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Living by the Sea. International and Intergroup Comparisons of Socio-spatial Representations of this "Life Territory"

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The article sets out to study socio-spatial representations of seaside areas using an international and intergroup approach. Specifically, we have attempted to identify forms of appropriation of place and their contribution to the process of identity construction. Research was carried out in France and Iceland. Despite the differences in geoclimatic conditions and lifestyles of local populations in these two countries, they share a strong sense of attachment to the sea and coast. In order to study socio-spatial representations, a qualitative survey (semi-structured interviews and cognitive maps) was conducted with 48 inhabitants. The interview guide focuses on four themes relating to respondents' life territories: representation of the life territory, individual personal history, elements of change, and relationships between individuals or groups. Evaluation grids were constructed to process the maps manually and analyse the comments made during the interviews. The findings show predominantly cartographic representations. However, there was a significantly greater

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number of these representations in France than in Iceland, where other forms of spatial representation of the territory were also observed, thus suggesting a different relationship to space. Furthermore, these representations of territories varied according to the origins of the respondents (native to the area, non-native to the area) as is evidenced by the drawings. These contrasts reflect different cultural representations of the territory stemming from a different relationship with time and space.

Keywords: socio-spatial representations, place appropriation, identity processes, cognitive map, seaside area

In westernized nations, seaside areas are a desirable life space (Robert & Melin, 2016; Toulier, 2016). For the purposes of this research, the term 'seaside area', which is usually self-explanatory, has been chosen to combine the idea of the coast – without focusing specifically on the geographical aspect of the land-sea interface – and the maritime aspect, which also encompasses issues relating to activities associated with the sea. To cite Corlay (1995), the emphasis in this approach is on the "human factor in the analysis of the coastal space" (p. 247), and the human factor is captured through the vector of three types of social actor: those who live on the coast, those who work there, and those who manage it. It is therefore an area which is both experienced and perceived – a life space. As a life space, the seaside area is the object of representations and meanings which are an essential part of the process of appropriation (Morval, 2007; Moser, 2003). This process makes it possible to interiorize a set of meanings linked to an environment and as a result, fosters a personal identification with the place (Proshansky, 1976). Through this process of appropriation of place (e.g., knowledge and meanings, behaviours and activities which occur there), the space becomes a life territory (Bailly et al., 2016).[1] "The space is therefore considered to be a *territory* in which groups with different representations work to promote their social and spatial practices; it is also considered from the point of view of its symbolic power, informed by local and universal cultural archetypes" (Bailly et al., 2016, p. 65). These relationships between space appropriation, an identity-based process, and the social construction of risk around a life territory, are the focus

[1] In this article, the phrase 'life territory' (*territoire de vi*e in French) is used. It was chosen for our study as it seemed to have greater international resonance than the more generic notion of space, which is considered to be more polysemic.

of the reMERci research project (Université de Bretagne Occidentale, 2025) within the framework of an international approach (France – Iceland). This research project, entitled "Appropriation of the maritime space and coast, social representation of the sea and identity construction: Understanding risk perception and adapting to territorial issues", aims to understand how individuals living in a seaside area position themselves with respect to the issues experienced by their territory and build a representation of risks associated with it. The project is therefore focused on different forms of social knowledge and usages linked to seaside areas.

This research adopts a comparative approach to two populations with different geographical circumstances and ways of life, but which share a maritime location. Previous studies (Guillou et al., 2020) showed that inhabitants of the coastal areas selected (Brittany in France and the Westfjords in Iceland), which both have a strong connection with the sea, differ in the way they express their social representation of this element. This comparison makes it possible to put points of view on coastal lifestyle modes into perspective, paying particular attention to different forms of cultural anchoring. For these two countries, the seaside area is an important life space. As we will demonstrate, it is linked to a number of issues which bring together different individuals and groups (e.g., local residents, professionals, managers) around economic issues (e.g., employment); social and family matters (e.g., local services such as schools, nurseries, retirement housing); environmental concerns (e.g., coastal erosion, urban development); and health services (e.g., medical and home care), and so on. These individuals or groups interact, influence each other, cooperate or fight for their share of territorial space. Conflict is frequent, for example in relation to fishing quotas, tourism, or building permits on sites with town planning or environmental constraints. This article describes the findings of the qualitative survey conducted with inhabitants of two territories, in France and in Iceland, with the aim of analysing the construction of social knowledge relating to the seaside area. More specifically, the aim is to use social representations to explore whether different lifestyles reflect different relationships with the seaside area and the issues associated with it.

USING A SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS APPROACH TO REPRESENT SPACE

Socio-spatial Representations

Understanding the seaside area as an object of representation by applying social representation theory (Doise, 1985; Moscovici, 1961) and adopting a comparative approach offers a better understanding of how social knowledge linked to these spaces is acquired and the degree of

emphasis placed on issues associated with these territories. In this study, there is a particular focus on socio-spatial representations based on the premise that the geographic space is socially constructed by the issues present in it (Ramadier, 2022). In other words, issues – and the social interactions associated with them – play a role in the construction of social representations of spaces (Robert et al., 2016). Socio-spatial representation refers to the social representation of territories and the way in which it develops based on personal and lived experience of these spaces, knowledge, beliefs, collective memory acquired about the spaces, and interactions which occur there (De Alba et al., 2022; Haas, 2004). Thus, the study of spaces as a social representation makes it possible to trace how they are objectified as life territories and represented in terms of psycho-social anchoring (Doise, 1992). Of the various approaches to this theoretical strand, the organizational and position-taking features developed by Doise and his co-investigators (e.g., Clémence et al., 1994) are the most relevant here. This approach has already yielded positive results in the study of socio-spatial representations (Clementi, 2022; Dias & Ramadier, 2015; Ramadier, 2017) as a way of explaining how people position themselves in relation to space with respect to socio-professional trajectories. In this study, respondents' nationality and origins will be explored as a source of anchoring.

Generative and Organizing Principles of Position-Taking

Affinities with Bourdieu's field theory (1979, 1980) and Moscovici's social representations (Moscovici, 1961) prompted Doise to define social representations as "the generative principles of position-taking linked to specific insertions in a set of social relationships, and organizing the symbolic processes taking place in those relationships" (Doise, 1985, p. 246). As principles which generate position-taking, these social representations provide individuals with shared reference points which allow them to regulate symbolic relationships. According to Doise (2005), these positions are generated in relationships of communication and refer to objects which have a certain significance for the individuals and groups concerned. Groups will position themselves by building a shared representation around a polemical object. These positions lead groups to define themselves in relation to the object, thus contributing to the construction of members' identity (i.e., what they are and what they are not). Thus, by situating groups in relation to objects of representation in this way, and by playing a part in the definition of members' identity, these positions also allow us to situate intergroup relationships by defining the boundaries of belonging. These boundaries are not fixed, but depend on the circumstances of their actualization (Doise, 1999). And "depending on circumstances, different

relationships become prominent and actualize different identity-related aspects" (Doise, 1999, p. 213).

Different cognitive processes are involved in the development of these positions (depending on specific forms of integration into the social field), and this plurality means that individual variations can be expressed. As organizing principals, these systems create differences and variations between individuals (Clémence et al., 1994), depending on the significance of the issue for people and their social integration. The positions adopted and the representations which they create are not random, but reflect the positions occupied by people in the social space. The arrangement and organization of the social space in which people are situated is recognized as a factor for understanding the nature and meaning of interactions and, by the same token, their impact on the representations produced. In this respect, the emphasis in this theory is on the importance of ordinary social interactions and the value, in this context, of studying the dynamics of change in relation to issues (Doise, 1990). Groups' position-taking in relation to issues makes it possible to determine those which are perceived as presenting a threat – notably with respect to identity, thus making them a potential risk – and those which can be transformed into an opportunity, thus counteracting the possible threat.

Lastly, definition based on organizing principles makes it possible to understand the transition from the individual to the collective by emphasizing the dynamic of social relationships and the idea of not viewing representations as closed systems imposed on all members of a social group. Although the community of organizing principles permits sharing, i.e. communication between individuals and groups, it can also express differences, disagreements, and opposition. It does not impose uniformity and position-taking; there is no obligation to achieve consensus within a group. As demonstrated by Moscovici (1961) consensus is only truly present in particular relationships of communication. Relationships formed between groups and representations are not one-to-one mappings and the various positions adopted constitute expressive variations of the representations produced by shared organizing principles. According to Doise and his fellow investigators, it is appropriate to study variations between individuals in order to "isolate the organizing principles of position-taking in relation to the issues which are considered important by members of a given population" (Clémence et al., 1994, p. 122).

This theoretical approach is valuable on many levels with respect to our research aim. On the one hand, it involves working with an object of representation which is not under construction, but which is a shared object and an object associated with an issue, in this instance

the life territory. On the other hand, this theoretical approach makes it possible to show that the different positions adopted in relation to our object can imply different identities. Lastly, these positions can help us to consider associated issues and interactions in a different way (e.g., threat or opportunity).

RESEARCH AIMS

The aim of this research is to analyse the construction of social knowledge relating to maritime and coastal spaces based on an international and intergroup approach. The two territories selected are located in regions of Brittany (France) and the Westfjords (Iceland).

For Brittany, the sea has always been a source of economic prosperity. The sea accounts for 5.4% of regional employment (CCI de Bretagne, 2025), and tourism in its own right accounts for 4.8% of regional employment. It is also closely implicated in many environmental issues. These include increasing scarcity of resources, climate change, accelerating rates of loss of biodiversity and the proliferation of environmental health issues. Taking climate change as an example, 35,614 ha of low-lying coastal areas are directly threatened by submersion (Observatoire de l'Environnement en Bretagne, 2018). From an environmental health risk perspective, green algae, caused in part by the release of nitrates into the ocean, has been a major problem for many years (Observatoire de l'Environnement en Bretagne, 2025). These issues are often in conflict. For example green algae pollution can have a negative impact on tourism, but scarcity of species can have a negative effect on fishing.

The Westfjords region is a distinct area of Iceland where the sea is also fundamental. The Icelandic economy is principally built on fishing and tourism, particularly in the Westfjords region (fishing accounts for 27.9% of all employment there). It is situated in a mountainous area which is difficult to farm and most of the population (95%) is concentrated less than 3km from the coast. Tourism in this region has developed around an ancestral fishing culture to include activities which are growing in popularity (e.g., whale watching, visits to fishing grounds, sea kayaking trips, seafood tasting). In Iceland more generally, tourism has been growing since the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in 2010. It accounts for 5.1% of all jobs in the country. Furthermore, Iceland's environmental policy is also addressing issues associated with the sea. In 2006, under the auspices of the National Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment, the government set three challenges: to combat marine pollution, fight against the effects of global warming, and develop sustainable use of resources (Government of Island, 2025).

The two regions of Brittany and the Westfjords, therefore have close historic ties with the sea. This continuity between past and present is a significant aspect of identity construction (Breakwell, 1992). The past provides a huge cultural legacy through the intermediary of intangible elements (e.g., traditional trades and know-how, local customs and myths) and tangible elements of landscapes (e.g., ports, lighthouses, fish markets, old boats). These aspects of coastal and maritime heritage handed down from one generation to the next are part of the identity of the seaside area; they are significant assets for tourism, and for the appeal and promotion of the territory.

People can represent this object, their life territory, and its issues, in many different ways depending on their lived experience, group interactions, communications methods and multiple uses of these spaces. Proximity to the object, symbolic proximity (e.g., connection) or measurable proximity (e.g., distance in time and/or space in relation to lived experience), can result in different types of appropriation of the life territory (in terms of uses and meanings). This knowledge of the territory shapes identity and determines individuals' ability to visualize and adapt to this space and the changes occurring there. The study will analyse the different forms of appropriation of space. It will examine the role of territory in shaping identity and the part played by this identity in the social construction of risks and individuals' positions vis-à-vis local problems. The four main areas of study are: the socio-spatial representation of the life territory, identity via personal history, challenges in the form of changes associated with the life territory, and intergroup relationships within the territory. These various aspects will be explored on the basis of international differences (Haut-Léon in France – the Westfjords in Iceland) and intergroup differences (native inhabitants – non-native inhabitants).

METHODOLOGY

Presentation of the Territories

In France, the area selected is the Pays du Léon, and the Haut-Léon in particular, which is located in the north of the Finistère *département*, in the region of Brittany. The study was carried out in the coastal communes of Cléder, Plouescat, Plougoulm, Roscoff, Saint-Pol-de-Léon, Santec, Plouénan, île de Batz, Carantec, and Taulé, which all belong to the community of communes of Haut-Léon (Haut-Léon Communauté, 2025), in the agglomeration community of Morlaix (Morlaix Communauté, 2025). This group of communes has a total population of almost 32,000 inhabitants (INSEE, 2020). This area has been selected for its coastal location (cf. Figure 1), its history, which is rooted in both the sea and the land (vegetable-growing and

exports), its heritage (notably its religious heritage), and the diverse challenges it faces (e.g., an ageing population, real estate investment, coastal erosion).

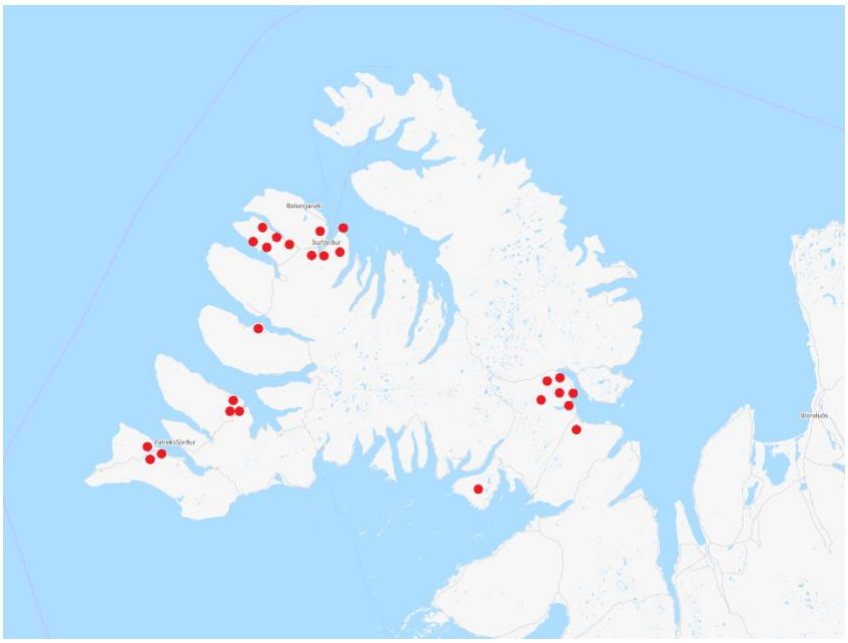
Figure 1

Communes Studied in Haut-Léon, France (OpenStreetMap, 2025).

In Iceland, the Westfjords (Vestfirðir) were selected. They have approximately 7,000 inhabitants (Statistics Iceland, 2025a) scattered across three main regions: North-Vestfirdir, South-Vestfirdir and Strandir (in the west). Surveys were conducted in these three regions, and more particularly in the north, in the municipality of Ísafjarðarbær (communes of Ísafjörður, Flateyri, Suðureyri and Þingeyri); in the south, in the municipalities of Reykhólahreppur (commune of Reykhólar) and Vesturbyggð (communes of Patreksfjörður and Bíldudalur); and in the west, in the municipality of Strandabyggð (commune of Hólmavík) (cf. Figure 2). This area was also chosen for its coastline, maritime roots (fishing, tourism) and, similarly to France, the diverse challenges affecting it (e.g., an ageing population, the economic dynamic, coastal risks).

Figure 2

Communes Surveyed in the Westfjords, *Vestfirðir*, Iceland (OpenStreetMap, 2025).



Survey Respondents

In these two areas, 48 semi-structured interviews were conducted: 23 were conducted in France by members of the research project team and 25 were conducted in Iceland by two local interviewers recruited for the project. Survey respondents were selected to achieve a diverse sample in terms of gender, age, employment status and location within the territory.

The sample in France comprised 17 men and 6 women, aged between 19 and 80. Two were students, 10 were employed and 11 were retired. In Iceland, surveys were conducted with 10 men and 15 women aged between 24 and 78. Survey respondents were all in employment, with the exception of one retired woman (a former teacher). France and Iceland differ in terms of employment. In Iceland, the proportion of people in employment is relatively high and unemployment levels are traditionally low (Statistics Iceland, 2025b). It is quite common to find people pursuing several different jobs. Furthermore, retirement age is relatively flexible as only public sector employees are eligible for a defined benefit pension scheme.

Of the different variables chosen for this study, “origin” was significant in the initial exploratory interviews (conducted in 2020). Defining people by “origin” involves making complex choices: being born in the commune or not, having ancestors or a family line there (ascendants and/or descendants), being born in the neighbouring commune, etc. In both areas, origin was a characteristic often raised by respondents to categorize individuals or to define

themselves. This aspect was therefore factored into this study. People are defined as "non-native" if they were not born in the area and have none of the connections or family ties that usually constitute roots. By contrast, 'natives' of the area were born in the commune or in a nearby commune (within the previously circumscribed zone) and have at least one parent born in the study area. This category includes people who left for several years, in both the younger and older age groups, for work or extended study, and have returned to live in the area. Since this research is based on a psycho-social perspective – the study of intergroup relationships and social identities – this categorization is based on antagonism between the two groups (natives and non-natives), and does not consider their life trajectories. Table 1 shows the number of people interviewed based on these characteristics.

Table 1

Characteristic of the sample by origin in the survey area.

	France	Iceland	Total
Natives	13	14	27
Non-natives	10	11	21

Note. This table presents the characteristics of the sample in terms of origin (native/non-native, France/Iceland).

Survey Procedure

The qualitative survey was conducted in the spring of 2021 and the winter of 2021-2022 in France and in Iceland. The interviews based on the shared interview guide were recorded, with recordings lasting between 1 hour and five hours. They were fully re-transcribed and the Iceland interviews were translated into French by a specialist translation company. The interview guide was designed to study the various forms of appropriation of space (uses, meanings, attachment to this space), different aspects of identity, and inhabitants' representations of local issues. It covers four themes: the representation of the life territory, the life history of the individual, striking aspects of change in the territory, and relationships between people or groups in the territory. Each interview also includes a grid to be filled in by the interviewer and a cognitive map drawn by the respondent depicting each of these themes. Each theme in the interview guide is described as a "layer" in relation to the drawing. The layers mean that the theme can be explored in speech and through the cognitive map. On the cognitive map, each layer is drawn or represented using a different colour: [1] Layer one: Representation of the life territory (black); [2] Layer two: Characterization of the person (green); [3] Layer three: Striking aspects of change (red); [4] Layer four: Intergroup relationships (mauve). In summary, the equipment

required for the interview was: *for the interviewer* – a semi-structured interview guide, a notetaking grid (for recording notes relating to each layer), a set of four ballpoint pens corresponding to the different layers, and a tape recorder; *for the interviewee* – a blank sheet of A3 paper for the cognitive map and a set of four coloured felt-tipped pens (black, green, red, mauve). The interviewee was reminded of the research aim and issued with the equipment. The interview began with the following instruction: "I would like you to draw or represent on this sheet of paper your life territory, the place where you live and are involved in different activities (in the very broadest sense). Show me your life territory."

Data analysis Process for the Cognitive Maps and Semi-structured Interviews

Categorization system for interview analysis

Analysis of interviews was carried out using a framework (categorization system) to inform our research aims (cf. Table 2). An identical system of categories was used in interviews in France and in Iceland.

Table 2

Categorization system for analysis of semi-structured interviews.

Category 1: Forms of place appropriation	
Sub-categories	**Examples**
Place knowledge	Places marked on the map, mentioned in the interviews
Practices	Work, leisure activities, involvement in associations, local government, political roles, etc.
Attachment	Rootedness, social bonds (affective, emotional), likes and dislikes, enhanced value
Definition of the local area	Words and expressions used to describe the local area
Category 2: Identities and intergroup relationships	
Person's origins	Personal history
Social interactions	Current groups or people, groups or people in the past, membership/non-membership of these groups
Memories and timeframes	What memories? Date and place
History of the place and timeframe	General history of the place and/or family history associated with the place
Category 3: Changes, issues and risks	
Identification and nature	Environmental, social, economic, cultural
Positioning	Challenges perceived as positive and/or negative or no position
Uncertainties	Localisation and timeframe

Note. This table presents a categorization system for the analysis of semi-structured interviews (based on 3 categories in total).

Indicators for analysing cognitive maps

In parallel, within the cognitive maps analysis framework, we developed a first indicator "*Scale of spatial representation*" measured on the basis of the black (geographical) layer. This indicator is divided into three mutually exclusive modes of spatial extent: Proximal (n = 15), Communal (n = 17), Distal (n = 16). This is not an indicator of distance. In terms of geographical extents and climatic conditions, the concept of proximity in distance terms can vary between the two countries. We therefore developed an indicator that can be used to identify

and discriminate between a “smaller distance” in symbolic terms and a “larger distance” (cf. Figure 3).

Figure 3

Examples of cognitive maps reflecting the indicator “Scale of spatial representation”.

Proximal (F-7)[2] Communal (I-12) Distal (I-1)

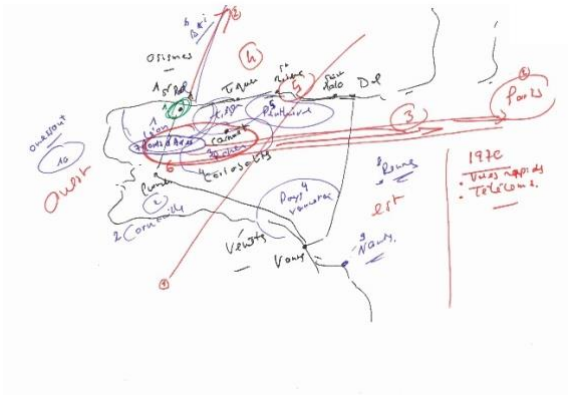
A second indicator, “*Structure of spatial representation*”, also measured from the black layer, makes it possible to identify the presence on the map of geographical elements: cartographic (e.g., coast, road, place) (category “Cartography”,[3] n = 28); closed or enclosed elements (e.g., circles, squares) (category “Cluster”, n = 22); elements with symbolic imagery (e.g., a house with a cross for a church, a cube or square with a triangle for a house, simplified people) (category “Pictogram”, n = 22); and landscape features (e.g., mountain, sea, valley, forest) (category “Landscape”, n = 22). These categories are not mutually exclusive and a single map can contain several elements (cf. Figure 4).

[2] Each mental map is prefaced with the first letter of the country (France or Iceland) followed by an interview number.

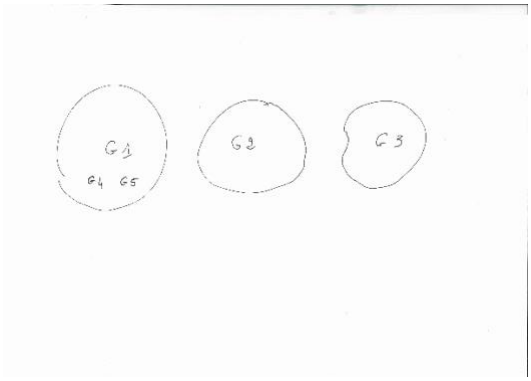
[3] This first category is called “cartography” based on Alpers definition (1983, p.124): “Maps give us the measure of a place and the relationship between places, quantifiable data, while landscape pictures are evocative, and aim rather to give us some quality of a place or of the viewer’s sense of it.”

Figure 4

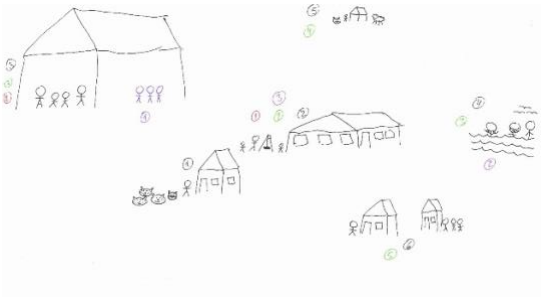
Examples of cognitive maps reflecting the indicator "Structure of spatial representation".



Cartography (F-1)



Cluster (F-13)



Pictogram (I-10)

Landscape (I-8)

Analysis of socio-spatial representations of changes (red layer) initially consisted of identifying the number of points localized on each map. In each country, 16 maps comprise change points or alternatively, 7 people in Haut-Léon and 9 people in the Westfjords do not show any. The number of points localized on each map is approximately even in both countries. On average, French respondents represent 5 change points and Icelandic respondents show 4.4 points. We then analysed the types of symbol used to represent these changes: 24 geometric figures (e.g., cross, ring, line) are used (divided equally between Haut-Léon and the Westfjords) and 12 pictograms, which are more commonly drawn in the Westfjords (n = 9) than in the Haut-Léon (n = 3).

Lastly, to analyse socio-spatial representations of groups (mauve layer) we simply identified the number of localized points on each map as very few symbols are associated with these marks. As was the case with changes, groups are represented on 22 maps, 13 in Haut-Léon and 9 in the Westfjords.

RESULTS: INTERNATIONAL AND INTERGROUP ASPECTS OF SOCIO-SPATIAL REPRESENTATIONS

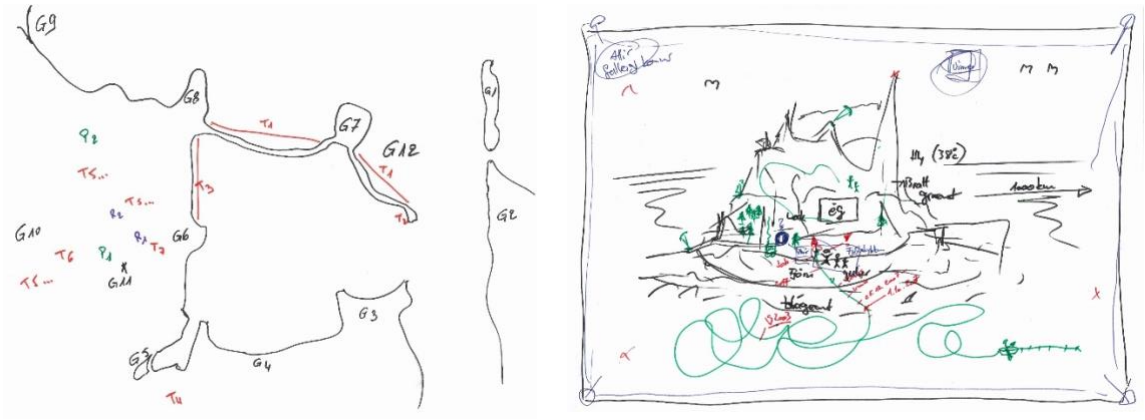
Socio-spatial Representations of the Life Territory

Socio-spatial representations of the life territory were studied on the basis of cognitive maps (black layer) and interviews (Category 1: Forms of appropriation of place). Combined analysis of the maps and interviews shows that the cognitive map does not necessarily refer to a cartographic representation; other forms of representation of the local area appear such as symbols or imaginary drawings. In this section, we will analyse them with respect to the international dimension (the landscape represented by Haut-Léon in France and the Westfjords in Iceland) and to the intergroup dimension (origin).

The "Structure of the representation" analysis indicator of cognitive maps shows the composition of these maps in a non-exclusive way, such that a person can use several elements on the map. Across all people surveyed, cartographic elements are the most frequently represented reference points (n = 28/48) on the maps. These are followed by elements representing closed worlds – clusters – (n = 22/48), and pictograms (n = 22/48), then landscape elements (n = 16/48). The distribution of these elements varies depending on the country. The proportion of cartographic elements compared to other elements is higher in Haut-Léon (i.e. Cartography n = 16; Cluster n = 11; Pictogram n = 9; Landscape n = 3) but is similar in the Westfjords (i.e. Cartography n = 12; Cluster n = 11; Pictogram n = 13; Landscape n = 13) (cf. Figure 5).

Figure 5

Example of a French map showing mostly cartographic geographic elements and an Icelandic map with landscape geographic elements.



Cartography (F-11) Landscape (I-23)

The exclusive indicator "*Scale of spatial representation*" shows that the distribution of the cognitive maps as a whole across different spatial scales is broadly equal (i.e. extent: Proximal n = 15/48; Communal n = 17/48; Distal n = 16/48). However, there is a clear distinction between countries. In the Westfjords, the life territory is circumscribed at a more local level which does not extend much beyond the commune (i.e. Icelandic extents: Proximal n = 10/25; Communal n = 11/25; Distal n = 4/25), but in Haut-Léon, the boundaries of the local area are further away (i.e. French extents: Proximal n = 5/23; Communal n = 6/23; Distal n = 12/23). The number of proximal-communal extents on the one hand, and distal extents on the other appears to be reversed.

The analysis of interviews offers an insight into the knowledge of the local area reflected by these spatial extents. In France, Haut-Léon (Pays du Léon) is mainly situated with respect to other *pays* (historic subdivisions) within the Finistère department (Pays de Cornouaille to the south) or to a neighbouring department (Pays du Trégor in the Côtes d'Armor). "*What I relate to is what we used to call terroirs, pays… no, not terroirs, that's Parisian-speak. What we used to call the Breton pays, the historic pays: there was Léon, Cornouaille, Poher, Penthièvre, etc. These were historic pays that had their own different languages and different customs; it wasn't an artificial thing!"* (F-1). The definition of these *pays* characterizes the people who live there (e.g., poor people, people from the *Pays* Pagan, coastal populations, the wealthy), and the environment (i.e. the "blue zone" or sea versus the "green zone" or land). The division of these *pays* according to socio-economic criteria is very strong in the French interviews. This also applies to towns and activities (e.g., water sports centres, seaside resorts, markets). The boundaries of these *pays* are notably indicated by linear forms of transport infrastructure: principally the national highway (which passes through the centre of Brittany) and, at a secondary level, railways and the Brittany Ferries service – the "*umbilical cord*" (F-1) between France and Great Britain.

In Iceland, in the Westfjords, the scale of spatial representation of the people surveyed is smaller. It is restricted to the village or a neighbouring village, and places do not refer principally to socio-economic characteristics, but to activities (e.g., the beach, the countryside, the museum, work). The boundaries are shown using environmental or landscape features (i.e. mainly mountains, but also the sea, forests and valleys), as is demonstrated by this inhabitant in his description of his local area: "*Yes, it's small ... Village ... Nature ... and ... Mountains ...*

Sea ..." (I-1). As we have observed, landscape features are found mainly on the Icelandic maps (i.e. "Landscape": Iceland n = 13/25 *vs.* France n = 3/23).

The decisive factor determining the identity dynamic in the words of the respondents is "non-native" people, sometimes defined as "immigrants", a status which appears to be lifelong. Within this category, there are, on the one hand, people from a foreign country (outside France or Iceland). They are mainly associated with work (e.g., labouring in the fishing industry in Iceland or in agriculture in Haut-Léon). On the other hand, people who are not native to the commune, but are native to the same *pays* or even the neighbouring commune, are also described as "immigrants". "*I'm an immigrant and people reminded me of the fact. The first time I stood for the Town Council as an elected representative, people said 'You're not from round here, are you?' I'd been living there for over 20 years*." (F-14)

Differences are apparent in socio-spatial representations reflecting origin. For the '*Scale of spatial representation*' indicator, we showed that the distribution was broadly similar across all categories (i.e.: Proximal n = 15, Communal n = 17, Distal n = 16). Nevertheless, more of the people situating their life territory at the 'communal' level were native to the area than non-native (i.e. native to the area: Proximal n = 7; Communal n = 13; Distal n = 7). This proportion can be explained mainly by the Icelandic sample which comprises 10 people native to the communes. In this instance, socio-spatial representation appears to be determined by international context (the difference between France and Iceland) rather than the difference between natives and non-natives.

Differences also emerge in relation to the indicator '*Structure of the representation*' (i.e. the categories: Cartography n = 28; Cluster n = 22; Pictogram n = 22; Landscape n = 16). The 'Cluster' and 'Pictogram' categories are identical in each group (i.e. Natives and Non-natives: Cluster n = 11, Pictogram n = 11). By contrast, the results are reversed in the other two categories: 'Cartography' (i.e. Natives n = 17; Non-natives n = 11), and 'Landscape' (i.e. Natives n = 6; Non-natives n = 10). Thus, for respondents who depict cartographic features, the proportion of natives is higher than the number of respondents who draw landscape features (where the proportion of non-natives is higher). Natives present a more analogical picture of their territory, while non-natives reflect a photographic style of representation of their life space.

Socio-spatial Representations of Issues in the Life Territory

The issues here are defined on the basis of striking aspects of change highlighted by the survey respondents during their interviews (Category 3: Changes, issues and risks). For this analysis, ten categories of issue have been recorded: environmental issues (destruction and/or improvement of the environment) (category 'Environment', n = 28/48); economic or service activities (development and/or decline) ('Activity', n = 28); issues connected to urban development (e.g., house-building and road-building, housing issues) ('Urban development', n = 25); population changes (e.g., diversity, ageing); ('Population', n = 22); open-mindedness or isolation ('Mentality', n = 18); the development of communications (infrastructure or telecommunications) ('Communications', n = 12); personal changes ('Personal', n = 12); and to a lesser extent issues relating to 'Tourism' (n = 9), 'Culture' (n = 7) and 'Education' (n = 6). These themes can be construed as threats (e.g., downturn in economic activity) or opportunities (e.g., economic dynamics). Tourism is also a typical example of an ambiguous issue; on the one hand it drives activities, but on the other hand it impoverishes community life. "*For better or worse ... tourists. Tourism has increased ... we're reaching the upper limit. THE THRESHOLD OF TOLERANCE? Yes ... yes ..., but it's a positive development.*" (I-2). Furthermore, the representation of the tourist population varies. In France, in Haut-Léon, there are more second homes belonging to retirees, which obviously creates an ageing coastal population, whereas in Iceland, in the Westfjords, tourists are an active population who come to spend holidays there. They are referred to in symbolic terms as "*migratory birds*" (I-3, I-12).

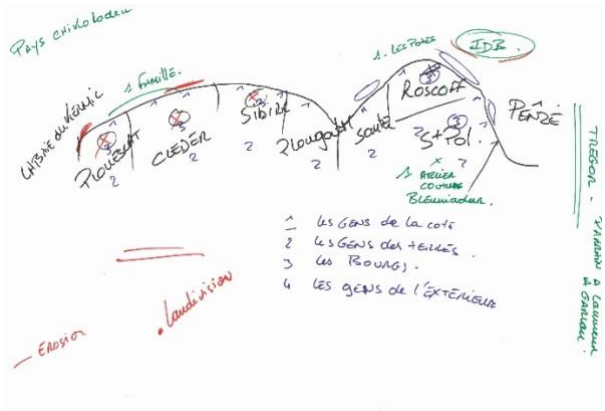
Among the other issues, the environment occupies a prominent position alongside economic and service activities (e.g., nurseries, schools, medical care). Although the latter are referenced in broadly similar proportions in France (n = 14/23) and in Iceland (n = 14/25), the proportion of environmental issues varies between the two countries (i.e. n = 18/23 and n = 10/25 respectively). Analysis of the semi-structured interviews makes it possible to put this relationship with the environment into perspective. Iceland seems to be protected from visible environmental deterioration. "*Houses can change ... they can change a lot. But nature all around me won't change that much. Unless you mean over billions of years, and that won't affect me at all.*" (I-6). In Haut-Léon, for example, like in many western countries that have embraced a tourism "industry" based around the sea, protecting nature from human activities is becoming a key social value. By contrast, in the Westfjords, nature comes first, or is at the very least equal, and humans adapt to it, like this respondent who refers to the restorative power of nature in Iceland that he attempted to resist when he first arrived there: "*When you settle here*

as an outsider, the winter is so long and dark, and there's nothing to do. You think, okay, I'm 27 years old, why am I living like a 70-year-old? […] *I remember the winter of 2009 or thereabouts, I changed my mind and realized that if you truly embrace the darkness and work with it, it's great, you know.*" (I-24). These different conceptions of nature have a particular impact on how risks associated with natural hazards (e.g., avalanches, erosion, submersion, etc.) are understood.

On the maps, these features indicating change were localized in a similar manner (cf. Figure 6). In both countries, over half of respondents localized these issues on the maps (i.e. n = 32 localization points), most commonly indicated by geometric shapes. The only difference between the countries was that pictograms were not much used in Haut-Léon (n = 3, houses for urban development or vegetation for the environment), compared to the Westfjords (n = 9, urbanisation, environment and population movements). However, aside from this, no major differences emerged.

Figure 6

Example of a French map and an Icelandic map representing aspects of change (red).



Ex. Coastal erosion (F-3)

Ex. Urban development (I-18)

Results relating to origins and the international aspect are unsurprising: native inhabitants of the area pinpoint more features of all types on their maps. From a content perspective, they refer to more environmental issues, economic and service activities, urban development, and tourism activities, etc. The opposite holds true in just two categories, which are more prevalent amongst non-natives: mentalities and personal changes.

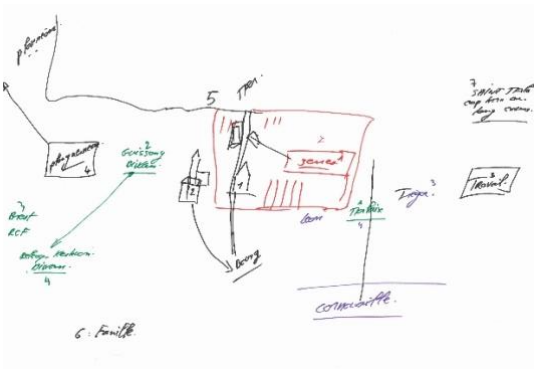
Socio-spatial Representations of Groups in This Life Territory

We conclude this international analysis by studying the socio-spatial representation of groups or, more specifically, relationships between groups and people in the local area (mauve layer; Category 2: Identities and intergroup relationships). In the areas surveyed as a whole, the groups named during interviews referred primarily to groups defined by socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., young/old, rich/poor) (category 'Demographics' n = 39/48). Next are groups named based on interpersonal relationships (e.g., family, friends, work relationships) ('Proximity' n = 24/48), followed by geographically localized groups (e.g., named town, district, locality) ('Geolocalization' n = 18/48).

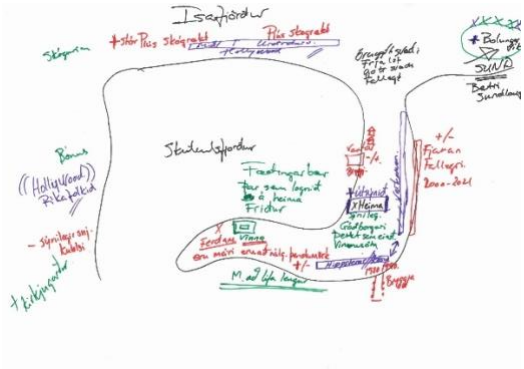
In the category 'Demographics', groups are cited in a similar manner in both countries, but, as was the case with socio-spatial representation of the territory, references to groups in 'Geolocalization' and 'Proximity' are reversed (i.e. Haut-Léon: Demographics n = 19/23, Proximity n = 6/23, Geolocalization n = 14/23; the Westfjords: Demographics n = 20/25, Proximity n = 18/25, Geolocalization n = 4/25). The representation of the life territory in Haut-Léon often refers to geographic locations (e.g., le Léon, Nord Finistère, the coastal strip, the beach). The family location (e.g., the family house) is also frequently cited, but is not as predominant as in the Westfjords, where the expression of this attachment is a recurring feature. As can be seen from the maps, the French survey respondents geolocalized groups with reference to sociological criteria. "*Basically, you've got Haut-Léon, which is very rich and a bit uptight and cold, and then you have Trégor next door and then Morlaix, which is much poorer, but has a reputation for being much more welcoming*" (F-4). By contrast, the Icelanders mention interpersonal relationships more frequently, which are also associated with sociological criteria as they refer to local activities (e.g., associations, clubs, work). "*families with children … Because in fact… I think there are two groups in the countryside. People with children … and elderly people who still live there by default*." (I-5).

Figure 7

Example of a French map and an Icelandic map representing groups (mauve).



Demographics + Geolocalization (F-2)



Demographics + Proximity (I-2)

As was the case with origins and changes, natives pinpoint the highest number of groups on the cognitive maps: of the 22 maps presenting groups, 15 were produced by native respondents. Consequently, natives also geolocalized more groups in the interviews. Nevertheless, the proportion of people surveyed citing local groups is equal (i.e. Natives n = 13; Non-natives n = 11).

FURTHER AVENUES FOR INQUIRY

Our research focused on analysis of socio-spatial representations of life territories in two countries: Haut-Léon in France and the Westfjords in Iceland, with contrasting lifestyles (international approach) and with inhabitants of different origin (intergroup approach). A difference in the representation of space emerges from the cognitive maps. Combined analysis of the maps and discussion of the maps using semi-structured interviews revealed that this representation does not necessarily refer to a cartographic figure. These are forms of categorization of space which are typically found in the literature and refer rather to research positions (Kitchin, 1994). According to Kitchin (1994), a cognitive map can be considered as: (1) a map in the simplest sense; (2) an analogy of a map; (3) a metaphorical map with no Euclidean properties; or (4) a hypothetical construct. In our study, we found a correspondence between the type of cognitive maps produced and the aforementioned epistemological positions theorized by Kitchin.

Put simply, cognitive representation of space can refer to an analogical representation of space based on spatial cognition or a semantic representation of space based on environmental cognition (Depeau, 2006; Depeau & Ramadier, 2011; Ramadier, 2022). These

processes draw on different experiences – perceptive experiences (through the senses) in the first instance, and language-based and practical experiences (through symbols) in the second instance. These models can be complementary (Depeau, 2006; Haas, 2004). In this study, the analysis of the structure of cognitive maps shows that both models can be observed, but analogical representation is more evident in Haut-Léon in France, and symbolic representation is more prevalent in the Westfjords in Iceland. This symbolism is also found in language, as is demonstrated, for example, by this respondent describing their local area: "*My world is not necessarily tied to the land. I am the fifth generation of my family living here, but my world extends all the way to the North Pole.*" (I-11). These differences in how people view space can also be seen in the intergroup comparison. In summary, native inhabitants have a much more analogical vision of their life space, whereas non-natives' representation refers to a semantic representation, akin to a photograph of their life space. This may be explained by an intentional appropriation (Proshansky, 1976) of the life space, the need to acquire historical and empirical knowledge which entails language and practical experience of place – a process which is clearly less critical for natives.

As mentioned above, this distinction on the basis of origins emerges spontaneously in respondents' discourses and this characteristic was probably highlighted by the instruction to describe their 'life territory'. This example illustrates the theory described by Doise (1999) according to which different identity-based aspects can be brought into play on the basis of prominent features of the situation. In our study, this intergroup distinction is interesting in terms of relationships with the territory as it reveals how different statuses are allotted. It confers the status of "outsider" on a non-native, even if they are geographically proximate. This status refers to a social position and legitimacy, a 'special aspect', which entitles a person to live in the territory or not, as is expressed by this French person who contrasts coastal populations with agricultural populations: "*These people have no legitimacy, there you have it. This may sound mean and unpleasant, but it's true and that's my opinion. […] These people are not legitimate, not like people who work the land. I could have a run-in with them, and that has happened when they've chucked earth on the road. Sometimes we have words … but at the same time, that doesn't mean we don't get on, they belong here. So yes, one [group] is legitimate and the other isn't.*" (F-17). This legitimacy conferred on natives and an innate right to reside in the area are based entirely on membership of a dominant group.

This distinction leads people who are not native to the area to define themselves as a "*trainee Breton for life*", or to exemplify the distinction between "*pure butter and slightly*

salted" (F-22). Integration can be achieved through activities (e.g., work, leisure, sport, nursery). In terms of defining groups, "family with children" is a significant factor for inclusion. "*I grew up in Selfoss, but I couldn't bond with my former friends there. I later realized that it was because they all had children. And I didn't have any yet. I couldn't form bonds because I didn't pick anybody up from school or nursery.*" (I-17). Origins are all about family, ancestors and roots. The territory also plays a part in the identity dynamic and in upholding socially accepted positions on both sides.

Another interesting aspect of the socio-spatial representation of territory, which we would like to highlight with respect to organizing principles, is position-taking (Clémence et al, 1994; Doise, 1985, 1990, 2005). As mentioned in the introduction, this theory focuses on objects as a source of challenge, in relation to which individuals will position themselves. Positions are adopted in respect of organizing principles which allow communication and information sharing about the object, even though positions are not shared. Proximal/distal structuring of the socio-spatial representation of the life territory could be viewed as one of these organizing principles. In terms of anchoring, positions prompted by these organizing principles are associated with social integration and relationships of domination in the social space. When we explored this difference in the origins dimension, we saw that it was present in both countries, but in a different way. In France, in Haut-Léon, the largest spatial scale represented is Brittany as a region; in Iceland, in the Westfjords, the largest spatial scale is the country and neighbouring continents (cf. Figure 1, F-1 and I-1). In France, the most striking differences between native and non-native inhabitants can be found between the proximal extent (which is represented more frequently by non-natives) and the distal extent (which is represented more frequently by natives). In Iceland, the differences between natives and non-natives are situated between the distal extant (only represented by non-natives) and the communal extent (overwhelmingly represented by natives). Non-natives' representations always suggest they have one foot outside the boundaries of the local community.

In conclusion, capturing these different forms of knowledge made it possible for us to identify the different positions adopted vis-à-vis life territories and the issues associated with them. These are most frequently associated with threats (e.g., a downturn in economic activity, an ageing population, an increase in second home ownership, housing problems, environmental damage) by native inhabitants than by non-native inhabitants. These issues are not, therefore, viewed in the same way by groups. This research has allowed us to highlight, in an exploratory manner, the different social positions in the life spaces studied. These results can be useful for

understanding issues and anticipating how practices can be adapted to achieve integrated and sustainable use of seaside areas. They have been incorporated into the framework of a quantitative study.

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