity. This difficulty is echoed by Ursula Stark Urrestarazu, who notes that even after decades of debate, the concept of identity in IR remains complicated and contested, carrying different interpretations for different scholars (Stark Urrestarazu, 2015, pp. 126–149). In short, while most agree that identity matters, there is less agreement on how exactly to define or operationalise it in a given international context.

Constructivist scholars argue that collective identity can shape the worldview of political elites and thus influence state behaviour. For example, Taku Tamaki's (Tamaki, 2010) work emphasises that political elites interpret the international environment through a shared understanding – essentially through the prism of collective identity. Richard Ned Lebow (Lebow, 2008, pp. 473–492) argued that group identities in IR are often formed in opposition to the 'other' (through negative stereotypes) but also points out that there is a lack of empirical evidence for the necessity of an external antagonist; instead, shared memories and positive mutual identification can equally foster solidar-

ity. These observations suggest that a shared identity does not have to be built against someone but can be built around shared experiences or values.

Perhaps the most influential constructivist perspective on identity in IR comes from Alexander Wendt (Wendt, 1992, pp. 391–425). He conceptualises identity as a relatively stable, role-specific understanding of oneself and others that arises from social interactions and shared ideas. Within this framework, states can have multiple identities (for example, a country can simultaneously identify itself as a sovereign nation, a member of the European Union and a participant in the 3SI), but each identity is defined in relation to the social context. Importantly, Wendt argues that "identities are interests-in-the-making" – actors define what they want (their **interests**) based on who they think they are (their **identities**) (Wendt, 1999). A state's perception of its role and identity in an international grouping will influence what it expects from that cooperation. Thus, if the 3SI members begin to develop a sense of collective identity (a sense of "we" in the *Trimarium* region), this could fundamentally shape their goals and commitments within the Initiative.

In conclusion, the constructivist approach informs us that the creation of a shared identity among 3SI countries can be a transformative factor. Identity gives meaning to cooperation by defining how states perceive each other and what they expect to achieve together. Conversely, the lack of a shared identity can limit the depth of cooperation, as states implicitly perceive the 3SI only as a transactional, interest-based arrangement.

The following sections examine whether an emerging shared identity can be detected in the activities and rhetoric of the Three Seas Initiative and how the presence or absence of such an identity may affect the progress of the Initiative.

Despite substantial work on the political economy and governance of the 3SI, the **identity dimension** remains empirically under-specified. Existing accounts seldom **operationalise** identity-building in official 3SI discourse or **test** whether identity markers **co-vary** with institutionalisation and EU-aligned framing. This study **fills that gap** by proposing measurable indicators of regional identity and testing constructivist expectations on the complete corpus of 3SI summit declarations (2016–2025) and core governance communications.

Analysis and findings

Across 2016–2025, official 3SI declarations consistently frame the Initiative as inside the EU order rather than parallel to it (M2). Early texts (2016–2017) already stress complementarity with EU mechanisms; institutional references expand from 2018 onward (M6), and resilience/security language intensifies post-2022 (M5). In line with H1–H3, paragraphs with institutional cues frequently co-feature community "we" framing (M1/C1) and EU-congruent language (M2/C2). Representative, traceable examples include: 2016 on acting "without creating a parallel structure;" 2020 that 3SI "complements and enhances cooperation in the EU;" and 2025 placing EU integration at the centre of 3SI undertakings. Co-occurrence is most visible in paragraphs that (i) introduce or expand instruments (Business Forum, 3SIIF, Innovation Fund), (ii) formalise partner inclusion, or (iii) frame post-2022 resilience-contexts

where communal "we" and EU-alignment are rhetorically functional. These patterns substantiate the identity-mediated cohesion expectation without requiring extensive quantification.

Mechanistically, EU-congruence acted as a discursive constraint against bloc-separatist framing, while institutional milestones (e.g., 3SIIF launch) and security shocks after 2022 predictably shifted the register toward resilience and coordination.

An analysis of the official documents and progress reports of the 3SI reveals both strengths and weaknesses in the Initiative's development to date. Joint declarations from summits between 2016 and 2024 have focused clearly and consistently on practical goals. All declarations emphasise the geographical scope of the Three Seas Initiative (EU member states between the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Seas) and the commitment to improve infrastructural connectivity in energy, transport and digital communications. This is presented as necessary to promote economic growth and integration in the region, as well as to strengthen European unity and resilience. The declarations also emphasise political support and coordination between participating countries to achieve these goals. Each summit declaration emphasises the 3SI's openness to cooperation with external partners – from companies to interested non-member states – provided they share the 'fundamental values and principles of European civilisation' (a phrase that recurs in 3SI summit declarations). In other words, while the 3SI objectives are largely economic, they are embedded in a values-based context, aligning with the broader Euro-Atlantic community.
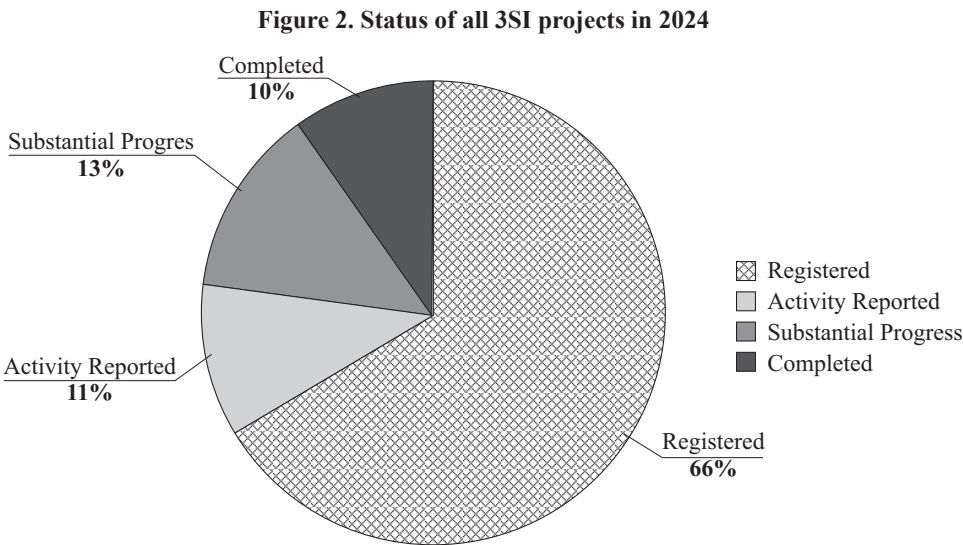
Over time, the scope of cooperation expressed in these declarations has evolved. For example, at the second 3SI summit (*The Second Summit...*, 2017), leaders agreed to establish the Three Seas Business Forum to engage private sector stakeholders and encourage cross-border business involvement. The third summit (*Joint Declaration of the Third Summit...*, 2018) went further, approving a list of priority interconnection projects across the region and signing a letter of intent on the establishment of the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund. In the following years, new priorities were added – in particular, support for innovation and research and development was recognised as an objective, reflecting the expansion of the agenda beyond traditional infrastructure. The Initiative has also grown in terms of membership and partnerships: in 2021 3SI leaders expressed openness to adding interested countries, and in 2022–2023, the Initiative officially welcomed Greece as a new member and granted Ukraine and Moldova partner or observer status (in 2022 Ukraine received special partnership status, in 2023, they became associate partners together with Moldova) (*Joint Declaration of the Sixth Summit...*, 2021; *Joint Declaration of the Seventh Summit...*, 2022; *Joint Declaration of the Eight Summit...*, 2023). These changes indicate that the 3SI is gradually maturing into a more institutionalised regional framework with broader perspectives.

One of the noteworthy observations from the content of the summit declarations is what they do not mention explicitly. Despite frequent references to unity, cooperation and shared values, the declarations refrain from explicitly invoking a common regional identity or describing the 3SI in terms of a collective persona. The emphasis is on practical cooperation and mutual interests. In light of constructivist expectations, one might expect rhetoric about a "Three Seas community" or a shared heritage binding member states, but such language is largely absent. This suggests that at the official

level, the 3SI has not begun overt identity-building – at least not in a declarative sense. Any emerging identity is implicit and lies in the repeated emphasis on common interests and values.

Beyond official statements, progress on 3SI projects provides another perspective from which to assess the need for a shared identity. According to the latest 3SI Progress Report (*The Status Report 2024*, 2024), the initiative has identified more than 100 priority projects in the transport, energy and digitalisation sectors, with an estimated total investment value of more than €100 billion. However, many of these projects are long-term endeavours, and a significant number are slowly starting or securing financing. By 2023, only some of the projects had been completed or were in progress, while many others remained in the preparatory phase. This delay in implementation was a cause for concern among 3SI leaders and stakeholders. In response, the Three Seas countries took concrete steps: in 2019, they established the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund (3SI-InveF) and subsequently introduced a dedicated stock exchange index to attract capital to the region. The fund, supported by the development banks of several member states, aims to leverage public and private investments for 3SI projects. Consequently, developing instrumentarium, 3SI states decided to empower another fund: 3 Seas Initiative Innovation Fund (3SIInnoF), established in 2024. 3SIInnoF is an investment vehicle operating as a fund of funds, which aims to support companies in the growth phase in Central and Eastern Europe. Development banks from Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary have joined the fund. Each institution has committed to invest €20 million. The European Investment Fund (EIF) acts as fund manager and will also double the investment volume of the 3S Innovation Fund from its own funds.

These above-described financial instruments are innovative for the Initiative, reflecting the recognition that market confidence and external resources are needed to achieve 3SI objectives.

Figure 2. Status of all 3SI projects in 2024

Source: Own work, based on Status Report of 2024 (projects.3seas.eu).

So what could be preventing the 3SI from realising its full potential? Analysts and commentators point out that one of the intangible factors may be the lack of a strong regional **identity or brand** for the Three Seas area. Unlike the Visegrad Group or the Nordic Council, which are relatively well-known as regional groupings with a clear identity, the Three Seas Initiative is a newer construct that outsiders (and even citizens of member states) may not yet perceive as a coherent entity. The lack of a clear identity may make it difficult to mobilise widespread support and trust among the member states themselves and may also make the region less transparent for external investors or partners. In fact, some studies suggest that an insufficient sense of common identity among 3SI countries is one of the reasons for the unsatisfactory involvement of external, non-state investors in their projects. Without a narrative of "we are in this together," each country can be perceived (by investors) as pursuing its own agenda, which can dampen enthusiasm for investing capital in regional ventures.

In sum, the findings point to a disconnect between the 3SI's economic ambitions and its socio-political cohesion. The Initiative has successfully defined what it wants to achieve (infrastructural connectivity, economic growth) and created mechanisms (summits, forums, funds) to realise these goals. However, it has not yet established *the idea of* the Three Seas region as a unified entity with a shared identity. This may become increasingly important as the Initiative seeks to deepen cooperation and increase resources.

The following section discusses how adopting a constructivist lens can shed light on the implications of this identity gap and explore whether and how a shared identity for the Three Seas Initiative can be cultivated.

Discussion

Examining the Three Seas Initiative through the lens of constructivism, we are able to highlight the importance of the emerging question of identity. The above-described findings suggest that although the 3SI has established a functional framework for cooperation, it lacks a deeper sense of community, which constructivists argue can be crucial for sustained cooperation. In practice, this means that beyond signing agreements and mobilising funds, member states may need to cultivate a shared identity to fully realise the Initiative's ambitions. A shared identity could strengthen solidarity among the 3SI countries, making them more willing to support each other's projects and present a united front to external partners. It could also make the Initiative more understandable and attractive to external investors by providing a clear narrative about what the Three Seas region means.

How can such a Three Seas identity be fostered? A constructivist approach offers some clues. Identities are created and reinforced through social interaction, communication and the internalisation of shared norms. In the case of 3SI, this means that every instance of cooperation is not only a means to an economic end, but also an opportunity to build a sense of 'we' among the participants. Joint infrastructure projects, if formulated appropriately, can become part of the story a region tells about itself – a story of mutually beneficial development and a shared destiny. The annual sum-

mits and business forum already provide spaces for elites to network; extending these people-to-people contacts (for example, through academic exchanges, cultural events or civil society forums under the 3SI's umbrella) can engage ordinary citizens in the idea of the Three Seas community. This grassroots aspect is crucial: as one expert aptly noted at the 3SI 2024 conference,[5] "we don't know each other as well as we should" – a candid acknowledgement that deeper interpersonal knowledge across borders is needed to overcome stereotypes and historical prejudices.

Another insight from the same conference was the importance of presenting national contributions as part of a joint effort. The Polish representative involved in the 3SI Investment Fund shared an instructive anecdote: when asked why Poland would invest in a Bulgarian port project, she emphasised that "it is not a Polish fund, but a 3SI fund – a joint fund." Such a perspective, if widely adopted by decision-makers, changes the image of initiatives not as one country helping another, but as all countries investing together in a common region. This kind of narrative directly strengthens the sense of shared identity, signalling that the gains of each member are a win for the whole group. Furthermore, another panellist emphasised that "trust is needed now more than ever" among 3SI countries, especially for endeavours such as digital infrastructure, where interdependence is high. Trust is, of course, both a product and a prerequisite for identity building. The more the 3SI countries trust each other – in terms of looking after regional interests, upholding common values – the more credible a shared identity becomes.

When constructing a regional identity, historical and cultural issues must be approached with caution. Centro-Eastern Europe is not a blank slate; it is criss-crossed with memories of alliances and conflicts that can be a source of unity or division. For example, long-standing tensions (such as those between Hungary and some of its neighbours due to the border arrangement after World War I or between some Baltic and Central European nations due to past grievances) can hinder the creation of an overarching Trimarium identity if ignored. A constructivist approach would not sweep these differences under the carpet but rather encourage dialogue and a reinterpretation of history in a way that promotes reconciliation. The trajectory of Western Europe provides a promising example: former adversaries such as France and Germany were able to rebuild their relationship after 1945 based on shared goals and values, which ultimately contributed to the emergence of a European identity alongside national identities. Similarly, 3SI states can work to transform historical divisions into a collective narrative of overcoming differences in the name of regional prosperity and security. In practice, confidence-building measures – such as joint commemorations, educational programmes about each other's cultures or joint dialogues about security – can complement economic projects by creating an emotional basis for unity.

Finally, it is important that any shared identity formed within the 3SI remains inclusive and complements existing identities. The Three Seas Initiative is not an alternative to the European Union, but a platform within it; all 3SI members (except new partners Ukraine and Moldova) are EU members and mostly in major share European values and commitments. Therefore, the 'Three Seas identity' should be seen as strengthening

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[5] „The Three Seas Initiative: an original concept of regional cooperation in different approaches" was held in Warsaw on 10 June 2024. The event was organised by the Three Seas Initiative Research Center at the Institute of Political Studies, the Polish Academy of Sciences.

the members' commitment to a stronger and more cohesive Europe. By aligning the 3SI identity with the broader European identity – essentially positioning the Three Seas region as the eastern backbone of the EU – the initiative can avoid the trap of being perceived as a divisive bloc. Instead, it presents itself as a constructive contribution to European unity, with its members jointly tackling regional challenges. This approach resonates well with constructivist ideas: identities are multi-layered, and a regional identity can coexist harmoniously with national and continental identities.

In summary, the constructivist 3SI perspective emphasises that material projects alone may not guarantee success if they are not accompanied by a social fabric of shared identity and trust. Analysis and expert observations concur that building a common identity – through open communication, inclusive participation and conscious shaping of a collective narrative – can significantly increase the effectiveness of the Initiative. This would enable the Three Seas Initiative to act not only as a convenient coalition, but as a community bound by a sense of common purpose. Although creating such an identity is undoubtedly a difficult, long-term undertaking, it seems both necessary and feasible.

Conclusions and perspectives

Methodologically, the article shows that regional identity-work can be traced in official documents through transparent, replicable markers (M1–M6) whose diachronic dynamics and co-occurrence with institutional references (C1–C2) are consistent with constructivist expectations.

The presented study aimed to determine whether the Three Seas Initiative needs a common identity and what such an identity might entail. Adopting a constructivist perspective allowed us to look beyond the Initiative's economic projects and consider the social basis of regional cooperation. An analysis of 3SI documents and development, combined with theoretical insights, strongly suggests that the Three Seas Initiative's shared identity is not only beneficial but perhaps crucial to their long-term success. By emphasising a common goal and shared objectives – essentially fostering **an identity for Trimarium** – 3SI can strengthen internal cohesion and present itself more effectively to the wider international community.

The evidence supports the hypothesis that a shared identity would strengthen the performance of the Three Seas Initiative. A shared identity can strengthen regional cooperation by increasing mutual trust and willingness to undertake joint ventures. It also appears to be a factor in attracting external investors, as a united region is more attractive and understandable than dispersed national efforts. One of the innovative aspects of 3SI emphasised in this study is the establishment of the 3SI Investment Fund, 3 SI Innovation Fund and the regional stock index – tools designed to stimulate financial flows to the region. These mechanisms have begun to satisfy practical financing needs, but their full potential may remain untapped without the reinforcing effect of a regional identity that signals stability and unity to outsiders.

Moreover, the 3SI objectives are closely aligned with the European Union's objectives of promoting economic growth, connectivity and convergence among Member

States. Just as the EU integration process has been facilitated by the development (however imperfect) of a sense of European identity, the Three Seas Initiative can benefit from fostering a sense of belonging among its participants. The addition of support for research and innovation to the 3SI agenda, the emphasis on sustainable development and the openness to partnerships reflect broader European values and priorities. This means that building the Three Seas identity does not require inventing a completely new value system – rather, it requires adapting and emphasising existing shared values (democracy, development, cooperation) in a regional context.

In conclusion, although creating a common identity within the Three Seas Initiative is a significant challenge, it is an achievable and worthwhile endeavour. The process will require conscious efforts: promoting inclusive dialogue, emphasising historical similarities, breaking down mutual misunderstandings and consistently presenting 3SI activities as part of a common narrative. If the member states succeed in this, the benefit will be a more resilient and dynamic Three Seas Initiative – one that can better coordinate internal activities and exert greater influence externally. A stronger sense of 'we' in the Trimarium would cement the Initiative's role as an important pillar of European infrastructure development and regional stability.

Finally, it must be recognised that the 3SI operates in a fluid international environment. Geopolitical changes, security crises and changes in the EU itself will influence the evolution of the Three Seas Initiative in the coming years. This emphasises the need for continuous research on the 3SI, especially with regard to the formation of its identity. Future research could, for example, examine how the inclusion of new members or partners (such as Ukraine and Moldova) affects the cohesion of the group or how external threats and challenges stimulate greater unity (or discord) among the Three Seas countries. Understanding identity in such a dynamic context is crucial because it will shape the Initiative's adaptability and significance. In conclusion, the Three Seas Initiative seems to 'need' a shared identity – or at least would benefit greatly from one – and the journey to build this identity is an essential part of its maturation as a regional coalition.

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Summary

The study investigates whether the success of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) depends on the formation of a shared regional identity. Anchored in the constructivist paradigm of international relations, it addresses the overlooked theoretical dimension of identity-building within 3SI. Drawing on summit declarations, official reports and constructivist literature, the analysis reveals a discrepancy between the Initiative's economic ambitions and the absence of overt identity-forming narratives. Despite growing institutionalisation and practical cooperation tools – such as investment and innovation funds – there is limited rhetorical or symbolic articulation of collective belonging. The findings suggest that fostering a sense of "we" could enhance trust, cohesion, and external visibility, strengthening both internal solidarity and attractiveness for investors. The article argues that identity, constructed through social interaction and shared norms, is not a by-product but a precondition of sustainable regionalism. It proposes pathways for identity formation rooted in inclusive dialogue, historical reconciliation and alignment with European values. This perspective positions 3SI not as an alternative, but as a regional pillar of a cohesive Europe.

Key words: Three Seas Initiative, regional identity, constructivism, international relations, Central and Eastern Europe

Dylemat tożsamości Trimarium: konstruktywistyczna perspektywa społecznych podstaw spójności regionalnej

Streszczenie

W niniejszym badaniu analizuje się, czy sukces Inicjatywy Trójmorza (3SI) zależy od ukształtowania wspólnej tożsamości regionalnej. Opierając się na konstruktywistycznym paradygmacie stosunków międzynarodowych, badanie porusza pomijany wymiar teoretyczny budowania tożsamości w ramach 3SI. Analiza oparta na deklaracjach szczytowych, oficjalnych raportach i literaturze konstruktywistycznej ujawnia rozbieżność między ambicjami gospodarczymi Inicjatywy a brakiem jawnych narracji kształtujących tożsamość. Pomimo rosnącej instytucjonalizacji i praktycznych narzędzi współpracy, takich jak fundusze inwestycyjne i in-

nowacyjne, retoryczne lub symboliczne wyrażanie zbiorowej przynależności jest ograniczone. Wyniki badań sugerują, że wzmacnianie poczucia „my" mogłoby zwiększyć zaufanie, spójność i widoczność zewnętrzną, wzmacniając zarówno wewnętrzną solidarność, jak i atrakcyjność dla inwestorów. W artykule argumentuje się, że tożsamość, budowana poprzez interakcje społeczne i wspólne normy, nie jest produktem ubocznym, ale warunkiem wstępnym zrównoważonego regionalizmu. Proponuje się w nim ścieżki kształtowania tożsamości oparte na dialogu integracyjnym, pojednaniu historycznym i dostosowaniu do wartości europejskich. Perspektywa ta pozycjonuje 3SI nie jako alternatywę, ale jako regionalny filar spójnej Europy.

Słowa kluczowe: Inicjatywa Trójmorza, tożsamość regionalna, konstruktywizm, stosunki międzynarodowe, Europa Środkowa i Wschodnia