

## Spaces of Belonging and Emotional Co-Ownership

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The search for identity is of significance to people and communities across the Euro-Mediterranean region, and continues to play a central role in the building of a common Region. Heidi Dumreicher and Bettina Kolb underline the importance of the local perspective in shaping the socio-cultural context in which identity evolves, from the house and the street to family members and neighbours. It is from this viewpoint that the authors contend that an emotional co-ownership can be developed as a basis for a shared future in the Region.

Yes, I want to have a feeling of belonging, to know where I come from, to feel part of a place and to have a social context that supports my self-image, how I think and feel about myself. But also yes, I want to feel different from the spaces and people around me; I am dreaming and looking for a different sense of reality. Human beings need both of these qualities of self-conception – socially and spatially settled roles of belonging that provide the grounding and self-confidence to seek new places and activities to take us into the future. The quest for identity plays a major role in identifying the old, valid concept of a common Mediterranean Region and in constructing a new one; this concerns people and nations, individuals and social groups, Mashriq and Maghreb, old Europe and new member states. When searching for a cultural and political common identity concept, the Mediterranean Utopia is well advised to start with a pluralistic concept of identity. Following a concept of unity in diversity, identities become overlapping; they appear as a patchwork of common yet differentiated histories, of controversial political situations, of patterns of socialization and of cultural and religious roots that come to light in this process. In the search for a common identity between the two shores of the Mediterranean, two sorts of desiderata emerge, namely the yearning for sameness and continuity on the one hand and the nostalgia for local identity on the other.

### Home and Belonging

To us, as a research team, the images shown in pictures of Mediterranean places do not look outstanding at all and could be in several countries of the world. Other partners try to discover a certain architectural style and want to verify the place as part of a specific national territory. For a resident himself who presents his house is very well defined, it simply represents his image: "This is my lovely home and here lives my darling wife." This is the way in which an interviewed dweller presents his photo of a house and a courtyard. To him, the home is a combination of physical and social elements, as an ascertained place with familiar yet outstanding people.

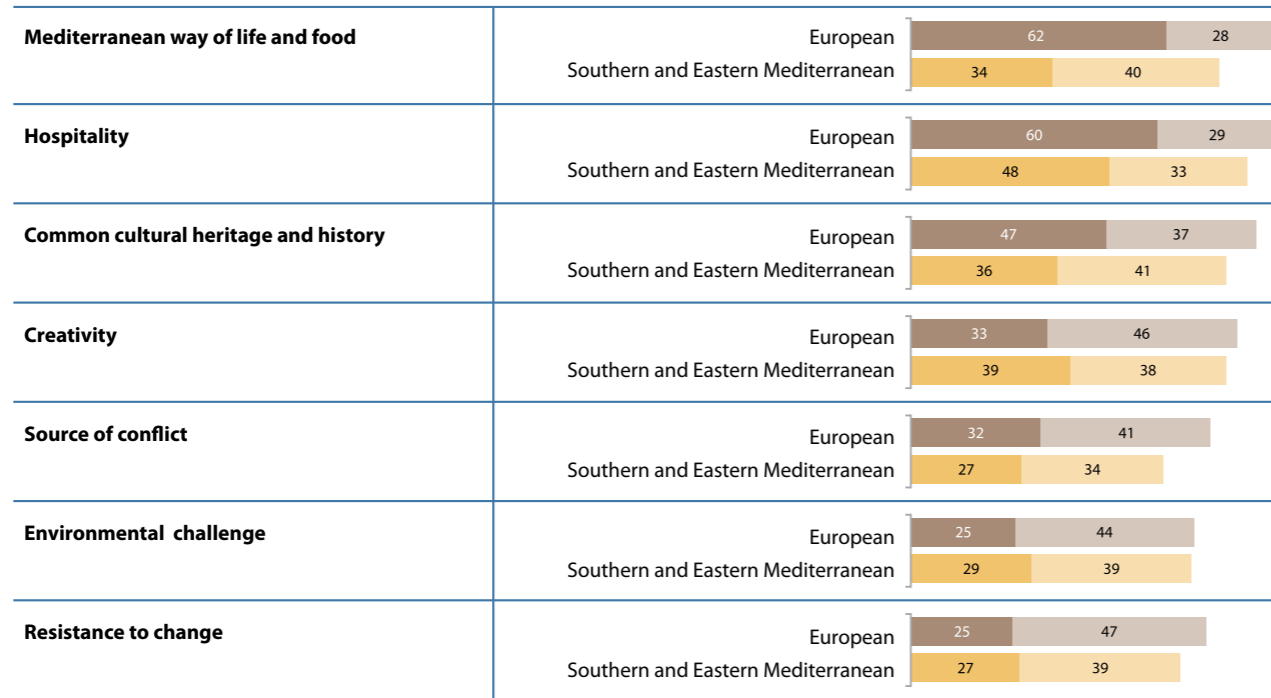
Our home -the place and the people - the house, the street, the family members and the neighbours - all these elements together build up the basis for the specific socio-cultural situation where identity grows. The combination of individual and collective identity is the basis for cultural traditions, social activities, with personal and societal elements. Starting with the house, the space for the individual and her/his most closely related family members and friends, the identity space grows in concentric circles, in fields of spatial and social encounter (Dumreicher and Kolb, 2006 and 2008). Several of these fields can be related to hominess, and contribute to the socialization of an identity construction. It is a combination of spatial and social elements that constructs the feeling of belonging and social affiliation: the family makes the house a home, the dwellers' community in the street and the quarter transform an anonymous open space into a well known neighborhood that I belong to.

These fields deliver a synthesis of empathy based identities, the social and spatial realm where the human being finds a place to express nearness and bonds of affection. At the edge of the village or the urban quarter, the construction of 'sameness' and 'otherness' develops more and more influence. The process of common identity construction starts in this field: the village becomes 'my and/or our' village, the town becomes 'my and/or our' town and they are different from the neighbouring village or town. Artifacts and cultural goods are slightly different inside and outside these spatial fields, house forms combine local features and, at the same time, intrinsic elements of the region, and common folklore finds an idiosyncratic expression. Even the language carries particular forms whether it be the accent or the wording. The nation state gives the geopolitical borderline to what we consider our people. The globe gives the broadest spatial frame - the human space within the limit of nature, where cultures and religions in their diversity create a multifaceted human identity. Beyond this spatial field starts the realm of philosophy and spirituality; these are concepts which can find their realm independently from the spatial place. All these

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

CHART 6.1

Strongly Somewhat



**Question:** Different people have different thoughts about what the Mediterranean region represents and the vision for the future. I will read out a set of ideas/images that may come to the minds of different people and please tell me if you think these characterize the Mediterranean region strongly, somewhat or not at all? **Base:** all respondents, % of 'Strongly and somewhat' by country (© Anna Lindh / Gallup Poll 2010).

spatial and social fields contribute to create the multifaceted identities that constitute the human being. Through social action, the individual constructs a relationship to a specific spatial field. In multiple empirical social and spatial studies, we found the evidence that even activities of residents that seem to be rather insignificant in themselves contribute to the appropriation process where 'usage creates meaning'; not an abstract meaning but an emphatic one. Starting from with many similar statements of village or city dwellers, it became clear that "only if dwellers use the potential of the city and what it has to offer (including the amenities of

public space) will they be able to fully identify with the place, releasing it from abstraction" (Dumreicher and Kolb, 2003). This founded our thesis about emotional co-ownership which we first discovered in different local situations in human settlements; but it can also apply to a larger field - in our case the Mediterranean Region which is a reality, but also a human and political vision. Emotional co-ownership describes a strong attachment to a place and its social meaning, to architecture and socio-cultural activities that take place in this urban environment. Under the condition of emotional co-ownership this interest stimulates the citizens

Poland - Educational Workshops on Islam

Launched in schools across twenty Polish cities, 'In the World of Islam' aimed to use education as a way to change negatively held cultural and religious stereotypes related to Arab and Muslim communities. Through a series of dialogue workshops taking place during a three year period from 2005 to 2008, over nine hundred students actively participated in sessions consisting of theoretical aspects, basic information on Arab and Islamic countries, discussion, and a practical dimension such as learning to write Arabic letters. According to the evaluation with participants, the initiative had a significant impact not only on the students' knowledge and attitude towards Arabs and Muslims, but also on their perspective towards other cultures – including people of Roma and Hindu background – which changed in a positive way. Following the project, a workshop was organised in 2009 with the participation of teachers and educators from Baltic Sea countries, as well as from Ukraine and Belarus, and the learning materials were promote through a series of new publications targeting schools.

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Croatia - Debates on Multiculturalism

Reaching out to around five hundred people across the city of Zagreb, the initiative consisted of a series of lectures, presentations, open debates and workshops on the theme of multiculturalism. An initiative of the organisation Veselkoleutar, the discussions drew on policies and practices carried out in different parts of the world, and the aim of the programme was to put the issue of 'cultural differences' in the heart of the public debate, taking into consideration that Zagreb does not have an official policy regarding immigration, segregation and cultural diversity. The way in which people of the city perceive and treat differences of 'others' was also discussed, putting in perspective the multicultural reality of Croatia and Zagreb, while at the same time exploring ways of implementing multicultural ideas and practices within the borders of the country. As a result, intercultural policies were established for implementation with non-governmental associations from eastern Slovenia, and the initiative led to the organisation and promotion of the 'International Tolerance Day'.

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to value the qualities of the place and to feel responsible for its present and future. This involvement creates spaces of possibility and fields of action for an empowered citizen who takes part in the decision making processes within her or his locality. All the spatial fields need a combination of individual - me - and collective - we identity spaces for people and their personal capacities. Our research in Islamic Mediterranean cities shows that the 'hara' - the small narrow lane that differentiates the urban pattern of the Medina at the smallest scale - works as a first collective locale for the creation of emotional co-ownership. The place of birth of my grandparents in my hara is more important than my actual individual living place. "We lived here in the hara, ...where me and my brother have grown up, and we are now ready for marriage". The origin as well as the future of the individual and his family is embedded in the specific hara. The quality of the hara is determined by spatial and social elements, which together form the background for life in the neighbourhood (Dumreicher and Kolb, 2010). Islamic cultural tradition is alive in the common bakery providing for physical needs, the Qur'an School and the library for educational requirements, the Friday mosque for establishing the weekly and yearly religious rhythm, and the hammam as a place for personal wellbeing, luxury and conviviality. When our interview partners speak so tenderly about their hara, they refer to their daily life experience which anchors them to the local background. This social and cultural anchor contributes to the perception of belonging and identity, as a result of this process of local socialization. In its similarities and differences, the elements perceived in the hara, its social practices and cultural patterns form a common collective memory, as this little lane becomes part of the historical and political framework of the Islamic city. How can persons with such an intense relationship to the place of primary socialization establish a concept for a common future of the Mediterranean region? Is the concept of multiple and multifaceted identities an assumption that helps in understanding the Utopian construct of a common space between north and south shore? The hara as a key experience for socialization stands for the origin, the base, whereas the shore on the other side of the Mediterranean stands for the 'otherness', the curiosity about the 'differentness'. The pluralistic concept of 'unity in

diversity' provides places for more than one identity. The hara is the starting point for a common culture, but will be enlarged with a broader spatial concept of identity. The cultural space of the Mediterranean Sea stands for the 'otherness', not withstanding its long history of contact and relationships, its exchange of cultural goods, of stories and traditions - and at the same time the confrontations through history and into the present.

Mediterranean as a Common Space

The common space of the Mediterranean Sea can be seen as a specific spatial field - a region built with villages, cities, monuments, landscapes and nations: a region with a diversity of economic and cultural conditions, responding to different challenges of history. Although there is an understanding of a common perception in terms of the social and spatial place constituting a Mediterranean region, latest quantitative approaches show that there is also a common understanding of key elements of a Mediterranean culture. When expressed through the options of 'strongly' and 'somewhat', several topics characterize this common space through a majority of agreement: the way of life and food (84%), hospitality (81%) and a common cultural heritage and history (81%) (Chart 8.1). Our approach that starts from the premise that identity needs both, nearness and otherness, is supported by a set of other questions that go beyond an acknowledgement of the common understanding of the 'project Mediterranean'. The quantitative results show a demand for the respect of cultural diversity: 46% think that their own society can gain in respect through cultural diversity from closer political, economic and cultural exchanges between the Mediterranean countries. In conclusion: The concept of multifaceted identities should take into account that cultural diversity is based on locally expressed emotional co-ownership and an active membership within the local society including a broader space and time concept: the future goes beyond spatial and cultural identities, contributing to a local yet global civic identity.

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