

Geographic stereotypes as a tool to learn about others: a European experiment



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EUGEO + Herodot

Europe's Geographical
Challenges

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Presentation: changing the attitudes

- In scientific discussions geographic stereotypes are usually disregarded as presupposedly biased or even intentionally incorrect or pejorative information
- Due to widespread use (but “pejorativization”) – arguing for change of this attitude
- Concrete steps towards improvements of the situation



Defining stereotypes

- pictures in our head that are perpetuated without change
- preconceived and oversimplified notion of characteristics typical of a person or group
- related to fixed, formalized or standardized phrases, ideas, beliefs, used and repeated without thought or change
- attributed to persons, groups, places,...



Stereotypes are necessary

Social psychologists (e.g. Garty, Yzerbyt, Spears 2002) argue for importance of stereotypes:

- aids to explanations
- energy saving devices
- shared group beliefs




Geographic stereotypes

...are stereotypes attributed to

1. geographical entities (e.g. regions, countries, places), or to
2. geographically defined groups (e.g. residents of a neighbourhood, citizens of a country, littoral population).

Widespread use of (geographic) stereotypes

- to describe ourselves or others,
- to portray or to attempt to understand the differences between the countries, cultures, places,
- to adapt our behaviour
- to adapt (inter-personal, inter-cultural) communication,
- in spatial orientation,
- decision making



Need for study of (geographical) stereotypes

- We can not “fight against” stereotyping, but increase awareness of it and learn to use it more efficiently
- How do we collect stereotypes?
- How do we include stereotypes into curricula, and into other sorts of learning?

Information sources about stereotypes

- Personal experiences and subjectively coloured narratives (including those in tourist guides)
- Sources that enable us to compare several geographical entities or geographically defined groups
 - statistical and other systematically collected data, and maps are among the ideal sources
 - Hill 2002: We Europeans
 - Public opinion surveys
 - Values research (e.g. Peabody, 1985; Inglehart et al. 1998; Hofstede, 2001; Schwartz, 2007; WVS, 2007)
 - (geographic) stereotypes research
 - Maps, regional geographical textbooks, tourist guides,...
- Computer game Real Lives (2007) that uses this kind of data, is reported by many teachers as a useful didactical tool to learn about others



*Simulation game based on and
constructing stereotypes from statistics*

Real Lives Cultural Reality Simulation Game:

- http://www.languageresourceonline.com/pilot.asp?pg=reallives_intro

(from presentation...) Through statistically accurate events, Real Lives brings to life different cultures, political systems, economic opportunities, personal decisions, health issues, family issues, schooling, jobs, religions, geography, war, peace, and more. As your students make decisions for their characters and experience the consequences of those decisions they will learn about the world and gain an increased appreciation of their own culture and the cultures of other peoples. The interactive software, carefully chosen Internet links, suggested classroom activities, and projects make Real Lives an exciting part of your secondary social sciences curriculum.



Using national stereotypes for simulations

- Small team within Socrates/Erasmus Thematic Network “ERIC - European Resources for Intercultural Communication” (ERIC, 2003-2005)
- Idea to use geographic stereotypes (+other relevant data) as a basis for simulating the potential changes faced by a virtual or real traveller from one place (country) to another
- This simulations would serve as a tool to learn about cultural geography (at different spatial scales), or as simple “preview” or “warning” tool for a traveller.

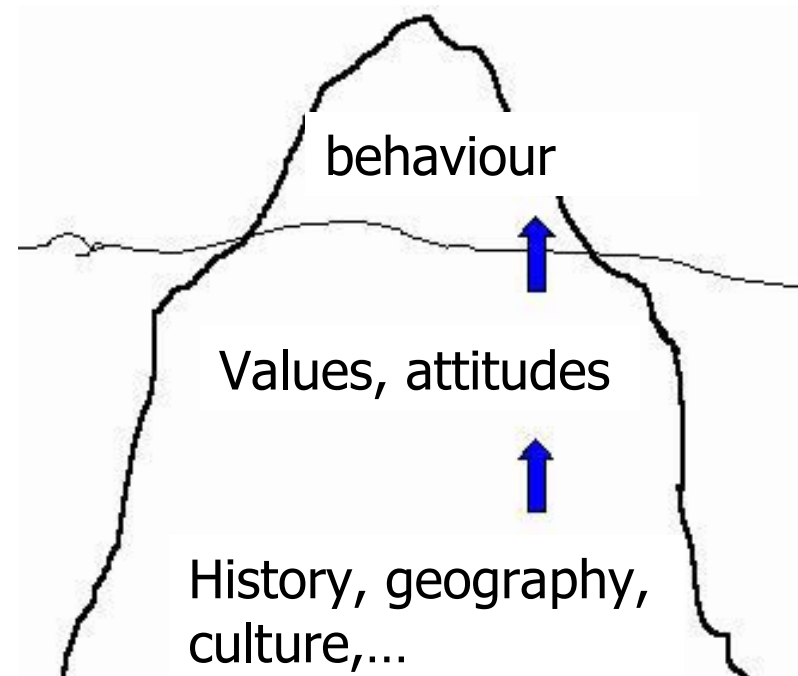


Using national stereotypes for simulations

- Not yet a working simulation system
- Focus on the missing part of the data, related especially to **behaviour and values**

Cultural iceberg (Weaver)

- Despite their trivial look, the behavioural data root in the deeper parts of the cultural iceberg, e.g. in beliefs, values, myths, worldviews



From: Bergschneider, 1998



European experiment

- internet pilot questionnaire (Krevs, 2005)
- intended to check the selection and understandability of the questions asked, the way they were asked, and the level of response by EU countries
- national scale is only the starting point, with different spatial scales of the questionnaire planned in the future



Questions orientations

- attitudes towards the guests: reception, welcoming ritual, taking care of the guests – their free time, payments when eating out, their introduction to the host's family;
- characteristics of verbal (ability to speak foreign languages) and nonverbal communication;
- attitudes towards socially marginalized groups of population (ethnic minorities, foreigners, other religious groups, drug addicts, mothers with children – victims of violence, population of lower economic class);
- status symbols (trademark, size, number of cars, size and location of house or apartment, furniture, clothing, profession and education, elite sports, leisure time at exotic locations);
- attitudes towards social regulations (consideration of traffic regulations);
- attitudes towards private space borders (use of fences) and respecting the appointment time (being late for business meetings);
- national symbols (national sports, traditional food, adopted food of foreign origin, natural phenomena as national symbol, bands performing "traditional" music);
- positive and negative cultural stereotypes about the residents of the country;
- general attitude towards each of the neighbouring countries;
- general attitude of the citizens of the neighbouring countries towards the country of the respondent;
- importance of different geographical identities (from the local neighbourhood to the global/world);
- habits about taking a rest during a day, timeframe for lunch and dinner, expecting guests to take the shoes off when entering host's home.



Language

- Simple English language
- The answers were expected in English, but in case of problems with expressing in English, respondents were encouraged to use their mother tongue.
 - non-English speakers did not complain much about the language used in the questionnaire, but a few English native speakers did



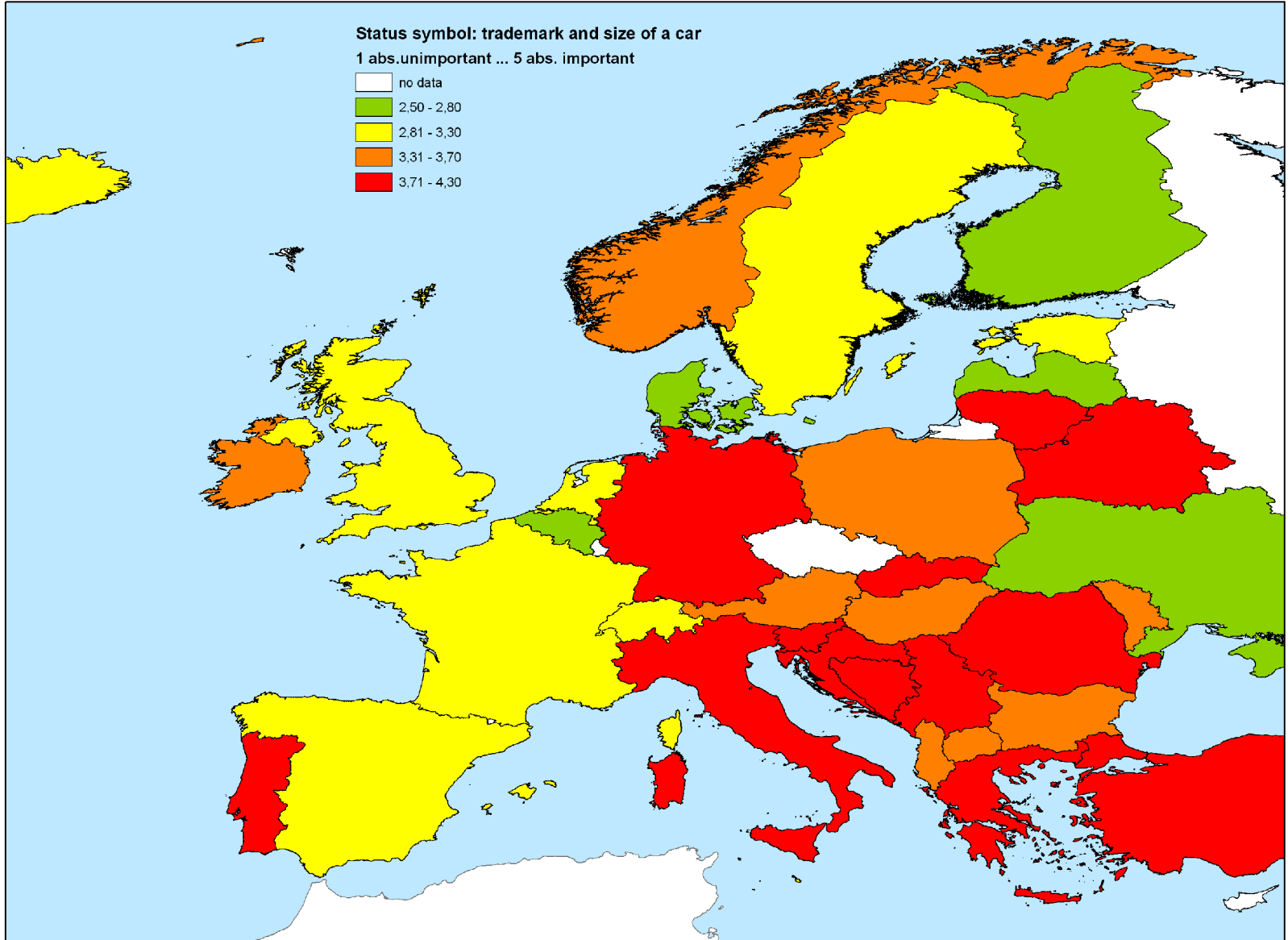
Methodological experiment

- Respondents have been asked to answer “as majority of their fellow citizens would”.
- In social sciences this approach to asking questions is almost forbidden since instead of personal opinions inherited stereotypes are reproduced.
- In our case this was exactly what we wanted.
- Expected quite representative stereotypes even with very small numbers of respondents from individual geographic entity.



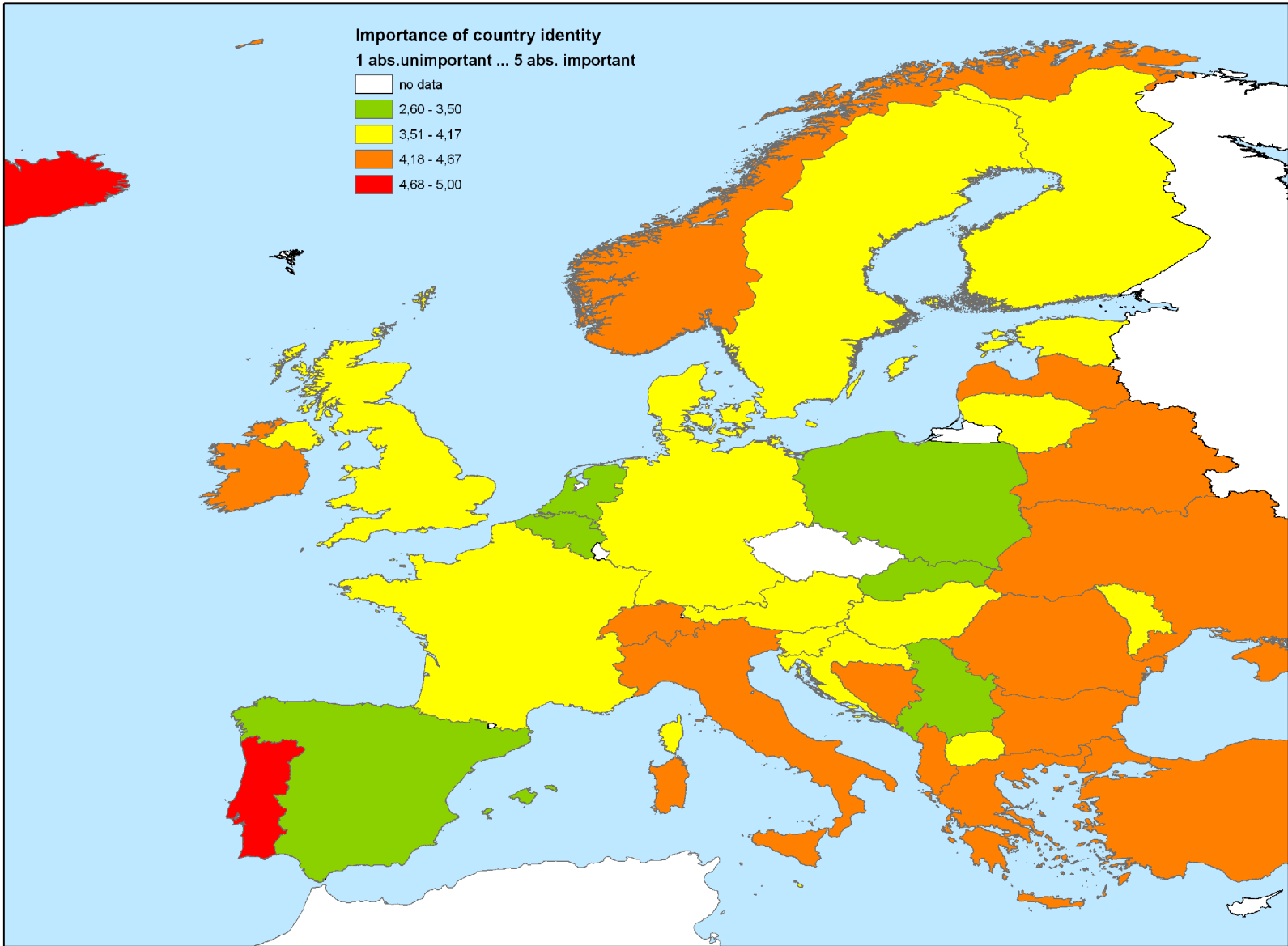
Methodological experiment

- Arbitrary dissemination of the questionnaire:
 - members of Erasmus Thematic network Herodot (Network for geography in higher education)
 - and Eurogeo (European Network of Geography Teacher's Associations),
 - few other cultural and tourist business networks and organisations in Europe,
 - ...asking them to disseminate the questionnaire further.
- Should be better monitored in the future.

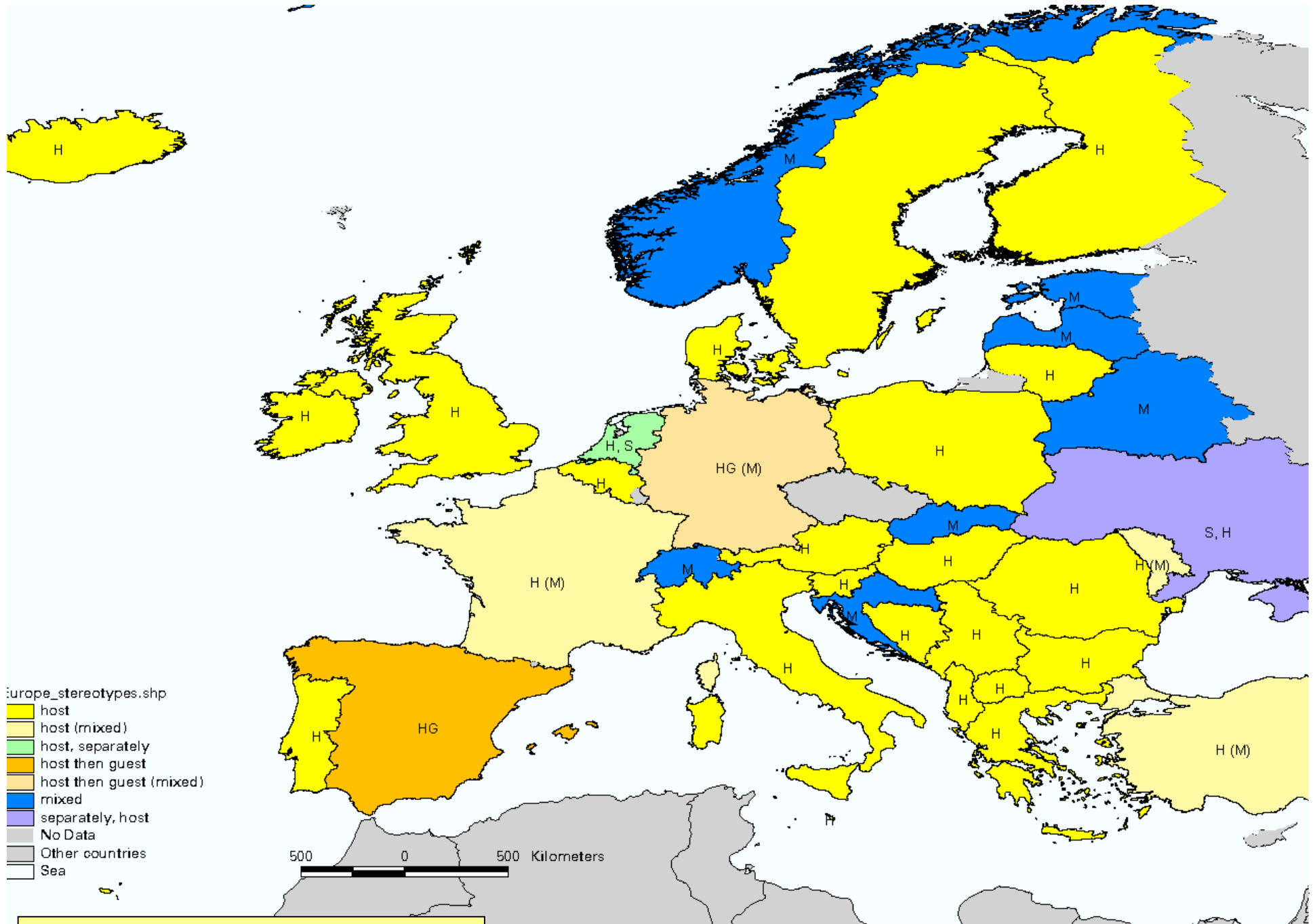




14. How important are these status symbols in your country?						
	absolutely unimportant for majority	mostly unimportant for the majority	partly important for the majority	important for the majority	absolutely important for the majority	Response Count
trademark and size of car	1.8% (6)	8.0% (27)	29.1% (98)	45.4% (153)	15.7% (53)	337
number of cars	8.3% (28)	25.2% (85)	35.9% (121)	21.4% (72)	9.2% (31)	337
size of house/apartment	1.5% (5)	11.9% (40)	31.5% (106)	39.5% (133)	15.7% (53)	337
furnishings of house/apartment	3.0% (10)	9.8% (33)	38.3% (129)	39.5% (133)	9.5% (32)	337
location of house/apartment	1.5% (5)	6.8% (23)	28.5% (96)	46.0% (155)	17.2% (58)	337
trademark of clothing	1.8% (6)	16.0% (54)	36.2% (122)	36.2% (122)	9.8% (33)	337
profession and education	0.3% (1)	5.6% (19)	23.4% (79)	43.0% (145)	27.6% (93)	337
"elite sports" (golf etc.)	18.1% (61)	38.9% (131)	26.1% (88)	13.1% (44)	3.9% (13)	337
travelling abroad to "exotic" destinations	3.9% (13)	30.6% (103)	34.1% (115)	22.8% (77)	8.6% (29)	337
	<i>answered question</i>					337

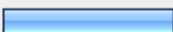
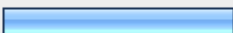
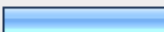





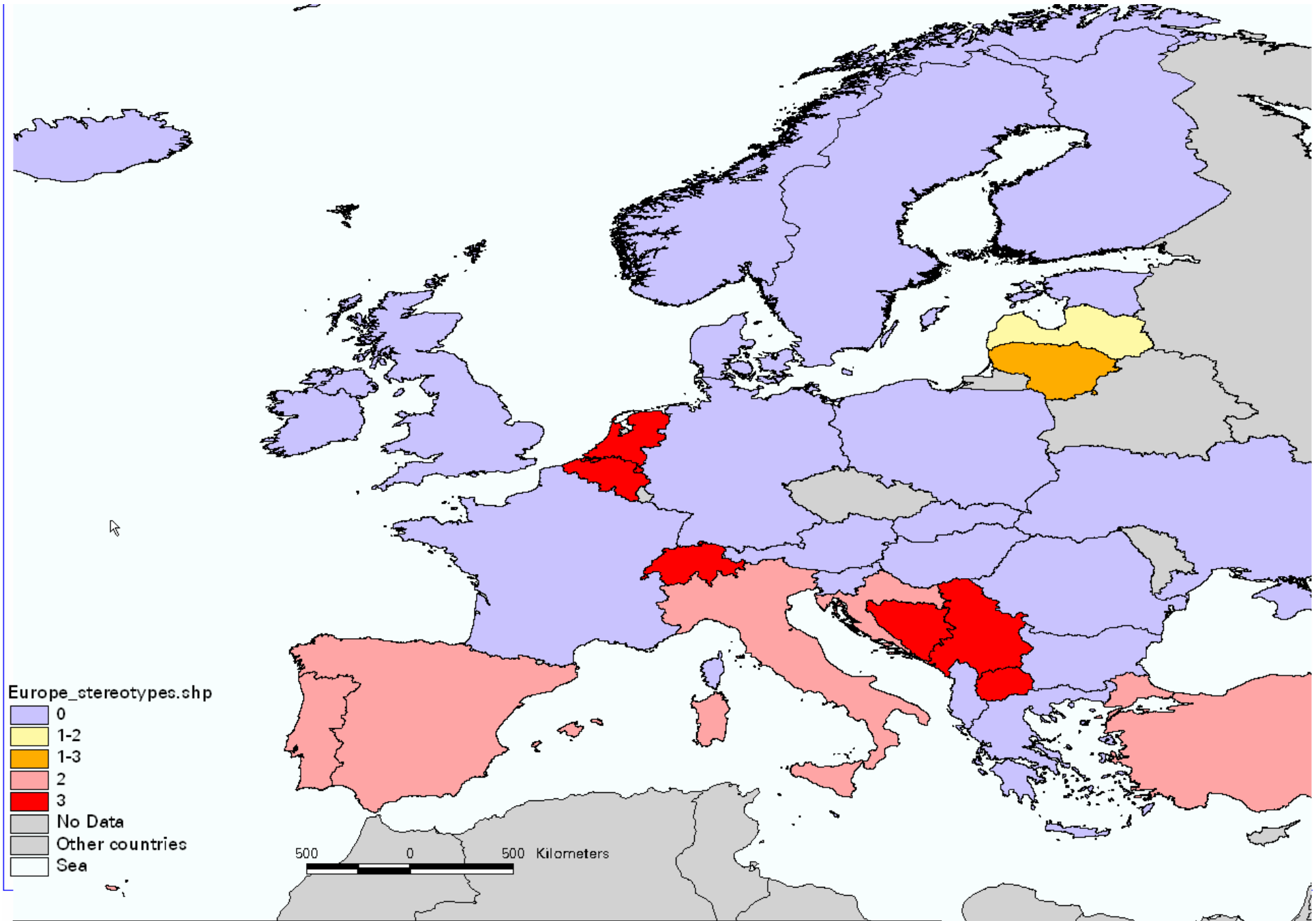
29. How important are these geographical identities to you?						
	absolutely unimportant	unimportant	partly important	important	absolutely important	Response Count
neighbourhood/part of a settlement where you live	3.0% (10)	11.2% (37)	22.1% (73)	44.1% (146)	19.6% (65)	331
settlement where you live (a village, a town/city)	1.8% (6)	4.5% (15)	15.7% (52)	56.2% (186)	21.8% (72)	331
region of the country where you live (subnational level – a region within the country)	2.1% (7)	8.8% (29)	25.8% (85)	44.7% (147)	18.5% (61)	329
international region (international level – a region stretching across two or more countries)	5.2% (17)	21.1% (69)	22.0% (72)	38.8% (127)	12.8% (42)	327
your country	1.2% (4)	5.5% (18)	15.2% (50)	42.1% (139)	36.1% (119)	330
European Union	4.6% (15)	14.1% (46)	30.7% (100)	34.4% (112)	16.3% (53)	326
Europe	1.9% (6)	7.7% (25)	26.6% (86)	41.8% (135)	22.0% (71)	323
The world / global	4.3% (14)	13.0% (42)	25.7% (83)	35.0% (113)	22.0% (71)	323
Other (specify below)	19.0% (8)	21.4% (9)	11.9% (5)	23.8% (10)	23.8% (10)	42
	<i>answered question</i>					332



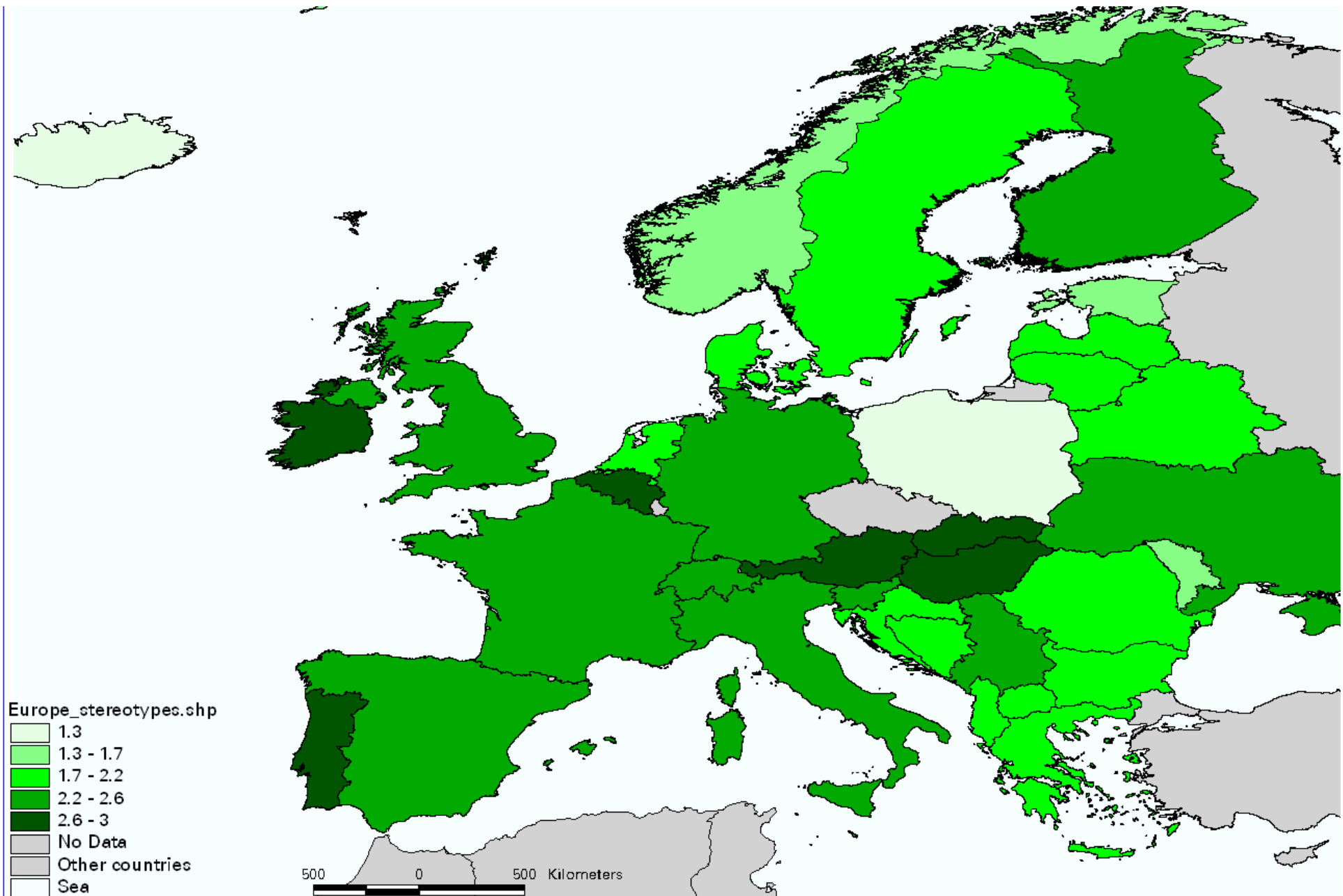
Who pays when eating out?



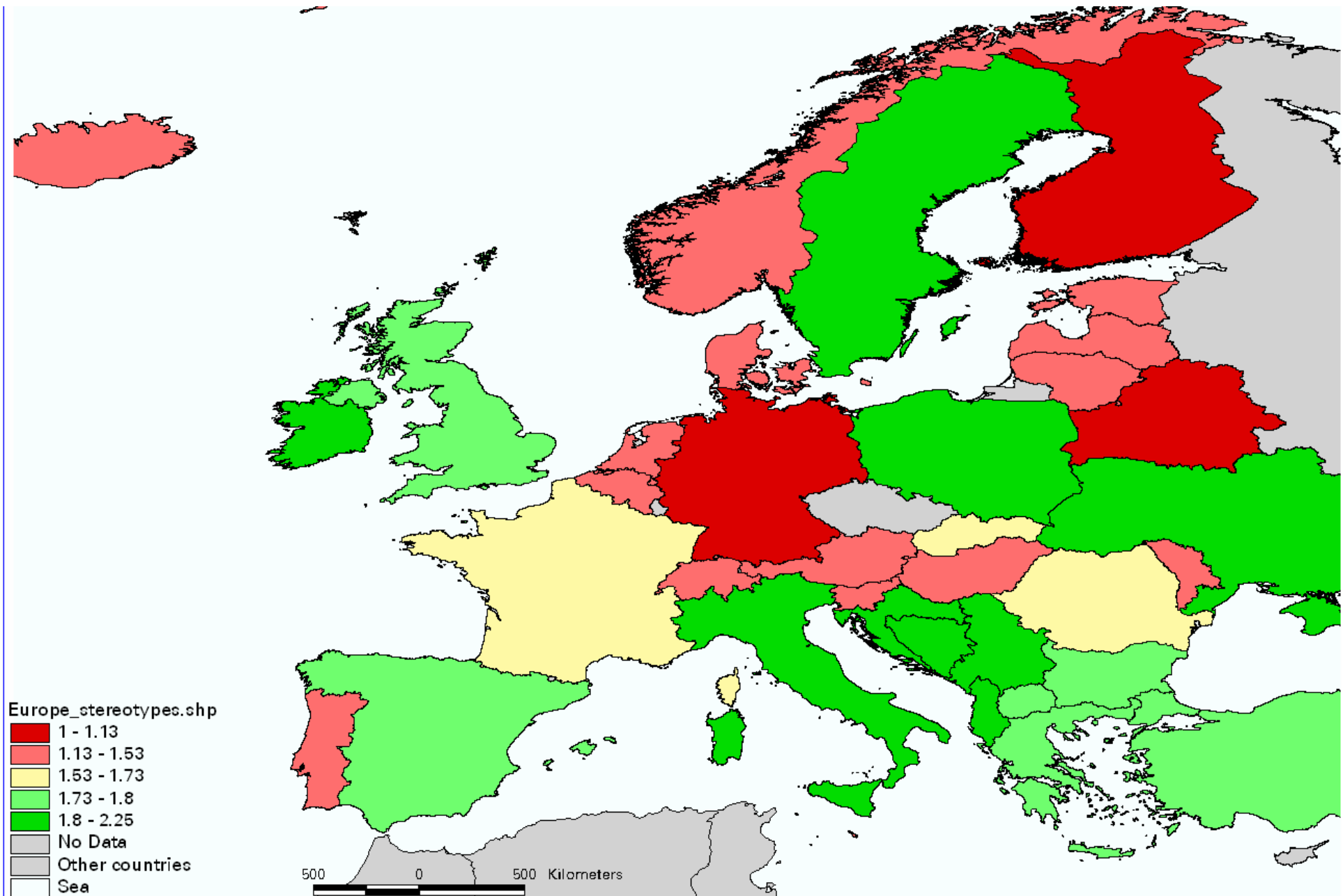
37. When inviting a guest into your apartment or house - what is the most common habit about his/her shoes?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
always takes the shoes off and wears the slippers		20.5%	68
usually takes the shoes off and wears the slippers - invitation to keep the shoes is an expression of "honour/respect" to the guest		27.4%	91
usually keeps the shoes on, except if he/she wishes to wear slippers		19.9%	66
always keeps the shoes on		24.4%	81
 view Other (please specify)		7.8%	26
<i>answered question</i>			332



Number of kisses when meeting a guest (most frequent answer)

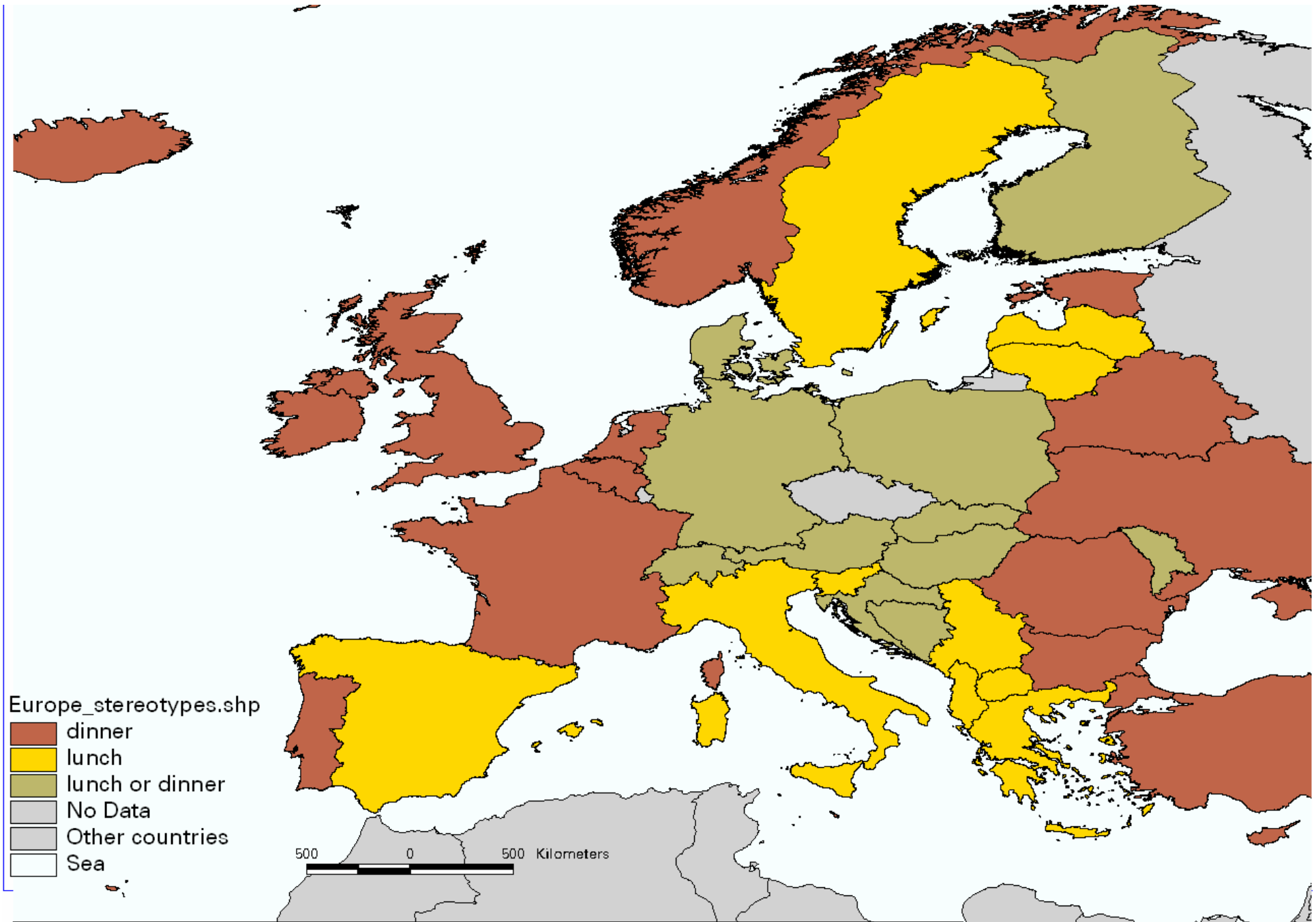


**Importance of “elite sports” (e.g. golf) as status symbol - average
(1=absolutely unimportant, 5=abs. Important)**



Traffic light turns red – what your countrymen most probably do?

(1=always stop, 2=if no car approaching cross the street, 3= cross the street anyway)



Daily meal with highest significance (you spend most time on it)?



Suggestions from respondents

- majority of the questions unambiguous
- very positive attitudes towards the idea and the implementation of our research
- more complex geographical identification should be allowed - national identification does not necessarily coincide with the country
- growing multiculturalism of many geographically defined groups - some of the stereotypes are valid only for sub-groups
- allowing several different answers (e.g. number of kisses in the welcoming ritual), or a wider selection (e.g. the time scale started at 12h but some respondents from Finland and Norway start the lunch at 11h);
- length of the questionnaire
- problems with answering as “majority of their fellow citizens” would answer
- adapt the questionnaire also for non-Europeans



From the discussion

problems with answering as “majority of their fellow citizens” would answer:

- our approach is really unconventional, but some results support our expectations to get answers comparable to those collected in a more “traditional” way, and with higher numbers of respondents (Vokic, 2007);



From the discussion

adapt the questionnaire also for non-Europeans:

- this could be a very tempting task, but it would be necessary to invite consultants from countries culturally very different from the European countries



Stereotypes and European dimension in teaching geography

- By learning and discussing the negative attitudes towards stereotypes will start to melt
- Excellent motivation or provocation for discussion and learning
- “Entrance” to more in-depth insight into less tangible cultural or geographical characteristics of the geographical entities or geographically defined groups within Europe
- Building material to construct, communicate and understand the descriptions and explanations about European geographic entities or geographically defined groups
- Awareness of the geographical and cultural richness of Europe, and ability to function in such complex circumstances



Stereotypes in the curriculum?

- Already there!
- Necessary to reserve some time to discuss (geographic) stereotypes
- A “geographic stereotypes database” would make their use/learning easier
- Very positive response from teachers already! (regional geography, EU or national identity/citizenship,...)

Stereotypes - opportunities and challenges

- A big step forward would be an **interactive web application**, “a learning machine” about stereotypes
 - Offer the idea to Google?
- An **improved, edited and interpreted collection** of geographical stereotypes seems a feasible alternative goal.
 - cooperation of Herodot and Eurogeo partners, universities and schools from all the European countries could really be promising
 - in the long run should not be limited to European countries - by learning about non-European countries we learn also about a part of European population, and through this also about multi-cultural Europe



- Interested to cooperate?