Abstract title: Social Construction of Identities in a Cross-Cultural Experience of Home

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Abstract:
The institutional changes in Estonia and joining the European Union, in particular, are clearly effecting individuals' perspectives in different fields of their conduct. On the account of multi-directional cross-cultural mobility enabled by this change there is increasing internationalisation of all spheres of social life with also salient reflections from individuals’ intimate lives. This implies formation of cross-cultural couples and hence a challenge of (re)organisation of individual lives within the web of multilayered relationships and construction of home at the encounter of different cultural identities. This argumentation builds on the authors’ contribution to the recent European biographical research project (‘Euroidentities’) and has become a source of inspiration for further study of the construction of identities on the home site(s) of individuals engaged in cross-cultural intimate relations. As is also supported by findings elsewhere (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001) in these globalising circumstances there is an increased possibility that couples from different societal and cultural backgrounds will meet and become tied to several places at once, constructing multi-local homes.

In this paper we are introducing the first results of an ongoing qualitative research which studies the construction of identities within the process of home creation of culturally mixed couples residing in Estonia with one partner of Estonian origin and
the other from either the Northern or Southern Europe. The entire research programme involves also a similar mix of couples with the Estonian partner having moved along the North-South axes. In-depth interviews are conducted with both partners in all cases.

This is of our particular interest to understand how the ‘residential stories’ informed by different socio-cultural experiences of individuals related on in-depth intimacy become present in an ‘international home’. How this experience interferes into the perception and (re) construction of individual ways of residing? How do these specific individual experiences reflect on a diversifying palette of modern residential dispositions on a broader scale of the housing field? By applying a biographical approach the study attempts an enquiry of the ways the partners adapt to as well as (re) create their homes in new socio-cultural circumstances with a focus on home designing with tastes, habits, preferences informed by current lifestyles as well as distinct previous cultural experiences. The preliminary analysis suggests that complex cross-cultural experience of home creation tends to appear as an assumption of as well as an opportunity towards (re) constructing identities with subtle references to cultures sustained as new home identities.