

Mapping Historical Consciousness:
Mental Maps of Time and Space among Secondary School Students
from Ten Locations around the Baltic and Mediterranean Seas

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Abstract

The article investigates the temporal and spatial structure of historical consciousness among secondary school students from ten locations around the Baltic and Mediterranean seas. It examines what eras and spaces in history are important to the students, and discusses how the mental maps of individuals at a certain location are affected by geopolitics and interpretations of historical experiences.

The results are primarily based upon one open survey question: 'Write down the names of as many important historical figures as possible within five minutes'. Psychological theories of memory are used in order to explain how such simple memory retrieval can be used in studies of historical consciousness. The data from the survey is presented in the form of maps, using techniques of mental mapping developed by geographers.

The empirical investigation reveals three categories of historical consciousness: national, found in Italy and Morocco, Americanized, found in Sweden, and multipolar, found in Estonia, Åland and Malta. The article argues that each of the three strands of historical consciousness is linked to specific historical and geopolitical circumstances.

Keywords

Mental Maps, Historical Consciousness, Sweden, Estonia, Åland,
Morocco, Italy, Malta, Survey, Secondary Schools

Mapping Historical Consciousness: Mental Maps of Time and Space among Secondary School Students from Ten Locations around the Baltic and Mediterranean Seas

Janne Holmén¹

1. Introduction

In the period since the Second World War, professional historians have become increasingly interested in how history is perceived outside of academic circles.² Orientations such as historical consciousness, collective memory, history culture, memory culture, uses of history, and history didactics have investigated, from a variety of angles, the views of history found in popular history, films, novels, and textbooks. Of these concepts, historical consciousness is perhaps the most ‘democratic’ in the sense that it carries an ambition to investigate views of history held by ‘ordinary people’ who are not themselves producers of history. However, few studies on historical consciousness have employed empirical methods, such as surveys and interviews, which would be suitable for exploring the historical consciousness of these broad groups.

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² This article is an outcome of the research project “Past and present in the minds of secondary school students: a bottom up approach to mental mapping in the Baltic and Mediterranean rim”, which investigates mental maps and historical consciousness among upper secondary school students from the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean regions. It is a subproject of “Spaces of Expectation: Mental Mapping and Historical Imagination in the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean Region”, which studies attempts at region building in the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean regions as well as the perceptions of these regions and their histories, financed by the Baltic Sea foundation. The role of this subproject within the main project is to contribute to the discussion regarding whether the attempts by political and academic elites to construct Baltic and Mediterranean regions correspond with the images held by broader layers of the population, and the selection of locations for the surveys are adapted to this question. However, the focus of this paper is on historical consciousness in a broad sense. A forthcoming article in *Journal of Cultural Geography* will investigate perceptions of the Baltic and Mediterranean Seas, region-building, and geographical mental maps.

The present paper investigates the temporal and spatial structure of historical consciousness among secondary school students from ten locations around the Baltic and Mediterranean seas. It examines what eras and spaces in history these students consider important, and discusses how the mental maps of individuals at a certain location are affected by geopolitics and historical experiences.

The results presented in this paper are, although they address broad issues of students' perception of time and space, mainly based upon one open survey question: 'Write down the name of as many important historical figures as possible within five minutes'. The chapter "Historical consciousness" is dedicated to explaining how such a simple approach can be useful, and in many respects even preferable to the more elaborate batteries of questions used in previous studies. Using psychological theories of the workings of the human memory, it is even argued that such simple memory retrieval can give an insight into one of the most elusive aspects of historical consciousness: the connection between past, present, and future.

The data from the survey is presented in the form of maps, using techniques of mental mapping developed by geographers. Mental maps and historical consciousness are treated as parallel terms – both describe human worldviews, the first focusing on the spatial and the second on the temporal dimension of the world.

The present paper explores the differences between the mental maps of students from different locations. It introduces – based upon empirical findings – the categories national, Americanized, and multipolar historical consciousness, and discusses the special spatial and historical circumstances under which each of these strands of historical consciousness have emerged.

1.1. Historical Consciousness

The historical consciousness concept was used at least as early as 1837, when the German philosopher Heinrich Moritz Chalybäus described Hegel's philosophy as the latest phase in the development of human historical consciousness. He did so by making an analogy to psychology and the development of individual consciousness.³ The concept was thereafter in regular use, but was first systematically studied in the 1960s.⁴ The development of theory and research within the field accelerated after the publication of Karl-Ernst Jeissman's "Geschichtsbewußtsein" in 1979.⁵ By this point, the concept had several

³Chalybäus, 1860; Chalybäus, 1854, p. 7.

⁴Aaron, 1961; Gadamer, 1963; Lukacs, 1968.

⁵Jeissmann, 1979.

different meanings: knowledge of the past; awareness that past, present, and future are always present; ability to reflect upon the links between past, present and future; and collective memories in the sense of emotionally founded interpretations of history. This study primarily investigates historical consciousness in the sense of knowledge of the past and collective memories. However, as will be argued below, this simple aspect of historical consciousness provides an inroad into the deeper meaning of the concept.

Historical consciousness has also been considered crucial for the formation of identity. This has secured a place for the concept in national history curricula – but it has also resulted in the criticism that historical consciousness is simply a rephrasing of traditional historical nation building.⁶ However, it is not necessary to limit the meaning of historical consciousness to an individual or group's awareness of the history of their own political entity or ethnic group, although that has been the case in most studies.

Despite significant efforts to develop the concept of “historical consciousness” theoretically, it has proven difficult to utilize in empirical research. Some historians have adopted these theories as a point of departure when studying the uses of history or artefacts of history culture, but it is doubtful whether they have actually made use of the theories in their empirical work. It has been argued that the concept is indeed unsuitable for such studies.⁷

Several attempts have been made to directly investigate historical consciousness by interviewing a limited number of individuals, through surveys of larger groups, or through a combination of these methods.⁸ However, previous studies have asked questions concerning limited and sharply defined aspects of historical consciousness rather than attempting a comprehensive mapping such as the one presented in this paper.

The large survey “Youth and History” investigated the historical consciousness of 32,000 teenagers in Europe. Magne Angvik, one of the editors of the final report, claimed that German and Scandinavian researchers of historical consciousness considered history “a complex connection of interpretations of the past, perceptions of the present and expectations of the future”, a theory the “Youth and History” questionnaire was an attempt to operationalize.⁹

The Youth and History survey consisted of 280 multiple choice questions. Despite – and maybe in part because of – the multitude of questions and the huge number of participating students and researchers, the results of the project

⁶ Laville, 2004, pp. 165 - 182.

⁷ Axelsson, 2004, pp. 11 - 26.

⁸ For example, Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998; Hartsmar, 2001; Potapenko, 2006; Potapenko, 2010.

⁹ Angvik & von Borries, 1997, p. 36.

remained vague and fragmented. It has been claimed that the project's shortcomings were related to an insufficient theoretical framework,¹⁰ but I would argue that the main problem can be found at the methodological level.

The surveys and interviews in previous research have used closed questions, attempting to establish that the remembrance of certain historical events is important to an understanding of the present and the future, and to identity formation. These questions are either formulated based on assumptions that certain historical events 'ought' to be of importance for the historical consciousness and identity formation of certain groups of students, or on a normative theoretical hierarchy which differentiates between 'good' and 'bad' forms of historical consciousness.¹¹ With such methods, it is difficult to discover aspects of historical consciousness that are not already presupposed by the theoretical point of departure. There is a risk that central aspects of historical consciousness remain undiscovered if they are not directly addressed by the questions – and this risk cannot be eliminated even with the most extensive battery of questions.

Additionally, when attempting to empirically investigate an extremely complicated theoretical concept such as historical consciousness, it is problematic to begin with its most abstract aspect, the perceived link between past, present, and future. A more intuitive approach is to start with the simplest aspect: *what* are people conscious of in the past – what constitutes their collective memories?

However, a sceptic might question whether it is actually possible to investigate historical consciousness by broadly surveying students' knowledge of history. How will it, according to this sceptical line of reasoning, be possible to find the important pieces of information – the ones related to the students' historical consciousness or identity – among all the information to which the students have been exposed during their lifetime, for example through school, media, and popular culture? Most of this information will no doubt be of very little interest and devoid of deeper meaning to the students. Luckily, we have a tool at our disposal that is incredibly efficient at identifying the bits and pieces that people perceive as important and meaningful from the vast oceans of information, which swell over them during their lifetime – the human memory itself.

Humans are exposed to a constant flow of information and experiences, but only the information which is considered important passes through the process of encoding into, storage in, and retrieval from the semantic and episodic

¹⁰ Seixas, 2004, pp. 3-24.

¹¹ The most well-known hierarchy is Jörn Rüsen's concepts traditional, exemplary, critical and genetic historical consciousness. Rüsen, 2004, pp. 63-85.

memories. The semantic memory stores our general world knowledge, while the episodic memory contains recollections of our own experiences, although it has been suggested that there is no definitive line between the two.¹²

The connection between past, present, and future that is so crucial to theories of historical consciousness has also been recognized in psychological research, since it has been argued that “episodic memory plays a critical role in future-oriented thinking and planning”.¹³ Episodic memory is connected to “autonoetic consciousness” – the awareness that you are the same individual today as you were yesterday and will be tomorrow – and to the self. Psychologists have also begun to recognize that the development of memory and identity is related to cultural and societal factors:

EAM [Episodic-autobiographical memory], autonoetic consciousness and the self are intimately linked, grounding, supporting and enriching each other’s development and cohesiveness. Their development is influenced by the socio-cultural–linguistic environment in which an individual grows up or lives. On the other hand, through language, textualization and social exchange, all three elements leak into the world and participate to the dynamic shaping and re-shaping of the cultural scaffolding of the self, mental time traveling and EAM formation.¹⁴

Based on these psychological models of how human memory works, we can suppose that by simply investigating what aspects of history students retrieve from their memories we will know what historical knowledge they perceive to be relevant in the present and expect to be important in the future. We can also suppose that the memories a person retrieves are affected by the history culture to which that person has been exposed. Furthermore, through social interactions that individual contributes to the history culture, thereby affecting what historical information other persons will consider important enough to encode into and retrieve from their memories.

By using open questions, like asking students to write down as many important historical figures as possible within five minutes, we will not get a complete overview of a person’s repository of historical knowledge, but rather an insight into what is ‘on top of their minds’ and is considered most important. If the same person is surveyed at different times it is likely that different things are considered important, and that slightly different historical information would be retrieved in the survey. It has been shown that retrieval of episodic memories is context dependent, and that associations play an important role in the retrieval

¹² McRae & Jones 2013, pp. 206-219; Tulving, 2013, pp. 1-25.; Gallo & Wheeler, 2013, pp. 189-205.

¹³ Evidence for this is that people with amnesia are less likely to engage in elaborate future-oriented thought than people with intact episodic memory. Gallo & Wheeler, 2013, p. 192.

¹⁴ Markowitsch & Staniloui, 2011, pp. 16-39.

of semantic memories.¹⁵ The influence of context and associations on memory retrieval makes it all the more important to keep survey questions open, neither directing students with leading questions nor by providing examples.¹⁶

Another methodologically problematic aspect of many previous studies of historical consciousness has been their openly normative nature. A substantial proportion of the scholars in the field have come from history didactics or other educational disciplines, and desire to conduct research that is policy relevant vis-à-vis the formulation of curricula, which commonly promotes progressive values such as democracy and tolerance.¹⁷ It is possible that this normative ambition has favoured the emphasis on theory over empirical studies, as well as the choice of closed rather than open questions in the few empirical studies that have been conducted. Critical empirical research does not readily produce norms regarding what constitutes a ‘good’ historical consciousness, and can therefore not be easily fitted into models for normative history education.¹⁸

One of the many paradoxical effects of this normatively theorizing approach is that despite repeated concerns about an overly westernized historical consciousness, almost no studies have been conducted on historical consciousness outside the Western world.¹⁹ In part, that might be a result of the idea that modern historical consciousness – the realization of historicity, the understanding that everything is historically situated – is a relatively recent Western discovery.²⁰ The perspective from psychology and memory research presented above does suggest, however, that historical consciousness could instead be understood as part of a universal human system for constructing images of and orientating in time and space.

Another reason for the lack of research outside the West might be the perceived problem of developing “... comparative frameworks that will be capacious enough to begin such work without implicitly elevating Western historical consciousness to an a priori ideal of development”.²¹ The complexity of intercultural comparisons is yet another argument in favour of utilizing open questions.

¹⁵ Eich, 1980, pp. 157-173; Raaijmakers, 1981, pp. 93-134.

¹⁶ Potapenko, who has mainly worked with interviews, did in his 2010 study include a small survey with open questions. He found that it exceeded his expectations regarding the quality of the material. However, when he asked the students about what geographical areas they would like to know more about he made the mistake of providing examples, and the students generally ended up discussing these examples rather than formulating free answers. Potapenko, 2010, pp. 102&105.

¹⁷ Seixas, 2004, p. 10; Potapenko, 2010, p. 25.

¹⁸ Seixas, 2004, p. 15.

¹⁹ What exist are a few studies on the perception of history in European overseas settlements, for example “Social identity and the perception of history: cultural representations of Aotearoa/New Zealand” and “The madman and the migrant: Work and labor in the historical consciousness of a South African people”

²⁰ Lukacs, 2005, pp. 10-16.

²¹ Seixtas, 2004, p. 14.

In order to investigate human consciousness of the spatial dimensions of the world, geographers have developed a method for unravelling peoples' worldviews by surveying what is 'on top of their minds' through open questions: Mental mapping. Since a growing body of evidence suggests that human perception of distances, directions, and movements in time is based upon metaphors from – and even involving the same brain areas as – spatial thinking, there is reason to believe that the original spatially-oriented mental mapping techniques could also be of use in the temporally-oriented research of historical consciousness.²²

1.2. Mental Mapping

The 'Mental map' concept has been used to describe both how people orientate in their environment and how they perceive the world, and it is approximately synonymous with 'cognitive map'. Although both terms are used in geography, behavioural science and psychology, geographers more commonly use the term 'mental maps'.²³ The term has also recently been used by historians, who have tried to describe the world views of political leaders,²⁴ the French colonial mind,²⁵ or images of the region around the Baltic Sea.²⁶ They have not, however, used the quantitative methods of mental mapping developed within the social sciences, but have instead used it as an analytical concept in qualitative studies.

It has been suggested that Immanuel Kant anticipated mental maps in his writings on geography.²⁷ However, the modern geographical research field of mental maps emerged in 1960 with the publication of Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City*, although Lynch did not actually use the term 'mental maps' but the term 'image'.²⁸ Another founder of the field was Peter Gould, who from 1966 used the term 'mental maps' for his maps of students' information and perception of different areas.²⁹

Previous research on mental maps has used several forms of data collection: interviews,³⁰ route descriptions,³¹ freehand maps³², and surveys. In 2014 and 2015, I conducted surveys investigating mental maps and historical consciousness among secondary school students in ten locations in the Baltic Sea

²² A good overview of this research is found in Cooperrider & Núñez, 2016.

²³ Hannes et al., 2012, pp. 143-165.

²⁴ Casey & Wright 2008; Casey & Wright 2011.

²⁵ Thomas, 2011.

²⁶ Götz et al., 2006.

²⁷ Richards, 1974, pp. 1-16.

²⁸ Lynch, 1970.

²⁹ Gould, 1966.

³⁰ Lynch, 1970.

³¹ Lynch, 1970; Fraczak, 1998, pp. 185-200.

³² Saarinen & MacCabe, 1995, pp. 196-204.

and Mediterranean regions: Gävle and Uppsala in Sweden, the Åland Islands in Finland, Noarootsi and Valga in Estonia, Bologna and Venice in Italy, Valetta on Malta, as well as Tangiers and Fez in Morocco.

My questionnaire (see appendix) primarily used a method inspired by Peter Gould, who constructed mental maps based upon quantitative data from surveys.³³ The present paper is principally based upon the third question in the survey, which investigated the students' historical information maps, but to some extent also upon questions four to seven, which investigated their perception of history. The other questions in the survey, which investigated geographical mental maps, that is information and perception of space, are used in a supportive function in the present paper.

1.3. The Schools

The project design aimed at surveying one class of 20–30 secondary school seniors in each school. In Gävle and Malta the survey was conducted on two different occasions in order to get a sufficient number of students. All surveys were conducted in person, except in Malta where I was present via Skype.

Comparisons between the surveyed countries are complicated by the fact that the school systems vary. The diversity within each country's school system is also substantial and has increased during recent decades, when schools in many countries have been encouraged to profile themselves and specialise. Despite diversity, the basic similarity of schools and classrooms worldwide makes them the best setting available for comparative surveys such as the present one, where the contextual influences on memory retrieval need to be controlled.

Large discrepancies in the levels of the schools have been avoided. It is possible that the knowledge level of students might influence their mental maps, and great differences in knowledge levels might therefore obscure the differences caused by location and other factors that I want to investigate. For that reason, schools with an elite profile as well as schools known for sub-par performance were avoided.

In Malta, the students surveyed had already begun Junior College at Malta University at age 18–19, while the other students in the survey were still in their last year of secondary school at this age. I chose to study the more selective Junior college rather than the last year of secondary school. The question about geographical information does indicate that the students from Malta were in the middle range of the classes surveyed regarding knowledge levels, which suggests Junior College students are comparable to upper secondary school seniors elsewhere.

³³ Gould & White 1986.

Students from the penultimate year of secondary school were surveyed in Åland, since the final year students were preoccupied with matriculation exams. In Noarootsi, final year students were combined with younger students in order to get a sufficiently large sample. This did not mean that the students from Åland and Noarootsi underperformed. They actually displayed average knowledge levels higher than in all other locations except Venice.³⁴ More detailed information about the surveyed classes can be found in the appendix.

1.4. From Survey to Map

This article is mainly based upon information gathered from question three of the survey, where students were asked to write down as many important historical figures as possible within five minutes and the city or country with which they are most commonly associated. The names produced have been analysed according to their spatial and temporal distribution.

In investigating the spatial distribution, I have followed the participant's suggestion for the place with which the individual are most associated. For example, this means that Adolf Hitler is sometimes categorized as Austrian, but most often as German. When the students have mentioned a person without stating the country with which they are most associated, I have followed the most common practice among the students of the class, and if no clear practice exists I have in undisputed cases used encyclopaedic information. Cosmopolitan individuals, such as Albert Einstein, have, if the students have not assigned them any city or country, been lumped together in the category "others". These examples are not displayed on maps, but form part of the total number of individuals from which percentages are calculated. The distribution of historical figures among some of the most commonly mentioned countries are displayed in Table 1.

The mental map representations used in this article, the cartograms (Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5), are based upon the same information as Table 1. A cartogram can be described as a hybrid of a map and a pie chart, where each piece of pie has the shape and location of the spatial unit that it represents. In this article the area units used are modern nation states and autonomous regions. Their areas in the cartogram are proportional to the number of important historical figures the students associated with them.

³⁴ Based upon the number of place names they were able to write down within five minutes in question 1.

Table 1. Spatial distribution.

The ten most common countries of origin among the historical figures mentioned by students from each surveyed location.

Fez	%	Tanger	%	Malta	%	Venice	%	Bologna	%
Morocco	33	Morocco	42	Malta	15	Italy	29	Italy	47
Germany	9	Arabian peninsula	10	Germany	12	France	16	France	12
Arabian peninsula	8	Germany	9	Italy	11	Spain	12	USA	10
Egypt	7	Palestine	7	France	10	USA	10	Germany	9
Turkey	6	Turkey	6	USA	10	Germany	9	Greece	5
Iraq	4	Iraq	4	Russia	9	UK	8	UK	5
Palestine	4	Einstein ³⁵	3	UK	8	Russia	3	Russia	4
USA	4	Egypt	3	India	5	Greece	2	Austria	2
France	2	UK	3	South Africa	4	China	2	Spain	2
Libya	2	Newton	2	Libya	4	Cuba	2	India	1
Uppsala									
Uppsala	%	Gävle	%	Åland	%	Valga	%	Noarootsi	%
USA	28	USA	32	USA	13	Russia	22	Estonia	28
Sweden	22	Sweden	13	Russia	13	USA	21	Russia	15
Germany	13	UK	9	France	11	Estonia	16	USA	10
Russia	8	Germany	9	UK	11	Germany	8	UK	10
UK	6	Russia	6	Germany	9	Italy	6	Germany	9
France	5	France	6	Finland	6	UK	5	France	5
Italy	3	Greece	4	Sweden	6	Greece	5	Italy	4
Spain	3	Italy	4	Italy	4	France	4	Austria	4
Israel	2	India	1	Spain	3	Iraq	2	Greece	2
India	2	Israel	1	Austria	3	Egypt	2	China	1

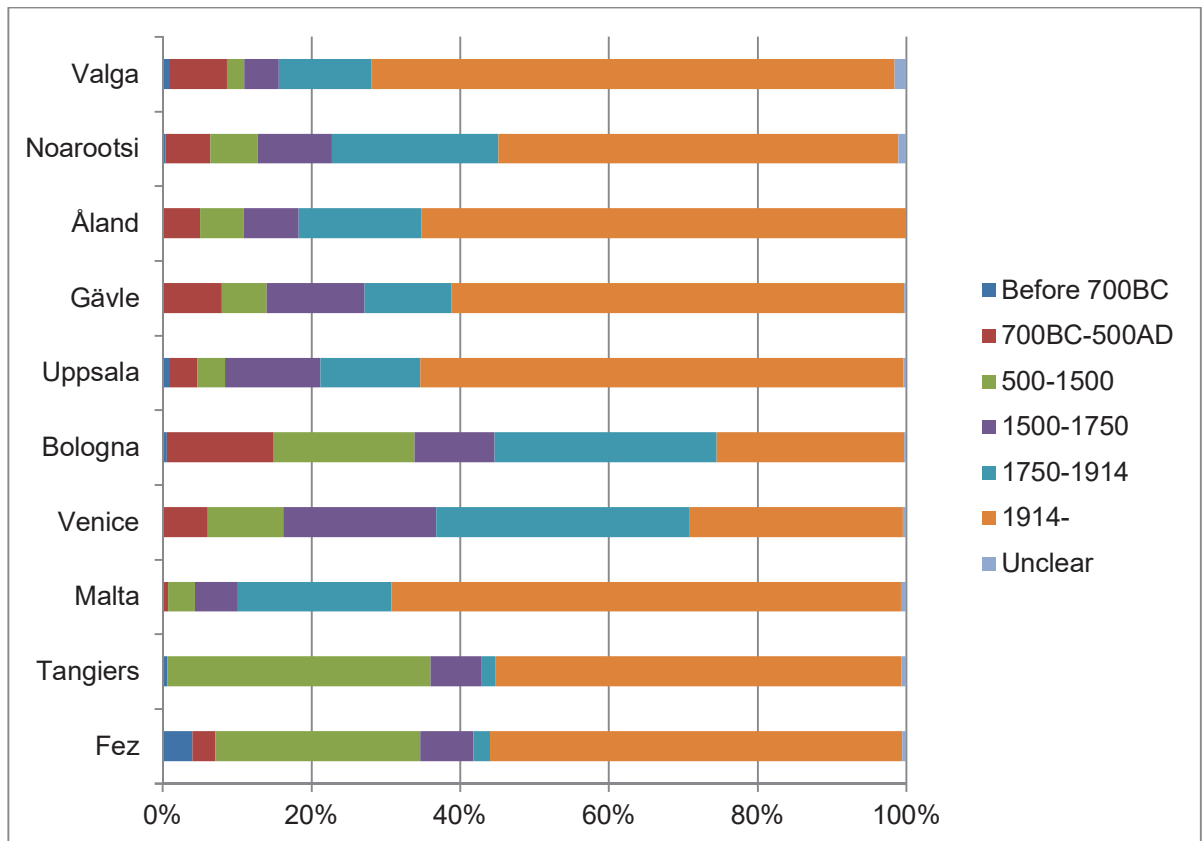
Since the cartograms are based on a world map with contemporary political units, and political borders have shifted over time, the created maps are undoubtedly anachronistic. However, they still transmit a general picture of which areas the students consider to have been important in history.

The temporal distribution of the figures mentioned by the students, the ‘mental timeline’, is displayed in Figure 1.

³⁵ Einstein and Newton were mentioned by many of the science students from Tangiers, but they did not associate them with any country.

Figure 1. Temporal Distribution, ‘Mental timeline’.

The historical figures mentioned by the students distributed on a timeline.



In coding the temporal distribution, the main methodological problem is that the lifespans of some historical figures transcend the arbitrarily constructed limits of time periods used in the present paper. The main rule followed is that a person is coded as belonging to the period with which the person is primarily associated. For example, Lenin, who lived most of his life prior to 1914, is still coded in the post 1914 period, since he is arguably associated primarily with the Russian revolution. Of course, there is always a certain element of arbitrariness in such decisions and some individual cases might have been handled differently. However, there are not enough uncertain cases to change the fundamental structure of the mental maps and mental timeline.

2. Three Categories of Historical Consciousness

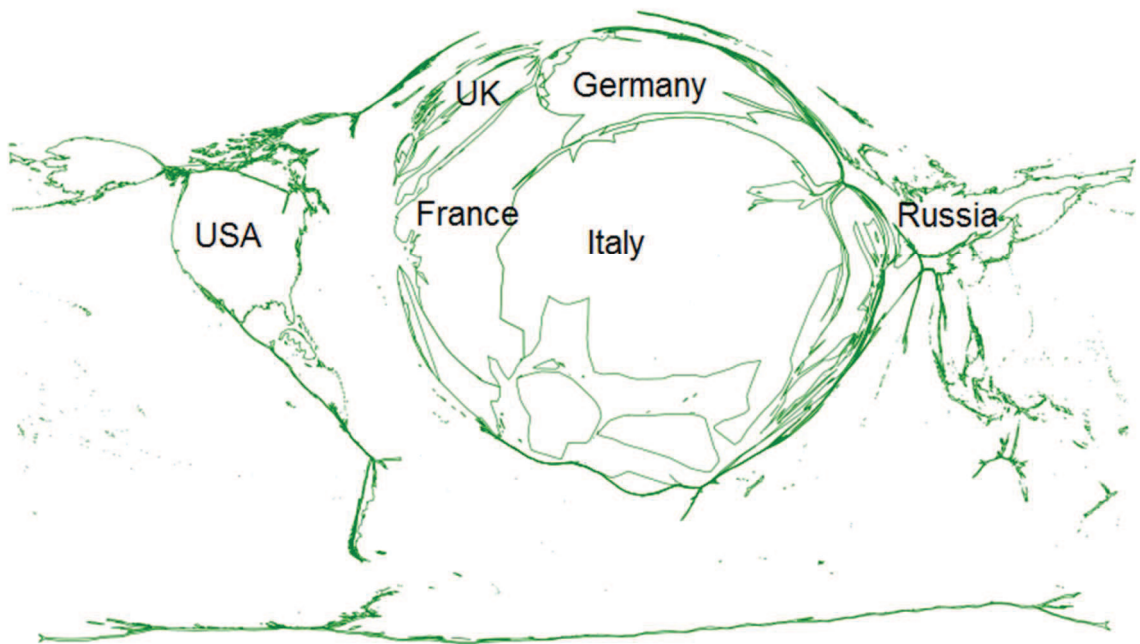
In this chapter, three categories of historical consciousness are introduced: the national, the Americanized, and the multipolar. They are not based upon any pre-existing model or theory, but are derived directly from the empirical material.

2.1. National Historical Consciousness: Morocco and Italy

The diagram of spatial distribution (Table 1) illustrates the share of important historical people from the participants' own nation is highest in Morocco and Italy, and the national bias is also evident in figures 2 and 3. This probably reflects a national focus in Moroccan and Italian history teaching and history culture.

Figure 2. Bologna: National Historical Consciousness.

Students from Italy mentioned many Italian historical figures, and very few individuals from outside Europe and the USA.



In one of the few earlier articles that tried to combine perspectives of temporal and spatial cognition, based on a series of experiments by the psychologist Ulf Lundberg, concluded that both physical and temporal distances are inversely proportional to emotional involvement.³⁶ That is, the further away from us in time and space something takes place the less likely we are to care about it. This pattern fits the data from most locations investigated in the present paper: Estonian, Swedish, Ålandic, and Maltese students listed a high number of important historical figures from the latest period (1914–), and then fewer and fewer for periods further back in time. However, this pattern was broken in Italy and Morocco.

The mental timeline (figure 1) illustrates that in both countries the focus is upon periods central in the history of ideas, largely consisting of Arabic medieval scholars – often identified as Moroccans – and Italian renaissance intellectuals. The Moroccan fight against colonialism in the 20th century and the Italian reunification of the 19th century are other periods which generate many important historical figures.

However, in Italy the period from 1914 and in Morocco the period from 1750 to 1914 are less well represented, likely because they are associated with national decline and confusion. A comparison illustrates the dramatic exclusions of these periods: the period from 1914 amounts to 28% in Venice and 25% in Bologna, whereas that period accounts for between 54% and 70% in the responses from other schools. In Morocco, 1750–1914 amounts to only 2%, compared to between 12% and 34% in other locations. The aversion to this period, during which Moroccan power waned until the country was eventually colonized, is confirmed by question five, since five of the 41 students from Fez mentioned “the enlightenment” on their lists of periods in history during which they would not like to have lived. In other countries, the enlightenment was perceived as something exclusively positive. Likewise, answers to question eight illustrate that Italian students associate present-day Italy with mismanagement and corruption.³⁷ Thus, the national historical consciousness in Italy and Morocco focuses upon periods of national grandeur and unification, and downplays periods that challenge the national narrative.

However, the finding that the Moroccan and Italian students’ historical consciousness is mainly preoccupied by their own country does not necessarily mean that they have a positive perception of their own history. It was only in these two countries that their own country tops the list of times and places in

³⁶ Lundberg, 1973, pp. 322-337.

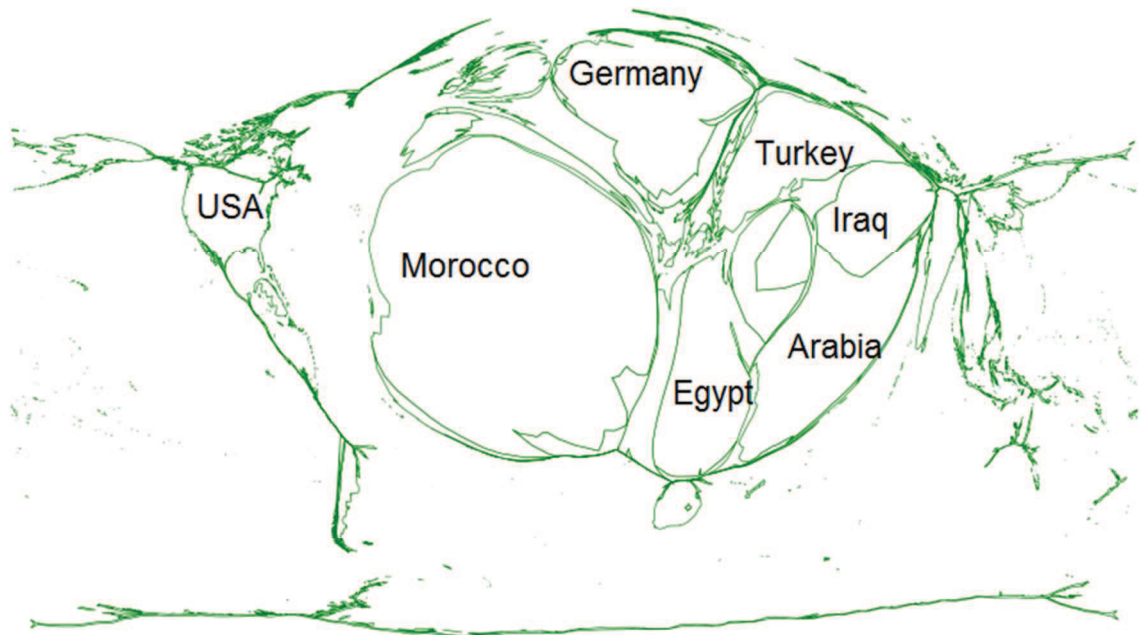
³⁷ Question eight actually concerned the perception of the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean regions. However, in all locations students tended to describe their own country rather than the region as a whole.

history where the students would not like to have lived.³⁸ In Italy, periods of Italian history also top the rankings of times in which the students would like to have lived in history, but not in Morocco, where periods in the history of Turkey, the Arab peninsula, and, for participants in Fez, Egypt are more popular.³⁹

Although Italian and Moroccan students' mental maps of history are similar in the respect that they were dominated by figures from their own nations, they differed greatly regarding the provenance of the foreign figures on their lists. Italian students, like those from other European locations, mostly mentioned figures from Europe and the USA, while the Moroccan lists were dominated by persons from the Middle East and Turkey, such as the prophet Mohamed, Yassir Arafat, Saddam Hussein and Suleiman the Great. The only person on top of both the European and Moroccan lists was Adolf Hitler.

Figure 3. Fez: National Historical Consciousness.

The Moroccan students associated many historical figures with Morocco, but also mentioned many from Turkey and the Middle East.



³⁸ Based on question five.

³⁹ Based on question four.

2.2. Americanized Historical Consciousness

The Swedish students' *geographical* mental maps were among the most national in the whole survey. However, as illustrated in figure 4, Sweden is substantially outweighed by the United States on their historical information maps, which was the second most important country on their geographical mental maps.

Thomas Nygren has claimed that the focus of Swedish history education shifted from national to international history in the 1950s, under the influence of UNESCO guidelines. Although Sweden's entrance into the European Union in 1994 caused a shift in the curriculum towards European history, the preferences of Swedish students remained internationally oriented, at least until 2002.⁴⁰ The present study does, however, indicate that the internationalism of Swedish students, when investigated in 2014 through open ended questions and compared to that of other nations, primarily equated to Americanism. It has been claimed that although Sweden is a deeply Americanized society, it is so in a particularly Swedish way.⁴¹ In that context, it is interesting to reflect upon the American individuals that made it onto the lists of Swedish secondary school students.

Some Americans have had a prominent role in Swedish history education for a long time. For example, Benjamin Franklin, in the role of a diligent student, was used as an important role model for Swedish children until the 1950s, when he began to disappear from textbooks.⁴² Consequently, Franklin no longer holds an important position in the historical consciousness of Swedish students, and is entirely absent from the lists of the Gävle and Uppsala students.

The people from the United States mentioned by the Swedes in this study are mostly from the 20th century. The Americans are either presidents such as Kennedy and Lincoln, civil rights activists such as Martin Luther King or – in the Gävle class, which had a cultural profile – artists such as Michael Jackson. If we compare this list with the Smithsonian's list of the 100 most significant Americans of all time,⁴³ we notice that the categories "Religious figures" and "Outlaws" are entirely absent from Sweden, and that "Rebels and Resisters" are only represented by civil rights activists, not by the Confederate generals and Native Americans that appear on the Smithsonian list. In Sweden, businessmen, labelled as "Empire-Builders" on the Smithsonian list, are only represented by Edison and Disney, who might be perceived as an inventor and a cultural figure. Conservative aspects of American society such as religion, big business, resistance to central government, and the myth of the frontier are thus not part of Swedish historical consciousness.

⁴⁰ Nygren, 2011.

⁴¹ O'Dell, 1997.

⁴² Holmén, 2006, p. 139.

⁴³ Frail, 2014.

Figure 4. Gävle: Americanized Historical Consciousness.

Swedish students mentioned more historical figures from the US than from any other country, including Sweden.



Swedish national consciousness is probably more linked to modernity than national history. It has been claimed that other countries have history and culture, while Sweden has rationality and the future.⁴⁴ Thus, the American figures prevalent in the students' lists are probably there as symbols of progressive modernity. It should be noted that the same Americans appear on the lists of students from other countries, the difference being that they are mentioned much more often in Sweden.

The answers to questions four, five, six, and seven, which investigated the students' perception of different historical periods and realms, confirm that Swedish students have a more Americanized historical consciousness than the other students in the survey, and that they also have a predominantly positive view of American history. Asked when they would like to have lived in world history, 25% and 29% of the periods chosen by Gävle and Uppsala students were from American history, compared to between 4% (Fez) and 23% (Åland) in other locations.

⁴⁴ Berggren & Trägårdh, 2015, p. 234.

2.3. Multipolar Historical Consciousness: Estonia, Åland and Malta

The historical mental maps from Valga and Noarootsi in Estonia, as well as the islands Malta and Åland (Figure 5), are neither predominantly national nor Americanized, but multipolar. In these locations, Russia is given approximately equal weight to the USA. In Malta, Italy and Germany are more prominent than either Russia or the USA.

The two islands, Åland and Malta, display the most spatially dispersed historical consciousness. Their own island was the most common place of origin for important historical figures found on the lists of Maltese students, comprising 15% of the total. In Åland, Sweden and Finland was each home to around 6% of the important historical figures, while individuals from Åland itself amounted to only 1.5%. The sum of Sweden, Finland and Åland, 13.5%, is equal to that of people from Sweden on the lists of students from Gävle, who displayed the second least national historical consciousness found in the survey.

Since the 1930s, the regional authorities on Åland, which forms an autonomous region in Finland, have attempted to inspire historiography about their own island, and Ålandic history is mandatory in schools. However, all Ålandic people mentioned in the survey were contemporary sports personalities or teachers, with the exception of the ship owner Gustav Eriksson (1872–1947), who was mentioned once. Eriksson was himself a major funder of Ålandic maritime history writing, which has been internationally oriented.⁴⁵

In other locations that have undergone struggles for independence or reunification, such as Malta, Estonia, Italy, and Morocco, individuals involved in that struggle were prominent on the students' lists of important historical figures. In Åland there was no mention of anyone from the Åland movement, the struggle for reunification with Sweden, which led to autonomy for Åland within Finland in 1921. However, Carl Gustaf Mannerheim, arguably the main hero of Finnish national historiography, was mentioned by 39% of the students. Thus, it seems that the history of their own autonomous region has left little impression on the historical consciousness of Ålandic students. In part this might reflect the fact that Ålandic regional identity primarily draws strength from sources other than history, first and foremost the Swedish language.

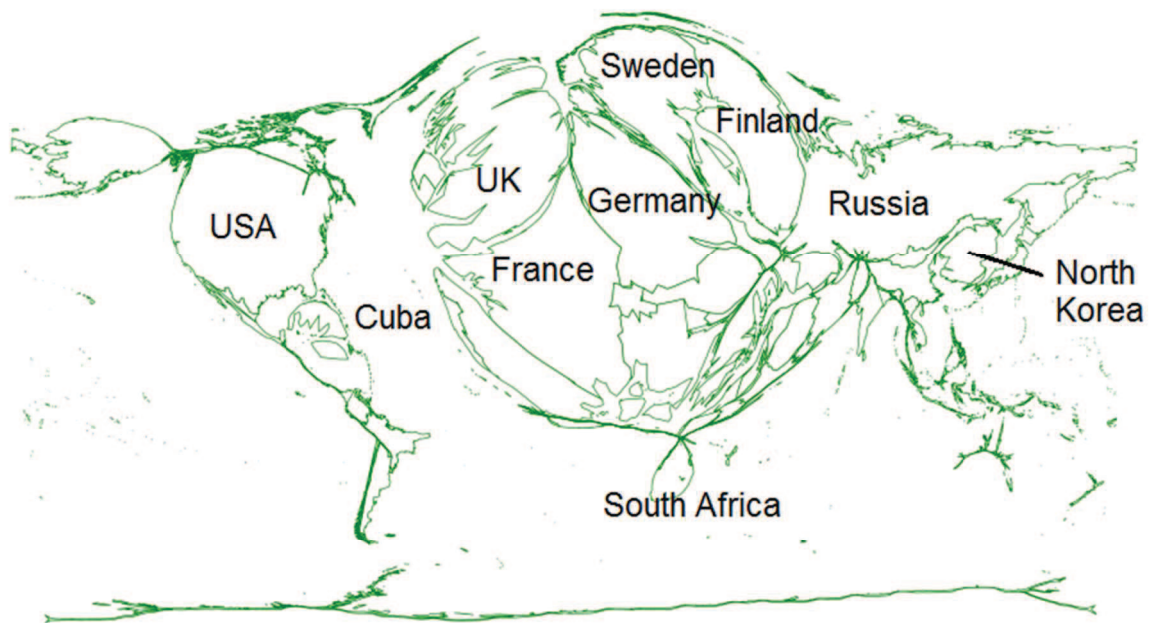
However, the mention of figures such as George Clemenceau and Woodrow Wilson, who only appear among Ålandic students, and maybe also the fact that Lenin is more frequently mentioned on Åland than in any other location,

⁴⁵ Regarding regional and maritime history writing in Åland, see Edquist & Holmén, 2015, pp. 143-241.

suggests that students from Åland are interested in and knowledgeable about the historical processes that led to the island's autonomy in 1921. They apparently consider local activists less important than the multitude of strong foreign actors that were involved in the complicated chain of events that led to autonomy.

Figure 5. Åland: Multipolar Historical Consciousness.

No single nation dominated the historical mental map of Ålandic students, since they mentioned historical figures from many different countries.



The multipolar historical consciousness does seem to be prevalent in small countries or autonomous regions which have largely had their historical destinies decided by foreign powers. In a small nation it might be easier to grasp that not only their own nation and the USA have been of importance in history. The Canadian historiographer Chris Lorenz has suggested that “the emphasis on the mediating functions and on the relative ‘openness’ of a nation is probably connected to its relative weakness”.⁴⁶

The multipolar historical consciousness is also linked to a preference for the Roman Empire. In Malta, Åland, and Noarootsi, the Roman Empire was the most commonly mentioned historical polity in question six, and in Valga it was

⁴⁶ Lorenz, 2004, p. 41.

second. By comparison, in Bologna and Venice, situated at the old heart of the empire, it was only the third and fourth most commonly mentioned polity. In Malta – where European studies are taught as a separate subject in secondary schools⁴⁷ – the European Union is also commonly mentioned and popular. It is possible that supranational organizations and empires seem most alluring in smaller nations, which might question their viability alone in an environment of stronger nation states. Since their own national heritage is less pronounced, there is an accentuation of the common Western heritage represented by the Roman Empire.

That the Maltese like Europe the most does not mean that they are the most Eurocentric. On the contrary, they displayed the least Eurocentric historical consciousness found in any European location, although still only 19% of the historical figures they mentioned were non-Western.⁴⁸

A survey conducted in 2007 found that Estonian youths were also positive towards the European Union.⁴⁹ My inability to find confirmation of this in 2014 might be due to differences in methodology, but it is also possible that the appeal of the EU has declined in the intervening years. However, the Estonian students' strongly expressed view in 2007, that Europe was the most important continent in history, is in accordance with my findings.

In Table 2, the ten cities surveyed are placed in a grid where the horizontal axis represents national, Americanized, or multipolar historical consciousness, and the vertical the Eurocentricity of the historical consciousness. It is striking that classes from the same countries converge on both axis, occupying the same square. This illustrates that the students' historical consciousness is indeed largely determined by national factors such as national history curricula and history culture. It is also interesting that the basic structures of historical consciousness in Åland and Malta are so similar. Many individual historical figures mentioned by Maltese students overlap with those mentioned in nearby Italy, as is the case with Åland and neighbouring Sweden and Estonia. However, Malta and Åland share a greater understanding of their place and that of the West in global history than each does with their closest neighbours. This indicates that geopolitical situation, in the case of Åland and Malta as relatively small independent or autonomous islands, has an important effect on historical consciousness.

⁴⁷ Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes, n.d; see also: *European Studies*, 2011.

⁴⁸ Western is defined here as Europe (including Russia, but not Greenland, Turkey and the Caucasus) and the USA.

⁴⁹ Potapenko, 2010, pp. 107.

Table 2. Eurocentrism and Categories of Historical Consciousness.

Vertical: Eurocentrism displayed as percentage of non-westerners⁵⁰ among the historical figures mentioned. Horizontal: categories of historical consciousness.

	National	Americanized	Multipolar
3–9% Non-Western	Bologna, Venice	Gävle, Uppsala	Noarootsi, Valga
14–19% Non-Western			Åland, Malta
34–39% Non-Western ⁵¹	Fez, Tangiers		

Valga, and especially Noarootsi, do not display as extreme a multipolar historical consciousness as the islands, but are more national. Estonia’s intermediate position in geopolitical terms, as a small state rather than a micro-state, is thus reflected by an intermediate historical consciousness. Potapenko’s survey in 2007 revealed the same combination of focus on national heroes and interest in the history of neighbouring countries, particularly Russia, which according to one student “...unfortunately is our neighbour, and on top of that a large country, so we can’t escape their history”.⁵² Russian history occupies a larger share of the Estonians’ historical consciousness than it does among of any other students, with Åland, also once part of the Russian empire, second (Figure 1). The same is not true of France, which is mentioned the most seldom in Morocco, despite most of Morocco having been under French colonial domination. In all countries surveyed Britain, which once dominated the seas, is more often mentioned in coastal than in inland locations, and most often on the Åland islands. However, of all coastal or island locations, British history is given least weight on Malta and in Tangiers, the very locations which have been under British control.⁵³ The weight of nearby Russia in the present, which is expected to remain significant in the future, makes it harder for the Estonians to forget their former imperial masters than it is for former French and British overseas protectorates to - perhaps as an act of mental decolonization - sever the bonds with their distant metropole’s history. The diminished influence of both France and Britain in the present – and the expectation that this will wane further in the future – makes it easier to forget their pasts.

⁵⁰ Definition in note 47.

⁵¹ Excluding Morocco.

⁵² Potapenko, 2010, pp. 106.

⁵³ Britain was one of the most important administrators of the Tangiers international zone from 1924-1956.

3. Conclusions

The historical information that students retrieved from their memories during the survey seems to be connected to their present experiences and to their expectations of the future.

Swedish students displayed an Americanized historical consciousness that focused upon Americans and Swedes. The peculiar Swedish Americanized historical consciousness developed in a country which has been shielded by its geopolitical location from continental Europe's tumultuous 20th century, escaping the invasions by stronger neighbours that most European countries experienced during the same period. This relative isolation and security has created the perception that Sweden's fate is less dependent on the actions of nearby powers such as Russia, Germany, or France, and more on domestic, forward looking reforms. The assortment of Americans prevalent in the Swedish historical consciousness is associated with the same rational, progressive, future-orientated modernity that has been claimed to permeate the Swedish national project. As a paradoxical consequence, although internationalism is often stated to be part of this progressive modernity, there is little room in the Swedish historical consciousness for anything else than progressive Americans and Swedes. The degree to which historical consciousness in Sweden can be considered future-oriented is therefore debatable, since it focuses heavily on the present superpower, and leaves very little room for rapidly emerging powers such as India and China.

Students from Morocco and Italy displayed what can be described as a national historical consciousness that focused upon periods of past glory and upon the struggle for independence and reunification, and downplayed periods of national disunity and disgrace.

Like Morocco and Italy, Åland, Malta and Estonia have gained their independence or autonomy quite recently, and have undergone several periods of disunity or dependency. However, in their case this did not result in a national historical consciousness, highlighting periods of glory and forgetting troubled times, but in a multipolar historical consciousness which recognizes the influence of many foreign actors upon the fate of the students' own nation. Here, the difference is one of size: the multipolar historical consciousness appears in polities so small that the outside world simply cannot be neglected. These small nations also lack the rich repository of historical memories on which the Moroccans and Italians based their national historical consciousness.

The Youth and History survey concluded that countries united by “[...] late and difficult nation-building and by experiences with liberal economics and a liberal democracy after their defeat in 1945” shared similar attitudes towards history.⁵⁴ This study proves that observation to be part of a universal pattern: historical consciousness is highly dependent upon historical experiences and current political conditions, and therefore similarities in political conditions and historical experiences produce similarities in historical consciousness.

The categorization of historical consciousness introduced in the present paper is not normative in the sense that it suggests, for example, an educational programme directed at transforming a national historical consciousness into a multipolar one. Nor do the concepts national, Americanized, or multipolar historical consciousness depart from a theoretical notion of what historical consciousness ought to look like. Rather, it is a theoretical generalization from empirical observations. It is intended to explain how different geopolitical circumstances and historical experiences affect the historical consciousness among broad segments of the population.

The notion that historical consciousness is a reflection of long historical developments and present political needs lends itself to a certain scepticism regarding the possibility of altering historical consciousness through educational means. Generally, educational policies and curricula merely express and reinforce the political needs upon which the historical consciousness is based. Fundamental changes in historical consciousness would require dramatic changes in the geopolitical situation that thus created a need to reinterpret the past. However, mental mapping techniques might function as a pedagogical tool that puts local views of the world and world history in perspective, and opens our eyes to other ways of perceiving time and space.

Mental mapping through quantitative surveys might also be of use for professional historiographers. By revealing the emphasis and lacunae in historical consciousness, we might discover interesting topics for further investigation. These might be conducted by other qualitative means in order to enrich and deepen the general overview that mental mapping offers us. Mental mapping also provides a language for historiographers in which to communicate with other disciplines, such as geography and psychology. Thereby, it might contribute to unifying the research on perceptions of the world that has hitherto been conducted separately by scholars in different fields without much – if any – interaction with one another.

⁵⁴ Angvik & von Borries, 1977, p. 50.

Appendix

The survey

The questions in the survey were:

1. Write down as many place names as possible within five minutes.
2. If you could choose freely, where would you most of all want to live. Give the countries on the map points from 1 to 5. 5 is the highest point which you award to the countries where you most of all would like to live, 1 is the lowest which you award to the countries where you least of all would like to live. [...] (4 1/2 minutes).
3. Write down the name of as many important historical persons as possible within five minutes. You should also write down their place of domicile (city or country). If they are associated with several different places, enter the one to which they have the strongest relations.
4. If you could freely choose a time and place in history, where would you most of all want to live? You can enter several alternatives. (3 minutes)
5. Name some times and places in history where you would not like to have lived. (3 minutes.)
6. Write down as many important polities (states, countries, realms, empires) from world history as you can within three minutes.
7. Grade the polities which you wrote down in question 6 according to how much you like to have lived in them. [...] 1 to 5] (3 minutes)
8. Draw a line around the areas you consider to be part of the Baltic Sea region, and another line around the areas you consider part of the Mediterranean region. [...].

How much would you like to live in the Baltic Sea region? Denote your answer by drawing a circle around a number on the scale.

Not so much Very much

1 2 3 4 5

Justify your answer. What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in the Baltic Sea region? [...Then the same question for the Mediterranean region].

The Schools

Location	Date	Group size F/M	Grade in secondary school	Survey during class subject in	Survey language	Profile/specialisation of school or class
Valga Estonia	01.4.15	30 23/7	3 of 3	Estonian	Estonian	
Noarootsi Estonia	02.4.15	19 14/5	1 and 3 of 3	Swedish	Estonian	Boarding school, Nordic profile, Swedish language studies
Åland Finland	5.15	19 11/8	2 of 3	Geography	Swedish	
Gävle Sweden	2.6/25.8 2014	31 25/6	3 of 3	History	Swedish	Cultural profile (theatre, dance, circus)
Uppsala Sweden	23.9.14	25 19/6	3 of 3	History	Swedish	Social science programme
Bologna Italy	11.11.14	23 10/13	5 of 5	History	Italian	Technical school
Venice Italy	12.11.14	16 11/5	5 of 5	English	Italian	Language school
Valetta Malta	16–17. 11.15	26 13/13	Junior college	Geography (outside schedule)	English	
Tangiers Morocco	25.11.15	18 14/4	3 of 3	English	Arabic	Science class
Fez Morocco	23.3.15	41 21/20	3 of 3	English	Arabic	

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