

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND DUAL BELONGING WITHIN ROMANIAN COMMUNITY IN AUSTRIA

*Marian Ionel CUTOI**

Abstract. *Intra-EU migration generates significant reconfigurations of identity and forms of belonging in the context of interaction between distinct social spaces. This article examines identity construction among Romanian migrants in Austria, with particular attention to dual belonging and the configuration of hybrid identity within the Romanian community. The analysis is grounded in a constructivist perspective, in which identity is conceptualised as a dynamic process shaped by social interactions and everyday experiences. The empirical component is based on a quantitative approach that combines data from a socio-economic survey conducted among the Romanian community in Austria with official statistical data. The study explores the relationship between language practices, social networks, perceptions of belonging, and patterns of everyday life to examine how these dimensions relate to processes of identity construction. The findings indicate a predominant pattern of dual belonging, characterised by differentiated orientations toward both the country of origin and the host society. Contextual language use, sustained social ties, patterns of belonging, and everyday practices reflect identity construction processes in which multiple elements are integrated into a coherent form of hybrid identity. The article proposes an interpretation of dual belonging as a process of identity construction, highlighting the processual and contextual nature of identity in the context of intra-EU mobility.*

Keywords: *identity construction; dual belonging; hybrid identity; Romanian community; intra-EU migration.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Intra-EU migration has generated significant transformations not only at the socio-economic level but also in terms of identity and forms of belonging. In this context, cross-border mobility facilitates continuous interaction between distinct social spaces, fostering the emergence of complex forms of identity positioning. Among Romanian migrants in Austria, these processes are reflected in forms of belonging that are not confined to a single national framework but involve simultaneous orientations toward both the society of origin and the host society. The literature on migrant integration has often focused on measurable dimensions such as employment, housing, language acquisition, and income. However, Atalay et al. (2023: 10) note that existing integration research often overlooks micro-level processes and everyday encounters, drawing attention to the relevance of identity negotiation, social interactions, and experiences of belonging. Building on this perspective, the present article examines identity construction within the Romanian community in Austria, with particular attention to dual

* Independent Researcher. University of Vienna, PhD in the field of International Relations and European Studies, Babes-Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca. E-mail: mcutoi@yahoo.com.

belonging and the configuration of hybrid identity. The analysis is grounded in a constructivist perspective, in which identity is understood as a dynamic process shaped through social interactions and everyday practices.

From a methodological perspective, the study employs a quantitative approach, combining primary survey data with secondary statistical data. The findings are examined through comparative analysis and theoretically informed interpretation. The analysis focuses on the relationship between language practices, the structure of social networks, perceptions of belonging, and patterns of everyday life in order to explore how these dimensions relate to processes of identity construction.

The article is structured into four main sections: the theoretical and conceptual framework, which outlines the main perspectives on identity and belonging; the context of the Romanian community in Austria; the research methodology; and the empirical analysis of identity construction and dual belonging. The concluding section synthesises the main findings in relation to the theoretical framework and highlights their implications for understanding identity and belonging in the context of intra-EU migration.

2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the context of contemporary mobility and the expansion of diasporic communities, the analysis of identity and belonging highlights their dynamic, relational, and deeply contextual nature. Identity is not constituted as a fixed reality but as a continuous process of construction, while belonging emerges as a situated experience shaped by social interactions, everyday practices, and simultaneous orientations toward multiple social spaces. Within this framework, the study integrates complementary theoretical perspectives, namely transnationalism, social network theory, and constructivism, alongside contributions from theories of identity and belonging.

Transnationalism provides a conceptual framework for understanding multiple forms of belonging in the context of contemporary migration. Schiller, Basch, and Blanc (1995: 48) define transnationalism as the process through which migrants build and maintain social relations that simultaneously connect the society of origin and the society of destination. This perspective is further developed by Portes (1997: 16; 2016: 83), who argues that migrants are not anchored in a single social space but participate simultaneously in the economic and social life of multiple contexts. In the case of Romanian migration, Sandu (2010: 100, 167) highlights the interconnectedness of the “social worlds” of migration, while Ducu (2018: 68) examines the distribution of family and social practices between the society of origin and the society of destination.

Such relationships are facilitated and reproduced through migration-related social networks, which constitute the social infrastructure of mobility. Massey et al. (1993: 450) argue that migration becomes self-sustaining through the development of networks of family and friends, which reduce the costs and risks associated with migration. Ritchey (1976: 389) highlights their role in migration decision-making, while Fawcett (1989: 678) distinguishes between familial, institutional, and cultural ties. From a social capital perspective, these networks facilitate access to resources and contribute to the structuring of social relations, playing an essential role in shaping the sense of belonging. Stark and Jakubek (2012: 15) emphasize the informal cooperative dimension of these networks, while Simon (2019: 3) highlights their self-reproducing character.

The identity dimension is examined from a constructivist perspective, which conceptualises identity as a product of social interactions and internalised norms. Wendt (1992: 397) argues that identities are products of social interaction rather than predefined realities, while Checkel (1998: 327–338) emphasises the role of norms and processes of social learning in their formation and internalization. Within this framework, migrant identity is not understood as a fixed reality but as a dynamic process shaped by everyday experiences and interactions within different social contexts. A complementary perspective is provided by Hall (1990: 225), who conceptualises cultural identity as situated simultaneously within the registers of “being” and “becoming”, emphasising its processual and open-ended character. Identity is not a fixed essence but the outcome of continuous transformation shaped by the interplay of history, culture, and relations of power. In this sense, identities are understood as forms of positioning in relation to narratives of the past, through which individuals define and redefine themselves across different social contexts.

This processual dimension of identity is further developed through the conceptualisation of intermediate spaces of cultural negotiation. Bhabha (1994: 37) develops the notion of the “third space,” emphasising that identity is not constituted exclusively in relation to either a culture of origin or a culture of destination, but within an intermediate symbolic space in which meanings are negotiated, reinterpreted, and reconfigured. This space does not represent a mere overlap of two cultural frameworks, but rather a site for the production of new meanings, where difference becomes constitutive of identity. In this context, the literature describes these dynamics through the concept of hybridity, which reflects the dynamic and recombinatory character of cultural interactions. Rowe and Schelling (1991: 231) define cultural hybridity as “the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices,” emphasising the capacity of cultural forms to be reconfigured in new contexts. Along similar lines, Nederveen Pieterse (2009: 58–60) conceptualizes cultural mixing and hybridisation as ongoing processes through which cultural forms and practices are continuously recombined across different contexts.

This discussion is complemented by perspectives on belonging, which shift the focus from the structure of identity to the lived experience of social relatedness. Yuval-Davis (2006: 197) conceptualises belonging in terms of emotional attachment and the feeling of “being at home,” emphasising its dynamic and contextual character, as it is constructed and reconfigured within specific social contexts. To capture the complexity of the concept, she proposes an analytical distinction between three interrelated levels: social locations, identifications and emotional attachments, and ethical and political value systems (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 199). These levels highlight how belonging is constituted at the intersection of structural positions, subjective experiences, and normative frameworks. From a complementary perspective, Antonsich (2010) provides an analytical clarification of belonging by distinguishing between two interrelated dimensions: on the one hand, belonging as the personal and emotional experience of “being at home” (place-belongingness) (Antonsich, 2010: 646), and, on the other, belonging as a discursive resource involved in processes of social inclusion and boundary-making (politics of belonging) (Antonsich, 2010: 649). This distinction highlights that belonging is not merely a subjective experience but is also constructed and reconfigured through social interactions and concrete contexts, in which individual

experiences intersect with processes such as social inclusion and exclusion, recognition, social participation, and the negotiation of identity positions.

At the conceptual level, Brubaker (2002: 164–167) challenges the tendency to understand social groups as fixed and clearly bounded entities. Instead, through the concept of “groupness,” he emphasises the variable and context-dependent character of collective identification, which emerges and changes through particular social situations and interactions. Applied to belonging, this perspective suggests that attachment to social groups should not be understood solely in terms of formal membership but as a dynamic process shaped by context and social relations. Along similar lines, Anthias (2008: 5) conceptualises belonging through the notion of “translocational positionality,” emphasising that it is not fixed but constructed in relation to context and individuals’ social positions. Belonging therefore varies according to specific situations and the ways in which individuals relate to different social contexts.

The integration of these perspectives allows the migration experience to be conceptualised as a continuous process of negotiating identity and belonging, in which mobility does not lead to identity substitution but rather to transformation and reconfiguration across multiple social contexts. Within this framework, identity emerges as open-ended and dynamic, often characterised by hybridity, while belonging is understood as an experience constructed through simultaneous orientations toward multiple social spaces, particularly the society of origin and the host society. Social networks and everyday practices mediate these processes, providing the contexts through which individuals continuously negotiate their positioning and forms of belonging.

3. THE CONTEXT OF THE ROMANIAN COMMUNITY IN AUSTRIA

The Romanian community in Austria developed progressively, experiencing accelerated growth following the political changes of 1989 and, particularly, after Romania’s accession to the European Union in 2007. The liberalization of access to the labour market contributed to increased mobility and the consolidation of predominantly economic migration, characterised by occupational diversification and an increasingly visible presence within the social structure of the host society (Cutoi, 2025: 25–26). This development is also reflected in the substantial growth of the Romanian population in Austria. While the Romanian presence was relatively limited in the early 1990s, it has increased steadily over the past two decades, with Romania becoming one of the main countries of origin of Austria’s migrant population. According to Statistik Austria data, Romanian citizens currently constitute one of the largest groups of foreign nationals in Austria, second only to German citizens. At the end of 2025, 158,204 Romanian citizens were registered as residents in Austria (Statistik Austria, 2026).

At present, the Romanian community in Austria is characterised by a predominantly urban distribution, with a significant concentration in Vienna and in economically developed regions (Cutoi, 2025: 212–214). Beyond its numerical dimension, the community is characterised by active social networks and the maintenance of ongoing ties with the society of origin. In this context, social integration is shaped by everyday practices and the structure of social relations, while differentiated language use and participation in social networks contribute to the formation of specific patterns of integration and belonging (Cutoi, 2025: 39–42). The community thus functions simultaneously as a space of integration and a space for identity continuity.

In this context, the migration experience cannot be reduced to a unidirectional process of integration but involves simultaneous orientations toward both the society of

origin and the society of destination. A pattern of everyday life thus emerges, characterised by dual belonging and transnational practices, in which structural integration coexists with the maintenance of active ties with Romania (Cutoi, 2025: 49). From this perspective, the analysis of identity construction and belonging becomes relevant for understanding how individuals negotiate these multiple positions. The Romanian community in Austria thus provides an appropriate empirical context for investigating the relationship between social practices, networks of interaction, and perceptions of belonging under conditions of intra-EU mobility.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study employs a quantitative approach that combines the analysis of official statistical data with empirical data collected through an online questionnaire administered to members of the Romanian community in Austria. This combination makes it possible to relate the structural dimensions of migration to subjective experiences of belonging and identity construction. Statistical data provided by Statistik Austria are used to outline the socio-demographic profile of the community and to provide comparative reference points for interpreting the survey findings. In this sense, the analysis is not limited to presenting the empirical data but also examines them in relation to existing indicators in order to identify convergences and differences between the structural and subjective dimensions of the migration experience.

The empirical component consists of an online survey conducted among the Romanian community in Austria, designed to capture dimensions relevant to the analysis of identity and belonging, including language practices, the structure of social relations, perceptions of belonging, and aspects related to lifestyle. The questionnaire was completed by 241 respondents aged between 15 and 61, drawn from all nine administrative regions of Austria. It was distributed through digital channels frequently used within the community, including WhatsApp, Facebook, and email, which made it possible to reach respondents across different geographical and socio-demographic backgrounds.

The sample is non-probabilistic and based on self-selection; therefore, the findings cannot be considered statistically representative of the Romanian population in Austria as a whole. Nevertheless, they provide empirically relevant indications of internal patterns within the community and variations across subgroups. The data analysis is based on descriptive statistics and comparisons between subgroups, for example by age, gender, or generation, while the findings are interpreted in relation to official statistical data. This comparative approach makes it possible to examine how everyday practices and social interactions relate to processes of identity construction and belonging in the context of intra-EU mobility. The empirical analysis focuses on the period 2023–2024, in line with the timing of the survey and the comparative statistical data used in the analysis. More recent demographic data are used only to provide an updated contextual profile of the Romanian community in Austria. Spatially, the study covers the entire territory of Austria. The main methodological limitations arise from the non-probabilistic nature of the sample, the potential subjectivity of respondents' answers, and the limitations of a single primary data collection instrument in capturing the full complexity of identity construction and belonging.

5. IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND DUAL BELONGING

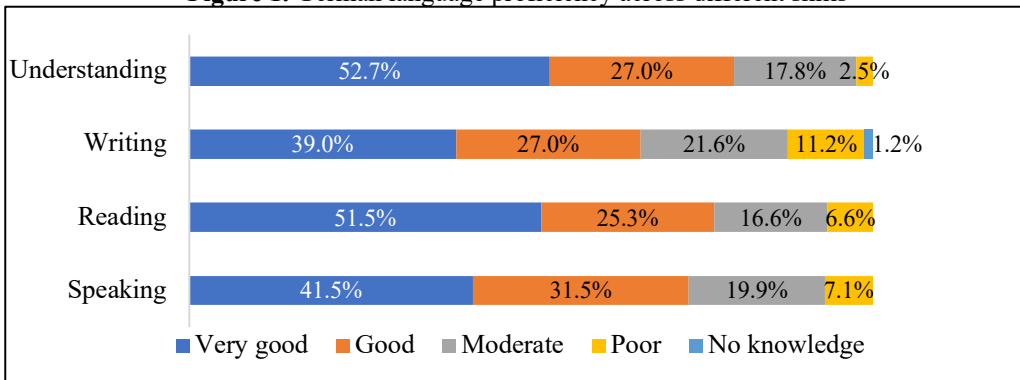
This section examines how identity and belonging are constructed in the context of migration through an analysis of the everyday practices and social relations of Romanian migrants in Austria. In this regard, language practices, social networks, perceptions of belonging, and lifestyle are examined as interdependent dimensions of the migration experience.

5.1. Language Practices and Identity

The analysis of language practices highlights how language use reflects individuals' positioning between the society of origin and the society of destination. Data provided by Statistik Austria show that members of the Romanian community in Austria generally have high levels of German language proficiency, with over 60% reporting good or very good levels in speaking and reading, and over 70% in comprehension and writing (Statistik Austria, 2023: 109).

The results of the author's survey are broadly consistent with this trend, while providing a more detailed picture of German language proficiency among respondents. The highest levels are recorded for understanding and reading, with 79.7% and 76.8%, respectively, reporting good or very good proficiency. Speaking also shows a relatively high level, with 73.0% of respondents assessing their proficiency as good or very good, while writing records a somewhat lower proportion of 66.0%. The distribution therefore suggests stronger receptive language skills, particularly understanding and reading, alongside comparatively lower levels in written proficiency. This overall profile is consistent with the Statistik Austria data and indicates a substantial linguistic capacity for participation in different social and institutional contexts. The distribution of proficiency across the four language skills is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. German language proficiency across different skills

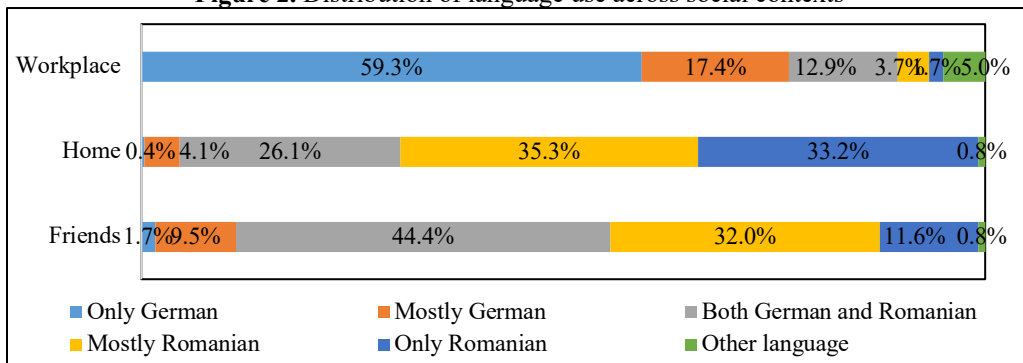


(Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from the author's survey)

Beyond the level of language proficiency, the analysis reveals that language use varies according to social context, reflecting a distinct organisation of everyday life. In the professional context, German is predominantly used, with 76.7% of respondents reporting that they use it exclusively or primarily. This pattern reflects adaptation to the institutional and functional requirements of the host society, where language proficiency becomes an important condition for economic and social participation. In contrast, Romanian predominates within the family environment, with 68.5% of respondents using

it exclusively or primarily. This distribution highlights the role of the family as a space for preserving cultural identity and indicates the persistence of forms of belonging anchored in the society of origin. Within social circles, mixed language use is evident, with 44.4% of respondents communicating in both Romanian and German. This linguistic alternation reflects flexible adaptation to diverse social contexts and suggests the presence of heterogeneous social networks in which interaction takes place among individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Compared with Statistik Austria data, which indicate a higher use of German within the family environment, the results of the author's survey point to a more pronounced use of the mother tongue in the private sphere. This difference highlights internal variations within the community and underscores the context-dependent nature of language practices.

Figure 2. Distribution of language use across social contexts



(Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from the author's survey)

Overall, these findings indicate that language use does not reflect a process of substitution, but rather a functional distribution across different social spaces. German is primarily associated with the public and professional spheres, while Romanian remains dominant in the private and family spheres. In this sense, language practices can be understood as expressions of an identity shaped across multiple social and cultural spaces and as an expression of a dynamic process of negotiating belonging. Differentiated language use reflects not only adaptation to distinct social contexts but also the structure of the relationships in which individuals are embedded. From this perspective, the analysis of social networks becomes essential for understanding how spaces of belonging are configured.

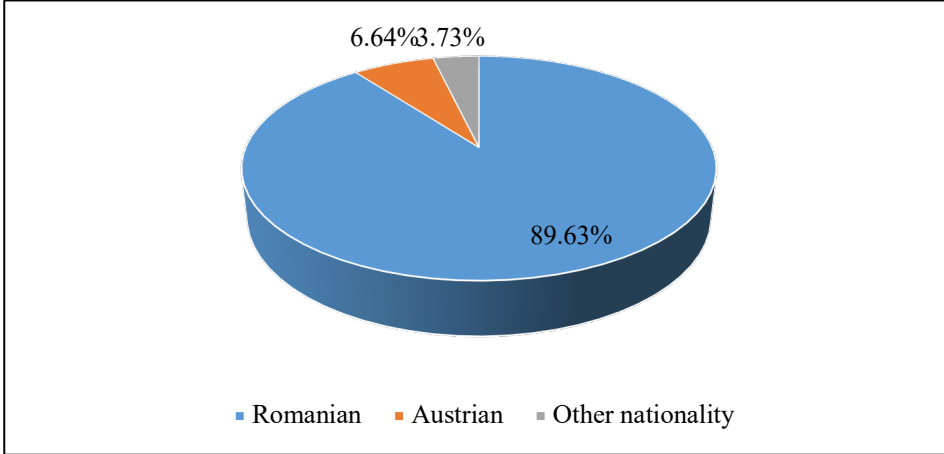
5.2. Social networks and spaces of belonging

The structure of social networks provides a relevant perspective on how belonging is configured in the context of migration. The analysis of respondents' circles of friends indicates that close relationships are concentrated primarily within the Romanian community, with 89.63% of respondents reporting that their closest friends are Romanian.

This concentration of relationships within the community reflects the presence of well-established social networks that can function as spaces of support and cultural continuity. At the same time, the presence of a segment of respondents (10.37%) who develop close relationships with people of other nationalities indicates openness to intercultural interaction and the existence of social networks extending beyond the

community of origin. This dual structure of social networks—predominantly internal, yet partially open—suggests a differentiated distribution of belonging, in which close relationships remain anchored in the community of origin, while external ties facilitate connection with the host society. This relational pattern is summarized in Figure 3.

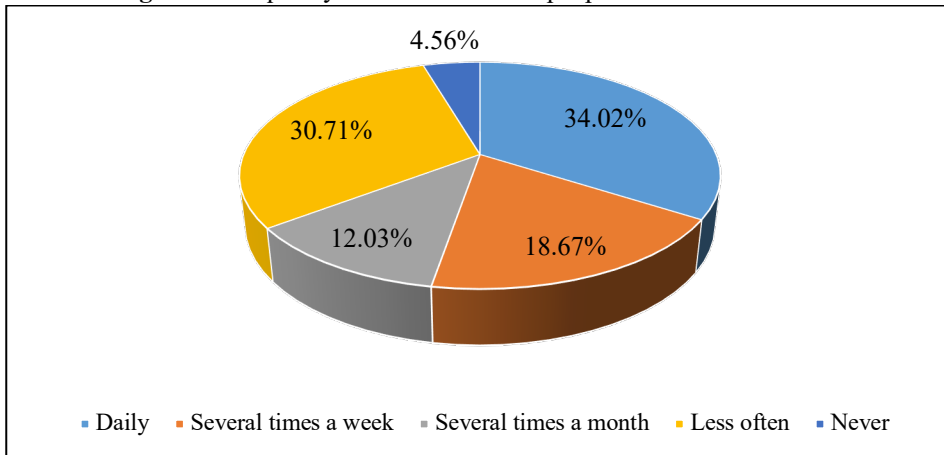
Figure 3. National composition of close friendship circles



(Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from the author's survey)

Beyond the structure of close relationships, the frequency of interaction with people of other nationalities points to a high level of social contact outside the Romanian community. More than half of respondents interact daily or weekly with people of other nationalities. This high frequency of interaction indicates that, although close relationships are predominantly internal, everyday social life unfolds within a broader social context characterised by frequent contact with members of other groups. The coexistence of close-knit networks and wider social interactions reflects a layered structure of belonging, in which individuals participate simultaneously in multiple social spaces. Figure 4 provides a visual overview of these interactions.

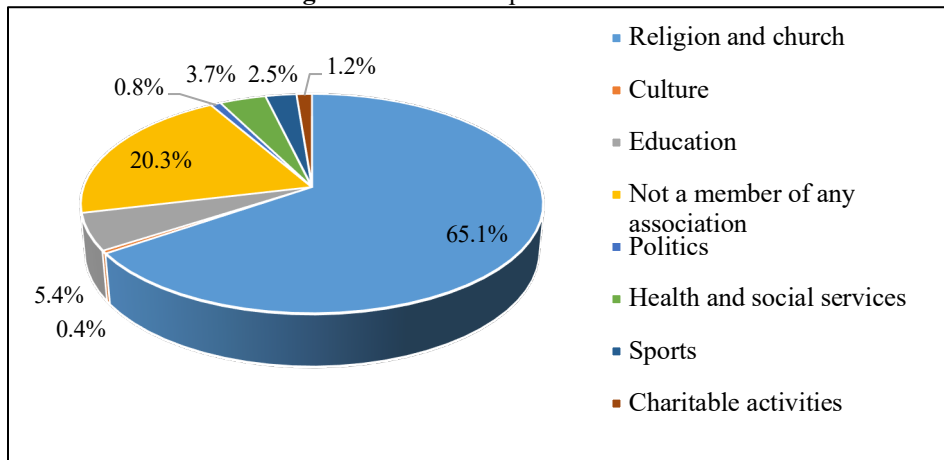
Figure 4. Frequency of interaction with people of other nationalities



(Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from the author's survey)

Another relevant element in the configuration of belonging is associational participation. The results indicate that approximately 80% of respondents are involved in at least one form of association, with religious organisations representing the most common form of participation. This type of involvement suggests the existence of institutionalised spaces of socialisation that strengthen relationships within the community and contribute to maintaining forms of collective belonging. At the same time, participation in different types of organisations indicates a diversification of social experiences and an expansion of networks beyond the immediate community sphere. These patterns are summarized in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Membership in associations



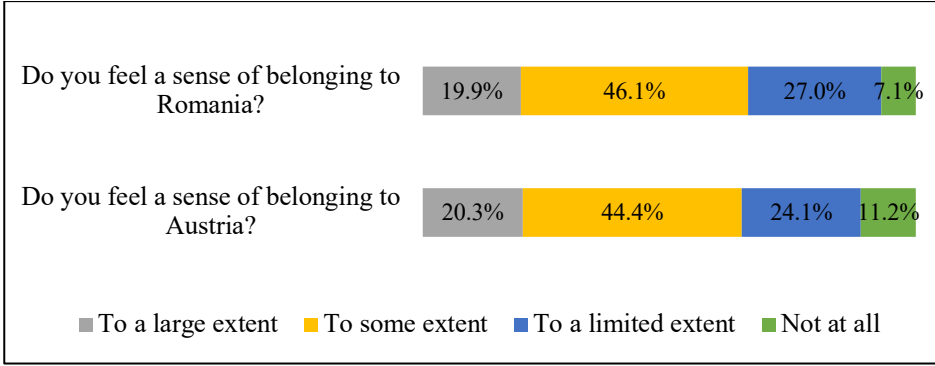
(Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from the author's survey)

Taken as a whole, these findings indicate that social networks are not uniform but are structured across multiple levels corresponding to different forms of belonging. Close relationships anchored in the Romanian community, frequent interactions with members of other groups, and participation in associational structures together shape a complex social space in which belonging is distributed across different social contexts and continuously negotiated through social interaction.

5.3. Perceptions of Belonging

Perceptions of belonging offer direct insight into how individuals define their relationship with the social spaces in which they live. Data provided by Statistik Austria indicate that 73.5% of Romanians in Austria report a sense of belonging to the host society, while 45.4% report a comparable sense of belonging to the country of origin (Statistik Austria, 2023: 97). These figures point to a stronger overall orientation toward the host society, while also indicating that attachment to the country of origin remains significant. The results of the author's survey provide a more nuanced perspective on the intensity of these forms of belonging. Figure 6 allows for a direct comparison of respondents' perceived belonging to Austria and Romania.

Figure 6. Sense of belonging

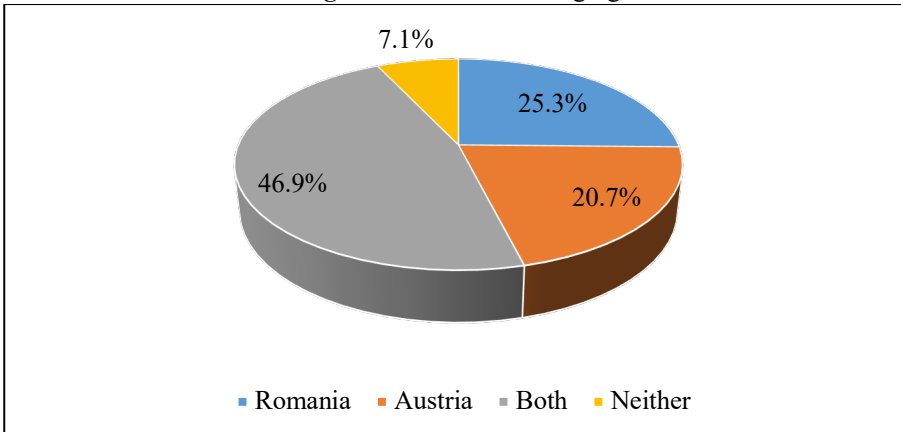


(Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from the author's survey)

When the categories “to a large extent” and “to some extent” are combined, 64.7% of respondents report a sense of belonging to Austria, compared with 73.5% in the Statistik Austria data. In relation to Romania, 66.0% of respondents report belonging to a large or some extent, compared with 45.4% recorded by Statistik Austria. The comparison therefore points to differences in the intensity and distribution of belonging across the two datasets: attachment to Austria is somewhat lower in the author's survey, while attachment to Romania is more pronounced. At the same time, 34.1% of respondents report belonging to Romania only to a limited extent or not at all, illustrating substantial variation in the intensity of attachment to the country of origin. More recent data also indicate some variation over time. According to the 2024 Statistik Austria report, 68.5% of Romanians report a sense of belonging to Austria (Statistik Austria, 2024: 97), compared with 73.5% in the previous report. This variation suggests that subjective belonging should not be understood as a fixed dimension of the migration experience but as one that may change in relation to social contexts and everyday experiences.

A clearer picture of the structure of belonging emerges when respondents are asked to position themselves between the two countries. The results show that 46.9% of respondents identify with both countries, while 25.3% identify exclusively with Romania and 20.7% with Austria. This distribution is presented in Figure 7.

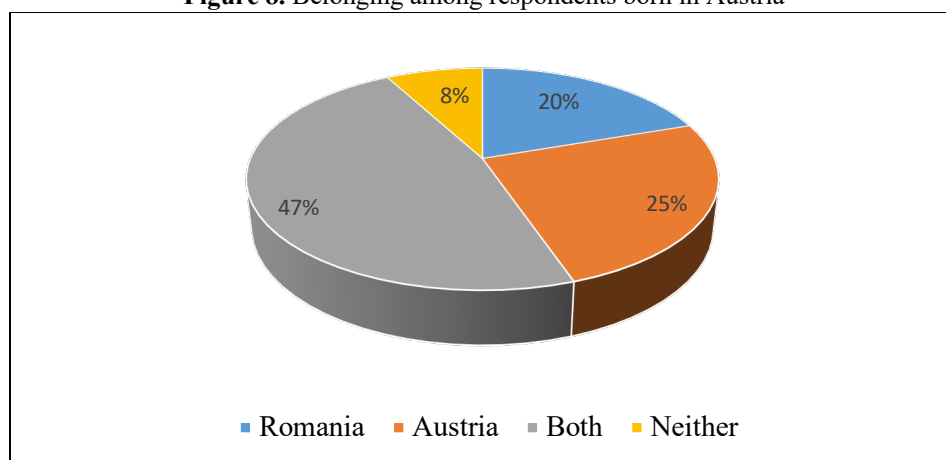
Figure 7: Declared belonging



(Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from the author's survey)

This distribution highlights dual belonging as the dominant form of identity orientation, suggesting the simultaneous articulation of multiple social and cultural frameworks. A relevant aspect for understanding these dynamics is the distinction between formal and lived belonging. Although 36.5% of respondents have acquired Austrian citizenship, only 20.3% report belonging to Austria to a large extent. At the aggregate level, this difference suggests that formal membership and the intensity of lived belonging do not necessarily coincide. Belonging therefore cannot be reduced to legal status alone but should also be understood as a subjective experience shaped through social interactions and everyday practices. A generational analysis shows that dual belonging remains the dominant orientation among respondents born in Austria, while exclusive identification shifts moderately toward Austria. This pattern is examined more closely in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Belonging among respondents born in Austria



(Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from the author's survey)

Among respondents born in Austria, 47% identify with both countries, while 25% identify with Austria and 20% with Romania. Dual belonging therefore remains at a level similar to that observed in the overall sample, while exclusive identification shows a moderate shift toward Austria. This distribution is consistent with simultaneous socialisation across two cultural frameworks and with the configuration of hybrid forms of identity.

The findings indicate that belonging is not structured in exclusive terms but rather as a relational and dynamic process through which individuals construct their positioning across different social contexts. Differences between Statistik Austria data and the results of the author's survey point to variations in the intensity and distribution of subjective belonging across the two datasets. These differences also reinforce the need to distinguish between formal membership, participation in the host society, and the subjective experience of belonging. At the same time, the distribution of responses shows that dual belonging represents the dominant form of identity orientation, with nearly half of respondents reporting simultaneous identification with both social spaces. This orientation reflects not only the maintenance of ties with the country of origin but also the integration of experiences and practices associated with the host society within a shared identity framework. The findings further indicate that belonging is not determined

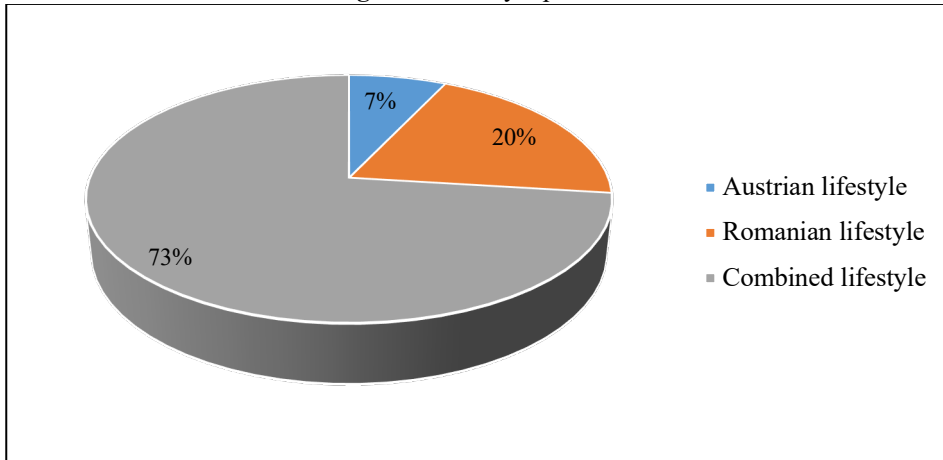
exclusively by formal factors such as citizenship but is constructed through everyday experiences, social interactions, and processes of symbolic negotiation. In this sense, the distinction between legal status and perceived belonging highlights its subjective and context-dependent nature.

The generational analysis further shows that dual belonging remains prominent among respondents born in Austria, while exclusive identification shifts moderately toward the host society. This configuration is consistent with an identity articulated across multiple and interdependent social and cultural frameworks rather than fixed within a single social space. Belonging can therefore be understood as a continuous process of negotiation in which individuals do not simply choose between two social spaces but integrate them into a complex identity configuration, reflecting the dynamic and multilayered nature of the migration experience.

5.4. Lifestyle and hybrid identity

The analysis of lifestyle provides an integrated perspective on how different dimensions of the migration experience are articulated in everyday life. Data provided by Statistik Austria indicate that a combined lifestyle predominates among Romanians in Austria, with 65.9% reporting that they combine elements of their culture of origin with those of the host society, while 31.5% predominantly adopt an Austrian lifestyle and only 2.6% predominantly follow the lifestyle associated with their country of origin (Statistik Austria, 2023: 105). The results of the author's survey are consistent with this overall pattern, while revealing a different distribution of responses. The predominance of a combined lifestyle is illustrated in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Lifestyle patterns



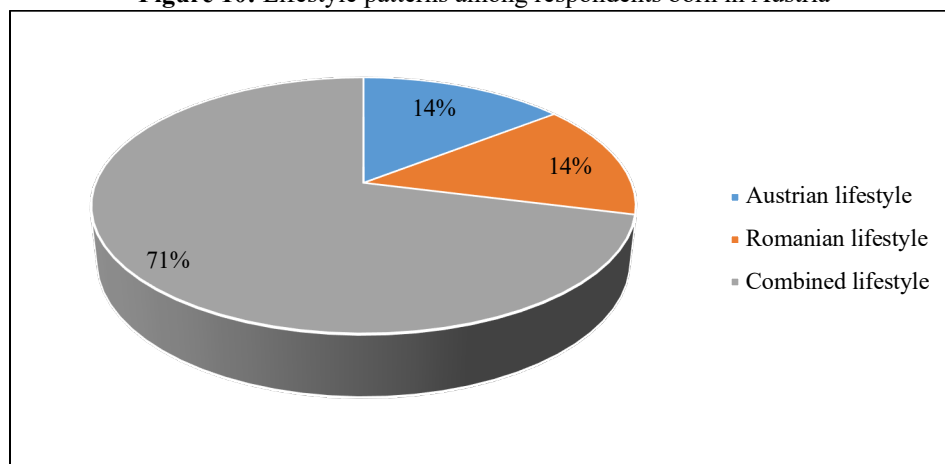
(Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from the author's survey)

Thus, 73% of respondents report combining the two lifestyles, while 20% identify predominantly with a Romanian lifestyle and only 7% with an Austrian one. Compared with Statistik Austria data, the proportion of respondents who predominantly adopt an Austrian lifestyle is considerably lower (7% compared with 31.5%), while orientation toward a Romanian lifestyle is more pronounced (20% compared with 2.6%). These differences suggest that, although everyday practices are adapted to the context of the host society, orientations associated with the society of origin remain significant. The

combined lifestyle thus appears not merely as a form of adaptation but as a way of organising everyday life that enables the simultaneous integration of elements from multiple cultural frameworks. More recent Statistik Austria data show a similar predominance of the combined lifestyle, although the distribution varies across categories. According to the 2024 report, 62.4% of Romanians report combining elements of the two lifestyles, while 27.7% predominantly follow an Austrian lifestyle and 9.9% the lifestyle associated with the country of origin (Statistik Austria, 2024: 105). The variation between the 2023 and 2024 figures suggests that lifestyle orientations are not fixed but may shift over time, while the combined pattern remains predominant.

This pattern can also be examined from a generational perspective. Figure 10 provides a closer view of lifestyle orientations among respondents born in Austria.

Figure 10: Lifestyle patterns among respondents born in Austria



(Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from the author's survey)

Among respondents born in Austria, the proportion predominantly adopting an Austrian lifestyle increases to 14%, while Romanian and combined lifestyles account for 14% and 71%, respectively. Compared with the overall sample, this distribution indicates a moderate shift toward the Austrian lifestyle, while the combined lifestyle remains clearly predominant. In this context, lifestyle can be understood as a space in which identity is articulated, as individuals selectively integrate elements drawn from different cultural contexts. Considered alongside differentiated language use, the structure of social networks, and the forms of belonging examined above, this organisation of everyday life points to a coherent pattern characterised by complementarity and contextual adaptation. The findings indicate that the combined lifestyle represents a predominant pattern within the data analysed rather than a simple process of cultural substitution. Everyday practices reflect a continuous articulation between cultural reference points associated with the society of origin and those of the host society. Within this framework, identity can be understood not as a fixed reality but as the outcome of continuous processes of negotiation through which individuals construct their positioning by integrating experiences acquired in different contexts. Lifestyle thus provides a concrete expression of these processes, reflecting how belonging is experienced, adapted, and reconfigured in everyday life.

The lifestyle patterns observed among Romanian migrants in Austria can therefore be interpreted as consistent with a form of hybrid identity, characterised by the integration of multiple cultural elements within a coherent configuration. Such an identity does not represent a simple combination of two cultural frameworks but rather reflects a continuous process of identity construction in which belonging is negotiated and rearticulated across different social contexts.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined identity construction and forms of belonging among Romanians in Austria, with particular attention to dual belonging and hybrid identity. By analysing language practices, social networks, perceptions of belonging, and lifestyle, and by relating the survey findings to official Statistik Austria data, the study explored how these dimensions are articulated within the migration experience. The findings indicate that the migration experience of Romanians in Austria cannot be understood in linear terms as a process of substitution between the society of origin and the society of destination, but rather as a continuous reconfiguration of practices, relationships, and forms of belonging. Taken together, the theoretical perspectives and empirical findings suggest that identity and belonging are dynamically constructed through interactions across multiple social contexts.

The analysis of language practices showed that language use is functionally distributed across different social spaces, with German primarily associated with the professional and public spheres and Romanian with the private and family spheres. This distribution reflects not only contextual adaptation but also the ways in which individuals organise their relationships and negotiate belonging in everyday life.

The structure of social networks revealed a concentration of close relationships within the Romanian community, alongside frequent interactions beyond it. This pattern indicates a differentiated configuration of belonging, in which rootedness in the Romanian community coexists with participation in broader social contexts.

Regarding perceptions of belonging, the findings indicate that belonging is not configured in exclusive terms but predominantly takes the form of dual belonging. Differences between Statistik Austria data and the results of the author's survey point to variations in the intensity and distribution of subjective belonging, while the significant proportion of respondents identifying with both countries highlights the coexistence of multiple identity orientations. The findings also suggest that formal membership, participation in the host society, and subjective experiences of belonging do not necessarily coincide.

The analysis of lifestyle reinforced these patterns, highlighting the predominance of a combined lifestyle in which elements associated with the culture of origin and the host society are integrated within everyday life. Rather than indicating cultural substitution, this configuration reflects a pattern of everyday life characterised by the integration of multiple cultural reference points and by contextual adaptation.

In this context, identity can be understood as emerging from a continuous process of negotiation through which individuals construct their positioning by integrating experiences across multiple social contexts. The findings therefore point to a form of hybrid identity characterised by flexibility, complementarity, and contextual adaptation, in which belonging is distributed across different social spaces and continuously reconfigured.

The contribution of this study lies in highlighting how identity and belonging are constructed in relation to everyday practices, social networks, and forms of interaction, providing an integrated perspective on the migration experience in the context of intra-EU

mobility. At the same time, the findings support a relational and processual understanding of belonging that moves beyond static and mutually exclusive interpretations of identity. In this regard, the analysis illustrates the value of integrating empirical findings with theoretical perspectives when examining processes of identity construction and forms of belonging.

Although the present analysis incorporates a limited temporal dimension by drawing on data from different years, future research could extend this approach through longitudinal methods capable of capturing changes in identity and belonging over a longer period. A more detailed examination of generational differences could also shed light on how socialisation across multiple cultural frameworks influences the configuration of identity and forms of belonging.

Comparative research involving other migrant communities or different national contexts could further contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how identity and belonging are constructed, negotiated, and reconfigured under conditions of contemporary mobility.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anthias, Floya (2008), *Thinking through the lens of translocational positionality: an intersectionality frame for understanding identity and belonging*, Translocations, Migration and Social Change, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 5–20.
- Antonsich, Marco (2010), *Searching for belonging – An analytical framework*, Geography Compass, Vol. 4, No. 6, pp. 644–659. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2009.00317.x>
- Atalay, D., Korkut, U., Nicolson, M., Scholten, P., & Laidlaw, M. (2023), *Beyond Integration: A Re-Evaluation of Migrant and Host Society Relations*, Central and Eastern European Migration Review, 12(1), 7–12. [10.54667/ceemr.2023.11](https://doi.org/10.54667/ceemr.2023.11)
- Bhabha, Homi K. (1994), *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge.
- Brubaker, R. (2002), *Ethnicity without Groups*, European Journal of Sociology, 43(2), pp. 163–189. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975602001066>
- Checkel, Jeffrey T. (1998), *The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory*, in World Politics, Vol. 50, no. 2, 324–348.
- Cormoș, Viorica-Cristina (2011), *Migrație și Identitate*, Suceava, Editura Universității „Ștefan cel Mare” din Suceava.
- Cutoi, Marian Ionel (2025), *The Romanian Community in Austria: Identity, Role, and Involvement in Bilateral Relations*, PhD diss., Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of European Studies, Cluj-Napoca.
- Cutoi, Marian Ionel (2025), *Religion and Identity in the Romanian Diaspora. A Case Study on the Formation and Socio-Cultural Role of the Romanian Pentecostal Church in Austria*, Analele Universității din Oradea, Seria Relații Internaționale și Studii Europene, Vol. XVII, pp. 205–224. <https://doi.org/10.58603/JTEB5443>
- Cutoi, Marian Ionel (2025), *Socio-Economic Integration, Identity, and Belonging among Romanians in Austria*, Inclusivity, No. 2/2025, pp. 25–52. <https://doi.org/10.58603/IQCM1933>
- Ducu, Viorela (2018), *Romanian Transnational Families*, London, Palgrave Macmillan.

- Expert Council on Integration (2023), *Integration Report 2023*, accessed May 20, 2026, <https://www.bundestkanzleramt.gv.at/service/publikationen-aus-dem-bundestkanzleramt/publikationen-zu-integration/integrationsberichte.html>.
- Expert Council on Integration (2024), *Integration Report 2024*, accessed March 2026, <https://www.bundestkanzleramt.gv.at/service/publikationen-aus-dem-bundestkanzleramt/publikationen-zu-integration/integrationsberichte.html>.
- Fawcett, James T. (1989), *Networks, linkages, and migration systems*, in *International Migration Review*, Vol. 23, pp. 671–680. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2546434>
- Hall, S. (1990), *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, in J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, pp. 222–237, London, Lawrence & Wishart.
- Massey, Douglas S. et al. (1993), *Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal*, in *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 431–466. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2938462>
- Nederveen Pieterse, Jan (2009), *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange*, 2nd ed., Lanham, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.
- Portes, Alejandro (1997), *Globalization from Below: The Rise of Transnational Communities*, Princeton University.
- Portes, Alejandro (2016), *International Migration and National Development. From Orthodox Equilibrium to Transnationalism*, in *Sociology of Development*, Vol. 2, pp. 73–92. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sod.2016.2.2.73>
- Ritchey, Neal P. (1976), *Explanations of Migration*, in *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 2, pp. 363–404.
- Rowe, William & Vivian Schelling (1991), *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America*, London, Verso.
- Sandu, Dumitru (2010), *Lumile sociale ale migrației românești în străinătate*, Iași, Polirom.
- Schiller, Nina Glick, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1995), *From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration*, in *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 68, no. 1, pp. 48–63. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3317464>
- Simon, Miranda (2019), *Path Dependency and Adaptation: The Effects of Policy on Migration Systems*, in *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation*, Vol. 22, no. 2. [10.18564/jasss.3970](https://doi.org/10.18564/jasss.3970)
- Stark, Oded and Marcin M. Jakubek (2012), *Migration networks as a response to financial constraints: Onset and endogenous dynamics*, in *ZEF-Discussion Papers on Development Policy*, No. 168, Bonn. [10.22004/ag.econ.132550](https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.132550)
- Statistik Austria (2023) *Migration & Integration: Zahlen, Daten, Indikatoren 2023* (Statistisches Jahrbuch).
- Statistik Austria (2024) *Migration & Integration: Zahlen, Daten, Indikatoren 2024* (Statistisches Jahrbuch).
- Statistik Austria (2026) “Population by Citizenship and Country of Birth (Bevölkerung nach Staatsangehörigkeit/Geburtsland)”. <https://www.statistik.at/statistiken/bevoelkerung-und-soziales/bevoelkerung/bevoelkerungsstand/bevoelkerung-nach-staatsangehoerigkeit/-geburtsland>. Accessed May 28, 2026.
- Wendt, Alexander (1992), *Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics*, in *International Organisation*, Vol. 46, no. 2, pp. 391–425.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira (2006), *Belonging and the Politics of Belonging*, in *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 40(3), pp. 197–214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220600769331>