Perception of Europe in the world by Portuguese and Romanian graduated students - does mental barriers exists?

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Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to present the different representations of Europe in the World as identified by Portuguese and Romanian graduated students. In the first part, where apart from defining the objectives and the methodology of the work, was developed the theoretical framing of perception and representations in geography. In the second part, we analyze the background of the students, the variables that influence the visions and the representation (image) of Europe in the world as defined by Portuguese and Romanian graduate students.

This idea of the European and the World's geographical space was determined through the realization of a questionnaire in three Portuguese cities, Lisbon, Coimbra and Évora, and in Romania in two different cities Bucharest and Iasi, which included students of different domains of study: Social Sciences, Political Sciences, Economical Sciences, areas of the Health, Engineering's and Arts. The questionnaires prepared, demonstrate the importance of knowledge on economic, social, cultural, religious and political aspects of countries in Europe and the World for the definition of the images by the students.

The socioeconomic status of the student and of the family, the personal experience of the individual (translated in the number of travels made, in the fact of already having resided or been born in another country, to have studied abroad) are determinative elements in the configuration of the different visions of Europe and of the World. On the other hand, the analysis intends to demonstrate also that the different perceptions are related to gender and language / nationality that imply a different life experience by the people questioned.

Key concepts: Perception; Representations; Mental Maps; Visions of the World and of Europe.

1. Introduction

This study appears in the context of the EuroBroadMap[1] project (Vision of Europe in the World), approved in the 7th Framework Program, started in January of 2009 and

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[1] EuroBroadMap – Visions of Europe in the World (FP7-SSH-2007-1) tries to analyze several representations of Europe in the world, the analysis is based in six different work packages (WP): WP1. Management of the project; WP2. The representations of Europe by the graduated students of several countries of the world, through the preparation of mental maps; WP3. The representations of the immigrants; WP4. The divisions of the world through the political perspective; WP5. The divisions of the world through the economical flows and the migratory movements; WP6. Preparation of syntheses integrative of several groups of work. the partners of the project corresponds to 11 countries: France, Belgium, Portugal, Sweden, Malta, Romania, Turkey, Brazil, Cameroon, China, India. More information in: www.eurobroadmap.eu

developed until December of 2011. The project has as central objective to understand the situation of Europe in the World supported in two dimensions: a quantitative approach supported in trade, migration and foreign direct investment flows in world countries; and a qualitative approach, centered in migratory routes and in the analysis of the perception of the graduated students, the last one here presented.

The present paper is inserted in the problematic of perception of the European space in the world, not only as a physic entity but also as an economical and socio-cultural one, according to the vision of the graduated students in Portugal and in Romania. Also intends to validate how the experiences of life and the socioeconomic status of this population determine their vision of a world and, in particular, the position of Europe in the global context.

Two main reasons justify the choice of Portugal and Romania cases. Besides being members of the same project, both countries have a peripheral geographic position.

The work is based on a questionnaire done in several universities in the two countries and five cities (three in Portugal and two in Romania) in study. The cities for the application of the questionnaires were chosen according to the size of city and the importance of the university, considering they represent different levels of polarization of students, coming from national or regional origins. In Portugal the questionnaire was applied to 480 students in three Portuguese cities (Lisbon (240), Coimbra (120) and Évora (120) and in Romania it was applied to 439 students in two cities Bucharest (199) and Iasi (240) respectively in different domains of study (social sciences, politic sciences, economical sciences and domains of the engineering, health and arts).

The choice of these three cities in Portugal is due to the fact that Lisbon, as capital of Portugal, is clearly the biggest city of the country. Coimbra and Évora are cities of medium size with a larger universitary tradition (have two of the most ancient universities of the country) revealed a not much different situation. In Coimbra, the university students are originating from many more districts than in case of Lisbon, being that, in Coimbra exist a great attraction of the surrounding districts of the region centre of the country and also is the more international of the three cities (more students of other nationalities). In Évora origins of the students are also more diversified, including all the districts of the south region of the country, and deriving a more enlarged geographical student's origin.

In Romania, Bucharest as a capital is more open to the international influences, the political and economic importance of the city being expected to shape a specific perception of the world among students. On the other side, the cultural background of Iasi, as an old and famous university centre in Eastern Romania with a strong regional polarization area, was expected to provide different visions of the world from the students.

In order to understand the visions of the students we analyzed the questionnaire, whose questions gave the explanation of the visions. The analyses propose to demonstrate that the different perceptions and the feeling of belonging of those students have a relation with the gender, language, nationality, domain of study, etc. The differences of perception between countries, has also as base the socioeconomic status associated and the students ' personal experience (through the number of travels made, temporary family migration or studies in universities outside their country).

2. Representations and Perception of the Space

The perception is not an objective process, but, a social construction, "we are taught to see, so that what is known is mediated through a series of cultural filters (social, political and academic) which refract reality and condition or pre- condition what we see. The result is that sight and knowledge, perception and conception are interwoven and determined by the value or belief system into which we are born, spend our formative years and to which we subsequently subscribe" (Pocock, 1981, pp.386). In other words, we develop our way of understanding, which at the same time steams our vision in other not familiar environments, taking us to possible misperceptions. Accepting the perception as a subjective act, the inquiries must be fitted in a humanist and subjective approach. In this context, the man is seen as an individual interacting constantly with the environment and being modifying simultaneously itself and his environment (Johnston, 1986, pp.221, quoted by Seeman pp. 4).

Each person imprisoned to a system of social relations, living in a given space, develops his own representation of his framing of life that allows him to practice and to imagine his country, region and World. This mental space is progressively formed and deformed by our senses during the apprenticeship of life, which goes to extend and become more complex (Bailly, 1990, pp.265).

The study of the representations allows advancing in a new apprehension of the space and of the social one. For Bailly et al. (in 1995 quoted by Claval, 2007, pp.174) "a representation consists in a social or individual creation of relevant schemes of the reality", while second Johnston et al., (2000, pp.703) "[…] it is a set of practices or activities, which are instituted and communicated, such practices of representation produce and circulate meanings between members of social groups and these meanings can be defined as culture.". For Jodelet (1981 p.36-37 quoted by Cabecinhas, 2004), the representations are understood as "[…] the product of an activity of appropriation of the exterior reality and simultaneously, as a process of psychological and social preparation of the reality (…) they are producing factors of reality, what determine the form how the individual interprets the situation and how it answers him."

Nevertheless, this concept is a subjective vision of a determined individual or group, in which, this one is strongly connected with his social domain and knowledge. The perception of the individual is going to depend on his course of life, experiences and opportunities (social, economical, political and cultural contexts). So will be represented the interactions between the individual / group and the form of those perceive and understand the world.

3. The knowledge and the experience of the world – which factors contribute to different visions of the world

As told previously, depending on the individual's background the way of seeing the world is altered. With this paper we try to verify what variables related to the personal experience of the individual are determinative in the vision of the world of Portuguese and Romanian students. We also want to verify which image (vision) they have of Europe and the world in general, based on countries where they would like /not like to live in a near future, on the students' feeling of belonging to a specific territory and on the words that they relate to Europe.
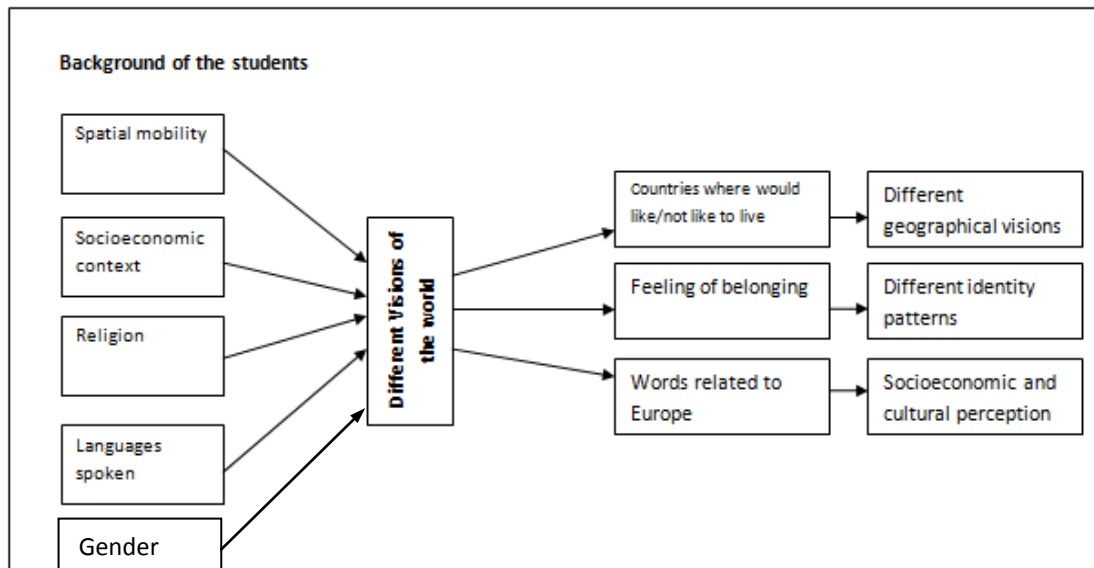
3.1. The background of the students

In the two countries we observed that the overall repartition of men and women in the sample is quite equilibrated, even if women seem a little over represented: 53,4% of the sample for Portugal and 54 % of the sample in Romania.

At the domain of study level the gender repartition is a little different. In Portugal some domains are more attractive for men than for women, and also the opposite. For example the sample shows a high over representation of women in arts and health, and medium over representation in social science. Men are over-represented in engineering. In politics and business the sample is quite well equilibrated.

In Romania the samples by domains have a more balanced gender structure, even with the same over-representation of women in health, arts and social sciences and the domination of men among the students from more "technical" fields, like engineering.

i) Origins and Spatial mobility of the family

The tradition of Portugal as migratory country (first emigration to Europe, Africa and Brazil, more recently, a strong immigration movement of people coming from African colonies,

Brazil and Eastern European countries) explains the higher values of spatial mobility of the families, if compared to Romania. In fact, 7,3% of students are not born in Portugal against 2,96 % in Romania.

In Portugal, the students that are not born in the country came mainly from Brazil (9 students), 5 students from Cape Verde, 5 students from Switzerland and 4 students from France, which represents a strong relation with migration routes and historical and cultural relations. In the cases of Brazil and Cape Verde it corresponds to immigrant's flows, in the case of France and Switzerland, could be related with families that were working in these countries and now their children decided to study in Portugal.

By city we can find a little difference in Coimbra, which is the more international city of the three, where the number of students not born in Portugal is higher than in Lisbon and Évora. This case can be related to the attraction by the domains of study and to the representation of emigrants returned to the region of Centre. Évora in this context is the city with fewer students born in a foreign country.

In Romania the students are coming mainly from the Republic of Moldova (9 students) and the rest from Bulgaria (1 student), Israel (1 student) and Syria (1 student). Due to proximity (spatial and cultural) and special educational opportunities (scholarship programs for Moldavians, larger opening to the European labor market) the Romanian universities became very attractive for Moldavian students after 1989, especially the city of Iasi, where all the foreigner students questioned were Moldavian. More cosmopolite, Bucharest attracts to its universities a larger and more diverse segment of students from other countries. Apart the Moldavians, a lot of them are coming from Arabian states (even since before 1989), choosing mainly the Romanian faculties of Medicine or Business, because of their diplomas accepted in Western Europe and the medium costs of their studies.

ii) The socioeconomic context of the student's family

The level of income as an important variable in the analysis, show that the large majority of the students from both countries tend to position themselves in the two medium classes of income level (low-medium and medium-high): 89,79 % in Portugal and 86,25 % in Romania. However, in Portugal medium-high level of income is more mentioned (48.33%), while in Romania, the low-medium level is dominant (48.75%). The non-answers are higher in Romania (1.60 % of students, compared to 0.63 % in Portugal), probably related to a higher sensitivity to this type of question.

As far as the income is concerned, only 6,9% of the Portuguese students declare to belong to the low level and less to the high income level, respectively 0.63 %. The same categories are higher represented in Romania, especially for the low income level (11,0%) but also for high income level (4,0%).

In both countries, there are obvious economic disparitie asociated to the cities ranks: the capital generally corresponds to higher levels of income in the students appreciations, while low incomes are overrepresented in other cities: 13.33 % in Evora, 14.7 % in Iasi.

iii) Religion

Concerning the religion, in Portugal, 23,5% of the students declare to have a feeling of belonging to a particular religion of coherent set of belief. Among them, 18,3% of students (88 students) declare to be Christians, 4 Buddhists and 2 Spiritists. Portuguese students in general are not linked to a particular religion or believe (76,5% of the students) but among those that have a religion the majority are Christians not practitioners, that fact has influence of previous generations that in general are very religious. The more instructed young's are less linked to religious practices, however they don't have nothing against it.

In Romania, a lot larger percentage (88%) of students declares to have a feeling of belonging to a particular religion or coherent set of belief, proving the (still) significant role of tradition and church in the present society. This also explains the lower number of non-answers. Overall, the religion structure is quite homogenous, closely related to the national/local one: among the students declaring their beliefs, 51% declares themselves Christians and 38,6% Orthodox, the rest of cults being under represented: 12 Catholics, 7 Muslims and 8 Protestants. So it is obvious that the Romanians are still very connected to religion which continues to be an important factor influencing the students' feeling of belonging.

iv) The diversity of languages spoken as an indicator of the potential knowledge of the world

The languages spoken by the students, is a variable that can demonstrate the openness of the students to the world, however in the case of these two countries that fact isn't necessarily true. In general the Romanians speak more languages than Portuguese students (the 76,9% speak between 2 and 3 languages while 71% of the Romanian students speak between 3 and more languages (namely in the fields of health and social sciences and in business).

Globally the Portuguese students declare to speak two (44,4%) or three languages (32,5%), which is quite coherent with the secondary education program that include the learning of 2 foreign languages (usually English and French, German or Spanish). 21 Portuguese students (4,4 %) speak only one language. Portuguese students, except for Portuguese which is their mother language, speak mainly English and Spanish, and Italian and French in rare cases. Other languages are quite rare and are mainly dependant of the origin of foreign students (Romanian, Russian and Japanese).

The average number of languages spoken by Romanian students sample is 2,99. Among them, 9 students speak only one language (2,1%), 71% of the students declare to speak (or to have spoken) 3 languages (40%) or more (31,3% in health and social sciences, 38% in business). In Romania this structure is also mainly based on the national education program, including at least 2 foreign languages, usually English and French. That's why the most frequently mentioned languages in the survey are English (85% of the students) and French (48%), followed by Italian and Spanish (often related to family immigration). Other languages are related to ethnic (Hungarian, Arabian) and national origin (all Moldavian students speak Russian).

3.2. The travels as an indicator of the geographical mobility of the students

The countries visited is also an important variable, because the spatial experience of the students facilitate the formulation of their image of the world.

As expected, the analysis of the students' travels verified that in Portugal the students travel more than in Romania, and the number of students that never have visited other country at all is also bigger in Romania. Portuguese students have quoted an average of 2,7 countries visited, 48,5% declare have visited 3 or more countries. Those who declare no country at all are 28 (5,8%).

Romanian students have quoted an average of 2,49 countries visited. 25% of them (112 students) declared that they haven't visited any country at all. But the situation is quite different according to the domain of study: most of those who haven't traveled abroad are in Business (37 %), and those who travel more are in Arts and Politics (37.5 % and 35 % of these declaring to have visited 5 countries). Still, the numbers should be also related to the long distance separating Romania from the Romanians' main travel destinations (mainly tourism and migration destinations): often some of the countries mentioned are only crossed, not quite visited (especially the neighbor countries).

However in both Portugal and Romania the travels destinations have an emphasis on neighbor countries but the majority of destinations are in general the same for both countries (France, Italy, Spain) though also those countries are the destinations of students that previously lived in other countries.

Portuguese students have already visited mostly countries inside the core of Europe, with a special emphasis on neighbor countries like France (47%, 226 students) and Spain (83%, 399 students), or other popular countries in the national context (the case of United Kingdom (20,4%, 98 students) and Italy(com 16%, 77 students). Germany and Switzerland follow with also some signification in terms of student's number that they them visited (9,2 % of the students already visited Germany, in absolute terms 44 students, and 9 % of the students already visited the Switzerland, in other words, 43 students.

The countries that are more distant have the lowest percentages - example of USA (4,6 %), of Brazil (4,6 %), of Cuba (2,9 %) and of Mexico (2,3 %), which does not stop them to appear like popular holiday destinations. The case of Brazil also can be referring to the connections that the students have with the country, because of their parents' nationality.

The experience of the world among the Romanian students is relatively limited mainly to Europe and its near periphery. Large areas from Central and Eastern Asia, Africa, South America are almost completely unknown, excepting a few famous tourism destinations (Brazil, Argentina, Egypt) or migration countries (Canada, Australia, New Zeeland). Tourism, family migration, education (scholarships or summer work programmes) and proximity, are the main reasons explaining the high knowledge of the European space: Italy (38.18 %) and France (31%) are the most quoted countries, followed by popular tourism and migration destinations (Greece, Spain, Austria, Germany, Netherlands) or neighbor countries – Bulgaria, Hungary.

The comparison of the two countries verifies that in Portugal the students travel more than in Romania, and the destinations are more diverse around the world. In both countries, European countries are an important travel destination, in the case of Portugal that

destinations are concentrated between the core of Europe and the neighbor countries (Spain), in the case of Romania the travels are more dispersed, with a higher representation of the Central and Eastern Europe, even if often known only as transit space.
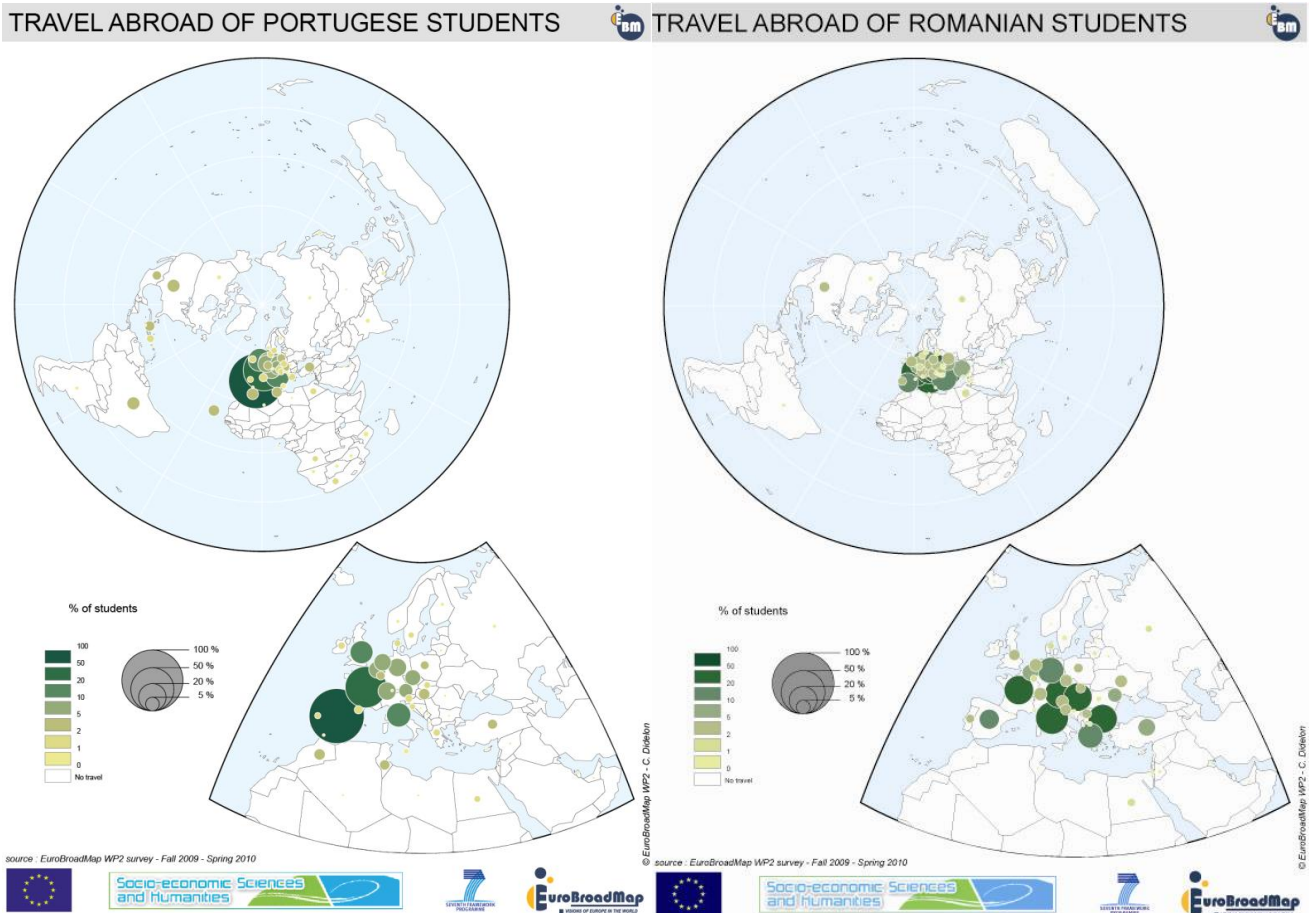
3.3. Living in foreign countries

Reinforcing the idea that traveling gives a new image of the world is the idea of living in a foreign country.

The analysis of the countries where Portuguese students lived for more than four months shows that the repartition is concentrated mostly in European countries like Spain (2,3%, 11 students), Great Britain (1,3%, 6 students), France (2,1%, 10 students), Switzerland (2,1%, 10 students), Italy (1,5%, 7 students), and Germany (0,6%, 3 students), and in non European countries like Brazil (1,7%, (8 students) and Angola (1,4% , 5 students). These are the countries with more number of Portuguese students lived for more than four months, in some of these countries that fact can be associated with questions of migration by the nationality of the student or the origin of the parents. The map also seems to represent the attraction manifested by Portuguese students based on cultural reasons and ERASMUS programs which are developed between European countries. USA (0,4 %, 2 students), Canada (0,2%, 1 student), Mozambique (0,4 %, 2 students), Cape Verde (0,4%, 2 student's) and China (0,4%, 2 students) also appear in the countries where students lived for the same

reasons but with less significance. In the South Africa and China the pattern of the map can be associated to the migrations in the direction of Portugal.

The spatial area indicated by the Romanian students is mainly limited to an extended Europe, and in some cases to Russia and USA. Inside this area, two groups of countries are emphasized: the first one includes the main destinations of Romanian migrants, a lot of students having relatives established in Italy (29,2 % quotations), Germany and Spain. Lower situated in the top of migration destinations, the second group is represented by countries more frequently visited for studies/scholarships (France – 18,5 % quotations, Belgium, Sweden and Denmark) or for summer work and travel programs (Greece, USA). As expected, Russia is often quoted by the Moldavian students, as a major migration destination for the Moldavian citizens.

In general the Romanian students are less dispersed in the places where their lived in the world, they lived mostly in Europe and in the great part of the surrounding/neighbors countries (position as countries localized in the middle of a continent). In the case of Portugal the destinations are more dispersed in the world and, in the case of European destinations, they are mostly centered in the core of Europe; we can verify a typical character of a country that is peripheral to Europe, with the only options of possible living destinations towards east. The limitation to the core of Europe is also possibly due to the ancient tradition as member of European Union.
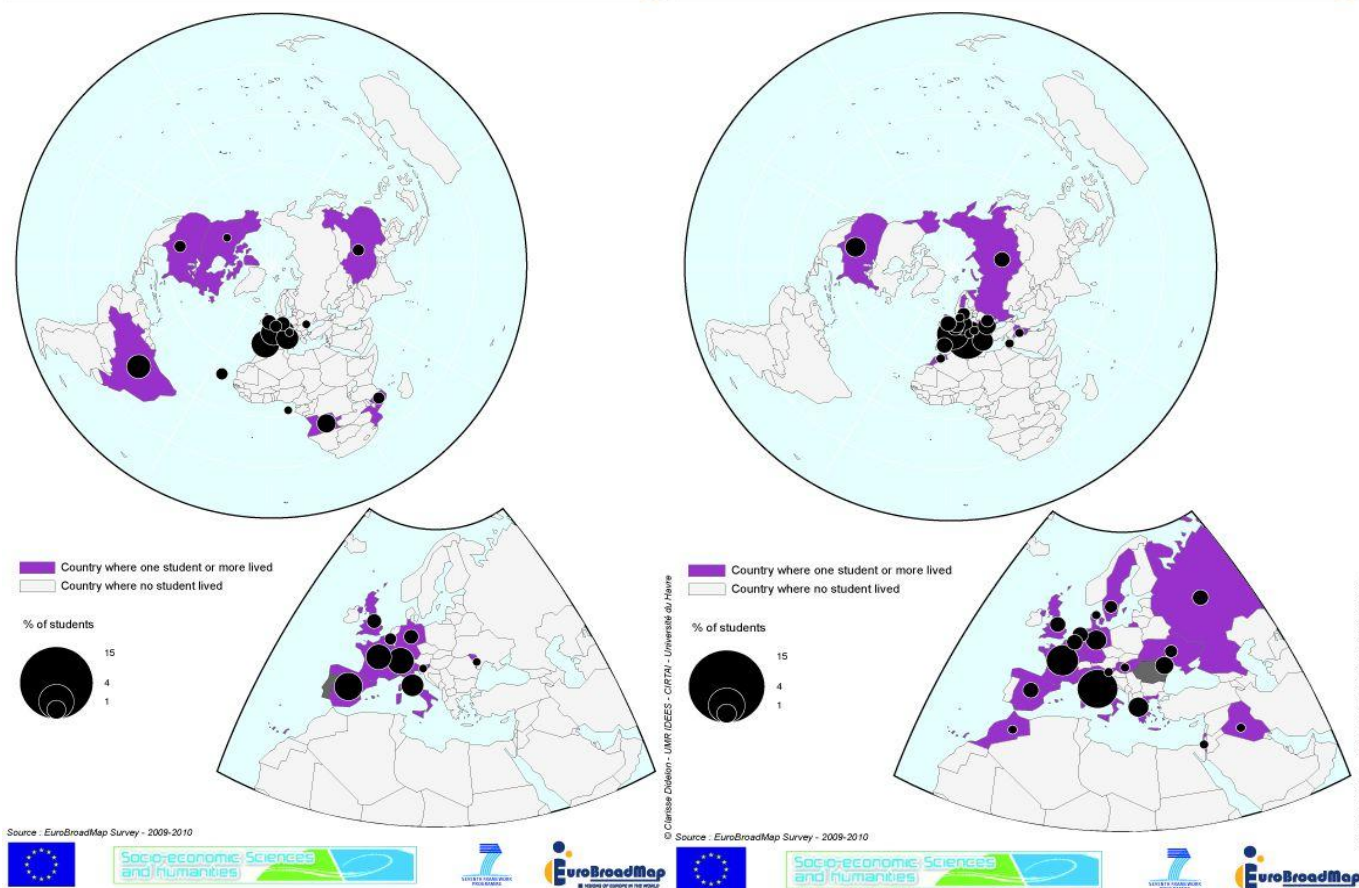
4. Different visions of the world – a comparative analysis between Portuguese and Romanian students

4.1. Feeling of belonging

The analysis of the feeling of belonging helped revealing the way students position themselves in relation to their country, to Europe and the World. In order to analyze this aspect they some questions were considered. The question about the students' feeling of belonging considered several options such as: local, Infranational, national, supranational and global. The question underlines in which measure the students feel themselves citizens of the world or on the contrary, it registers nationalists or regionalists positions. The test of the CHI2 allowed us to check which variables are the most influential in the variation of the feeling of belonging of the students in both countries.

In Portugal the majority of the students have a feeling of belonging associated to the global scale. In second option they have a local scale, while in Romania the students identify themselves more with the national level, followed by the global level. In both countries, gender is an important variable that explains the differentiations in the students' feeling of belonging. But the rest of variables influencing the students' perception are different: spatial mobility, the city of survey and the family income in the case of Portugal, and the domain of study, in the case of Romania.

The greater part of Portuguese students declares that their first level of belonging is the Global level. This is followed by the Local level (27,3 %) and by the national level (23,1%). The Infranational level and supranational level are not very much selected by the students who answered this question. We tested the relation between the scale of belonging and the variables describing their experience of the world, presented in the previous part.

One of the most significant variables for the Portuguese students are the cities where the survey was made, meaning that the students in Lisbon, Coimbra and Évora, have different perceptions as far as their spatial belonging is concerned. The **city of the survey** is a significant variable to explain the scale of belonging. In fact, in Évora the students are significantly over represented among those who declare to have a local level of belonging (35%). That fact is related with the type of city: Évora is an interior city with a majority population composed by students that create a feeling of belonging associated to the area. In Lisbon and Coimbra the students are more global (32,5% and 39,2%). In the case of Lisbon the second level of belonging is the national (in Lisbon is an important level of belonging) and in Coimbra is the local maybe for the same reason that Évora. On the other hand, in Évora the students who declare to have a global level of belonging are also well represented. The scale of belonging by domains reveals that social sciences are the study with more local scales of belonging, and arts are the most global.

Concerning the **spatial mobility** (the country of residence of the students is different from their country of birth) the picture is quite clear. The students that are not born in Portugal, are over represented among the students that declare to have the global level as first level of belonging. In that situation what it is very much reduced is the representation of the students who declare to belong to the national level, as if the spatial mobility could have blurred this level of belonging that is otherwise the more quoted.

These results show that in Portugal the level of belonging is also associated to **gender**: women present a strong feeling of belonging to local scale but also to global scale, as men are more linked to national and supranational feeling of belonging. That fact can be related with the fact that women are more attached to family and the local were family live. In the case of men they are in general more nationalist, more attached to the nation and its values and interests.

The relation to **income level** is also evident, as students with medium-high and high income level, feel more supranational and global. As we saw previously, medium-high and high incomes are related with some fields, which shows the relations between income, field of study and feeling of belonging.

A large part (41,4%) of Romanian students surveyed declares that their first level of belonging is the "national" level. This is followed by the global (30,2%) and local level of belonging (13,8%). The infranational level is very rarely quoted (2,8%) by the students who answered this question. We've tested the relation between the scale of belonging and the variables describing the students' experience of the world, presented in the previous part. In the case of the Romanian students spatial mobility and the general family background are not significant variables, in opposition with gender and the domain of study.

As in the case of Portugal, the **gender** structure of the Romanian students is a major factor influencing their scale of belonging and it keeps the same correlations observed for the Portuguese students: the women of the sample appear to feel more global (34,3% of them), compared to men (25,3%), and this fact does not seem strictly related to a larger spatial experience of the world. The local level is also better represented in the case of women, while men have a higher feeling of belonging to national and supranational structures.

The structure by **domain of study** has a definite influence on this. The national level is well represented in all the domains, with a maximum for the Social Sciences students (55.1% of the geographers), Politics and Business, where the national borders are a constant reference in their professional discourse. The same educational background explains a larger identification to local scales among geographers (24.6%) and students in Politics. An exception are the Arts students, who seem to travel more (having the highest percentage of more than 5 countries visited (37,5%) and tend to identify themselves better with larger spatial structures (global) but also get inspired by the local experiences.

Less powerful in the general spatial representations, the other infranational administrative levels are also less represented in the students' choices. As for the supranational and global levels, they are overrepresented among students in Engineering, Health, Arts and Business, probably related to their higher professional opportunities and aspirations to work abroad (this would explain the lowest global sense of belonging among "politicians" and geographers).

In general, the higher the number of languages quoted by students, the higher represented are their supranational and global levels of belonging: the students speaking only one language identify themselves mostly with local and national levels. Contrary to the case of Portugal, the city of survey do not significantly influences the answers of Romanian students, though there is a slight overerrepresentation of the global level in Iasi, compared to the capital. As for the students' religion, there is a higher sense of belonging to the global and supranational structures among Catholics (58,3%) and those declaring themselves as

Christians; the Orthodox (dominant in the sample) are more connected to the national level, while the local is more important for the small communities of Muslims and Protestants.

This overall image is solid with the differences between variables associated to the background of the students. In fact the only variable in common to the two countries, which influence the perception these students, is the gender, and in general in both countries, the women's are more global. The remaining variables show great differences between countries and consequently are reflected in the perception of the students.

4.2. The students' perception of the world countries: Options for possible countries to live in a near future

For living in the future, the students of both countries chose in general the same countries, only differently ranked. A larger part of the Portuguese students chose Great Britain as the first place where they would like to live; in Romania that country is France. As for the countries they wouldn't like to live in, the image is the same but in Romania the most unloved countries are in the neighborhoods (Russia), while in Portugal the first places are divided between Iraq and China.

The top 10 countries where Portuguese students declared they would like to live in a near future are firstly Great Britain (319), Italy (263 answers) and Spain (244 answers), followed by USA (232) and France (213). Lower ranked, they mention also Germany (99), Netherlands (98), Brazil (89), Switzerland (71) and Australia (70). Looking at the variation by gender, we can notice that Great Britain is mentioned in first place by both men and women, followed generally by USA for men and Italy for women, maybe because of the romantic image of the city. The top 10 countries where Portuguese students declared they would not like to live in a near future are firstly China (176 answers), Iraq (171) and Brazil (143), followed by Russia (128), Afghanistan (110), Iran (106), Angola (82) and South Africa (71). To a less important degree, they mention also Japan (64), France (59), India (56), Mexico (55) and USA (52).

In general Portuguese students have a general north (like to live (developed) –south (not like to live (undeveloped countries) patterned perception of the world states.

As for the countries where Romanian students would like to live in, **Western Europe** is a major attraction area, followed by North America. The most frequently mentioned countries are France, indicated by 235 students, Great Britain (201) and Germany (153), mostly seen as emblems of welfare and good living standards. They are followed by (other) popular migration destinations for Romanians: Italy (133), Spain (132) and Austria (99). The different positions in the women's or men's preferences are probably related to the spatial division of migratory labor (building sector in Italy, tourism services and restoration in Greece), to distance and to the general image built by media (probably a more romantic image of France, for women, while USA, for example, is higher ranked by men).

There is also homogeneity between genders regarding the countries where the Romanian students would not like to live. Russia and Bulgaria are the first quoted by all the students, closely followed by the other neighbors of Romania (Republic of Moldova, Hungary and Ukraine). Generally, women tend to be influenced in their negative appreciations by the

political conflicts (Iraq, Iran) and safety issues mentioned by media (Turkey, often seen as a country where Romanian men go for trade purposes) or by distance (China).

In the case of Romanian students we did not found the patterned vision north/south but a vision that valorize the developed countries (associated to the core of Europe) and depreciate the neighbor countries and the Middle East countries.
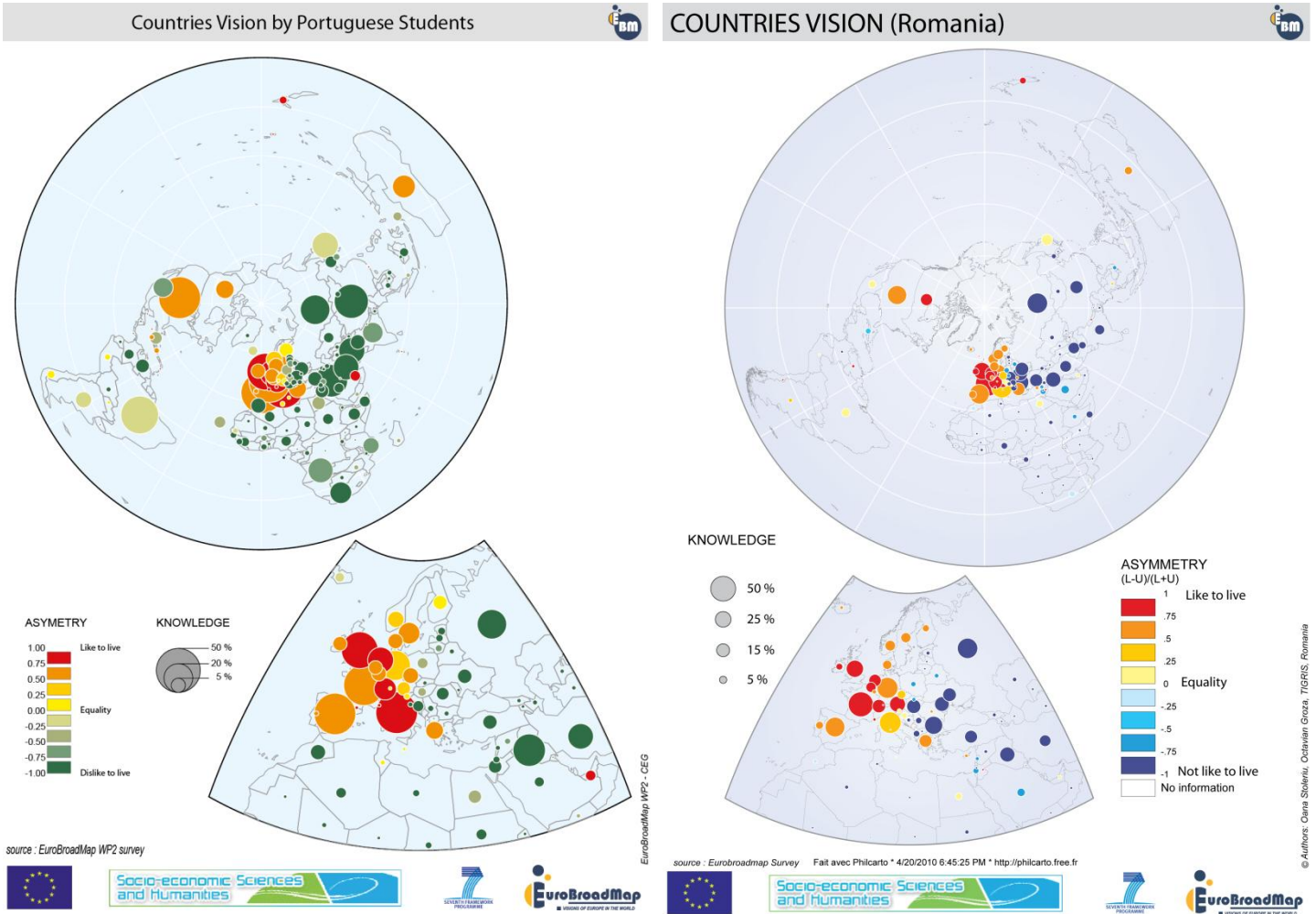
	Like	Not like	Countries visited	Countries lived		Like	Not like	Countries visited	Countries lived
Portugal	Great Britain	China	Spain	Spain	**Romania**	France	Russia	Italy	Italy
	Italy	Iraq	France	Switzerland		Germany	Bulgaria	France	France
	Spain	Brazil	Great Britain	France		Great Britain	Iraq	Bulgaria	USA
	USA	Russia	Italy	Brazil		Italy	Moldova	Austria	Germany
	France	Afghanistan	Germany	Italy		Spain	Hungary	Hungary	Greece
	Germany	Iran	Switzerland	Angola		USA	Ukraine	Germany	Moldova
	Netherlands	Angola	Belgium	Germany		Austria	China	Greece	Great Britain
	Brazil	South Africa	Netherlands	Great Britain		Switzerland	Turkey	Spain	Belgium
	Switzerland	Japan	Czech republic	Belgium		Canada	Italy	Turkey	Russia
	Austria	France	Austria	China		Netherlands	Iran	Belgium	Spain

In Portugal the countries chosen by the students as countries in which they would like to live have a strong relation with the travels they made and the countries where they lived, is a knowledge mostly based on experience.

In the Romania this relation is not so clear, the countries where the students would like to live, aren't always the same countries that they know by their own experience. In the countries where the students wouldn't like to live we verify a relation to the information provided by the media (China), and a relation to countries where they visited or lived (France).

These results demonstrate how the perception and representation is a result of living experiences (living and visiting countries) or/and media diffusion) of information.

4.3. Words related to Europe in the imagination of the students

Regarding this topic, the diversity of words chosen by the students was quite large and therefore the ranking of the words was analyzed according to its frequencies, in order to classify the content.

In general we verified that Europe is seen by the students from both countries in a positive way, as an entity of the world demarcated by the union between heterogeneous countries.

Portuguese and Romanian students perceive Europe above all as a political and economical entity. In Portugal, words like "union", "European" or "community", or "cooperation", are mostly associated with "euro", "development" and economical issues as "economy "and "power". Representations of Europe are also based on historical knowledge ("history", "old") and political values ("freedom", "diversity", and "peace", "civilization"). Many students insist also on the cultural dimension and the historical dimension also important for the representation of Europe.

The ranking of the words was analyzed according to the gaps between frequencies in order to classify the issues; consequently, we can see that the concept of "union" is the most important one for the Portuguese students (as well as for Romanians) followed by development and culture. That are the mainly words that characterize the Europe for Portuguese students. Among the first 10 most frequent words, 4 describe socio-cultural values ("freedom", "culture", "history", "diversity"), 3 words describe political values ("European", "union", "community") and only 2 words describe economic values ("development", "euro").

We found the same idea of an unitary political and economic force acting on the international scene in the answers of the Romanian students. Their two most quoted words are 'union" (45.4 % of the sample) and "euro"(24%), reinforced, on lower ranks, by "power", "European", "exchanges", "economy", ´trade", "development" etc.

The second major image of Europe for Romanian students is that of a cultural space, based on a long history: "culture", "history", "old". Another dimension of Europe, again positively perceived, is that of a social place defined by "freedom", "diversity' and quality of life ("wealth"), where it is good to live. Overall, the political and economic Europe is mostly seen as a homogeneous ("union", "unity", "community"), contiguous space (the geographical Europe - "continent"), while the Cultural Europe seems to relate more to "diversity".

We observed important similarities between the visions of Europe in both countries. In general, all the words used by the students are related to the European Union ('union" is the most frequently used by Romanian and Portuguese students). This indicates also a strong

association between Europe and the European Union. The ranks of other values associated to Europe are also quite similar: economy ("development" in Portugal and "euro" in Romania), culture, an well-defined entity (European) based on "history" (Portugal), geographical limits ("continent") and sharing similar social and political values ("community", "diversity", "freedom").

Portuguese students			Romanian students	
WORDS	**FREQUENCY**		**WORDS**	**FREQUENCY**
union	180	**1**	union	174
development	111	**2**	euro	92
culture	105	**3**	culture	79
euro	69	**4**	European	70
European	54	**5**	power	69
history	49	**6**	continent	63
community	34	**7**	history	53
freedom	31	**8**	diversity	51
continent	28	**9**	freedom	42
diversity	28	**10**	exchanges	40
civilization	26	**11**	economy	39
old	25	**12**	old	33
economy	23	**13**	wealth	33
power	21	**14**	community	31
world	21	**15**	free	29
developed	19	**16**	trade	29
economic	18	**17**	unity	29
cooperation	17	**18**	economic	28
peace	17	**19**	politic	27
knowledge	16	**20**	development	24

5. Some concluding notes

When analyzed the variables concerning the students' background we verified that there are lots of differences between the two countries analyzed. The gender is the only significant common variable influencing the students from both countries. In Portugal we can find more students of other nationalities, the socioeconomic status is higher than Romania supporting a higher spatial mobility: Portuguese students generally traveled and lived in more countries of the world. In Romania, on the other side, even if the students travel less, it seems that their readying for exploring the world is high: in general, they speak more languages than the Portuguese students. Maybe because of that, in Portugal the majority of students have a feeling of belonging associated to the global and after to the local space, while in Romania the students identify themselves better with the national level, and after with the global. Excepting gender, the other variables explaining the students' feeling of belonging are different: in Portugal spatial mobility, the city of the survey and the income other variables are very important, while in the case of Romanian students, the domain of study is significant.

The selection of the most quoted countries to live in among the Portuguese students can be used to identify some interesting trends as well. When it comes to places where the

students would like to live, neighborhood countries, rich big countries (USA, UK, and Australia) and Mediterranean countries were the most quoted. In contrast, Portuguese students have a far more negative perception of big poor countries (Russia, China, India) and all small or medium countries politically unstable (Iraq, Afghanistan etc.). Latin America (with the exception of Brazil), Central Asia and Southeastern Asia are very poorly known areas. As for Africa, it often negatively quoted as a whole but the countries are rarely quoted. Portuguese students also have a general north (like to live) –south (not like to live) patterned perception of the world states.

The experience of the world among the Romanian students is quite focused on Europe and its near periphery. Large areas (Central and Eastern Asia, South and Central America, Africa) are almost unknown. Strongly related to the Romania's economic level, this spatial experience is mainly due to the migratory background of their families and to the scholarships or work and travel programs for students. The students' vision of the world, in terms of "like" or "not like" to live in, show a clear cleavage between East and West: Western Europe and North America are generally well known and highly positively appreciated, while Eastern Europe, Middle East and the neighbor countries are also known but definitely less attractive. The negative quotations are often related to the information provided by the international media, concerning wars, social crisis and politics.

In general, the words that students use to describe Europe demonstrate interesting and quite similar perceptions of the space. Most of the words are related to the European Union, indicating a strong association of Europe to European Union. In fact in the students' perception there is not a physical frontier of Europe, but a mental one, confined by the concept of European Union and by the feeling of identity created by the belonging to this political, economic and cultural community.

All these confirmed the fact that the students surveyed in two opposite peripheries of Europe and with very different socioeconomic backgrounds, tend to have a mostly Eurocentric vision of the world, generally based on the same major reference points.
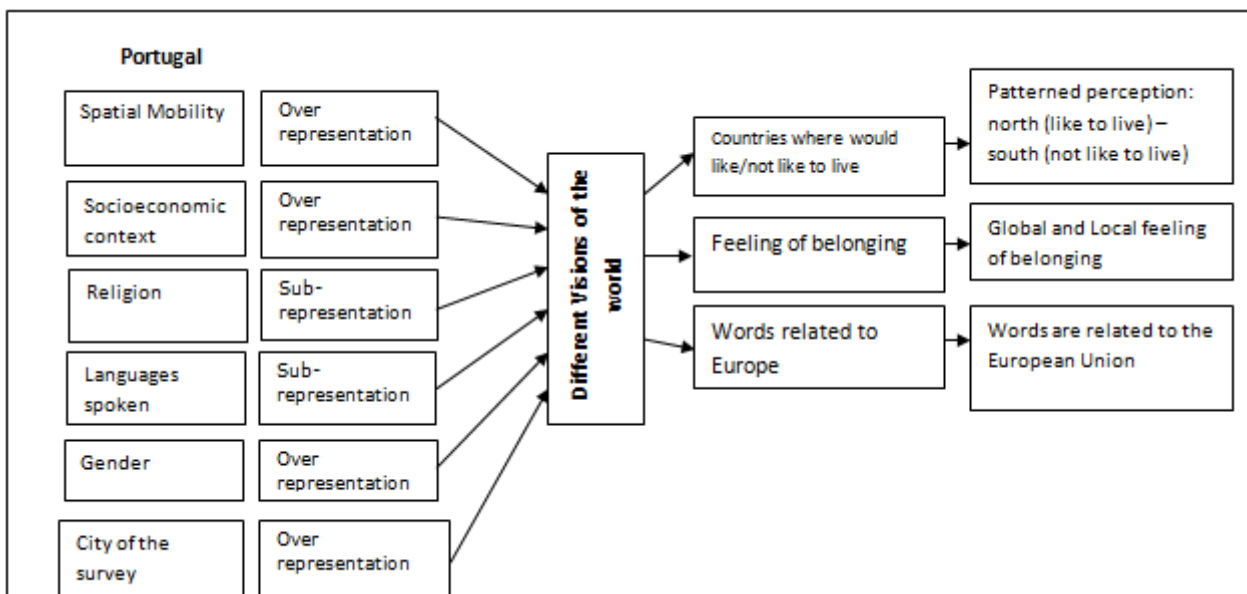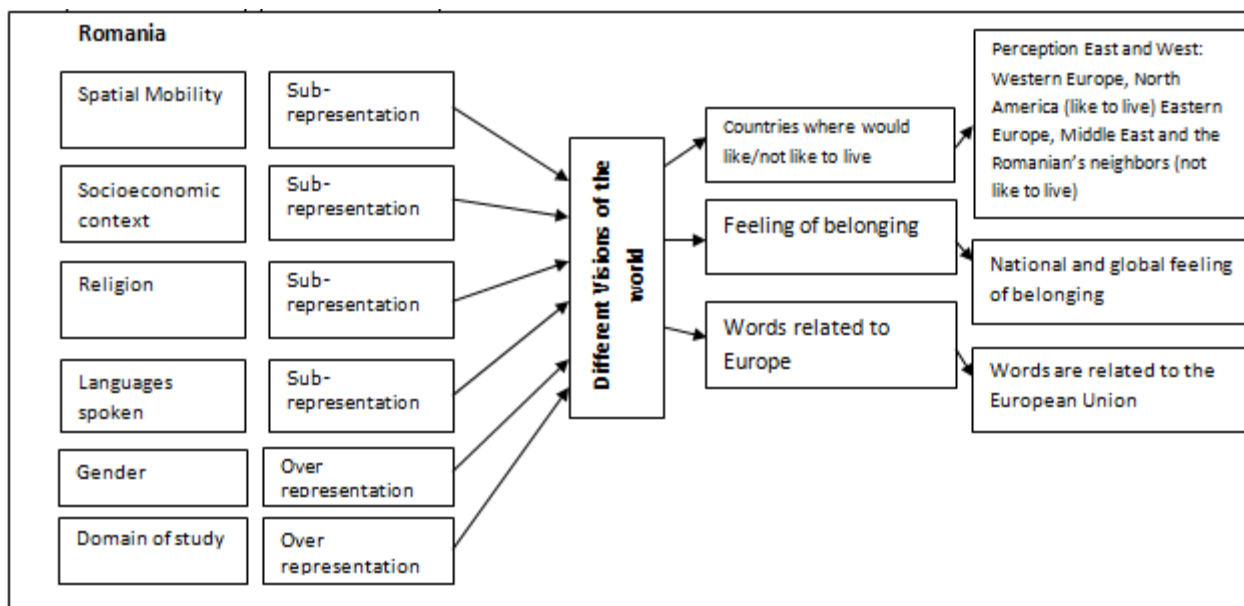
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