Children's exploration of the concepts of home and belonging: Capturing views from five European countries.

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ABSTRACT

Understanding one's sense of belonging is a central part of identity formation and self-awareness; feeling safe somewhere, with specific people is identified as a basic human need. This paper explores the ideas of children from three age groups in five different European as they discussed the concepts of 'home' and 'belonging'. Findings showed that the children's ideas could be organised into six interrelated aspects: Spatiality, Materiality, Multiplicity, Social Relations, Affect, and Dislocation. Whilst there were differences in the ways that the children conceptualised home across the classes, even the youngest children were able to describe their ideas using metaphors and abstract concepts, and they agreed that a home was more than just a building.

1. Introduction

Understanding one's sense of belonging is a central part of identity formation and self-awareness; feeling safe somewhere, with specific people is identified as a basic human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1969; Maslow, 1968). In the 21st century the movement of people across and within borders and a diversity of family units means that some children have multiple homes and feel that they belong in different places. Offering them the chance to deconstruct their own perceptions of what home and belonging mean gives value to these different living contexts, and also engenders tolerance, empathy and inclusive attitudes towards each other's lives and ways of living. In a European-funded project exploring children's responses to different cultural themes, DIALLS (https://dialls2020.eu), students from three age groups (5-6 year olds, 8-9 year olds and 14-15 year olds) engaged with a selection of wordless films and picturebooks which they used as stimuli for discussions about ideas around living together, social responsibility and belonging. This paper explores the ideas of children from these three age groups in five different European countries, England, Germany, Spain, Cyprus and Lithuania, as they discussed the concept of home in response to a short, animated narrative film. The unique

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opportunity afforded by the DIALLS project meant that children of all ages viewed the same short film *Baboon on the Moon* (Duriez, 2002), which as a wordless text was equally accessible to the different language users. Additionally, as an ambiguous multi-layered text, the appeal of the film as a springboard for discussion was apparent in all-aged classes.

The interdisciplinarity of the project, and of education studies itself allows us to bring together perspectives from cultural studies and psychology, in addition to expertise in literacy, citizenship education and socio-cultural discourse analysis, and we use these lenses to create a framework for analysing student ideas about home and belonging. As teachers in each country followed the same lesson prompts (albeit with inevitable adaptations as appropriate to age and pedagogical context) data from these countries capture children's ideas in one single 21st century European moment in time. We simply ask:

RQ1: How do children in different European countries conceptualise home and belonging?

RQ2: How do their ideas reflect the fluid and multiple experiences of their home lives?

2. Theoretical underpinning from a cultural studies perspective

The research on belonging as a human need, state of mind, and driving force of various social processes has a long history in scholarship. This research has become increasingly timely in the contemporary world characterised by voluntary mobility and forced movement of people, cultural diversification of societies, and digitalisation enabling remote social interaction and community-building online. Belonging forms an interdisciplinary field of study that has been scrutinised by scholars in different disciplines of social sciences. Despite different conceptual frameworks and empirical focuses, these studies share a common understanding of the intertwined nature of subjective and social aspects in constructing, articulating, and manifesting belonging. Calhoun (2007, 286) explains this view as follows:

> Everyone belongs, though some people belong to some groups with more intensity and often less choice than others belong to any. Such belonging matters not only as a subjective state of mind – not insofar as it feels either good or bad to individuals. It matters also as a feature of social organisation. It joins people together in social relations and informs their action.

These studies also share an approach to belonging as a state that is constantly transforming and is not based on any innate social categories. Yuval-Davis (2006, 199) describes this feature by noting how "[e]ven in its most stable 'primordial' forms, (…) belonging is always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity". It is about a process in which individuals construct conformity with groups, communities, institutions, or other cultural or social entities to gain a personal experience of involvement (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Čeginskas, 2015; Yuval-Davis 2006, 2011). Indeed, the studies on belonging commonly emphasise experience and its emotional and affective dimensions. This is also the feature through which the scholars in social sciences and cultural studies have distinguished belonging from the concept of identity. For Anthias (2008, 8), "[i]dentity involves individual and collective narratives of self and other, presentation and labelling, myths of origin and myths of destiny with associated strategies and identifications", while belonging "is more about experiences of being part of the social fabric and the ways in which social bonds and ties are manifested in practices, experiences and emotions of inclusion". Thus, belonging can be perceived as an active relationship between individuals encompassing participation in the processes through which belonging is articulated or manifested (Lähdesmäki et al., 2021a). In the case of our research, these articulations and manifestations occurred in students' classroom talk when discussing and interpreting the film *Baboon on the Moon* (Duriez, 2002).

Despite these similarities, our review of previous research on belonging highlighted six distinct – but in many ways interlinked – theoretical aspects that simultaneously function as methodological lenses to the data in our analysis (see Lähdesmäki et al., 2016; Lähdesmäki, Mäkinen, Čeginskas, & Kaasik-Krogerus, 2021b). The first of these aspects deals with spatiality. Particularly in social sciences and humanities, belonging has been explored as including spatial meanings that relate to emotional attachments and constructions of home and safety (Antonsich, 2010; Blunt, 2005; Medved, 2000; Yuval-Davis, et al., 2017). Antonsich (2010, 645) has even described this aspect as "place-belongingness" referring to "belonging as a personal, intimate feeling of being 'at home' in a place". The scale of the spatial aspect of belonging may vary from the sense of belonging to broad geographical entities, or even a global community of humans, to micro-scale spatial units, such as one's own home.

Second, belonging is closely related to materiality and is commonly expressed and constructed through material objects, physical environments, and embodied practices. Boccagni (2014, 289) explains the materiality of belonging claiming that humans have "a need to relocate belonging in something real." In previous research, the materiality of belonging has often been examined through mobile people's longing for home or through people's diverse 'home-making' practices in which houses and their materiality become invested with social and emotional meanings of belonging (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016). Third, rethinking belonging in the context of increased mobility of people has led researchers to discuss various forms of multiple belonging, such as multicultural, diasporic, and trans-local belonging, and to investigate problematic issues such as discrimination, inequality, and tensions between individuals and communities that the negotiation on belonging may include. Forced and voluntary movement of people may bring about simultaneous spatial attachments. Migration and mobility have been theorised as creating 'multi-sited' (Bennett, 2014; Marcu, 2014) spatial belonging to several homes, hometowns, or home countries, but also feelings of 'in-betweenness' (Huot et al., 2014). Multiplicity as an aspect of belonging underlines it as situational and plural, transforming across one's lifespan, and as constantly being negotiated, particularly at moments of migration.

Belonging always has a social dimension. Our fourth theoretical aspect emphasises social relations as a core feature of articulating and manifesting belonging. Through this aspect, articulations and manifestations of belonging become elements of social organisation that create groups, communities, and complex social entities, such as societies. In previous studies, the social aspect of belonging has been explored both through public-oriented official membership in a community, such as citizenship (Geschiere 2009; Sicakkan &

Lithman 2005), and as a private sentiment of a social attachment to other people with proximity, such as one's family members (Kobayashi, 2014).

A sense of social relatedness is a basic human need (Pittman & Zeigler, 2007). It acts as a strong intrinsic motivator (Deci & Ryan, 2008) that drives us to seek out and maintain positive interpersonal relationships. The quality and frequency of our social interactions have strong cognitive, emotional and behavioural consequences, and affect our well-being and health (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Even short, seemingly impersonal, contact can have significant effects on how we perceive and behave in our surroundings (Walton et al., 2012). Whether we perceive the people around us as friendly, sympathetic, and caring is thus a central aspect of our social cognition, meaning the processes we employ to understand and meaningfully interact with others (Abele et al., 2008). The relevance of *communion* for navigating our social environment is highlighted by the fact that it is often the first impression we seek to gain from interpersonal contact (Wojciszke & Abele, 2008) but just as central in how we see ourselves, especially in familiar contexts (Uchronski, 2008).

Emotions are also central to belonging and our fifth aspect considers the affective dimension of belonging. A sense of safety and reliability is a basic human need and emotional well-being (Pittman & Zeigler, 2007). Perceiving the environment as controllable leads to a sense of self-efficacy (Ajzen, 1991) and agency (Bandura, 2001), meaning that what we do is in our own hands. It can also mean that a place is "ours" (Riley, 2019). Agency has an affective dimension: emotional appraisal of the situation in which we find ourselves influences how self-efficacious we feel (Gentsch & Synofzik, 2014). In the longer term, feeling autonomous and competent, being able to affect the world, is a prerequisite for well-being and life satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2000) as well as a positive self-concept (Marsh et L., 2012). In this way, knowing one's surroundings and perceiving them as predictable can lead to a feeling of comfort.

Belonging is commonly understood as a positive state that people need and want to achieve. Longing for and constructing belonging often emanates from the fear of its flipside, non-belonging, unfamiliarity, dislocation, and missing home where one cannot be or that one does not have. Thus 'dislocation' is the final aspect of belonging that we draw on in our analysis. Gerharz (2014, 553–554) argues that the advantage of the concept of belonging is that "it emphasises the relational dimensions of inclusion and exclusion". The idea of belonging and being included comprises the possibility of being excluded (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016). Belonging is thus not only a subjective process: every individual can freely feel belonging to a group, place, or people, but his or her belonging is not necessarily socially recognised or allowed by others. Belonging as a social process presupposes access, as Anthias (2002; 2008) notes. Minorities, marginalised and oppressed people are often confronted with explicit and implicit inequalities, discrimination, and exclusion caused by limited or blocked access to belonging. A lack of contact, and especially active exclusion and *ostracism*, is associated with a host of negative effects: sadness and anger in the short term, and a sense of significance and potentially even antisocial behaviour in the long term (Williams & Nida, 2011).

The above-described six theoretical aspects to belonging – Spatiality, Materiality, Multiplicity, Social Relations, Affect, and Dislocation – form the starting point of the conceptual framework for the examination of our empirical data.

3. Methodology

The dataset comprises recorded and transcribed classroom discussions from a total of 56 lessons in five countries. Consents were given for children's discussions to be recorded and shared, and all names that appear here are pseudonymised. Three age groups of children are represented 5/6, 8/9, 14/15, though due to data collection differences (due to the COVID pandemic) these are not equally represented (see Table 1).

The lessons recorded were part of a larger programme concerned with teaching children cultural literacy, defined by our DIALLS project as a 'dialogic social practice' with underpinning dispositions of tolerance, empathy and inclusion (Maine et al., 2019). Lessons had a dual focus, to teach students dialogue skills and to discuss cultural content themes. In the lesson where home and belonging were discussed, students watched the film, *Baboon on the Moon* (Duriez, 2002) and used their interpretations and responses to it as a springboard for a wider discussion about the concepts in a more abstract way. In the stop-motion animated film, a baboon character is shown stationed on the moon, going about his daily business of maintaining the moon's illumination generator. After his work is done, he sits and takes a trumpet from a small case and plays a wistful tune whilst looking at Planet Earth far away. A tear runs down his face. The film was originally part of a teaching resource pack, *Starting Stories* (BFI, 2003), and it was aimed at younger children, but we felt there might be equal appeal to an older age group, where deeper insights about isolation and dislocation could be elicited. In the lesson, students of all ages considered the themes of home and belonging through referencing the *text* (talking about the character in the film); making *personal* connections (through talking about the themes in relation to their own lives); and in an *abstract* way (discussing the terms as more general concepts about other people or situations). They were explicitly asked: 'Is home where you live?', 'Where do you belong?' and 'What is home?'

Table 1
Breakdown of number of classes from each country.

Country	Class age 5-6	Class age 8-9	Class age 14-15
England	6	5	4
Germany	1	5	7
Spain	4	4	4
Lithuania	1	4	7
Cyprus	4		

In the lessons, home and belonging were terms used together though not interchangeably. 'Home is where you belong', led to further elicitations about the essence of belonging, but sometimes the features of home were not related to belonging *per se*, but rather where it was, what happened there, how it felt to be there and who was also there. We acknowledge that teacher framing of these questions will have directed some of the responses, particularly where these were discussed in a whole-class context. Additionally, the cultural terminology for 'home' and 'belonging' was subtly different in each language, meaning that the terms 'home' and 'belonging' were translated with nuanced differences in different countries.

Data were analysed following a deductive-inductive process. We deductively used the six aspects that were apparent from our interdisciplinary conceptual framework as what Attride-Stirling (2001, 388) describes as "organising themes". In contrast to her approach, rather than starting with "basic themes" and working upwards in an inductive process towards these themes, we worked iteratively, coding generally into these organising themes, but identifying basic themes inductively. Our organising themes gave us sufficient tools to handle the data across the different country and age-group contexts and our basic themes ensured that we did not miss culturally specific nuances as we constantly-compared the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus, we are able to describe generally and comparatively the whole dataset using the six aspects of belonging, but within countries have undertaken a closer qualitative content analysis. To address inter-rater reliability, we engaged in an initial workshop where all coders analysed the same sample data and discussed it, then subsequent workshops where we compared our own datasets refining our sub-codes through comparison across data sets. In all instances, data were fully anonymised and in compliance with our project ethics policy, no raw data was shared between countries.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Quantitative overview of all results from the five countries

The six coding groups with internal sub-groups are shown in Fig. 1. Coders were able to assign several codes to the same quotation and coded for the code group, the sub-code and, also, the 'reference' (*text, personal* or *abstract*). A general sub-group category was also assigned where inductively comments seemed significant but were not accounted for in other sub-groups. Additionally, both 'house' and 'room' were used in two code groups, Materiality and Spatiality, to reflect when comments were about location, or the physicality of the space.

Across all age groups all aspects of belonging that formed the deductive code groups were present (see Fig. 2). Social Relations and Affect accounted for the largest proportions of assigned codes. Notably in the German data, 40% of assigned codes were Social Relations, significantly more than in other countries. For Lithuania, it was Affect that was most commonly assigned with 35% of all codes. Materiality was also similarly present in the Cypriot and German data – which was interesting as the ages of the children were markedly different in these countries (all classes in Cyprus were 5/6 year olds; where only one of the German classes represented that age group). Children in Spain made more comments about Spatial aspects of home than any other country (26%) but Affect and Social Relations were also commonly present (21% and 22% respectively) in those classes.
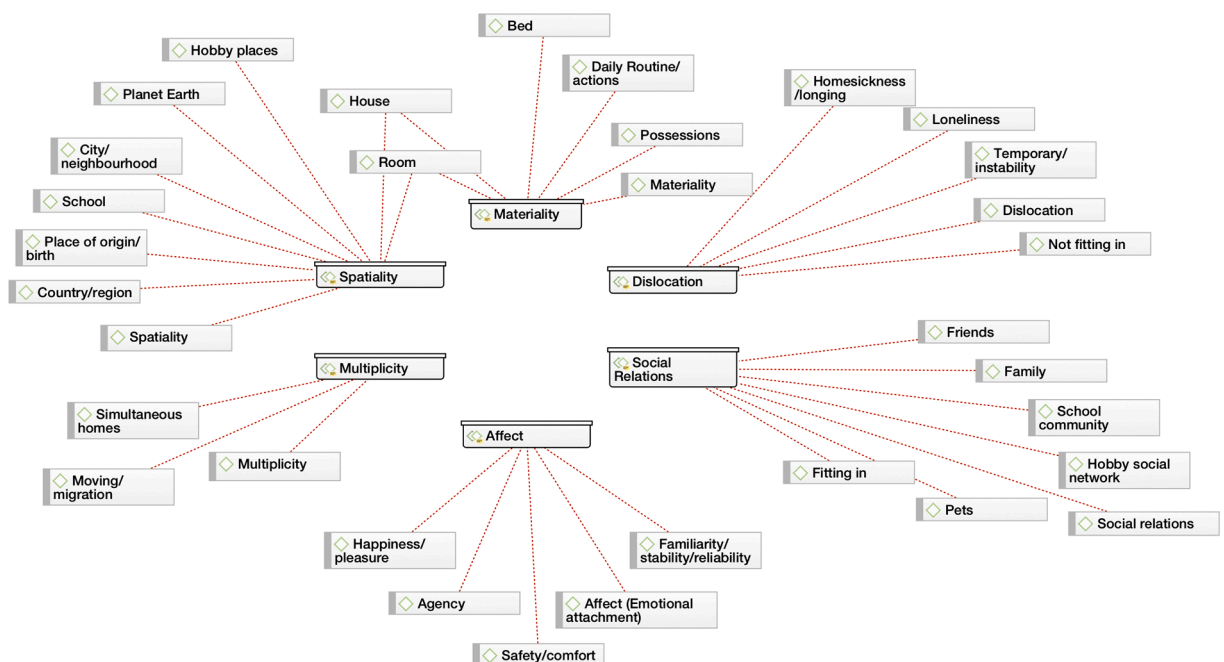

Fig. 1. The six deductive grouping groups with inductively generated sub-codes.
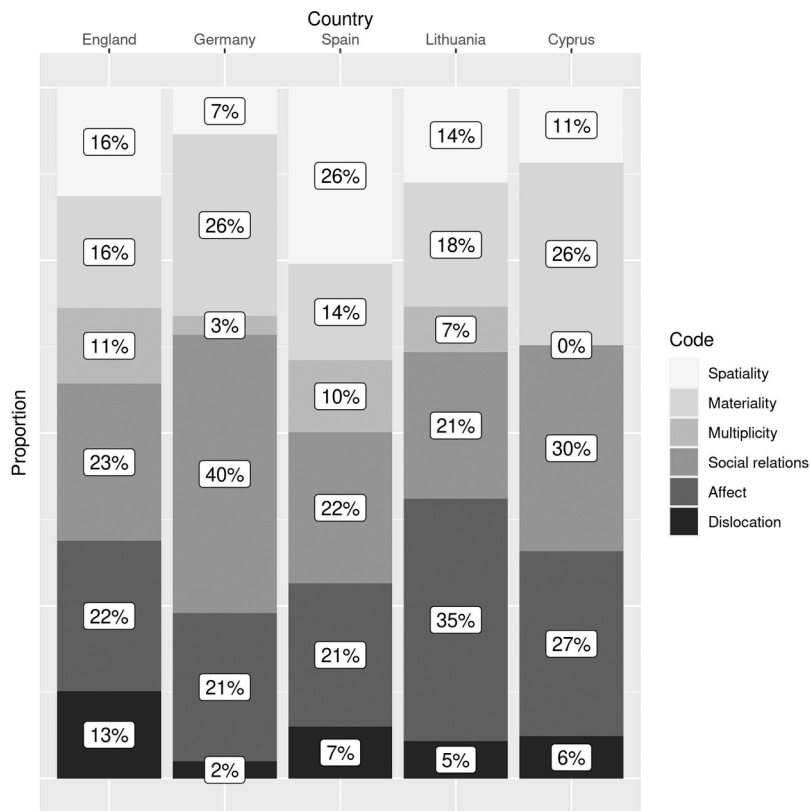
Fig. 2. Distribution of code groups for each country (taking averages from each age group).

The breakdown of topics related to different age groups (see Fig. 3) showed that younger children from England, Spain, Lithuania and Cyprus particularly referenced Social Relations when talking about home, with the youngest children in Germany more frequently referencing material aspects of home (50% of the assigned codes). Children in the 8/9 age group varied in their responses. For England
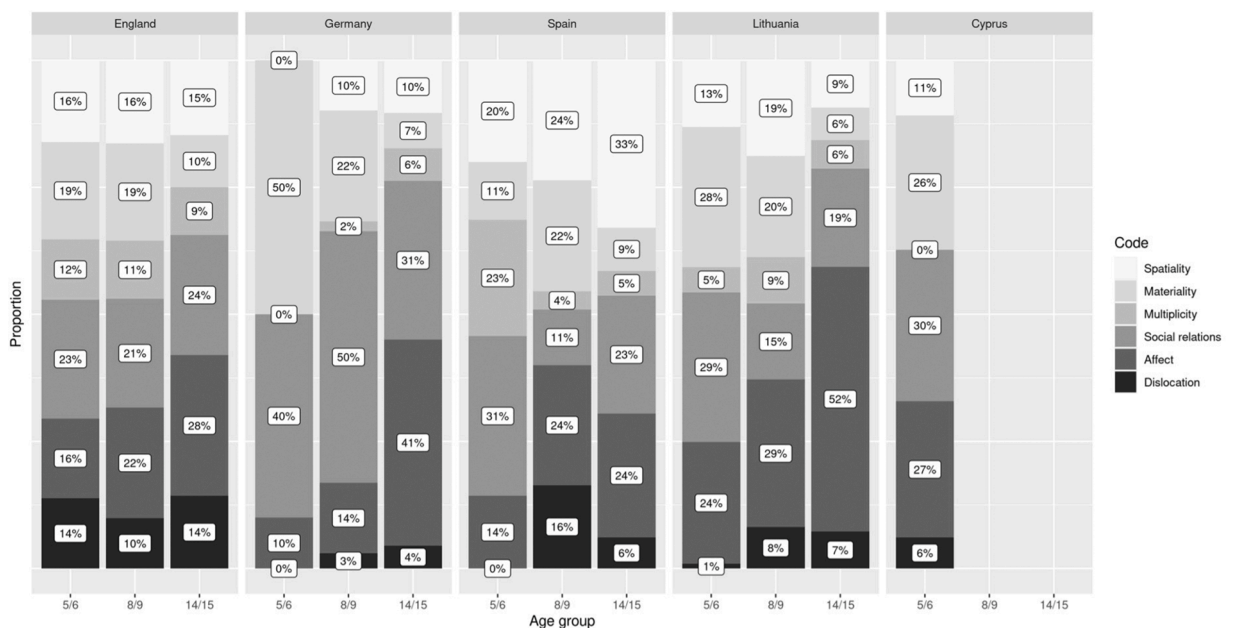

Fig. 3. Distribution of code groups across ages.

the classes focused on Social Relations (21%), Affect (22%) and Materiality (19%) fairly evenly. In Germany, Social Relations was by far the most frequently occurring code (50%) for this age group, with Affect (24%) and Spatiality (24%) more common in Spain. Older children showed a range of responses with Affect featuring prominently in all countries and particularly significantly in Lithuania (52%). Comments related to Dislocation occurred infrequently across all countries apart from England, and when compared to the 'source references' codes (of *Text, Personal* and *Abstract*) it was found that the younger children talked about dislocation in terms of the film's character (coded *Text*).

4.2. Qualitative case studies from the five countries

This section dives more deeply into the data taking each country in turn to examine patterns with the code groups and using qualitative illustrations.

4.2.1. Case Study 1: England

In the English data the most frequently assigned sub-code was *family* within the Social Relations code group, representing 13% of all coded quotations. Whilst it is not surprising that this sub-code was most frequent, arguably that it only came up 13% of the time is interesting. Split across the ages it was more often occurring in the lower and middle age groups (16% and 13% of their codes respectively) with only 7% of the assigned codes for older children's quotations.

Home as a place of *safety* or *comfort* (Affect code group) was the next most significant sub-code. It constituted 8% of all coding, and even more significantly, 11% of assigned sub-codes for the older age group. Analysing the coded quotations it was apparent that children across age groups often simply defined home as where one feels safe and comfortable. For the youngest children, this was sometimes combined with notions of care (by parents or family) and physical safety from hurt (see example En1) Older classes also tended to mention family and safety/comfort when defining home, although without the explicit link of parental care.

Example En1 (Age 5/6)

Astaya: Well a home is a place where you stay with your family - you have your friends round, you can play in your garden and it's all - it's all fun and it's all a place - safe place to be.

Calton: Because home is where you stay with your mummy and daddy because they look after you and [make sure] you don't get hurt..

Linked to ideas of *safety*, Children in five classes discussed homeless/houseless people, and the consensus across age groups emerged that homeless people probably find home wherever they feel safe. This then acted as a counterpoint to the notion that safety was related to a *building* or 'house'.

Example En2 (Age 14/15)

Tej: A home doesn't - a home could be like anywhere, like you find, almost see or like love or like where you fit in. So even like people who are called homeless, they even could find a place where they might feel more safe than usual - and they could justify that as a home, even though they're called the homeless.

Home was also defined as a place of familiarity — and that this could change over time. *Familiarity/stability/reliability,* combined with the opposite, *temporary/instability,* represented 8% and 9% of the assigned sub-codes by the middle and older children. These children used their level of familiarity, or similarly, longevity of time spent in a place, to distinguish between a home and a (new) house or temporary space. As they refined the idea of home in contrast to what it is not, children often brought up hotels or vacation homes as counterexamples to 'home' and arrived at the conclusion that these were not 'home' because of their temporary nature or because they cannot be 'returned' to.

Example En3 (age 8/9)

George: Well, I think home is like your checkpoint. So it's like if you were to go out somewhere, it's most likely you'd come back and that place that you come back to is your home. If you were to go on holiday for a bit, the place you'd come to is your home. If you were to move house, you would come from your old home to your new home. That would be your home.

Finally, *homesickness* and *loneliness* together represented 9% of all of the assigned sub-codes and this might appear to be a particular fascination of the children in the English classes. However, it should be remembered that the discussion was prompted by watching the film *Baboon on the Moon*. As mentioned earlier, source references (*Text, Personal* or *Abstract*) were also coded, and 96% of the *loneliness* or *homesickness* codes co-occurred with the *Text* activity code, meaning that the children were talking about home for the Baboon, and how he was dislocated from it, explaining why the creature appeared sad at the end of the film. As one 9 year-old described, 'He's lonely because he's got a job, he's doing the moon, lighting up the moon, and he's on his own and he's got no one to talk to'.

4.2.2. Case Study 2: Germany

Many German students seemed to have a very clear picture of what home means for them: Of all 223 coded contributions, more than a quarter (28%) mention *family*. There is no classroom in which family is not being discussed as a central aspect of home. Social Relations more generally make up 37% of all codes. The focus on Social Relations is true for all age groups. Aside from family, *friends*

are mentioned often, and *pets* and *neighbours* also feature regularly. The only other concept that seems as universal to the children as family is a feeling of *comfort* which is brought up in all but one class and appears 36 times in total. These two aspects of belonging, family and Affect, also often appear together, such as in this example:

Example De1 (age 8/9)

Lea: Well I think, most people have written family and parents because parents have raised you and cared for you and you just trusted them and you can depend on them, that's why I think family turns up a lot.

Apart from these two aspects, there seem to be age variations: In the younger age groups, material aspects appear in 22% (age 8/9) and 50% (age 5/6) of all codes. Daily routines such as sleeping, eating and leisure time play a large role. Older primary students also focused on the material aspect of houses, beds, and rooms but also mentioned possessions, especially:

Example De2 (age 8/9)

T: So why does Maria say that the baboon has his home there?
Sibel: Because there's a house there.
T: Can you back that up?
Sibel: Because there's a house there and because there's a bed in it and a kitchen and…

This focus is much less pronounced in secondary classrooms, where material aspects only appear in about 7% of the coded quotations. The reverse is true for affective and agentic components: just over 40% of all contributions in secondary classrooms mention feeling comfortable, safe, emotionally attached to a place, but feeling free and being able to do what one wants also appears as important to these students.

Multiplicity and non-belonging (5% and 4% of all codes respectively) are not very prevalent. The youngest children did not discuss them at all, but their prevalence then increases with age. Spatiality was also not discussed by the youngest students but was mentioned in approximately 10% of the cases in the older primary as well as the secondary students. In both age groups just the location where you happen to be at the moment or where you spend a longer amount of time seemed to be a relevant signifier of a place being a home. However, this was sometimes qualified or supplemented in the way that spending time in a place leads to certain experiences that are related to one of the other categories:

Example De3 (age 14/15)

Miriam: Yes, for us home is the place where you feel the most comfortable. With which you associate many emotions and trust and that is because you have lived there for longer.

Hobby places or school were never mentioned as connected to home although learning and leisure (as embodied actions and thus aspects of materiality) were.

The place of origin or birth was also mentioned, although only nine times in total. This last aspect points to a peculiarity of the German language: Home can be translated as both "Zuhause" as well as "Heimat". "Heimat" approximately means "homeland", whereas "Zuhause" is broader and can also mean a place of origin, but usually connotes a place of living. Teachers usually asked about "Zuhause" which could be a reason why places of origin were not discussed more often; the word "Heimat" only appears six times in all contributions.

Analysis of the activity codes showed that German students most often seemed to discuss belonging on an abstract level 57% of codes), followed by the personal (38%), with only very few text-based contributions (5%). although this seemed to depend on the concrete task or question posed by the teacher (e.g. "What does home mean?" vs. "What is home *for you*"? vs. "Where is home *for the baboon*?").

4.2.3. Case Study 3: Spain

In the Spanish data, the most frequently used code group is Spatiality, which represents 27% of the total number of codes used. Across age, high percentages are observed at all levels, especially at the oldest and middle ages. However, in the 5/6 age group there are some categories that appear more frequently – Social Relations and Multiplicity. The Spatiality sub-codes used by pupils in their definitions of home are diverse, the main ones being those related to origin/place of birth, home as a physical place and specific region or city.

Example Es1 (age 5/6)

T: Where is your father's home?
Pau: In Bilbao
T: And why is it there?
Pau: Because he was born in Bilbao

In this example it is clear that the teacher had elicited the Spatial coding by directly asking about 'place', however, Pau still makes it clear that it is because of birth (rather than relating to another coding group).

The next two most assigned codes were Affect and Social Relations, with very similar degrees of occurrence, 22% and 21%

respectively. The students' reflections around the concept of home when they talked about Affect were usually quite simple, mainly related to the idea that a home is a place where one feels good, at ease, where one feels safe and comfortable. On the other hand, when they talked about Social Relations, students frequently connected home with the place where the family is, without going too deeply into the concept of the family, only highlighting in some cases the importance of parents. Again, as in the Affect code-group, most statements were quite simple, with students simply expressing the condition that in order to have a home it is necessary to be with the family.

Examples Es2 (age 8/9)

Abril: What is a home? It is a place where you are treated well
Mario: Home is where you have your father, your mother and your family and also what you need to live like water.

In several quotes, the Spatiality code group appears combined with Affect or Social Relations. This is because there are small differences between what pupils mean by *house* and what they mean by *home* in Spanish and in Catalan languages. At all ages they recognised this distinction, and in many cases, it was even guided and encouraged by teachers through their questioning. Students related the idea of *house* from a non-emotional point of view, using the code group of Spatiality and mainly the sub-code of 'house' as a physical place. In contrast, they related the word 'home' to Affect and Social Relations, implying that when we recognise a place as home, it's because we have positive emotions about that space or we are with people we appreciate.

Example Es3 (age 14/15)

Àlex: That's what I'm saying, the house is a building made for living and home is when you give a sentimental or emotional value to this building, which is yours or your family's.

The idea of family is also associated, on several occasions, with the Migration sub-code of the Multiplicity code-group. In one classroom of 5/6 year-olds and in two classrooms of 14/15 year-olds, discussions ensued about why a person might be willing to migrate to another country. On this issue, the students provided two fundamental reasons: because of wars and in search of better jobs. These reasons were connected also to the Social Relations code group as they discussed the difficult situation that people can experience when they have to leave their family and, consequently, their home, even if it is to get a better life.

Example Es4 (age 14/15)

Anna: In the first point of view, our home is our family and people who we love, and in second point of view is that, people, because of external reasons, like wars, they had to migrate to another country and they leave their family and their life to start over.

Finally, the code group of Dislocation is the one that appears least frequently. In the group of 5/6 year olds, none of the coded quotations are related to this category; in the group of 8/9 year olds there are 5% of the total number of coded codes; and in the group of 14/15 year olds there are 3%. However, as in the data from other countries such as England, the vast majority of quotations about Dislocation referred to the text *Baboon on the Moon,* as the pupils tried to explain why the Baboon is away from Earth, his home, but without generalising this knowledge beyond the video narrative.

4.2.4. Case Study 4: Lithuania

Like students from many other countries, Lithuanian children most often used the words 'family, people who are close' when talking about home, other children also singled out more general words, 'people' and 'friends'. These comments were most significant in the youngest age group with social relations representing 29% of the coded quotations.

For the middle and older age groups, ideas about Affect were most commonly expressed when talking about home (29% and 52% respectively). This was expressed using words such as, 'cosiness', 'openness', 'self-ability', 'feelings', and 'emotions'. Children also often use words such as security and openness', 'not being afraid to be different', 'confident and able to be oneself' to express what feeling safe at home means. Within the Affect code group, the children also used words and phrases that described freedom and autonomy, 'he can do what he wants', 'he can behave as he wishes', 'no one will guide you' 'no one tells you what to do' 'they can be themselves' were some of the phrases that the pupils used, in addition to expressions of safety such as 'you feel good because you will be accepted as you are'.

The children used the text, their personal experiences and abstract concepts of home; of course, as previously mentioned this may have been related to the ways in which teachers elicited their response. For example, children aged 5/6 and 8/9 related their ideas more closely to the text of *Baboon on the Moon* or simply on their own personal experiences, while the older students aged 14-15 were more likely to speak in the abstract (in fact 72% of their assigned codes were about the abstract concept of home). However, an interesting pattern emerged. Many of the discussions in the older age group focused on issues of exile and migration, issues close to home within the context of recent Lithuanian history (with the deportation of Lithuanians to Siberia during the Second World War subsequent occupation by the Soviet Union).

Example Lt1 (age 14/15)

Mantas: I know, well from history, anyway, let's say there was an exile, and there were people there, they were attached to their home and it was hard to leave because it was all they had..

When asked by their teacher to select three key words to define home, one group of older children were very specific about historical detail, bringing up collective memories, in particular about The Mount of the Cross (a place of pilgrimage destroyed under Soviet rule):

Example Lt2 (age 14/15)

Lina: But here's our story, too. Our ancestors.
Aušra: Our Blood.
Lina: Maybe memories
Titas: Mount of the Cross.

Even when talking about the Baboon, the children used the term 'exile' to describe his plight. The phrases "exiled to the moon" or "exiled for other jobs" are used by the children.

Another theme that is related to the current Lithuanian situation is the issue of migration for economic and social reasons, and this was also reflected in the children's ideas.

Example Lt3 (age 8/9)

Upė: The Baboon went to the moon to work
Rytis: The Baboon was forced to go to the moon to work to help his country and his family.

Whilst the affective aspect of 'home' is highly prevalent for the children in these classes (with 42% of all codes assigned), often these comments were related to a sense of loss or leaving home and tied to the historical context of the country.

4.2.5. Case Study 5: Cyprus

Due to the COVID pandemic, data collection was significantly impacted in Cyprus and as such only the youngest age group of children feature in the study. In the data from Cyprus schools the code groups that were most prominent were Social Relations (30%), Affect (27%) and Materiality (26%). This was not surprising, since the children from these classes frequently referred to family members and friends, their toys, daily routines and actions, as well as to a number of emotions that reflected their ideas of home and belonging.

The most frequently assigned code within the Social Relations code group was 'family members' with 24% of all content-based codes assigned. While 'family' was the most noticeable idea within the code, there were instances where the children became more specific referring to family members such as grandpa and grandma, brother or sister and even cousins. Not only did this idea appeared significantly in the class discussions about home, but it also occurred in the Dislocation code group as the children discussed the situation of the Baboon in relation to the absence of his family members.

The next most significant code was 'safety and comfort'(20%) within the Affect code group. Even though it became evident there were some instances where a distinct level of elicitation from the teacher was necessary for the younger children, some interesting and original ideas came up as these children discussed their emotional attachment with their home.

Example Cy1 (age 5/6):

Loukas: A warm hug.
Georgos: A place that protects me when in danger.

Example Cy2 (age 5/6)

Christina: Ehh…shield. […] It protects us.

What was noticeable and significant in these examples is that some children in this younger age group spontaneously attributed metaphorical connotations, as they expressed their views of home as a place of safety and comfort, using similes such as home as a warm hug and home as a shield. Home as a place of 'happiness and fun' was the second most important code within the Affect code group (12%), as children directly referred to feeling happy in their home and having fun, while 'love' appeared in 7% of the assigned codes.

Material aspects of home and belonging were also apparent in the coded discussions where specifically 'daily routines and actions' appeared 27% of the time. This included routines and actions such as eating and drinking, sleeping, playing or having a shower. Codes such as 'house', 'possessions' and 'room' appeared less prominently in these discussions. An interesting idea that emerged within the Materiality code group was the idea of the 'fireplace' as an important part of the house/home.

Example Cy3 (age 5/6)

Marios: With one to light their fireplace to keep warm.
Nikolas: A house to keep warm.
Christos: It is a house with glasses that, where, where you light the fireplace.
Andreas: The house is to light the fireplace.
Melina: Eh It also has a fireplace and a baby.

Constantinos: I made a house that has a bathroom, a sofa, and a TV to have a fireplace and there lives a child. And his parents.

As these students explained their drawings and ideas about what a home is, they drew on ideas of materiality as well as comfort and warmth arising from the existence of a fireplace. This is also related to the context and particularly the areas from which data was collected which were largely rural. In such rural areas the existence of a fireplace is a common house feature and therefore part of these children's experiences.

The fact that these children are living in rural areas also seems to have affected their discussions of home in relation to its spatial aspects. Although the category spatiality came up only 11% of the time, it was interesting to notice how children connected their home with nature and their yard where they possibly have the opportunity to play.

Finally, the code group Dislocation was represented in only 6% of the assigned codes and this exclusively appeared in text-based discussions focusing on Baboon's home, rather than through the children's personal experiences or in an abstract form.

5. Synthesis of discussion and conclusions

Our six theoretical aspects of belonging and the combined deductive-inductive analysis illuminate the richness of the children's ideas about home in our five case countries. In the data, home appears as a fluid concept, simultaneously overlapping aspects such as materiality and spatiality or social relations and affect. The consideration of what home 'is not' and discussions about dislocation and non-belonging, also seemed to help the children to crystallise their ideas.

Our analysis underlines the intertwined nature of subjective and social aspects of belonging (Calhoun, 2007). These aspects are reflected in the children's personal experiences and perceptions of their place and role within a group or community, and how they participate in the shared social organisation of home and belonging. The analysis highlights how the meaning of home and sense of belonging emerge as part of a dynamic social process (Yuval-Davis 2006, 2011) and are created in relation to people at home and in additional meaningful contexts with close friends and family (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Čeginskas, 2015). The data demonstrate how this meaning-making process is intertwined with emotional and affective dimensions (Anthias 2008), and how belonging is an active relationship (Lähdesmäki et al., 2021a) between the children and those they associate with in their surrounding social contexts, manifested through doing things and being together. A sense of social relatedness (Pittman & Zeigler, 2007) was articulated through the children's discussions about close relationships with family members and loved ones but also through connections to broader social networks at school or through hobbies.

The younger children in the study commonly considered home through important social relations within their everyday life, such as with family members, while the older children usually explored the idea of home through the affective aspect of belonging, emphasising various emotions associated with it. A sense of safety and reliability as a basic human need (Maslow, 1968) and the basis of emotional well-being (Pittman & Zeigler, 2007), was articulated through the discussion of the positive emotions that having a home and being at home created. Even the youngest children reflected on how they valued comforting spaces and social relations where they felt safe. This was particularly evident in our German data, in which the feeling of comfort was brought up in all but one classroom. Emotional well-being also included feeling in control and the opportunity of 'being oneself' with a sense of agency and autonomy.

In the data, place-belongingness as described by Antonsich (2010), was attached to spatial locations ranging in scale from the intimate space of a child's own room to the abstract idea of Planet Earth. The need to locate belonging in something material and real (Boccagni 2014) was articulated in the classroom discussions by the emphasis on various items and possessions that the children connected to the idea of home and a feeling of belonging. The 'multi-sited' (Bennett, 2014; Marcu, 2014) spatial belonging to several homes and the feelings of 'in-betweenness' (Huot et al., 2014) emerged in the discussions in relation to the perceptions of mobility or migration, either based on the interpretations of *Baboon on the Moon* or reflections on real-life situations and experiences, though these were less frequent. Lähdesmäki et al. (2016) note how the idea of belonging as being included in a group or a community also includes the possibility of being excluded from them. In our data, this duality of belonging emerged in the experiences and perceptions of dislocation from home or not fitting in.

The analysis revealed some differences in the data between the case countries. One of these differences relates to how the children dealt with belonging in terms of place of origin or birth. In the data from England, it was noticeably rare for children to define home in fixed terms of birthplace or nationality, and much more common for them to discuss home as linked to family or feelings of safety, comfort, or familiarity. Importantly, discussions did not tie down 'family' to a place of origin or genealogy, but rather made the simple presence of one's family the prerequisite for home. Home was, then, widely discussed as a place that might change over time and was subject to an individual's own view of themselves and their surroundings. In Spain, the children in the study were more likely to talk about places of origin, or where their families originated as important elements of home and belonging. In Lithuania, the country's difficult history seemed to impact on the older students' discussions. Here, the idea of dislocation was approached in the context of deportations, exile and migration as collective memory and legacy.

In our data, the children moved fluidly between personal, textual and abstract references for their discussions, though we recognise that these would have been guided by the teachers in their orchestration of the activity. We found that whilst this was more common for the older students, even the youngest children used metaphors and abstract concepts to express their ideas. This was particularly evident in our Cypriot data, where the children expressed their views of home as a place of safety and comfort through metaphors.

There are limitations to this research of course. We have presented a snapshot of ideas from a moment in time and a small number of children from a sample of European countries. Their views are by no means to be taken as representative of their cultural groups – but rather as an acknowledgement of the complexity of what it means to belong and have a home, and the importance of agency in enabling feelings of safety and comfort for all age groups. Home is a social, emotional and cultural space that offers safety and comfort and is thus more than just a house; this paper has shown how children from five European countries share this idea. Their notions of

home reflect the well-known saying 'home is where the heart is'. As Noah from England reflects, 'a house is just a building, a home's something that you make'.

Statement of Interests

There are no competing interests to declare

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