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THE VALUE OF HUMAN CAPITAL AND EDUCATION:
DEVELOPING THE SOCIAL ECONOMY IN MEMBER STATES: THE
EUROPEAN COOP CAMPUS PROJECT

GEORGE O. TSOBANOGLOU* and GEORGE M. KORRES**

ABSTRACT

Social Economy is one of the most important economic sector in Europe, with a significant occupational relevance. Based on available evidence, it is estimated that the social economy in Europe – measured as the aggregate of cooperatives, mutuals, associations and foundations – engages over 14.5 million paid employees, equivalent to about 6.5% of the working population of the EU-27. The social economy has increased more than proportionately between 2002-03 and 2009-10, has increased from 11 million to 14.5 million jobs. The significant contribution of the social economy to economic development and wellbeing has been confirmed by the recent economic crisis that has highlighted that social economy and entrepreneurship generate new employment and help preserve existing jobs, as in the case of the conversion of existing corporations into social economy organisations. The facts demonstrate how social economy and social entrepreneurship respond to emerging social needs, for example, in Italy between 2007 and 2011 employment in cooperatives increased by 8% while it decreased in the economy as a whole by 1.2% and in private enterprises by 2.3%. Furthermore, social economy organisations effectively foster entrepreneurship and business creation; bringing economic activity in areas that are neglected due to low profitability and by bringing an entrepreneurial culture in sectors that were traditionally considered outside of the scope of entrepreneurial behavior.

Keywords: VET, ECVET, European Coop Campus.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a new framework for a new European policy for the recognition and validation of qualifications and competences. The pillars for this framework are the brief description of EQF and ECVET devices, in the framework of new European policy for recognition and validation of qualifications and competences. The focus is being drawn on qualification that European policy in the field of credit transfer in VET (ECVET) sees as a crucial element. Qualification is conceived as a mediating factor between labour market's increasingly changing needs and the provision of training offered by VET institutions in response to those needs. The main pillars for

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the design of applications into a new domain of work activity, say in the voluntary sector, the social reproductive sector may be : (1) a competence defined job profile , (2) a learning outcomes qualification organized into related units, (3) a set of transferable-transportable such learned units to aid and sustain vocational and continuous training activities across borders on a European scale and finally (4) an agreed upon system of general rules that would agree to recognise the collected credits (ECVET). This denotes the establishment of a common universal equivalent for the pan European skills system that would recognise the complexity of European States and the division of labour in EE and the formation of a standardised credit “currency” system in most employment –training categories. In many countries there is a national control of skill provision as the national economy seems to define qualifications to a large extend.

2. A CURRENT NEED FOR A VET CREDIT SYSTEM TO FACE TRAINING MOBILITY ACROSS EUROPE

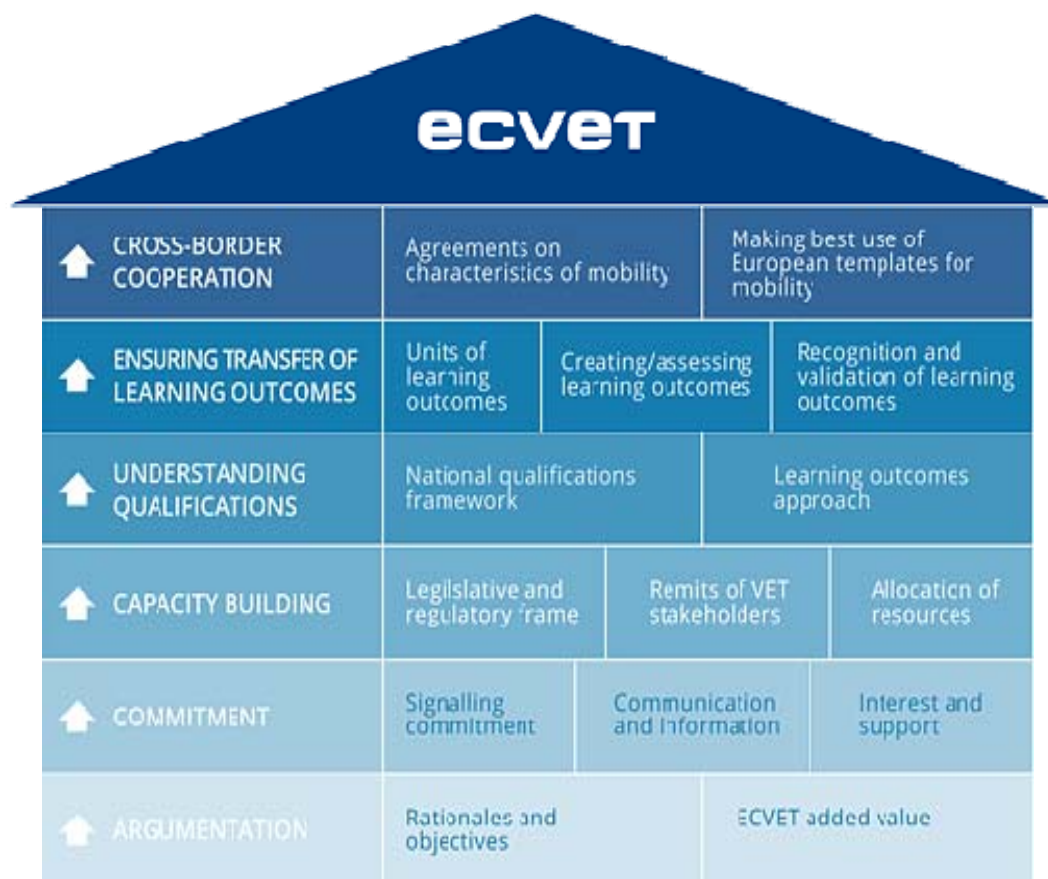
Mobility of labour is essential to promote socio-economic integration and an internal market exchange for goods and services in Europe. Economic realities, however, are far from meeting requirements necessary to achieve these aims. While for European workers, initial vocational training might be the period of life in which they are offered the possibility to acquire mobility experience at an early stage, the mobility of apprentices across inner European borders is still quantitatively low.

Of the numerous reasons for this pronounced lack of propensity for mobility among apprentices one of the most serious is certainly the great diversity of nationally organised VET systems, which vary according to regulations, degree of formalisation, institutional providers of education and training, and allocation of responsibilities. This in turn accounts for a lack of transparency of skills gained in the course of mobility periods spent abroad. The disparity of certification and validation procedures is great. In particular, systems which have a high degree of formalisation of education and training pose almost insurmountable obstacles for the knowledge, skills and non-specific competence acquired abroad to be aligned with national norms and made visible in documentation. For this reason, periods of vocational education and training spent abroad are very difficult to be recognized as an integral part of education.

In higher education, this problem was solved by the adoption of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), developed under the ERASMUS programme. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity by which European educational policies are *regulated*, the ECTS does not aim to harmonise systems of higher education, but rather to ensure that learning outcomes achieved abroad and relevant for certification could be transferred to the home country. This has made studying in a foreign European country an institutionally founded issue. This has

given a fresh impetus to university reforms currently being pursued by a number of EU member states.

FIGURE 1: THE ECVET ARCHITECTURE IN THE EU EDUCATIONAL DESIGN FOR SKILLS



Source: ECVET portal

In view of the success of the ECTS a corresponding transfer system – the ECVET system – in vocational education and training was deemed as appropriate. However, this field has special characteristics which exclude a simple application of the ECTS model. There is an institutional difference between responsible institutions – schools, universities, businesses, bodies providing, chambers of commerce, etc. – which differ

between and within countries. The ECVET system has to satisfy different demands and prove adaptable in a different, more complex environment.

In June 2002 in Copenhagen the EU Ministers of Education and the European Commission started the Copenhagen Process aiming at concretising a policy for vocational certification and continuous learning to match the Bologna Process established for university reform. The Declaration placed high emphasis on measures aiming at increasing transparency and recognition, and promoting mobility for vocational training. It was then agreed:

- to establish the European Qualification Framework (EQF);
- to integrate the existing Europass-VET and the European Curriculum Vitae into a single document to increase the transparency of qualifications and knowledge; and
- to establish common educational standards through the establishment of a credit system in vocational education and training (ECVET) and for quality assurance in VET.

Between 2008 and 2009 the European Parliament and the Council approved the EQF and ECVET Recommendations.

3. FRAMEWORK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECVET

One of the main obstacles to attracting more interest in transnational mobility as part of initial and continuing vocational training and education is the difficulty in identifying, validating and recognising learning outcomes acquired during a stay in another country. Furthermore, lifelong learning is taking place increasingly in different countries and in a wide variety of contexts, formal, non-formal and informal.

In other terms, ECVET is a methodological framework that can be used to describe qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes with associated points, with a view to transferring and accumulating learning outcomes. ECVET is based on the designing of coherent and meaningful units of learning outcomes and not on fragmentation of qualifications. ECVET does not aim for or require harmonisation of qualifications and VET systems; it aims instead for better comparability and compatibility.

According to the definition of the European Commission in the recommendation on a European qualification framework for lifelong learning (European Parliament and Council of the EU, 2008), a qualification is “a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to a given standard”.

The functions of standards as coordination mechanisms between the worlds of work and education can be described as follows:

- (a) to improve transparency for users (employers, teachers, learners) about the value, the character, the profile, and the requirements of specific learning experiences;

- (b) to reform VET by orienting it on the development of competences;
- (c) to provide sound information about occupations and the expectations of employers, to design appropriate learning programmes and qualifications;
- (d) to ease communication between stakeholders: social partners, trainers and teachers, experts, representatives of students and parents, or other interest groups;
- (e) to make qualification systems more flexible, to respond to changing demands of the economy.

4. GREEK ECVET IMPLEMENTATION REGIME

The diversity of education and training systems in Europe has developed in national contexts and forms integrated parts of the individual countries' identities. This diversity, as positive as it is, nevertheless at times also leads to a lack of transparency and comparability between systems. ECVET is designed as a way to work together, *despite* these organizational differences, but the diversity of systems is still not to be underestimated as a complicating factor and should be taken into account when agreeing on mobility cooperation between the international partners.

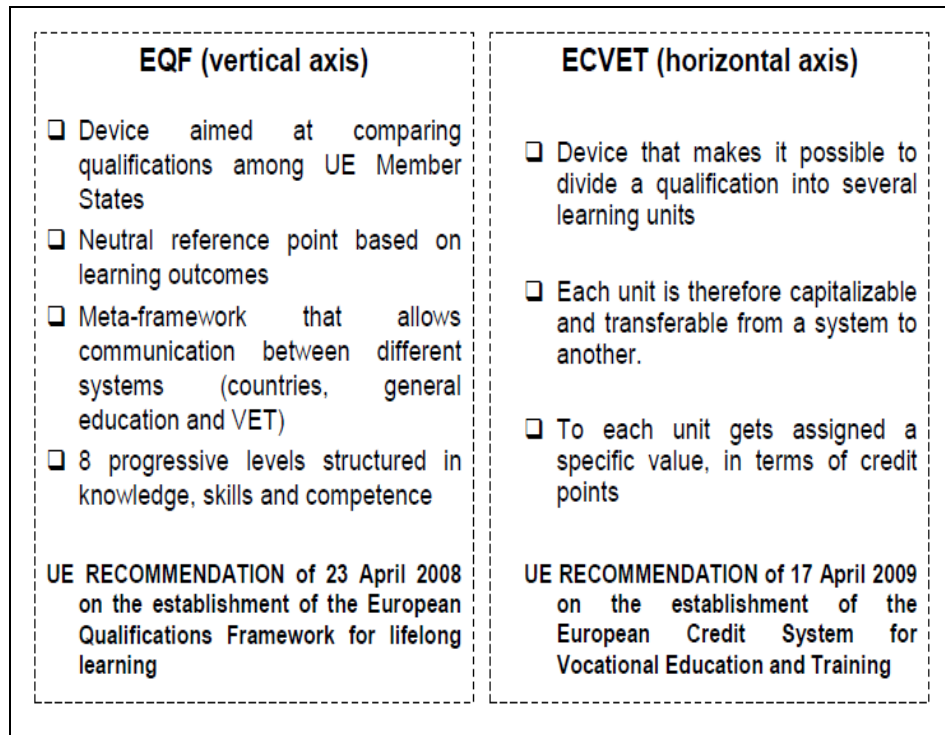
The current crisis in Greece has brought up the reality of the administrative system which handles employment. Even though in the EU, the focus is on the promotion and development of the social economy, the structure of the employment system in Greece does not seem to participate in this attempt. However, multiple individual units within the country put considerable effort in overcoming the entry barriers to the social economy, and consequently, in growing and progressing. Following this logic, the European programme European Coop Campus aims at supporting those attempts through the formation of non-formal learning institutions and at uplifting the administrative capability of those units.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Among the key challenges for social economy organisations there is the lack of specialized training and education in the sector. To overcome this challenge a better capacity building is necessary for social economy organisations, starting with specialized programmes. Several universities, often in partnership with social economy organisations, are launching new research centres devoted to social economy issues like social enterprise management or social innovation. However, it is also worth mentioning that most social entrepreneurs generally are not university graduates and if they have had a training, more often it was a VET or adult training. The very large and diversified range of activities and professional figures related to social economy across European countries and regions are often not clearly defined in terms of learning outcomes. Frequently, they are also regulating access to training and qualification opportunities. This limits the mobility beyond the VET systems "edges"-

confines national and regional VET systems and creates barriers to mobility within a particular VET system. This in turn creates an obstacle to the mobility outside the formal education. For the EU to strengthen its social economy sector, it requires knowledgeable workers in the field. However, workers within the social economy sector are at present finding obstacles to pursue further training due to lack of recognised qualifications in this field. Besides, workers within the social economy sector are unable to reap the full benefits from their work experiences as these are also not being recognised.

FIGURE 2: EQF AND ECVET



Moreover, many European VET providers offer learning opportunities in the concerned professional field, but these VET courses are based on knowledge rather on competences, and the assessment of them is often not conducted on the field of related performances. This lack of competences needed by the labour market make more difficult the employment of the trainees, and the employees in keeping their job and improve their employability.

To summarize, EQF and ECVET are complementary devices of an integrated system for the validation, recognition and certification of qualifications and competences between European countries. They represent the vertical and horizontal axis of a system that improve the VET mobility within the European Space of Learning (Figure 2).

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EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF INITIAL EDUCATION ON PRESCHOOL PEDAGOGUES' PROFESSIONALISM

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ABSTRACT

The present research is a survey on the influence that the initial studies of preschool pedagogues, graduates of the Early Childhood Department of the Technological Educational Institute (TEI) and currently working in preschool institutions, have had on their professional activity and development. In particular, the research aims to establish the pedagogues' incentives and degree of interest in pedagogical studies, to investigate the influence of their studies' content on the way they cope with the demands posed by their vocation, and to identify the forms of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) favored by pedagogues. Research data were collected using a questionnaire which was sent to a randomly selected sample of pedagogues in the Attica Prefecture and were statistically analyzed using SPSS. Data analysis points out that respondents have consciously chosen their profession, and that their initial studies, both theoretical courses and practical training, are beneficial to work with children, while not quite sufficient for the management of parents or colleagues. Respondents were also found to be constantly looking for training programs to meet the emerging needs of the profession.

Keywords: Initial education, continuous professional development, professionalism, preschool pedagogues.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has been a subject of growing academic and political interest. Given research results indicating that learning begins at birth or earlier, pedagogues' treatment of children is considered so crucial that educational institutions and governments focus on specially designed programs that invest in improving the quality of ECEC services. A fundamental area of ECEC quality improvement is curriculum implementation by a well-trained teaching workforce, with emphasis on professionals who are closely related to child care and education, namely preschool pedagogues. Both initial education and continuing professional development can guide and improve the performance of these

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practitioners. The proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Education and Care (QF) recognizes “well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfill their professional role”, and “supportive working conditions including professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents” as actions strengthening the quality of early care and education provision (European Commission, 2014). The question discussed in this research is to what extent the aforementioned actions are implemented in the case of ECEC workforce in Greece.

The primary concern of this research is to investigate how the initial education of early education graduates of the Early Childhood Department, Technological Educational Institution (TEI), who already work in preschool institutions, has influenced their professional activity and development. The specific objectives of the survey were to determine the pedagogues' incentives and degree of interest in pedagogical studies, the influence of their studies' content on the way they cope with the demands of their profession, and the forms of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) favored by them. In particular, the survey tried to provide answers to the following questions:

- Is there increased epistemological interest on the part of preschool pedagogues in the career they have chosen?
- What is the influence of initial education on the demands posed by their profession?
- What forms of Continuing Professional Development do preschool pedagogues use in order to enhance their professionalism?

It is the intention of this research to be original in terms of its subject and its objectives. We hope that it can contribute to the scientific dialogue on preschool professionals' education and training, while, on a practical level, it can help with the improvement of procedures and policies regarding the academic training programs on the one hand, and the design and implementation of continuing training programs for preschool pedagogues, on the other. However, certain limitations exist in terms of how inclusive this research is. Firstly, the views it investigates are those of the graduates of the Early Childhood Department of TEI, who stand at level 5 of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-5), when there are also pedagogues who are secondary education (ISCED-level 4) or university (ISCED-level 5) graduates, whose work in preschool institutions is closely related to children. To investigate the entire range of pedagogues is beyond the scope of the present research procedure. Secondly, a limitation exists in relation to the survey area sampling. The sample includes subjects of the Attica Prefecture and, therefore, generalization is restricted to this area. Admittedly, a research on a Pan-Hellenic scale would produce more interesting results.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Preschool pedagogues' education and professional competences development

Preschool pedagogues implement curriculum in preschool settings, a task that requires a substantial level of *knowledge, skills* and *attitudes*. Knowledge refers to the cognitive fields of pedagogy, developmental psychology, sociology etc., whereas skills and attitudes refer to the application of knowledge and the cooperation between professionals and parents and the competent institutions, as well as the attitudes expressed by the pedagogues themselves both in normal conditions and in a crisis in the workplace. Quality evaluation of the provided services is largely based on the professional skills of the workforce. Epstein underlines the importance of preschool professionals in ensuring high-quality services. High-quality early childhood services depend, in part, on the highly-trained staff and a consistent and developmentally based educational approach (Epstein, 1999).

ECEC staff plays a key role in ensuring healthy child development and learning. Areas for reform include qualifications, initial education, professional development and working conditions. Higher qualifications are found to be strongly associated with better child outcomes and working conditions can improve the quality of ECEC services (OECD, 2011). According to the *Starting Strong II* report, figures from various countries reveal a wide pay gap between childcare staff and teachers, with childcare staff in most countries being poorly trained and paid around minimum wage levels (OECD, 2006). UNICEF (2008) highlights appropriate training and working conditions for all staff as an important element of quality. It is noted that only high-quality care offers long-term benefits for society in the form of increased productivity and incomes and higher returns from investments in education. The importance of well-trained staff is also emphasized; 80% of childcare workers should be adequately trained and at least 50% should hold a bachelor's degree. The European Commission Childcare Network's targets specify that qualified staff employed in services should be paid at not less than a nationally or locally agreed wage rate, which for staff who are fully trained should be comparable to that of teachers; a minimum of 60% of staff working directly with children in collective services should have a grant-eligible basic training of at least three years at a post-18 level which incorporates both the theory and practice of pedagogy and child development. All training should be modular, all staff in services working with children (both collective and family day care) should have the right to continue in-service training, and 20% of staff employed in collective services should be male. With respect to staff-child ratios it aims for

- 1 adult: 4 places for children under 12 months
- 1 adult: 6 places for children aged 12-23 months
- 1 adult: 8 places for children aged 24-35 months
- 1 adult: 15 places for children aged 36-71 months (EC, 1996).

The Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care (CoRe) report on the skills required for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) specifies that workforce quality is determined by a multitude of factors, including competent individuals and organizational systems. Key factors include good working conditions, which minimize the likelihood of workforce leakage, continuing pedagogical support leading to documentation and critical reflection on practices, and co-constructing pedagogy by means of a dialogue between theory and practice. The CoRe report arrives at the key finding that competence in the context of ECEC should be perceived more as an attribute of the entire early childhood system, rather than as a set of skills and knowledge of a single pedagogue. Further, a competent system is one that develops relationships of reciprocity, supports individuals in fulfilling their potential for developing responsible practices, addresses and satisfies children's and families' needs in the rapidly changing social contexts (Urban, Vandenbroeck, Peeters, Lazzari and Van Laere, 2011).

In their research, Paul Leseman and Pauline Slot (2011) maintain that rather than focusing on the educational training of each pedagogue separately, we ought to focus on the professional level of the team and the preschool institution as a whole. Jan Peeters and Steven Brandt (2011) stress that pedagogues learn more when there is a generalized learning culture, whereby theory and practice are closely related. According to this approach, the increase in competences must rely on the premise that reflection on real-life situations involving children and parents results in new pedagogical knowledge being produced, the objective being to enable pedagogues to support and justify particular pedagogical choices.

Research findings conclude that ECEC curricula can be powerful instruments for making the ECEC system more effective in its overall mission but, at the same time, they 'can also engender processes that move away from this main goal because they go against the principles of good practice' (Laevers, 2005). Furthermore, research evidence is consistent with the view that the staff-child ratio can have a significant impact on the quality of care that children receive (Munton, Mooney, Moss, Petrie, Clark, Woolner, et al., 2002). In this regard, research findings indicate that higher staff ratios (more staff per group of children) are more likely to facilitate positive and responsive interactions among adult and children – both on an individual and a group basis. The impact on children's development has been extensively demonstrated (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart, 2004). However, the findings also reveal that the influence of the staff-child ratio on quality is linked to other elements of the care environment including staff education and training, staff salaries and group size.

In the Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (QF), "well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfill their professional role", and "supportive working conditions including professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation,

reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents” are recognized as actions strengthening the quality of early care and education provision (European Commission, QF, 2014). According to the QF, finding opportunities for ECEC staff to develop their skills can make an important contribution to the quality of services provided. However, staff training and development, good leadership and a supportive working environment are not the only factors which support high quality. It is also important to create working conditions where staffs are valued; where there is sufficient time for preparation, team meetings and reflection; and where the adult: child ratio enables each child to receive the attention he/she deserves. Good working conditions create well-motivated individuals who have the time and resources they need to support children and to work with parents and members of the community.

Urban et al. suggested that competence is more than the sum of the individual practitioner's *knowledge, skills and attitudes*. There are immense opportunities arising from this precondition for *competent systems*. The most important are *democratic and epistemological* in nature (2012). Competent systems require -and encourage- democratic governance, i.e. policies that provide stable frameworks for democratic participation and experimentation (Moss and Urban, 2010). They also require a redefinition of our professional epistemology -*how we know what we know* about early childhood- and how and by whom the professional body of knowledge is produced (Urban et al., 2012). The contributions of all actors, including practitioners, parents and children at every level of the system offers a true possibility for a radical democratic and epistemological renewal of public education.

2.2. Professional profile and degree of epistemological interest

A fundamental aim of education is to support the student in discovering their aptitudes and interests so that they can become a complete person. These aptitudes and interests, in turn, should be reflected in their choice of profession. Vocational guidance and choice of studies are critical for a successful career. So, how does this apply in the case of preschool pedagogues? In Greece, vocational guidance is part of the secondary education curriculum. Students who wish to study in tertiary institutions must sit the Pan-Hellenic Examinations, their score plays a decisive role in entering the Department of their choice. Students admitted to the Early Childhood Department, TEI of Athens, generally achieve average to high scores in the Pan-Hellenic Examinations, an indication of their intense interest in the vocation of preschool pedagogues. Approximately 180 students are admitted each year to the Department. The length of studies is 8 semesters: 7 semesters of theory and practice activities and 1 semester of practice in preschool institutions. The Department's Study Guide defines a preschool pedagogue as a specially-educated person who

- Cares for and educates early childhood children and supports their families.
- Designs and implements appropriate activities taking into account the

developmental and cultural uniqueness of children.

- Works in complex and constantly changing environments.

The course includes modules on Developmental Psychology, Developmental Psychopathology, Pediatrics, Dramatic Play, Music and Movement, Computers, Infant Care, Children and Play, Principles of Education Act, Day Care and Education, and Current Trends in Early Childhood Education.

Preschool pedagogues can attend continuing education programs provided by:

- OMEP - Organisation Mondiale pour l'Éducation Préscolaire/ World Organization for Early Childhood Education
- EADAP - Society for the Development and Creative Occupation of Children (a Synergy program)
- ELLEPAP - Scientific Society for Preschool Care (annual conferences)
- PASBYN - Trade union of preschool pedagogues (annual conferences)
- Municipalities.

3. METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire survey was used to address the research objectives. The survey is the most widely used data-gathering technique in sociology, and it is often used in educational research. Surveys produce quantitative information about the social world and describe attributes of people. They are also used to explain or explore. The survey asks many people about their beliefs, opinions, characteristics, and past or present behavior. Researchers usually ask about many things at one time in surveys, measure many variables and test several hypotheses in a single survey (Neuman, 1994).

3.1. Procedure

Based on the principal aim, the specific objectives and individual questions, a questionnaire was compiled consisting of nineteen (19) questions involving 23 variables. The questions were formed around three thematic axes corresponding to the research objectives: to determine the respondents' incentives and degree of interest in their studies; to investigate the influence of their initial studies' content on how they cope with the demands of their profession, and to investigate favored forms of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The questionnaire was initially tested on 10% of the sample and necessary modifications were made. One hundred and eighty questionnaires were distributed, one hundred and fifty-five of which were completed and returned.

3.2. Sample

The sample was randomly selected from the total survey population, that is, state and private preschool institutions pedagogues in the Attica Prefecture. Questionnaire distribution was carried out in collaboration with the institutions' directors, who were informed of the research objectives. The questionnaire was accompanied by a letter to preschool pedagogues informing them of the research objectives and guaranteeing anonymity. The survey was conducted in the autumn of 2015.

3.3. Analysis

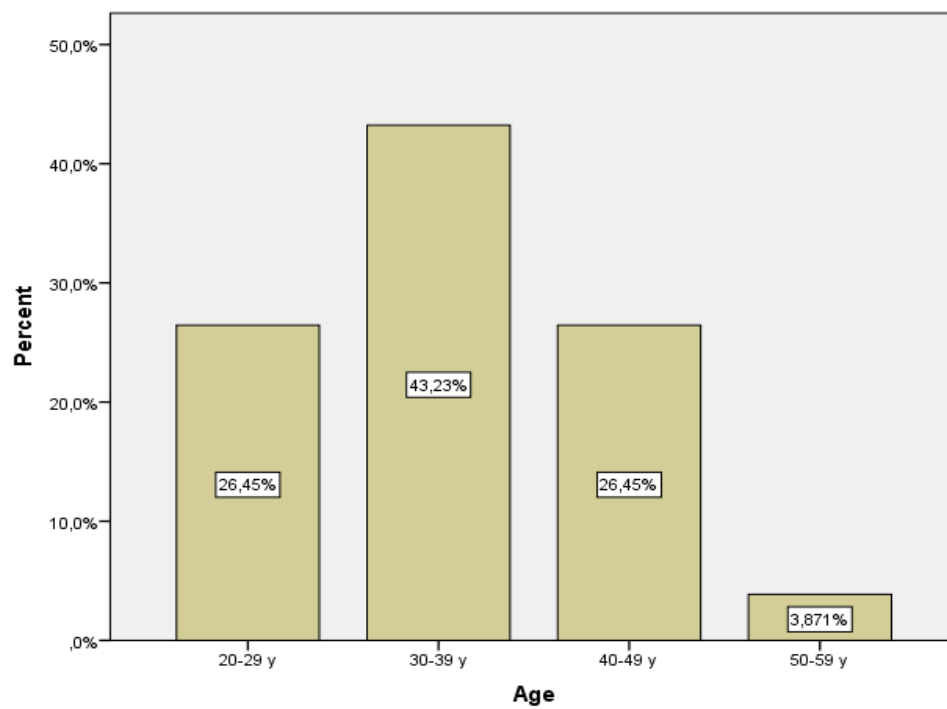
The statistical analysis of the data was carried out via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 22) using the commands of Frequencies, Multiple Responses, Crosstabs (Pearson Chi-Square - χ^2 , p), Descriptive, Compare Means (T-Test Independent Samples Test, One-Way ANOVA, Correlations).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Degree of interest in pedagogical studies

This section presents the results of data analysis regarding the general characteristics of respondents and their degree of interest in pedagogical studies. The majority of respondents, 67 (43,23%), are in the 30-39 age group, 41 (26,5%) are in the age range of 20-29, 41 (26,5%) are 40-49 years old, while 6 (3,9%) are over 50 years of age (Fig. 1).

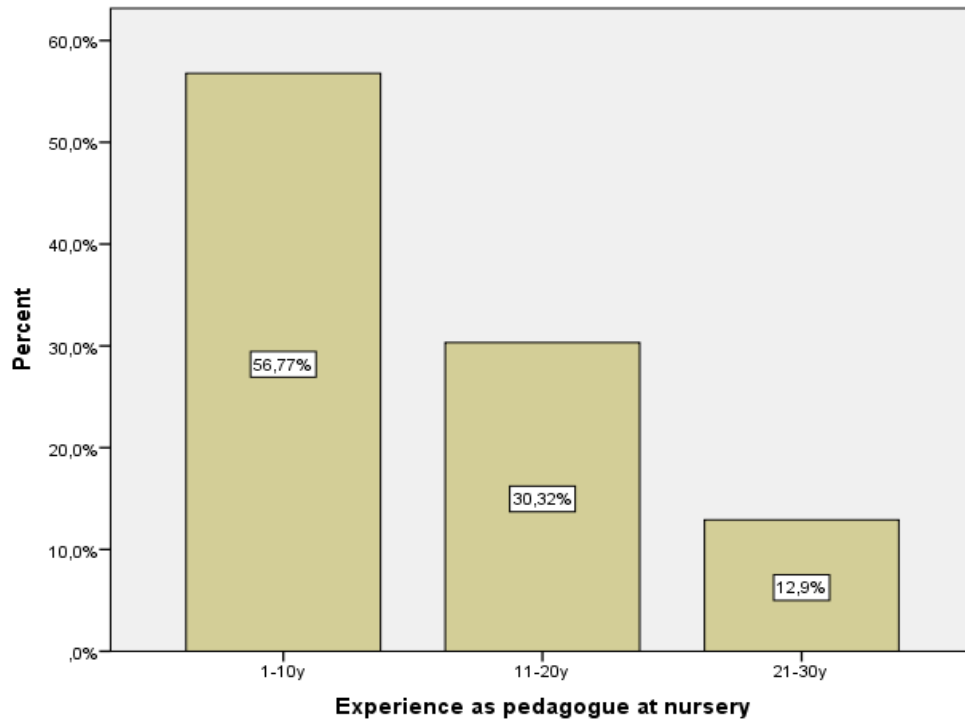
FIGURE 1: RESPONDENTS' AGE



Source: Developed by the authors

In terms of work experience as pedagogues in preschool institutions, the majority, 88 (56,8%) has 1-10 years of experience, 47 (30,3%) 11-20 years while a mere 20 (12,9%) have professional experience longer than 21 years (Fig. 2).

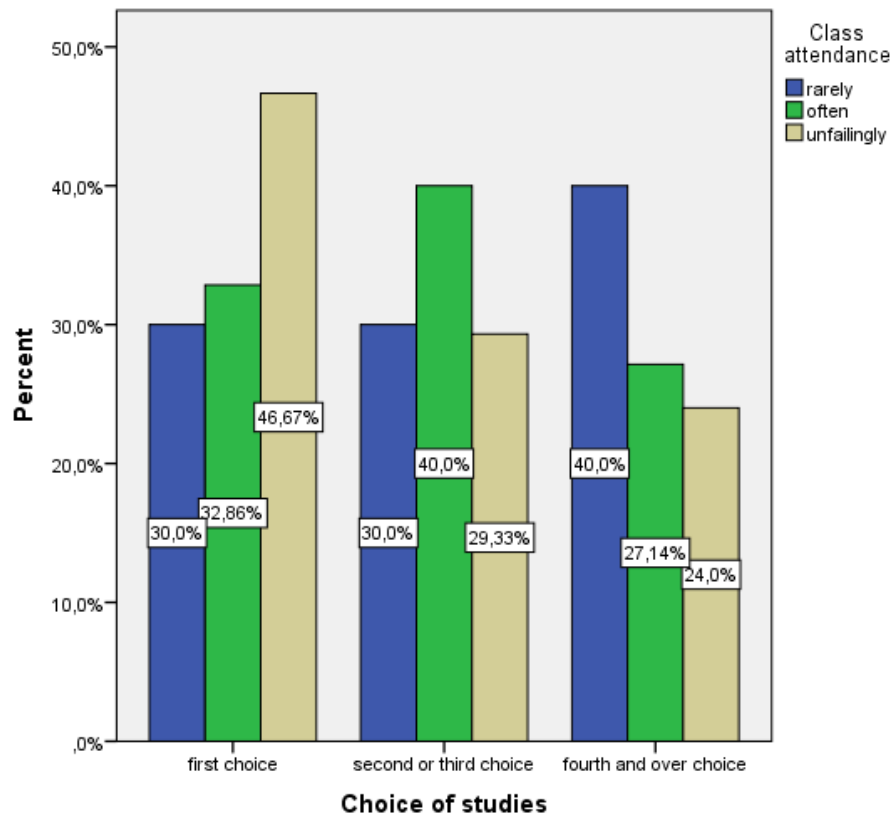
FIGURE 2: PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE AS PEDAGOGUES



Source: Developed by the authors

In terms of qualifications, the vast majority, 150 (96,8%), hold a bachelor's degree, while a mere 5 (3,2%) hold a post-graduate degree. However, their choice of field of study appears to have been a deliberate one: 61 (39,4%) of the respondents had selected the Early Childhood Department of TEI as their first choice in their post-exam application for tertiary education, while for 53 (34,2%) the Department was the second/third choice, and for 41 (26,5%) it was the fourth or later choice. In addition, the order of preference is reflected in class attendance. As illustrated in Fig. 3, students whose first choice was the Early Childhood Department unfailingly attended classes, unlike those whose order of preference was different.

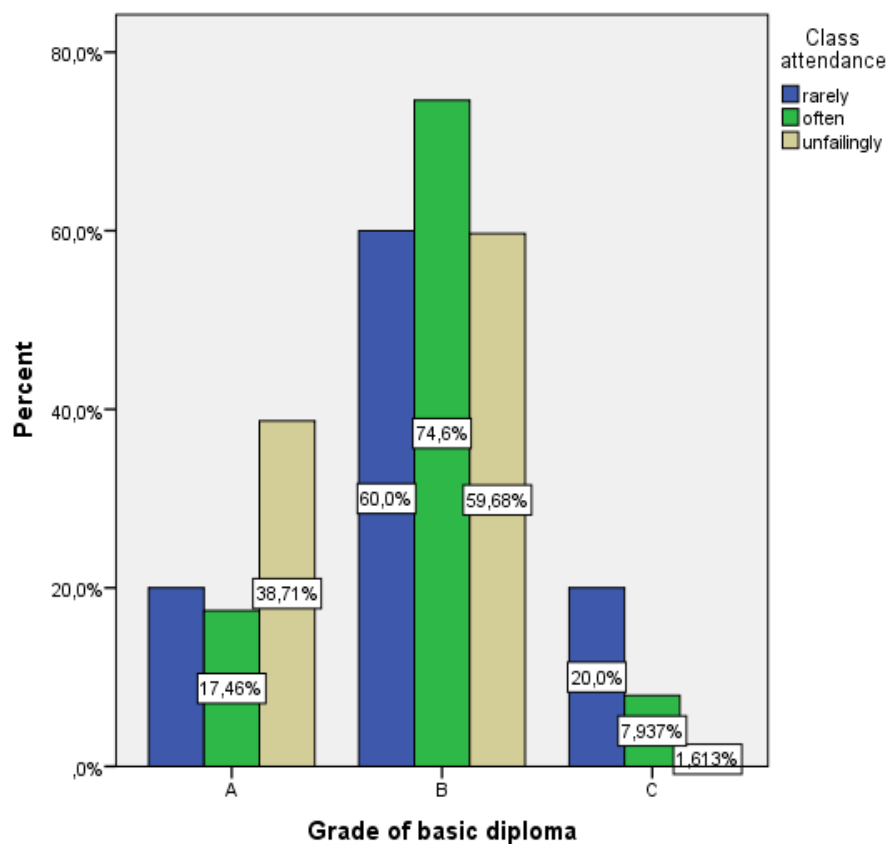
FIGURE 3: BIVARIATE CORRELATION: CHOICE OF STUDY AND CLASS ATTENDANCE



Source: Developed by the authors

Class attendance appears to have an impact on average degree grades. Students who attended classes more diligently obtained their degree with grades A and B, as opposed to those with lower class attendance, who obtained a C (Fig. 4).

FIGURE 4: BIVARIATE CORRELATION: CLASS ATTENDANCE AND AVERAGE DEGREE GRADES



Source: Developed by the authors

With regard to the students' epistemological interest in the core modules, it can be seen that their preferences vary, with pedagogy being given top priority and psychology, art and medicine following (Table 1).

TABLE 1: STUDENTS' PREFERENCES FOR MODULES

	little		enough		very		very much		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Psychology	2	1.3	31	20.0	83	53.5	39	25.2	155	100.0
Pedagogy	1	.6	6	3.9	39	25.2	109	70.3	155	100.0
Art	42	27.1	84	54.2	23	14.8	6	3.9	155	100.0
Medicine	110	71.0	34	21.9	10	6.5	1	.6	155	100.0

Source: Developed by the authors

Significantly, this ranking varies when the pedagogues' professional experience is correlated with module importance. This finding is presented below following the correlation analysis.

4.2. Impact of initial studies on pedagogues' professionalism

This section presents the data analysis results regarding the influence of initial studies on pedagogues' professionalism. The first finding is that a high percentage (65.2%) of pedagogues regard long term (6-month) practice in preschool institutions as an extremely important experience that prepares them for their future vocation, while the rest of the respondents (34.8%) see the 6-month practice as an 'intermediary' offering them an insight into the work field and its distinct characteristics. The second finding concerns the communication skills acquired by pedagogues during their initial studies. It appears that their communication skills with colleagues are better (enough 51%, very 14.2%) than their communication skills with children's parents (enough 32.9%, very 5.2%). In addition, the T-test for dependent samples for the variables of communicative skills with parents and communicative skills with colleagues shows a statistically significant difference, $t(154) = -6.58$, $p < .001$.

Subsequently, it was found that a rather high percentage (45.8%) of pedagogues working in preschool institutions collaborate with university students-prospective pedagogues. Further, the T-test for independent samples shows that the correlation of professional experience and collaboration with students-prospective pedagogues not to be statistically significant, $t(153) = 0.64$, $p = 0.07$. Similarly, the correlation of the

variables of age and collaboration with students-prospective pedagogues is not statistically significant, $t(153) = 1.27$, $p=0.20$. Finally, peer learning activities are deemed very important for pedagogical work and professional development (enough 5.8%, very 94.2%). The T-test for dependent samples and for the variables of module importance shows statistically significant differences for the pairs of variables: Pedagogy and Medicine $t(154) = -28.29$, $p<.001$, Pedagogy and Arts $t(154) = -2.75$, $p<.001$, Art and Medicine $t(154) = -5.78$, $p<.001$. The rank correlation test according to Spearman's rho between the variables of pedagogues' experience, communicative skills, collaborative skills and the relevance of gained knowledge shows a positive correlation for some pairs of variables (Table 2).

TABLE 2: CORRELATIONS OF VARIABLES

	Age	Experience at nursery	Communication skills with colleagues	Importance of PLA	Courses importance Pedagogy	Courses importance - Medicine
Age	1 155					
Experience at nursery	.797** .000 155	1 155				
Communication skills with colleagues	.064 .428 155	.217** .007 155	1 155			
Importance of PLA	.090 .264 155	.196* .014 155	.047 .561 155	1 155		
Courses importance - Pedagogy	.158* .049 155	.042 .606 155	-.129 .109 155	.006 .937 155	1 155	
Courses importance - Medicine	.055 .499 155	.172* .032 155	.186* .020 155	-.014 .868 155	-.351** .000 155	1 155

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Developed by the authors

4.3. Favored forms of Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

This section presents the data analysis findings with regard to the variables of forms of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The statistical *multiple responses* analysis shows that preschool pedagogues resort to various forms of CPD, such as seminars and self-study. A significantly small number have attended training programs or have finished a post-graduate course (2,6%) as a form of CPD (Table 3).

TABLE 3: \$CPD FREQUENCIES

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
\$CPD ^a	Conferences - CPD	146	46.8%	95.4%
	Self- study - CPD	128	41.0%	83.7%
	Training program - CPD	30	9.6%	19.6%
	Postgraduate study - CPD	8	2.6%	5.2%
Total:		312	100.0%	203.9%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Source: Developed by the authors

The correlation of the experience and training program variables was examined to find out the extent to which professional experience is associated with attendance at training programs as a form of CPD. According to the null hypothesis H_0 , there is no difference between the two variables. The chi-squared (χ^2) test showed that a statistically significant difference exists between years of professional experience and training programs attendance $\chi^2(2, n = 155) = 14.68, p = 0.001$ and thus H_0 is rejected and the alternative H_1 accepted. That is, training programs attendance is correlated to years of professional experience, with pedagogues with more years of experience resorting to training programs as a form of CPD to a greater extent. In addition, the experience and self-study variables were examined to find out to what extent professional experience is related to self-study as a form of CPD. According to H_0 , no difference exists between the two variables. The χ^2 test showed that there is no statistically significant difference between the variables, $\chi^2(2, n=155) = 4.88; p=0.87$ and thus H_0 is accepted. In other words, pedagogues resort to self-study irrespective of the years of professional experience. Finally, the correlation between the variables for choice of studies and training program was examined to see to what extent the studies order of preference is related to attendance at training programs as a form of CPD. According to the null hypothesis H_0 , no difference exists between the two variables. The χ^2 test showed that there is a statistically significant difference between

the studies order of preference and the attendance at training programs $\chi^2(2, n = 155) = 10.57$; $p=0.005$ and therefore H_0 is rejected and alternative H_1 is accepted. That is, attendance at training programs is pertinent to the pedagogical studies order of preference, with pedagogues whose first preference was pedagogy resorting to training programs as a form of CPD to a greater extent.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

By analyzing the survey results in terms of the demographic characteristics of pedagogues, we found that the majority of them are of a young age. It was also established that the vast majority had work experience of up to ten years. These findings suggest that preschool pedagogues constitute a workforce with needs, who meet the criteria for further developing their professional competencies.

The first survey question was about the pedagogues' incentives to pursue this vocation and their degree of interest in pedagogical studies. Taking into consideration the findings on class attendance and average degree grade, the survey results have established that pedagogical studies were given high priority by pedagogues. These findings reveal a workforce that begins their career with strong motivation and a major epistemological interest. In terms of module relevance, pedagogues prioritize pedagogy-related modules, which also prove their dedication to their field of work. On the other hand, the survey finding that only a small percentage (3.2%) has completed postgraduate studies highlights the need of postgraduate courses being created by Early Education Departments at Greek TEI, either autonomously or in collaboration with other relevant tertiary education departments.

The second survey question concerned the influence exerted by initial studies on the vocational demands of pedagogues. It was found that the combination of theory and practical training provides pedagogues with vocational skills, while long-term (six-month) practice in preschool institutions is highly conducive to their preparation for their professional roles. As pointed out by the European Commission Childcare Network, initial studies should incorporate pedagogical theory and practice (EC, 1996). The findings suggest that their studies provided pedagogues with higher communication skills with colleagues than with children's parents. This can be explained by the fact that, on the one hand, there are not sufficient communications and pedagogue-parent collaboration modules while; on the other hand, mentor pedagogues do not seem to encourage parent-related initiatives during practical training. It is a very hopeful sign that pedagogues regard collaboration with colleagues as an important factor and that *peer learning activities* in the context of studies are deemed extremely useful and effective for their professional development. As also stated by Urban et al, competence should be understood as a system characteristic, rather than a set of skills and knowledge of a particular individual (2011).

The third survey question concerned the forms of Continuing Professional Development favored by pedagogues. The findings establish that, irrespective of age and professional experience, pedagogues very often attend conferences and resort to self-study. These findings can be accounted for by the fact that the institutions where they work only provide occasional seminars, as opposed to regular training programs. This highlights the need to create regular training programs, as CPD is now more necessary than ever for all professionals and for pedagogues in particular. Such programs will enable pedagogues to keep up to date with all the developments in pedagogical science and child development.

5.1. Suggestions

Three main suggestions can be drawn from the present research. Firstly, preschool pedagogues display dedication to their initial studies and increased epistemological interest in their vocation, which, however, are not supported by regular training programs throughout their career. Their increased interest and need for continuing studies must be met through the design of relevant postgraduate courses and regular training programs. Secondly, although pedagogues are supported in developing collaborative skills during their initial studies, they are not adequately supported in building skills related to managing their relationships with parents. The provision of academic modules on communication and collaboration with parents, as well as encouragement to take initiative in parent-related situations during their practical training will be necessary as well as sufficient conditions for the development of more competent pedagogues in this respect. Finally, both initial studies institutions and providers of continuing professional development must continually reform the content of their programs content so as to meet the emerging vocational needs of pedagogues.

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A VIEW OF THE REFUGEE CRISIS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN THROUGH CLASSICAL EUROPEAN GEOPOLITICS

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ABSTRACT

By using theories of classical geopolitics this paper aims to shed some new light on the refugee crisis and particularly on NATO's mission in the Aegean. Unlike what has been publicly supported by the leaders of Germany and Turkey, who have been the real brokers of the mission, refugee flows towards Europe may be a secondary objective. NATO's mission needs to be viewed within the context of the ongoing crises in Ukraine and Syria as well as in combination with historical data pointing towards German-Turkish cooperation against Russia.

Keywords: Aegean Sea, Classical Geopolitics, Germany, Turkey, NATO, US, Russia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Following the meeting of the German Chancellor (Merkel) with the Turkish Prime Minister (Davutoğlu) and his Dutch counterpart (Mark Rutte) in March 2016 (“Turkey and Germany agree on plan to ease refugee crisis - Al Jazeera English,” n.d.) NATO has been assigned with the mission to “patrol” the Aegean Sea by means of a taskforce led by Germany (“NATO expands migrant mission in Aegean Sea | News | ekathimerini.com,” n. d.) In press parlance, the description of the mission was grosso modo, the prevention of illegal immigrants and refugees from crossing that narrow strip of water that lies between the Greek islands’ coasts and the Turkish coast. However, given that NATO is a huge military organization, dedicated to Europe’s protection, eyebrows are raised with regard to NATO’s mobilization to tackle an issue that has to do with, essentially, unarmed civilians illegal crossings. Moreover, since Turkey – a NATO member-state – is the country of origin of illegal immigration, it would seem saner to have the Turkish coastline patrolled, not only by sea but also by land, in cooperation with the Turkish police and coast guard. Additionally, and as the alliance has no interdiction mandate (up to this point), reservations have been expressed with regard to the efficiency of such a mission (“NATO’s Mediterranean Mission | Foreign Affairs,” n.d.)¹

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This paper aims to present a different interpretation of NATO's mission in the Aegean, based on classical geopolitical concepts and narrations related to the southern, archipelagic² tip of the Balkan Peninsula; an effort is made to interpret the decision behind North Atlantic military alliance's mobilization in order to tackle, essentially, civilian flows. Particularly, it will be argued that NATO's mission in the Aegean, with a possibly expandable (in the future) mandate towards interdiction of shipping, is the latest of the tactical moves that can be better understood if seen within the context of the crises in Ukraine and Syria and aims at exercising pressure on Russia in both theaters. It is claimed therefore that the refugee and migration flows are a secondary or even tertiary objective of the Alliance and particularly of the states that have suggested NATO's mission in the Aegean – i.e. Germany's and Turkey's – while its primary objective is to reverse the course of events in Ukraine and Syria that have, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, brought about concrete damages not to NATO in general, but particularly to these two countries. Germany and Turkey, therefore, are trying to contain their damages by reverting to classical German and Turkish geopolitics that in the past targeted Russia.

The paper will further suggest that although the US has – rather coldly – backed the German-Turkish plan for NATO's Aegean operation, due to the fact that it views the Aegean from the aspect of its value for the Sea Power and of the role it plays in *Heartland* geopolitics, it may have different aims that are directly linked to its Global Policy. Refugee flows, German, Turkish or even NATO national and corporate interests are also tertiary worries for the US, as it will be argued, since the US looks for ways to perpetuate its supremacy in Global politics. It is suggested, therefore, that the US uses the German-Turkish NATO initiatives in western Eurasia (which appear to be serving Germany's and Turkey's particular regional interests – and they do, up to a point), in order to promote US positions in the Archipelago. Accordingly – at least to Geopolitics Theory – US does not intend to leave the Archipelago under the control of any of the powers of the *Heartland*, be that Germany, Turkey or, of course, Russia, as such a prospect would be harmful to its own interests as the Sea Power. NATO's new mission precludes a greater engagement in the Aegean by the US and, in terms of Global Politics, could either signal attempts to block Russia's exit to the Mediterranean or (more likely) to regulate it with the aim to extract Russia's cooperation in other places of the region and of the planet. Germany's and Turkey's initiative might have exactly the opposite results than those they expected: Instead of a western blockade to Russia, which they would have wanted to use as a leverage in order to achieve Russian concessions in Ukraine, the Black Sea and Syria, may have opened a line of communication between US and Russia.

2. CLASSICAL GEOPOLITICAL NARRATIONS AND THE AEGEAN

Before proceeding to the main argument, a brief sketching is required of the major classical geopolitical narrations that are used, of their geopolitical pan-regions and of the role the Balkan southern archipelagic tip plays in each of them. This sketch will also provide our general background upon which NATO's mission in the Aegean will be interpreted, in combination with ongoing crises in Ukraine and Syria and is based, at the same time, on the historical German-Turkish geopolitical convergence in western Eurasia.

The southernmost tip of the Balkans, Greece, is mainly a constellation of numerous islands of various sizes, scattered over the sea route from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Black Sea, to the south of the mainland of the Balkan Peninsula and to the east of the Anatolian (or Asia Minor) Peninsula. Peloponnesus, while connected to the Balkan mainland via a land isthmus at its north-eastern corner, is essentially the biggest of the islands, acting together with Crete (the 2nd bigger and southernmost island – save for Gavdos – of the Archipelago) as the political and economic center of gravity of the Archipelago. This relatively small region of the planet, the southern archipelagic tip of the Balkan Peninsula has been traditionally the overlapping area of several traditional geopolitical conceptions:

1. The most famous geopolitical narration is Mackinder's and Fairgrieve's *Heartland* (Robert D. Kaplan, 2012; Mackinder, 2004)³. In Mackinder's view, the *Heartland*, historically, has been contested for by a multitude of nations and has, therefore, been called in a variety of ways, acquiring each time its different appellation in the literature of Geopolitics, depending on the nationality of the author. Even Mackinder himself defined the *Heartland* in slack geographical terms (Cohen, 2015) (Fig.1), assigning to it different boundaries over time. Depending on the historical period, some of the names it can be described with, for example, are Napoleon's *French Empire*, the Germans' *Libensraum*(Cohen, 2015)⁴ or *Mitteleuropa* and Russia's *Eurasia* (Laruelle, 2008)⁵.

2. The second geopolitical conception and narration derives from Hodgson's geographical concept of the *Wider Middle East*, found in his gigantic 3vol. work (*The Venture of Islam*) named as the *Oikoumene* (Hodgson, 1977)⁶ (Fig. 2), after the Greek term for the ancient, known to be inhabited, world from the eastern shores of the Atlantic up to India, covering the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, the Middle East, Central Asia and south Asia (Pakistan, India).

3. The 3rd geopolitical concept has also its roots in Mackinder's view of geography and politics and is described as the *Middle Tier*, a belt of nations stretching along the North-South axis, from the Baltic Sea to the Aegean Sea, nations who defy particularly German and Russian geopolitical maximalisms to control the *Heartland* (Kearns, 2009; Mackinder, 1919)⁷ (Fig. 3).

4. The 4th pan-region is that of *Central Europe* (Fig. 4), put forward by American perspectives on European Geopolitics during the last phase of and, particularly, after the Cold War. *Central Europe*, as Kaplan explains, is actually the American post-cold war effort of peace in Europe, but can be essentially described as an expanded version of *Mitteleuropa*, embracing the pan-region of *Middle Tier*, stretching as far as the nations of the Middle East to the south, Scandinavia to the North and Central Asia to the East (Robert D. Kaplan, 2012).⁸ It has been – up to recent events in Ukraine – America's solution to the security problem of Europe (Brzezinski, 1998, pp. 57–86).

5. A 5th famous geopolitical concept (Fig. 5), offspring of the Cold War's polarized politics, is the notion of the *Rimland*, the littoral belt of nations and nation-states stretching along the western, southern and eastern periphery of Eurasia, from the U.K. and Western Europe to Japan. As regards western Eurasia, the *Rimland* narration encompassed what had been described in Geopolitical theory as the westernmost regions of the *Heartland* geopolitical concept and the belt of *Oikoumene* (or the wider Middle East) from Hodgson's geopolitical narration.

The southernmost archipelagic tip of the Balkans, Greece, is part of the narration and an overlapping point of all 5 major, God's-eye view, classical geopolitical approaches to Eurasia. Yet, its particular role is characterized by a peculiarity, which is better demonstrated when one takes into consideration the narration of the 6th geopolitical pan-region.

6. The archipelagic southern tip of the Balkan Peninsula also forms an integral part of another geopolitical pan-region, which has been described by Mahan as the realm of Sea Power or as *Thalassocracy* (a term deriving from the Greek word describing possession of and command over the Seas): The Earth's oceans. Because of the uniformity (as opposed to the *pluriformity* of land terrain) of the nature of the world's seas, *Thalassocracy* historically as a unified political universe, as opposed to the political multiversity of land politics.

One may understand the Archipelago's role in Classical Geopolitics by looking at its relation to *Thalassocracy*; Mackinder, here, too, stands highly explanatory: as he comments on the *Middle Tier* zone he states that due to Greece's openness to the Seas, although it forms part of the *Middle Tier* and, historically has been part of the *Heartland*, it is also an independent geographic entity (Robert D. Kaplan, 2012; Mackinder, 1919)⁹ In his works Mackinder assigns particular importance to the Aegean: Inclusion of the archipelagic space of the Aegean into the sphere of a power of the *Heartland*, he says, may mean the total domination of this power over the world (Mackinder, 1919, p. 204).¹⁰ In his 1919 version of the an expanded *Heartland*, Mackinder leaves Greece out of this zone, because Greece, as he says, is so much bounded by water and therefore accessible to sea power. He therefore considers the Archipelago as the domain of the Sea Power. This, one may add, is a geographical fact deriving from the archipelagic nature of Greece and which applies also in the case of the other narrations of Geopolitics, be they *Mitteleuropa*, *Oikoumene* or *Rimland* etc.

If Greece is a “detached” part of the *Heartland*, then it is a “detached” part of the *Oikoumene*, or of *Mittleuropa*, of the *Rimland* and so on. Greece is a natural juncture and as every juncture it has an existence of its own: a joint, discernible from the limbs it adjoins (for example the two geopolitical regions with vertically intersecting orientations: The North-South orientation of Mackinder’s *Heartland* and the East-West orientation of Hodgson’s *Oikoumene*).

From the perspective of *Thalassocracy* (Sea Power) the archipelagic tip of the Balkan Peninsula is the only geographical point to which access to and, therefore, influence on the geopolitical zones of Western Eurasia is permissible. Due to its function as the bottleneck of the Black Sea, which lies in the center of the geographical region geopolitically conceived as the *Heartland*, the control of the Archipelago of the Aegean Sea functions as a regulator for the fate of the *Heartland* (Mackinder, 1919, pp. 53, 134, 204).¹¹ Even without knowledge of geopolitics and just by looking at the map, one may realize the fact that the Aegean, with its thousands islands, rocky-islands and reefs is a major choke-point. In fact, in modern times, it is the only choke-point between the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea since the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits are covered by international treaties that ensure safe passage of the shipping of Black Sea’s littoral states during peace. The Aegean Sea, the Dardanelles, Bosphorus straits and Crimea may be treated as essentially one strategic hotspot, but the Aegean Sea clearly has added strategic value due to the mere fact that it is the entrance to an enclosed sea (Black Sea) and the exit to an open Sea (Mediterranean), while the Straits have the opposite function (Mahan, 2013, p. 8).¹²

In the narrations of *Middle Tier* zone, *Mittleuropa* and *Central Europe*, the Archipelago provides contact with and access to the southern edge of these pan-regions, playing an important role in political developments (R. D. Kaplan, 2013 Kindle Locations 2392-2393).¹³ In the narration of the *Oikoumene* or the *Wider Middle East* and depending on the historical circumstances, the Archipelagic tip of the Balkan Peninsula functions as a barrier which helps in keeping the *Heartland* isolated from the former or, at least, partly in contact with it. Historically, this targets not so much the Russian geopolitical narration of *Eurasia* (since Turco-Russian historical enmity guarantees that there cannot be any long lasting Russo-Turkish convergence) as Germany’s attempts (Robert D. Kaplan, 2012 Kindle Locations 2394-2399, 2415-2416)¹⁴ to merge its vision of *Mittleuropa* with the Ottoman/Turkish versions of *Oikoumene* and *Middle Tier* – attempts such as those witnessed between Germany and the Ottoman Empire or Germany and Turkey in WWI and WWII respectively (McMeekin, 2010, p. 122) or expressed by Turkey’s ex-Prime minister (Davutoğlu, 2001). In other words, it helps keep the wider Middle East in a regulated contact with the rest of the zones of Eurasia and particularly with a Europe dominated by Germany. Of course, depending on the historical and political circumstances, it may act as a joint which brings them together. In the narration of *Rimland*, Greece, along with the Archipelago, according to George Kennan’s description of 1947, was pivotal for the

control of the whole of the southern European shores and of parts of the Middle East (Jervis and Snyder, 1991, p. 85. 95. 120).

3. EXPLAINING NATO'S PRESENCE IN THE AEGEAN THROUGH CLASSICAL GEOPOLITICS AND THE WARS IN UKRAINE AND SYRIA

Having presented the major classical geopolitical narrations about western Eurasia, it is time now to use their analytical power in order to sketch the interpretation of NATO's mission in the Aegean and to conjecture on its future results, in relation to the foreign policies of the main protagonists. As it was suggested at the beginning, NATO's mission in the Aegean was the result of Russia's direct and indirect blows, stroke at the heart of Germany and Turkey's web of interests in western Eurasia. Since Germany and Turkey are NATO's biggest member, to an extent their losses are also NATO's losses. These 3 actors (2 nation-states and 1 military alliance/organization) hope and aim to amend the damages suffered by them or even reverse the course of events in Ukraine and Syria:

3.1. Ukraine and Germany

Russia's moves in Ukraine have inflicted a major blow on Europe's most important experiment, the EU and, through it, indirectly to Germany. The project so far has been artificially sustained mainly through a constant expansion to the east, towards ex-soviet space in a conscious effort to keep the German Industrial Minotaur satisfied (Brzezinski, 1998). Each European enlargement was preceded by a NATO's one to include the new countries/markets within the North Atlantic security structure. It was a practical way to provide Europe with a temporal solution to the "German Problem", by keeping the German Minotaur "fed" with new markets and NATO as a guarantor of peace. The project, nevertheless, has practically stopped in Ukraine, due to Russia's objections to any further EU advance to the East. As it may be understandable, the practical halt of EU in Ukraine will affect Germany's behavior, and since Germany is a key NATO member this development has the potential of affecting the core politics of the alliance. In reality, the civil war in Ukraine proves the limitations of the European Post-Cold War security structure.

3.2. NATO, Germany and Ukraine

NATO's mission and self-understanding after the Cold War has been interwoven with EU's expansion to the east, which in turn serves European security (NATO's main objective) by keeping Germany saturated in exchange for peace in the continent. Russia's current intervention in Ukraine has put an abrupt stop to it and this is an issue that poses serious questions about NATO's corporate existence, as well as self-

perception. For 2-3 decades NATO has been functioning under the premise that it “pacifies space” and then EU “expands” into it. In Ukraine quite the contrary happened. Neither EU expanded nor did NATO “pacify” (quite the contrary happened, actually). Everything came to a halt, if not to an end. Moreover, Ukraine has proven to be a manifold failure for NATO’s peace keeping rhetoric: a country, close to Europe’s borders (even European by some standards) has drifted towards an unwanted condition, where war and violence dominate. Thirdly and more important, following the events in Crimea, one may say that the Black Sea has almost completely been appropriated by the Russians. From Crimea, now, and through its long-range weaponry, entrance to the Black Sea is largely under Russia’s eye (Kucera, 2016), making NATO’s presence there precarious. The latter development brings us to the other key NATO ally, Turkey.

3.3. Turkey, NATO, Germany and Ukraine

Russia’s new positioning in Crimea brought about something unwitnessed before in history: Control over who exits from the Bosphorus straits, en route from Eastern Mediterranean to the Black Sea, now, does not rest only with the power dominating the land adjacent to the waters but also with the one controlling Crimea. With a distance ranging between 550-600 km between Crimea and the mouth of Vosporus strait, any ship unwanted by the Russians entering the Black Sea through the Straits can be targeted by their SS missiles (“P-800 Oniks,” 2016).¹⁶ This tells a lot on Russia’s dependency on Turkey’s disposition regarding the straights. Constantinople, to the benefit of Kherson, is no longer the Queen of the Straits. Russia, now, not only benefits from the provisions of the Montreux treaty as regards access to the Mediterranean but, in case of war, it can practically negate any foreign naval presence in the Black Sea. This, finally brings us to the Syrian crisis.

3.4. Syria, Turkey, NATO, Germany and Ukraine

If Russian intervention in Ukraine has placed Germany, Europe’s most important NATO member, in a predicament, its intervention in Syria, combined with the partial control over the Straits, has caused a nervous break-down in NATO’s most important member in the Middle East: Turkey. Russia’s intervention on the side of Syria’s President Al-Assad was a game-changer as regards the course the Arab Spring would follow in Syria; particularly for Turkey, it was a devastating event as it promoted, indirectly, the emergence of Rojava Kurdistan, which, together with the Iraqi Kurdistan threatens to cut Turkey off Arabia’s Sunni Muslim hinterland in the short term while in the long term and given the (apparently) excellent relations between US and Kurds, it sounded Turkey’s geopolitical degradation. Russian involvement in the

operations on the ground favored the Kurds against all other elements of the Syrian opposition (radical or not) (“How Russia sees Kurdish quest for autonomy,” 2016).

3.5. The geopolitics of the Archipelago

Germany and Turkey are the two NATO countries that have suffered most of the damage from the recent Russian engagement in Ukraine and Syria. Germany loses its status as the leading power of Europe and faces the prospect of economic stagnation due to the halt of EU’s enlargement enforced by Russia. Turkey, on the other hand, has lost its status as the sole regulator of the Straits, while it faces further future geopolitical diminution in the Middle East because of the Rojava Kurds. Both countries, contrary to their dreams of regional leadership, now face a less grandiose future. It is therefore understandable that both of them would be interested in reversing the course of events that so far have benefited Russia and have been degrading their geopolitical status. It is within this context, as stated previously in the paper, that one should view NATO’s engagement in the Aegean.

At first glance, suggesting that NATO’s Aegean mission aims at serving German and Turkish interests may appear as an overstatement – and to an extent it is. NATO’s mission also serves NATO’s corporate interests, given that NATO’s self-perception is tied to an expanding Europe, with Ukraine in it. On top of that, NATO’s mission in the Aegean seems irrelevant to Ukraine and is only linked to the crisis in Syria. Germany justified the move based on illegal refugee flows, yet, as stated at the beginning, these are just civilian flows, not really posing any immediate security risk.

Turkey, even though being the source of the flows, also justified the German-Turkish proposal more or less on the same terms, trying to extort as many benefits as possible from the EU. As will be demonstrated below, by asking for NATO presence in the Aegean, Germany and Turkey played their geopolitical classical aces in an effort to bring pressure to Russia in Ukraine and Crimea and to remind Russia of the fact that its southern ports (Crimea’s included) can be choked off. Germany will try to use it as a trump card for a more moderate position as regards Ukraine’s future in the EU.¹⁷ As regards Turkey, having NATO in the Aegean with a possibly expandable mandate towards interdiction, was one step closer to intercepting the only supply line towards Assad and towards the Kurds. Secondly, Turkey sees this as a first class opportunity to publicize its claims over some of the islands of the Aegean.

4. A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF GERMAN-TURKISH CONVERGENCE OVER THE WIDER REGION OF THE AEGEAN

In order to achieve their aims, Turkey and Germany had to obey the laws of classical European Geopolitics and their actions converged over the Aegean, whose

strategic location enables the exercise of pressure on Russia, with the aim of achieving results both in Ukraine and Syria.

In fact, German-Turkish convergence over the Aegean is a historical pattern of contemporary history. Both the Ottoman Empire and Kemalist Turkey have played an important role in Germany's geopolitical quests in modern history while, on the other hand, Germany, too, was a key factor in the geopolitical view of the world of both the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. At the end of the 19th century and as Germany – in Chancellor Bülow's words – was trying to find its "place under the Sun" following its *Drang nach Osten*, its geopolitical dreams met with those of the Ottoman Empire. Beginning from 1882 (Trumpener, 1996, pp. 109, 111)¹⁸ their contacts (which included the construction of the Baghdad railway (Avery, Hambly, & Melville, 1991, pp. 2, 3) and high investments in Ottoman Empire (Marian Kent, 1996, p. 108) culminated in the dispatch of a German general to assume responsibility of the defence of Constantinople and, from 1914, of the Straits (Marian Kent, 1996, p. 111; Kissinger, 1995, p. 198; Moschopoulos, 1922, p. 8ff). Turkish defence of Kallipoli, which has been recently (so symbolically) saluted by Davutoglu after the deal with EU for the refugees, was, to a point, a German success, too. As would be the case in WW2, one of the demands Turkey made on Germany, in order to provide its alliance, had to do with dominion over some of the Aegean Sea islands and Germany, of course, accepted it (McMeekin, 2010, p. 110).¹⁹ The Ottoman Empire's geopolitical view, inspired by its Pan Islamism and Pan Turkism complemented Germany's and targeted the same enemy: Russia, with the Aegean Sea being an essential element in their plans (McMeekin, 2010, p. 111).²⁰

The role of Turkey was equally important in the plans Nazi Germany made for its new world order. Franz von Pappen's, the German ambassador in Ankara, remarks on Turkey's pivotal position are indicative of this fact (Weber, 1979). In reality Germany was interested in a Turkish alliance much before WW2. They had exchanged military councils and had been discussing over the status of the Bulgarian borders and over the fate of Mosul, i.e. Iraq, (Leitz, 2000, p. 92), for which the Germans had been gathering intelligence, if not openly fomenting revolt against the British. Pan Turkism reappeared in Turkish politics and the Germans saw in it a possible ally in their effort to destabilize the Turkish nations of the Soviet Union and create a diversion for the Russian Army. Turkey was not indifferent to this flirt, either. First of all Nazi Germany's rise and defiance of WWI treaties restored partial control over the Straits for Turkey (this was done partly with the help of the Soviet Union) in 1936 (the Montreux Treaty (Leitz, 2000, p. 93), by which international supervision over the Straits was abolished. Secondly, in discussions with Germans, Bulgarian borders were being redrawn theoretically and this time to the benefit of Turkey. Thirdly, as of September 1943 Germany was in possession of the Aegean islands of Dodecanese, which it was bargaining in exchange for Turkey's commitment to war on its side. Again, the Aegean and its wider region were focal points of the German-Turkish flirt.

It is more than obvious that Germany and Turkey follow that same geopolitical pattern. The main and extremely important difference is that Germany (so far) does not have its own independent military resources and is therefore dependent on NATO. Turkey, on the other hand, has its own military resources (a strong army and navy) and has tried to nullify Russia's gains over the straits by provoking a state of war with it (by shooting down a Russian jet in Syria and executing one of its ejected pilots), in order to invoke the Montreux provisions and to block Russia at the straits (cutting its indirect support to the Kurds via the Russian sea line to Assad), but since Moscow reacted cool-headedly, the next best choice for Turkey was to bring NATO in (with the cooperation of the other want-to-be-regional superpower) and also try, to engage the US; this brings us to Sea Power perspectives.

5. SEEING THINGS FROM THE SEA: THE US, UKRAINE, SYRIA AND THE AEGEAN

NATO may view its new mission in the Aegean as a counter-balancing move to Russia's almost total appropriation of the Black Sea or as a corporate reaction to avoid changing its orientation and self-perception, as regards security in Europe. For the US, though, NATO's involvement in the Aegean is probably viewed from the classical geopolitical perspective of the Sea Power. Control over the Archipelago (at least according to geopolitical theories) is a guarantor that the pan-regions of Eurasia will not unite under a continental power, be that Russia, Germany or whoever else might threaten US supremacy in western Eurasia. Moving NATO within this semi-closed sea with a loose (expandable?) mandate, may presage a greater US engagement in this geopolitical hotspot of western Eurasia – which had been sought for by the US even earlier – but not necessarily a greater NATO engagement (“Athens Macedonian News Agency: News in English, 15-05-15,” n.d., “Επιμονή Καμμένου για Αμερικανική βάση | Kathimerini,” n.d.).

US interests are not 100% identical to those of NATO or to those member-states that proposed the Aegean mission. It is therefore far from certain that, in the long run, the US shares the same interests as Germany or Turkey, as regards NATO's objectives in the Aegean. It is true that Russia's intervention in Ukraine has brought US in a rather difficult position: America is Europe's peace guarantor, and the “peace mechanism” (NATO pacification-EU expansion) needs to be fed in order to perform its main function, which is providing a solution to the centuries-old “German problem” of Europe (Brzezinski, 1998, p. 57). Still, if seen clearly from a US standpoint, Ukraine is a problem created by the nature of the European experiment itself (one should not forget that some of the German politicians were, understandably, the main supporters of Ukraine's EU candidacy and that EU enlargement in the case of Ukraine preceded NATO membership for the first time in the history of EU enlargement). In the Sea Power perspective, under such circumstances, Ukraine's EU

membership may have appeared as another attempt to control the *Heartland*, a concealed *Drang nach Osten*. Secondly, even if the US had backed EU's enlargement more vigorously, and even if the latter had succeeded in Ukraine, the fact that the EU, by its nature, would have to continue expanding towards Central Asia, against a furious Moscow, means that it would stumble somewhere deeper in Eurasia, with incalculable consequences.

Besides dealing with the moribund EU, the US, as the leading NATO member, has to deal with the orientation of the alliance: should it rearrange NATO's dogma, whose self-perception, after the end of the cold war, has been tied to the process of EU expansion and thus to the mechanism that now has reached a dead-end in Ukraine and faces imminent collapse? Or should the US press forward with "business as usual" risking a confrontation with a soured Russia, which may eventually lead to a war and to a US involvement, while ensuring negative or inimical Russian disposition towards US interests elsewhere in the world?

In the Middle East, too, US interests are not in any grave danger, despite Turkey's (a US ally) precarious position vis-à-vis Russia. Quite the contrary, one might say: The effect the Arab Spring and the subsequent establishment of ISIS had in Syria was the complete collapse of central control in the Kurdish regions at the north-east and north-west of the country (and elsewhere, too). Given that the Kurdish population is one of the factors in Syria that is trusted the most by the US, Turkey's openly expressed will to suppress the Kurdish national movement in the country (under the pretext of its possible spreading over its own Kurdish populated areas) must have been a constant headache for the US. Any attempt on the US part to provide any guarantees for the security of the Kurdish populations would be regarded as hostile by its NATO ally and probably would have been vetoed anyway. Russia's involvement in Syria, therefore, acted as a US balancing card that helped put the US out of the predicament as regards its Kurdish allies, securing at the same time that Turkey would not unilaterally invade Syria's northern regions.

6. CONCLUSIONS

NATO's mission in the Aegean presages a greater US involvement in the region. Even though the crises in Ukraine and Syria, by which NATO's mission was justified, are major sources of concern for NATO and particularly Germany and Turkey, the US interests are not directly affected by them. Based on classical geopolitics, this paper suggests that NATO's Aegean mission is an effort by Germany and Turkey to put some pressure on Russia's access to the Mediterranean Sea, in order to contain their damage in Ukraine and Syria respectively (German-Turkish convergence vis-à-vis Russia is a standard geopolitical behavior observed in other crises, also). Turkey would be particularly interested in choking off Russia, since that would mean that it could continue its efforts to suppress the Kurdish national movement in Syria (by the

same means it has used so far) with Russia, finally, being unable to respond appropriately. Choking off Russia at the Turkish straits would be more preferable, by invoking the Montreux articles (this was probably the main reason why the Russian jet was shot down by TuAF in November 2015), but Russia carefully maintained a peaceful mood. The next best thing then for Ankara was the Aegean, and illegal refugee flows could be used as a pretext, all the more so since they could be controlled by Turkey.

If looked at through classical geopolitics theory, the way things evolved in Ukraine and Syria has enabled US to strengthen its presence along the buffer states that have been described as the *Middle Tier* by Mackinder. In this way, US has now a full overview of the contacts between the major geopolitical players of the *Heartland*. Moreover, given that the strategic hotspot of the archipelagic southern Balkan tip remains too crucial an element in the global strategy of the Sea Power to leave it to the affairs of others, any German and Turkish plans, in the long run, to bring about concessions on the part of Russia through NATO's mission in the Aegean, is contingent on US strategic plans as regards its relations with Russia.

NOTES

1. This was actually one of the two points of critique that were exercised on NATO's engagement. As Zhukov correctly points out, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg emphasized that stopping refugee ships would not be part of it. Instead, NATO would focus on deterring people-smuggling networks through intelligence and surveillance. For example, NATO will monitor migrant flows and share information with Greek and Turkish coast guards, as well as the EU border control agency, Frontex.
2. The term archipelagic is used here with its geographic connotations and not with its legal/jurisdictional dimensions that derive from International Sea Law.
3. Like almost all of the classical geopolitical conceptions, the "Heartland" is fluctuant and loosely defined conception, not just in geographical terms but also in terms of History and Politics. It was first sketched by Sir Halford Mackinder in his hereby referred to paper. Later on, as Kaplan points out, Mackinder's disciple, James Fairgrieve, coined the term "Heartland".
4. See Haushofer's visions of a united "Eurasian pan-region" in p. 25: "He proposed variously a German-Russian alliance, a Pan-Russia-South Asia grouping, and a Japan-China-Russia bloc. His call for Germany, the USSR, and Japan to form a Eurasian panregion that would dominate World-Island..."
5. See, p. 202: "Eurasianism... stood for different modes of combination, alliance, or fusion between two entities seen as having a substantive reality: "Europe" and/or "the West," on the one hand (the difference has never really mattered to Eurasianist thinkers); and

“Eurasia” and/or “Asia,” on the other hand. In the interwar period, a group of Russian émigrés transformed the idea of Eurasia into an ideology called Eurasianism: a complex set of ideas that marshal a range of disciplines (history, linguistics, geography, economics, and ethnology) to demonstrate the naturalness of the entity designated as Eurasia. This intellectual construct has two levels: If Eurasia exists, merely awaiting self-revelation, this means, first, that the peoples inhabiting it have something in common and, second, that they ought to live together in a single state. The Eurasianist ideology is fundamentally statist; it is based on the presupposition that only a polity “conscious” of its own identity may aid the “realization” of the naturalness of Eurasia”. In this respect the culturalist theories of Eurasianism are intrinsically linked to a legitimization of empire and are part of a tradition of movements that, since the Slavophiles of the 1830s and 1840s, have been seeking to define how Russia is a distinctive, non-European civilization”.

6. For a Definition of Oikoumene (Ecumene), see p. 50. For its Greek roots, see p. 109.
7. See p. 213: “but the peoples of the Middle Tier — Poles, Bohemians, Hungarians, Rumanians, Serbs, Bulgarians, and Greeks—are much too unlike to federate for any purpose except defense, yet they are all so different both from Germans and Russians that they may be trusted to resist any new organization of either great neighbor making towards the Empire of East Europe”. Moreover, on p. 212 Mackinder underlines the importance of an Independent Middle Tier in Eastern Europe separating the Germanic world from the Russian, while on p. 204, referring to the WWI, he directly connects Greece’s independence from Germany to Britain: “The Greeks were the first of our seven peoples of the Middle Tier to achieve their emancipation from German control in this War for the simple reason that they are outside the Heartland and therefore accessible to sea-power”. As pointed out by Kearns Mackinder sought to deprive Russia both of the western part of the Heartland and of an outlet through the Black Sea into the Mediterranean. He also wanted to make it difficult for Germany to extend itself eastwards, making a play for sole control of the Heartland itself, see p. 156. This geographical belt of nations has been referred to by Mackinder’s disciple, Fairgieve as “cush zone” or buffer zone, see (Cohen, 2015, p. 190).
8. See Kindle Location 350-441. Mainly it is the geopolitical notion behind West’s drive towards East, either in the form of ex-soviet states’ inclusion in the EU and NATO or in the form of western interventions in Yugoslavia and Iraq (and generally the Middle East) from the ‘90s until present time.
9. Kaplan suggests that for Mackinder, Greece was a fascinating exception: A detached part of the Heartland open to influence from the sea power. Unlike Greece, the rest of the Balkan Peninsula and the Anatolian Peninsula are considered as Heartland’s geographic extensions by Mackinder (Mackinder, 1919, p. 134).
10. Referring to WWI, Mackinder makes the following comments: “... in these days of submarines and aeroplanes, the possession of Greece by a great Heartland power would

probably carry with it the control of the World- Island; the Macedonian history would be reenacted”.

11. Here Mackinder provides historical examples to support his view: “The fact that the Macedonians rendered the Aegean a closed sea enabled them to sea”—thus depriving the Greeks and the Phoenicians of their bases— was that allowed Alexander the Great, a Macedonian, the luxury to attempt the land conquest of the Greater Near East”; also, on p. 134: “Under Rome, the realm of the seamen had been advanced to the northern shore of the Black Sea; under the Ottoman Turks the Heartland, the realm of the horsemen, was advanced to the Dinaric Alps and the Taurus”; see also p. 204 where he states: “But in these days of submarines and aeroplanes, the possession of Greece by a great Heartland power would probably carry with it the control of the World- Island; the Macedonian history would be reenacted”. These, we think, crystallize Britain's concept of the strategic importance of the Greek Peninsular/Archipelagic space as regards its relation with the “Heartland” powers. It is included in the nations of the Middle Tier that need to remain independent from either Germany's or Russia's grip.
12. The value of the Aegean as entrance to the Mediterranean is expressed by the following segment, in Mahan's words: “At present, indeed, it seems that the centre of sea power, resting mainly with England and France, is overwhelmingly in the West; but should any chance add to the control of the Black Sea basin, which Russia now has, the possession of the entrance to the Mediterranean, the existing strategic conditions affecting sea power would all be modified”.
13. “For, as I will argue, it is Germany, Russia, and, yes, Greece, with only eleven million people, that most perceptively reveal Europe's destiny”. Elsewhere in his book, Kaplan states: “Yet it is interesting to contemplate what would have happened during the Cold War had the negotiations between Churchill and Stalin gone differently: imagine how much stronger the Kremlin's strategic position would have been with Greece inside the communist bloc, endangering Italy across the Adriatic Sea, to say nothing of the whole eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. The Greek financial crisis, so emblematic of Greece's political and economic underdevelopment, rocked the European Union's currency system beginning in 2010, and because of the tensions it wrought between northern and southern European countries was nothing less than the most significant challenge to the European project since the wars of the Yugoslav secession. As Greece ably demonstrates, Europe remains a truly ambitious work in progress: one that will be influenced by trends and convulsions from the south and east in a world reeling from a crisis of room”.
14. This is particularly important even today, since, as Kaplan put it “...German power is enhanced by both a larger Europe, and also by a Europe in which Mitteleuropa reemerges as a separate entity”. Besides that, “The very fact of a united Germany has to mean comparatively less influence for the European Union than in the days of a divided Germany, given united Germany's geographical, demographic, and economic preponderance in the heart of Europe. Germany's population is now 82 million, compared

to 62 million in France, and almost 60 million in Italy. Germany's gross domestic product is \$3.65 trillion, compared with France's \$2.85 trillion and Italy's \$2.29 trillion. More key is the fact that whereas France's economic influence is mainly limited to the countries of Cold War Western Europe, German economic influence encompasses both Western Europe and the former Warsaw Pact states, a tribute to its more central geographical position and trade links with both east and west".

15. "In 1947, George Kennan warned that loss of Greece would 'render a tremendous impetus to "bandwagon" adherents to the communist movement: It might well be sufficient to push both Italy and France across that fateful line which divides the integrity and independence of national life from the catastrophe of communist dictatorship. It might mean that final loss of our positions in North Africa; and the Iberian Peninsula could then not long hold-out. It might well make hopeless the position of other non-communist countries in northwestern Europe . . . It would necessarily paralyze the political will of [England] and would probably make it impossible for it to do anything else than to cling to a precarious and unhappy neutrality". See also p. 95: "Dean Acheson warned the cabinet that "if Greece fell within the Russian orbit, not only Turkey would be affected but also Italy, France, and the whole of western Europe"" and p. 120: "Greece was at the top priorities in 1947 of the strongpoint policy: The resources for the strongpoint strategy were to be primarily economic and were meant to lift the sagging morale of nations that ringed the U.S.S.R. The Joint Chiefs, though they now advocated a perimeter strategy, were asked to draw up a list of areas of strategic importance to the United States in June 1947. Asia was at the bottom of their list of regions and China was thirteenth of sixteen nations considered to be important to containment. Europe, including Greece, was at the top".
16. Referring to the operational range of Oniks missiles.
17. See the consequences the Italian-Turkish war of 1912 had Russian trade and economy, in McMeekin, p. 102: "The closure of the Straits during the Turkish-Italian war of 1911-12 had devastated Russian shipping, cutting off most of her burgeoning grain export trade, not to mention imports of components desperately needed by Russian industry".
18. See p. 111: "From 1882 onwards, German involvement in the military affairs of Turkey had increased with the arrival of a small group of officers under General Major Otto Kaehler. Following Kaehler's death in 1885, the group had been taken over by Lieutenant-Colonel Baron Colmar von der Goltz, who worked with great energy and enthusiasm during the next ten years, advising the Turks on general staff matters, military organisation and training procedures. Late in 1895, Goltz returned to active service in the Prussian army, first as a divisional commander and later as a 'commanding general' (corps commander), but he kept in touch with his Ottoman pupils and some members of his mission remained in Turkey. One of them, Louis Kamphövener, ennobled in 1900, served as inspector-general of the sultan's infantry for a number of years; several others officiated as inspectors of the Ottoman cavalry, artillery and engineering corps. Among the inspectors who were sent to Turkey in later years was Erich Weber, a colonel in the engineers, who rose to divisional command during the war and headed one of the

Reichswehr's military districts afterwards. (Weber's daughter subsequently married another veteran of military service in Turkey, Karl Dönitz, the later grand admiral and Hitler's successor as head of state." By 1912 Germany had opened 20 new consulates in the Middle East, see p. 109: "By 1912, German consular posts in Asiatic Turkey alone numbered close to twenty, including three in the Mesopotamian region (Mosul, Baghdad, Basra), over half a dozen in 'Syria' and Lebanon (Aleppo, Damascus, Tarabulus, Beirut, Haifa, Jaffa and Jerusalem), two in Cilicia (Adana and Mersin), and two on the Black Sea coast (Samsun and Trabzon)."

19. Referring to the secret negotiations between the Turks and the Germans in 1914 and the deal to concede Aegean Islands to Turkey: "The belligerent Enver, keen to get Turkey into the war, was willing to let the German warships in for free, but fortunately for Ottoman diplomacy he was overruled by the Grand Vizier. Said Halim's asking price was steep: Germany must accept the abolition, in perpetuity, of all the Capitulations which still granted exceptional legal status to Europeans in the Ottoman Empire; she must obtain fair terms for Turkey if Bulgaria or Romania entered the war; she must promise to return former Ottoman islands to Turkey if Greece joined the Entente powers and Germany won; she must promise to adjust Ottoman borders in Anatolia eastwards so as to 'place Turkey into direct contact with the Muslims of Russia'; and last, Berlin must 'see to it that Turkey receives an appropriate war indemnity'. Although predictably offended by the onerous price Germany was being asked to pay to, in effect, turn over two powerful warships to the Ottoman Empire, Wangenheim realized he and Admiral Souchon had no choice. He signed the deal late in the afternoon on 6 August 1914".
20. Referring to the German admiral Souchon in 1914: "Because of political complications at the Porte, his original orders to reach Constantinople had actually been rescinded by the German Admiralty on 5 August, although Souchon had been left free to determine his own course. As the stubborn commander later recounted, he chose, entirely of his own volition, to make a risky dash through the British screen to Constantinople in order 'to force the Turks, even against their will, to spread the war to the Black Sea against their ancient enemy, Russia".

APPENDICES

FIGURE 1: S. B. COHEN, *GEOPOLITICS: THE GEOGRAPHY OF
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS*,
THIRD EDITION (LANHAM: ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD, 2015)



FIGURE 2: MAP BASED ON HODGSON'S CONCEPT OF OIKOUMENE (ECUMENE), SEE G. S. HODGSON, *THE VENTURE OF ISLAM, VOLUME 1: THE CLASSICAL AGE OF ISLAM* (UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 1977)

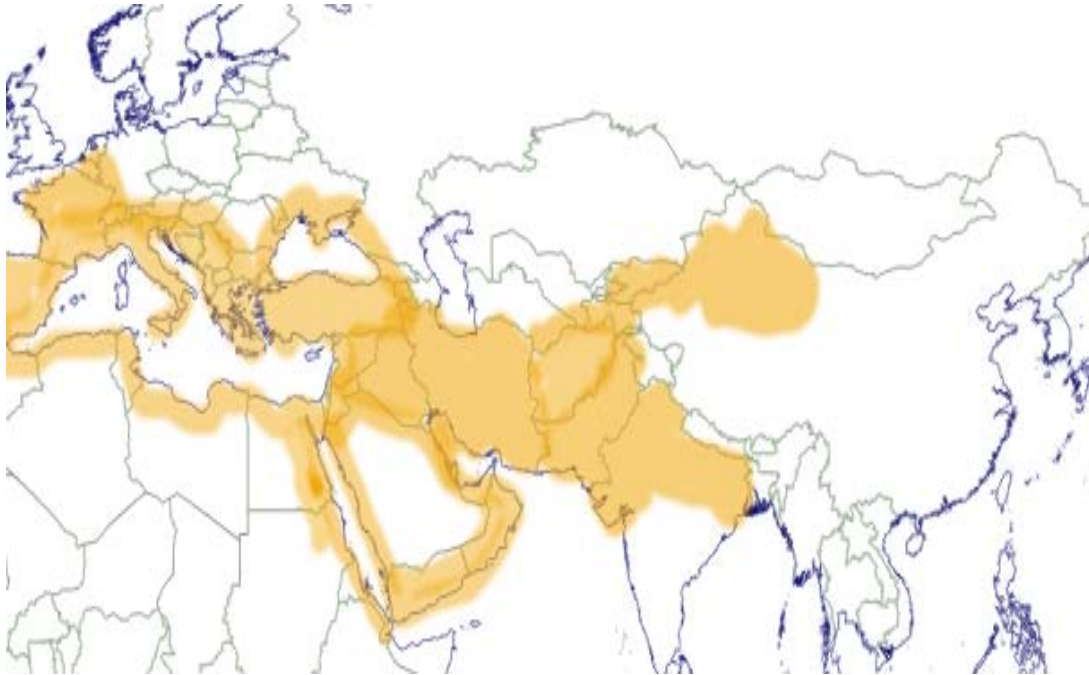


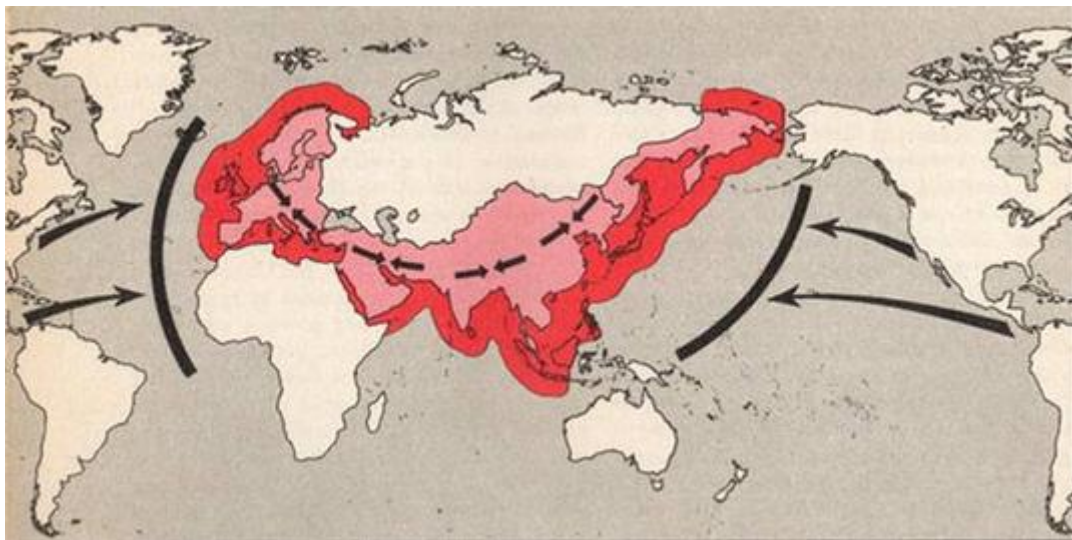
FIGURE 3: THE MIDDLE TIER, MAP BASED ON: H. J. MACKINDER,
*DEMOCRATIC IDEALS AND REALITY: A STUDY IN THE POLITICS OF
RECONSTRUCTION* (H. HOLT, 1919), P. 213 (THE BALTIC REPUBLICS
SHADED IN LIGHTER COLOR)



FIGURE 4: THE PAN-REGION OF CENTRAL EUROPE (MITTELEUROPA + MIDDLE EAST) WITH ITS PROJECTION TOWARDS CENTRAL ASIA: GEORGIA AND AZERBAIJAN (AND OTHER STATES?)



FIGURE 5: SPYKMAN'S RIMLAND



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THE FRENCH TOUCH IN LUXURY: AN ATTEMPT OF DEFINITION

DOMINIQUE ANTONINI*

ABSTRACT

This paper provides an academic definition of the “French Touch”, in the luxury industry. In the present context of growing demand for luxury goods, academics and professionals use the term as a common place, but there is a lack of specific literature. Therefore, an exploratory research is conducted among experts in order to clarify the object, to understand the phenomenon and to construct the definition. This paper demonstrates that the expression “French Touch” has a multi-dimensional structure. Altogether it is a mind-set that drives attitudes and behaviours, that bears strong symbolic values, and that is regarded as a paramount point of reference.

Keywords: French Touch, French luxury, Fashion, Symbolic value, Mind-set.

1. INTRODUCTION

The demand for luxury goods and services has been soaring during the last decade despite the economic downturn of certain countries. There is an abundant literature about this subject. French luxury has a long-established tradition as well as a world-wide recognition. From this context a term emerges: ‘French Touch’. The expression is used by luxury brands in many fields such as fashion, services, gastronomy. The French Touch is rooted in commercial narratives used in customer-destined contacts. Jean-Paul Gaultier always dresses his models with “*marinière*” (a sailor strip jersey) or beret which are French common places. Luxury hotels such as Sofitel New York provide French style interior design.

The expression “French Touch” extends to many other fields, sometimes beyond the boundaries of Luxury. “French Touch” is a bio restaurant in Courbevoie (France), the brand name of beauty salons makeover; the expression is also used as a prefix or a suffix of brand names e.g. The New York French Touch Conference about tech-ecosystems, beauty-frenchtouch.com. Even Renault, the French car company produced advertisements about French Touch. The advertisements which put the French Touch into action provide ‘clues’ represented by French characteristics and clichés: The Eiffel Tower, the streets of Paris, a young beautiful lady elegantly dressed, relishing a gourmet dinner in a charming chateau, a romantic atmosphere and many more. As an anchor point of our article we propose a basic and temporary definition of ‘French Touch’ in a socio-economic context: ‘French Touch refers to a

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set of attributes, images, symbols, values attached to a product that makes it typically French'. Subsequently, a more accurate definition is suggested in the last section.

The lack of specific literature in Marketing and Management prompts us to opt for a non-conventional literature review entering into the historical and professional background, extending beyond the domain of business academics per se. In the first section we review literature on "French Touch". In the second one, we report on empirical research and attempt to provide a definition of what the French Touch is.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. *The Country of Origin Effect*

We cannot talk about the French Touch without talking about the country of origin of the concerned product. The French Touch seems to be directly bound to the fact that a product is made in France. There have been many definitions of the country of origin in the literature, ranging from "the country where a product is made to the country where the head office of the company is located", (Yong, 1996; Johansson *et al.*, 1985), as well as 'the place of manufacture' or even "the origin of the product components" (Thakor and Lavack, 2003; Parsons *et al.*, 2012).

Looking separately at the above mentioned meanings, the actual country of origin of a product becomes rather unclear. Certain products would have a different country of origin for each of the definitions. In the last 20 years, numerous researchers have proven that the country of origin of a good, influences the customer's attitude towards the concerned good. The topic was initiated by Schooler in 1965. He found that products, which have their origin in less developed countries are perceived to have a lower level of quality. In the following years researchers like Bilkey and Nes (1982), Cordel (1992), Tse and Gorn (1993) discovered that stereotypes do exist in customers' minds and that those stereotypes not only influence the way they evaluate a certain good, but they even influence their final purchase decisions (Phau and Pendergast, 2000). There are different ways, which lead to those associations in consumers' minds. The above mentioned, researchers have found that a consumer has either a positive or negative experience with a certain product from a certain country. This experience creates country-related product associations, which then influence the individual's evaluation of other products of the product category from the same country (Chen, 2014).

However, following research has discovered that consumers' mind-set concerning certain countries is far more complex and goes far beyond country-related product associations. Peeter, Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999), discovered that there are two different categories of associations, which are not product related. They call them 'affective associations' and 'normative associations' and differentiate them as follows: 'affective associations' are generated by direct or indirect exposure to country-related

information, whereas normative associations are a function of long standing cultural, political, and economic factors.

None of those associations are directly related to any products from any specific country, but Chen's research from 2014 proves that they still do influence consumers' evaluation of the product. In other words, consumers have heard or experienced certain things in relation to a country. This creates associations in the individual's mind-set and thereby a country-related affect which then influences his product evaluation and purchase decision.

In the last two decades, globalization has caused more and more companies to move production outside their home country in order to minimize costs. Many products are not even produced in a single foreign country, but some parts are produced in one country, others are produced in a different one. In many cases, the knowhow, that makes the product what it is and which is the source of the product's differentiation, does not come from the country it is produced in. However, the country a good is produced in, is legally and by definition as mentioned above, the product's country of origin. The question is, doesn't the "Made in..." lose its meaning, if the actual place of creation of the product is somewhere else? (Phau and Pendergast 2000).

One solution researchers have found is to have different labels. "Made in..." and "Assembled in..." is not the only one figuring on our everyday products anymore. "Designed in...", "Engineered in..." and "Parts supplied by..." are more and more common labels, (Phau and Pendergast, 2000). The researchers explicitly state that the country of origin of a brand does not change if the country of production changes, and that the "*Made in...*" label is not related to the brand's perceived country of origin, (Phau and Pendergast, 2000).

Even if people do know that the products are not actually produced in the brand's country of origin, this does not change their perception of the country of origin. However, some brands do reinforce the country of origin of brand association by making the country or a certain city in the country part of the brand name. Phau and Pendergast give the examples of "Donna Karen New York" and "Pierre Cardin Paris".

In Marketing, according to the research of Herz and Diamantopoulos (2013), especially emotional country-specific associations can be used very effectively in Marketing communications. In other words, if marketers know how the particular country of origin of their product influences customers' evaluation, they can use it to increase the likelihood of purchase by adapting their communication. For example, if a company has a country of origin with a favourable image and high reputation, the firm should highlight the country in their communications and include it clearly in their communication strategy. If the country of origin is favourable for example, the "Made in..." label should figure well visibly on the product and packaging and consumers' attention should be drawn to it during advertising.

In certain sectors, an advantageous “Made in...” label is a real competitive advantage, which is very hard to be copied. Koschate-Fischer *et al.* (2012), prove this assumption with examples like perfumes made in France or luxury handbags which are made in Italy.

Moreover, if a firm’s products have an unfavourable country of origin, the marketers should focus on other things in their communication strategy and omit stating the country of origin. Here the European legal background plays a very important role: In Europe the “*Made in...*” label is mandatory, which means that companies are not legally obliged to write the country of origin on each product. Consequently, if a product has an unfavourable country of origin, the firm can just decide not to put the label on it and leave the customer uninformed about the products’ origin. If we go further, the company can even choose a different country with favourable country of origin associations and make the consumer perceive the product comes from this country. As the product does not have a label, the consumer is unlikely to question the perception (Koromyslow, 2011).

Koschate-Fischer *et al.* discovered in 2012 that promotion is not the only one of the 4 Ps which is concerned by the country of origin effects. When setting the price, a company needs to take into consideration these effects. In his research Koschate-Fischer has found in his research that the perceived country of origin directly influences the price consumers are ready to pay for a certain product. Consequently, marketers can achieve much higher prices, when their product is perceived to have a favourable country of origin. They also need to be conscious of the fact that they have to set lower prices, if the country of origin of a product has an unfavourable reputation. Consequences of this discovery are tremendous, because it puts into question the whole idea of relocating the production of a good to a developing country in order to decrease production costs. While production costs might be lower for example in China than in European countries, the country’s reputation concerning quality is likewise lower. According to Koschate-Fischer *et al.* this directly reduces the price consumers are willing to pay for the product and thereby decreases the firm’s margin. Finally, the relocation of the production does not point to success, because the higher margin on lower costs is nullified by the lower prices, (Koschate-Fischer, 2012).

According to Kapferer and Bastien (2012), countries differ in their attitudes towards luxury. France has a vision of intimate luxury, for the connoisseur where history, know-how and detail are consumed before enjoying the object on its own terms. Luxury is pleasure. Luxury is backed-up by the principle of non-ostentation, wealth must be hidden.

In the USA everything must have a functional alibi (“a diamond is forever”, in addition to professing love, it is also a good investment). A Porsche is beautiful and has a good resale value. For the American, the pursuit of happiness is a duty and a right. You progress through life through more comfort, more performance and more

efficiency. In Japan, luxury must be expensive. Superior quality is in second place. The brand must be prestigious. Japan does not consider neither being exceptional, nor the fact of being bought by a minority as criteria of luxury.

In Russia the consumption of luxury is a defence mechanism, to be loved and earn respect, as a reaction to the past shortages during the communist era. The signs of value must be strong, known and recognised. You exist through luxury. Displaying that you are important people dictates the consumption patterns in China (“She chi”). A further element is the conformity to the group or the mass snobbery. Consuming luxury items in India means that you have climbed the rungs of society through economic success, and you flaunt your status. India resists Western luxury as they have their own skilled artisans; hence the ‘hand-made’ does not mean a value. Kapferer (2012) brings forwards that behind the luxury brand, lies the country cachet and culture. Luxury goods are bought for being the finest objects and services a country can produce, with the additional unique cachet of being “made in”. To remain a true luxury brand, entails sticking to local production.

2.2. The French Touch

Before discussing details of the French Touch and its definition, it is important to present its historical context. French fashion was born during the 17th century on the impulse of Colbert, Minister of Finance and Superintendent of Royal Buildings, “Arts et Manufactures”. Colbert played a prominent role in making French craftsmanship famous throughout the world. He encouraged the creation of “manufactures”, occasionally importing skills to ensure excellence, and promoted exports by increasing the navy. Colbert developed harbours and the created a trading company (*La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et des Indes Occidentales*), as well as the Académie de France in Rome and the Comédie-Française theatre company (Castarède, 2006; Ormen, 2011). In Versailles Louis XIV displayed his style decorated with gold, silk and lace to the entire world especially during the great parties of the Royal Court. This resulted in the French population being extremely proud of their fashion luxury and gastronomy. The Sun King had many skilled workers from Flanders or Venice in order to build numerous French “manufactures” in Versailles. French luxury was envied by other countries and remains as a reference.

During The Age of Enlightenment, love, romance, and women were highlighted. Seduction can be noticed through clothes, make up and so on. The real sophistication of French fashion with the unique artisanal know how.

The French women around 1815 wore corsets and underskirt, men wore dark suit; both genders were romantically dressed. The clothes reflected the era which was extremely guided by literature and art.

Under the Second French Empire, Paris became enviable and attractive. Boutiques multiplied, creators and stylists settled down, and fashion spread.

At the end of the XIX century, France was regarded by the entire World as the leader of fashion, sophistication, elegance and savoir-faire. Today, fashion weeks take place in Paris, New York, Milan, and London, but designers still want their blessing in Paris where fashion is more than a business, it is part of French history, traditions, heritage, know-how and culture (Castarèdes, 2006; Ormen, 2011).

France is synonymous with elegance, fashion luxury, represented by French women, and has been exported and imitated in Europe. But the French ones are easily recognizable. Dior compared French fashion to a myth, intangible, and ephemeral. He has also talked about French elegance as unique. Even if at the moment Italy or the United States are well-known for their industry or products, France is certainly the most creative one. But the French elegance stays unique and exclusive to French, mostly women. Some people called it the subtle duo between creativity of the designer, and the creativity of the women who wear it.

According to Daphne de Saint Sauveur et Emily Lane (1998), the French Touch, applied to interior design is characterized by an effortless elegance that characterizes the arrangement of a vase of wild flowers on a cottage table in Normandy as much as the choice of objects d'art on a Louis XVI escritoire in a luxury Parisian apartment. This book is an opportunity to sample this wonderful way of life, with a wealth of lavish colour photographs that take the reader into the most beautiful homes of France. Chateaux, mansions, farmhouses and village homes, modest townhouses and tiny flats: all reflect in every detail the taste and personality of their owners. Gardens are no less important, and they have been laid out, embellished and cared for with equal devotion, whether acres of formal landscape or a small townhouse patio. Everybody concerned with the design of interiors or gardens will find this book an inspiration: everybody who knows and loves the French will enjoy an intimate record of a mode de vie of enviable ease and charm.

In 1954 Jean-Jacques Guerlain creates the Comité Colbert. Their object is to internationally promote the French values and to combine tradition, modernity, craftsmanship, creativity, history and innovation. The Comité Colbert currently has a membership of seventy five companies from the world of luxury and creation. All of them share a contemporary vision of the art of fine living, striving to constantly develop and enrich it by exploiting their diversity. They represent one-quarter of the world luxury sector. Today this elegance is also intimately related to art and culture. The French Touch came from this context (Castarèdes, 2006; Ormen, 2011).

2.3. Defining the French Touch

To our knowledge, there is no academic definition of the French Touch. The expression is used as such and applied to fields other than Marketing, including entrepreneurship (Lasch and Yami, 2008), banking, sport, social networks, and social domestic matters. Numerous non-academic publications, notably trade publications,

periodicals (such as *The Economist* or *Women's Wear Daily*), mass newspapers (such as *Le Monde*, *Capital*) as well as professional magazines, all widely use the term as a common place, to depict a specific pattern (Socha, 2013; De Seze and Vaz, 2013; Lynch, 2012; Solé, 2008). At no time do they provide any definition leaving the reader to assume its meaning.

Interestingly, only one French professional publication has attempted to define the French Touch. In 2011, the *Fédération Française du Prêt à porter Féminin* (French Committee for Ready-to-Wear Clothes), issued a gathering of several definitions. Each of them is different and therefore none of them is in common agreement.

Luxury professionals define the French Touch mainly as a dress code: “Something rare, like an invisible perfection, an encounter between two noble types of matter, skin and fabric, the purpose of which is more the seduction than the appearance”, (Bellieud-Vigouroux, quoted by Örmén, 2011).

Örmén (2011) quotes Jean-Paul Cauvin, grand couturier and CEO of *Julien Fournié SAS* and Jean-Pierre Mocho (CEO of the French Committee for Ready-to-Wear Clothes); for them French Chic and French Touch are often interchangeably used. “The French chic”, is to be well-dressed, without showing that one has made an effort to do so.... To have great taste, as if that weren't a concern”. According to Moch, “The French Touch is the perfect balance of classical elegance and the inclination for forefront fashion”) “The French Touch matches the fantasy and audacity of French women, who always dare, balance and mix styles... who adapt fashion trends to their own whim...”. The fashion designer Chantal Thomas (quoted by Örmén, 2011) says that it is “Something like an elegant casualness”. Örmén mentions also the fashion designers Barbara Boccara and Sharon Krief, who talk about the “casual chic” way of life. The French Touch is a mixture of styles, a pragmatic fashion, which embodies a woman who juggles with multiple lives, her job, her children, her friends.

Other professionals define the French Touch as a lifestyle or mind-set. ‘The French refinement, inherited from the 17th century's tradition, put into use by Louis XIV at Versailles's Royal Court’. Fréry (2012), talks about the “new French Touch” synonym of nonchalance.

Örmén (2011) quotes another experts of luxury, Inès de la Fressange, a former model at Chanel haute couture fashion house. She just mentions how it can be recognized: ‘French Touch can be noticed in the streets, it is envied by foreigners, it is made of mixed elements, it does not mind being regarded as luxury but as elegant, without posture it prefers casualness.

Other definitions provided by professionals depict the French Touch as a source of inspiration. Ludot and Montenay (quoted by Örmén, 2011), talk about the city of Paris, the capital of fashion, the inspiration of the World in words such as “magical, unique, mind set”, and use the word ‘perfection’. Montenay talks about the Parisian woman, the model whose elegance inspires the entire World.

Finally, non-academic sources refer to symbols or clichés. Örmén (2011) quotes Jean-Marc Gaucher (CEO of Repetto) and Laurence Benaïm, (fashion journalist), who wrote that the French Touch is: an image. Brigitte Bardot, the freest woman in the World, laying on the bonnet of a coupé car, wearing a mini skirt and Repetto carmin red ballerina shoes. Everything was perfect: grace, elegance, freedom”. Laurence Benaïm says that the French Touch is: ‘Catherine Deneuve and Françoise Dorléac in “Les Demoiselles de Rochefort”, Dior couture, Louboutin shoes, Pierre Hermé macaroons.

Valérie Haie (2002) asserts that “Luxury is culturally French”, and uses a set of words instead of a complete definition: audacity, modern life, artistic values, accessible luxury, aesthetics, cultural influence, legacy, Paris capital for fashion and taste, immaterial assets, sensuality, glamour, romanticism, great distinction.

Women magazines, such as Woman Wear Daily, trade publications and mass newspapers integrate French Touch in their publications as a standard expression to depict a reference and a fashion trend. Many adjectives stand out: beauty, elegance, refinement, seduction, glamour, icons, rarity, wealth, worldwide influence, supreme point of reference, perfection, atmosphere, freedom, fantasy and magic.

At the end of our literature review, we note that there is an absence of relevant academic literature about the French Touch, and consequently, neither definition nor research to date.

We only know that the country of origin effect comes into play for French products and that there are common core attributes or immaterial assets which can be brought forwards. Many points remain unanswered: What is the French Touch in academics? Does the country of origin effect apply to it? Is the French Touch synonymous with ‘Made in France’ to the customer? Further research is needed.

3. METHODOLOGY

We first conducted a semantic analysis from both the elements provided by professionals and from a dictionary of semantics. Then, we conducted an exploratory research in order to clarify the object, to formulate the problem, to eliminate certain possibilities (Evrard, Pras and Roux, 2003), as well as to understand certain phenomena, such as people’s mind-sets, motivations and process of reasoning.

We conducted semi-structured personal interviews with ‘experts’ of luxury, lasting approximately half an hour to one hour. Interviews were live, recorded and transcribed. The expert analysis method has been chosen because our field of research is new and there are few academic papers and no theory about it (Evrard *et al.*, 2003) and in order to bring forward convergences and consensus.

An expert is any person having a good practical or legal knowledge about a topic, which provides him with the legitimacy to express a representative viewpoint of the group of protagonists he belongs to. An expert is a key provider of information. For

this study, the experts were chosen according to their experience of luxury, including consumers and experts in consumption (Desjeux, 2005; 2006).

The interviewees fit two major criteria. The first one is the country of origin, so that we can get different viewpoints. Twenty respondents were interviewed, aged between 18 and 55 and equally divided into men and women. Five respondents were French, four were Italian, four Latin American, three of them North American, three of them Chinese and one Japanese.

The second criterion is the purchase rate of luxury items. We arbitrarily put a minimum of one purchase every two months and no maximum number.

The experts were five professionals of the luxury industry (present and former), chosen for their knowledge of organisational and commercial strategies, five luxury customers, for their acute sense of luxury buying, four professors specializing in the luxury sector, for their academic approach to luxury and four Master's students specializing in the luxury sector, for both their theoretical interest for the industry and their young viewpoint.

The interview guide offered open questions and was divided into two parts. The first part helped to focus on the understanding of what makes a product typically French, the value of the French Touch and the link to the country of origin. Projective methods were put into action to unlock the defence mechanism and bring forward the main inhibitions in buying (Haire, 1950; Guelfand, 1999).

The interview guide displayed three different advertisements for three different handbags. Those advertisements were not genuine but they had been created for the sole purpose of this research together with invented brand names as mood boards. (De Souza, 1984). Those arrangement of images, were chosen as visual stimulus materials, designed to represent atmospheres and feelings and to explore respondents' experience of a brand and a product.

The three advertisements showed a person and displayed a specific atmosphere. One of them clearly represented the French Touch according to what the non-academic literature stipulates.

The first handbag is from the imaginary luxury product named "The Beauty". The beautiful woman is walking over a green meadow. The sun is shining.

FIGURE 1: MOOD BOARD ABOUT BAG - 1



The second handbag is from the brand “La Magnifique”. The elegant woman is sitting on the terrace of a café. In the background you can see the Eiffel tower glittering in the dark.

FIGURE 2: MOOD BOARD ABOUT BAG - 2



The third handbag is branded “Prettiiness”. The pretty woman is walking through a street. She seems to be having a good time, doing some shopping.

FIGURE 3: MOOD BOARD ABOUT BAG - 3



In fact, it is the same bag, but presented in different colours and in different contexts.

The respondents were asked to express their preferences and to compare the three advertisements, without telling them about the topic of French Touch, so that we could elicit their unbiased opinion about the meaning of the French Touch and the link to the country of origin. The respondents were asked which bag they preferred and to explain why they had made this choice. Then they were asked to assign a different price to each bag and to explain why they would pay more for one handbag than they would for the others. The respondents were then asked to associate each advertisement to a country, and to say in what country the handbags had been produced. We told the respondents that the second handbag had been made in France, and the other two did not have any country of origin label. We asked them what value they would assign to each handbag. Finally, we told the interviewees that all the bags had a “Made in China” label on them and asked them what value they would assign to each handbag.

The second part of the interview guide was structured around several open questions, in order to discover what the French Touch means to the respondents.

1. In your view, what is the French Touch?
2. What makes a brand or a product typically French
3. Please give five words that come to your mind when describing the French Touch.

4. What brands fit the « French Touch »?
 5. The French Touch is highly appreciated by luxury consumers. Why?
 6. Can you describe an advertisement that puts the French Touch visually into play?
 7. What the characteristics of a French-touch-like store would be according to you. (Location, furniture, salespeople, general atmosphere, colours...)
 8. Have you ever purchased a French Touch product?
 9. Is French Touch similar to ‘Made in France’?
 10. Does anything similar to the French Touch exist in your country of origin?
- Then we conducted a content and thematic analysis of consumers’ comments. These tools are recommended for an objective, systematic and qualitative analysis of communications, the purpose of which is to interpret them. (Berelson, 1952; Paillé and Muchielli, 2003). The data collected were manually scrutinized.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. *Semantic analysis*

It emerges from our semantic analysis that the expression French Touch has a multi-dimensional structure. The words provided to explain the French Touch can be classified into four semantic groups of meaning: dress-code, mind-set, symbols and reference. Each group of word forms a dimension with key components.

Group #1 Dress code: aesthetics, sensuality, glamour, beauty, elegance

Group #2 Mindset: lifestyle, audacity, modern life, artistic values, great distinction, freedom, fantasy, exclusiveness

Group #3 Symbols: immaterial assets, romanticism, refinement, seduction, rarity, magic, atmosphere, perfection.

Group #4 Reference: inspiration, cultural influence, Paris capital for fashion and taste, icons, worldwide influence, lifestyle maker.

4.2. *Content analysis*

The customers we interviewed replied that French Touch is something that refers to “Frenchness”, recognizable under designs patterns and styles. The French Touch is appreciated by luxury consumers because they associate the French Touch or the idea of France, at a visual and stylistic level to the conception and reference of luxury, and probably its country of origin. The fields quoted are in Perfumery, Fashion, Linens & Tapestry, Jewelry, Lingerie, and Hosiery. Many respondents quoted, Guerlain, Chanel, Ladurée, Hermès, Givenchy and Chanel which brings forward the French heritage of the brand, even if the world knows Chanel as a French Haute Couture and fashion brand, still for its advertising commercial “Coco Mademoiselle”. The scene takes place in Paris, a woman with nonchalance decided to run away from the man after

spending a night together but she stays stunning, elegant and sexy, the whole situation can be defined as French. The respondents quoted the TV commercial “Prada Candy” in which the name of the perfume is pronounced with an exaggerated French accent. Several brands use this method to give their products a little French Touch.

The most recognizable French Touch would be represented by French clichés. The French Touch is mainly related to tradition, history and elegance, which are automatically associated to the brand. The French Touch is also referred to as the French “Art de vivre” appreciated and envied by customers all over the world. It is a set of French values and cultures unique in the world.

French Touch is inspiring, as it gives a special “touch” to products. Products with the French Touch are mainly products that inspire consumers. It gives them one straight thought about French culture. Indeed, sophisticated, classy, the “French” way of life, are the values that come to mind when we think about France. It may also be a reference to art, culture, music that can only be found in France. The French Touch pushes the customers to impulsive purchase, sometimes at an unreasonable price.

According to our respondents, there is a major difference between French Touch and “Made in France”. It lies in the nature of both terms. While “Made in France” can be determined objectively, the French Touch is much more subjective. “Made in France” is one specific country of origin label and the French Touch, however, depends upon customer perceptions. Certain customers might say that a given product has the French Touch, while other ones might state the opposite. “Made in France” is just a point of information, a geographical differentiation, while the French Touch already implies certain associations. As one of our respondents stated: “Products with the French Touch are mainly products that inspire, and make one think about French culture”. Hence, if a product makes customers think about the French way of life, it has the French Touch.

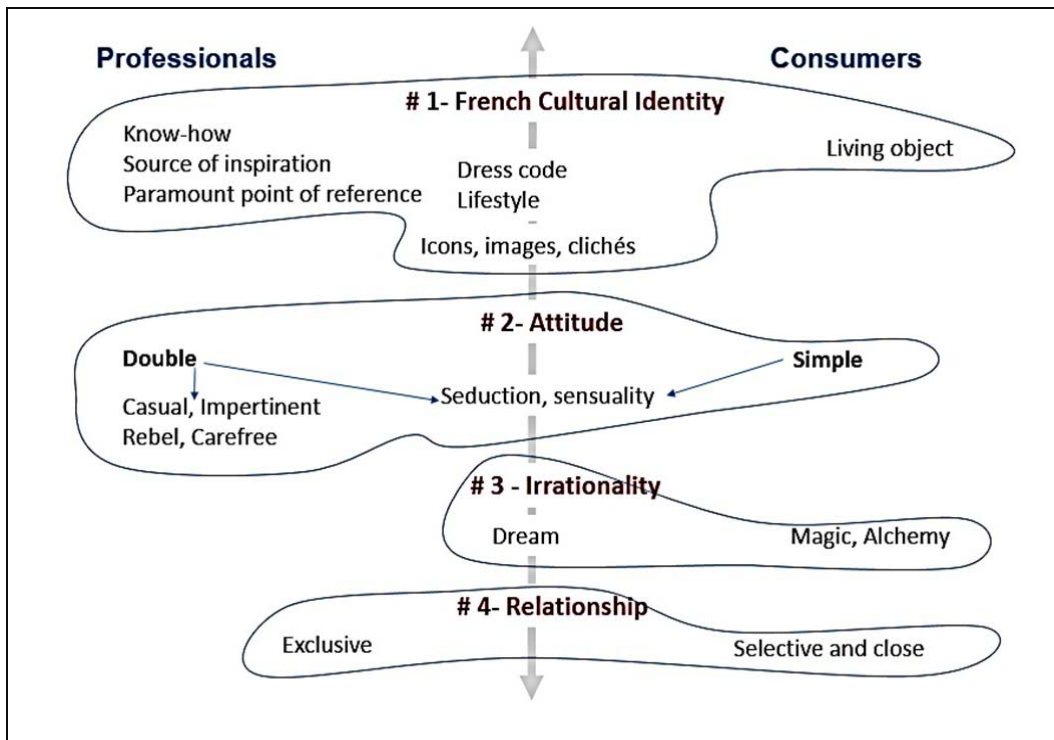
According to the respondents, countries are associated with specific products such as Italy with leather goods, Switzerland with watches, Germany with cars etc. One interviewee said, “If I had to define Italian touch, it would be mainly about design and comfortable luxury; British touch would be edgy and ironic; German touch would be more “squared”, “hard”, and masculine”. Things similar to the French Touch have been mentioned by some interviewees, such as “Deutsche Qualität” for products from Germany. The “French Touch” is a specific term, which is internationally known.

The last difference between the two terms, pointed out by the respondents is that the place of production is an actual fact, which cannot be changed, while the French Touch is created by the brand name whatever the country of origin.

Our study revealed other features. The appeal to French-like items can be explained by affinities with the lifestyle, as well as people’s knowledge and understanding of intrinsic values. It is an open-close world. The French Touch cannot be thoroughly explained because it depends upon the alchemy between people and

products. The emotions caused by the French Touch are strong since they are linked with the needs for recognition.

FIGURE 4: THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF THE FRENCH TOUCH



4.3. Attempt of definition

The definition of French Touch the ‘experts’ provided is close and complementary to the temporary definition given in the introduction. Customers defined the French Touch as a mental state in which people share the same viewpoint about life. ‘The French Touch is a privileged and exclusive relationship with the products. The French Touch applies to a small number of items which have their own “territory”.

From those elements we posit a definition of the French Touch:

‘The French Touch is a mind-set that drives customer attitudes and behaviours, that bears strong symbolic values and that is regarded as a paramount point of reference, augmented with a touch of irrationality. The French Touch a living object with which luxury customers maintain a close and selective relationship. The French

Touch endows a product with uniqueness and is a source of value for both customers and companies.’

5. CONCLUSIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The starting point of this article lies in the fact that many academics and professionals of luxury widely use the term French Touch, but at no time do they define it. The lack of specific literature in Marketing and Management led us to enter into the historical and professional background, extending beyond the domain of business academics per se. Then this article reported on exploratory research, based on qualitative methods, such as semantic and content analysis. This article ended with a proposed definition of the French Touch.

This article involves both academic and managerial implications. In academics, this study provides a theoretical background as well as a definition of the French Touch. From a managerial point of view, this article provides a unified definition which encompasses the different dimensions of the term.

This study is limited by its exploratory nature. Further studies need to be carried out so as to enlarge our understanding of the French Touch and to endeavour to measure its importance. Quantitative research need to be undertaken in order to measure the French Touch and confirm its multi-dimensional nature. There is also a need for complementary research on the role played by emotions in the French Touch buying process. Similarly, the French Touch has a key impact on firms. Further research could be refined by type of items, amount of purchases or by culture.

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DEMOGRAPHIC REALITY, CITY SIZE AND THE REAL ESTATE CHANGES: A CASE STUDY OF THE GERMAN TERRACED HOUSES

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ABSTRACT

The Germans by the year 2050 will see their population decline significantly. Currently many German cities have seen their population decline. The housing market is an area expected to be greatly affected by this event which is going to change the relationship between supply and demand. Although many studies have focused on the analysis of this kind of impact little attention has been given to specific house types and more specifically to terraced house prices and their reaction. Our study targets in the investigation of parameters that affect this specific house type values in the German metropolitan and big cities. It shows that births, population change and the size of the city play a significant and negative role to price estimation of this specific house type.

Keywords: Real estate; demography; housing submarkets; literature review; terraced housing prices; spatial planning; demographic boom.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a growing concern over the future demographic situation of most European countries. A number of different studies focusing on the future demographic development are not very optimistic while, at the same time, they all agree that by the year of 2050 the European population will considerably decline in numbers¹. In Germany, the population projections show that the German population by the year 2050 could fall to as low as 69 million (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2003). Signs of such a decline have already started to show. At the end of 2006, the German population was 82.3 million, 130,000 less in relation to the total population recorded at the end of 2005 (Berlin-Institut fuer Bevoelkerung und Entwicklung, 2006).

Although Germany's population increased in 2001 and 2002, it has been falling ever since. In 2006, there were 675,000 less births in relation to 2005 when there were 686,000 births, which is also the lowest number of births seen in Germany since the end of the World War II². The German governance ease immigration rules in order to attract more immigrants and boost the inner workforce. Immigration like the birth rate has fallen in numbers too. To be more specific, net immigration falls from

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79,000 in 2005 to 20,000 – 30,000 in 2006. This fall will have a major impact on the workforce while at the same time it reveals the real demographic trends that currently exist.

In addition, population aging and shrinkage are expected to affect the German states in different degrees and develop new standards and new areas for research. Additionally, the event of the German reunification (occurred in 1990), a significant event that changed the demographic scenery of the country should be mentioned. The states in the south and west of the country, due to this event, gained economically and demographically, from the inner population movement while the population of the eastern states seems to have shrank significantly. In the future, due to the above described development, southern cities will be less affected by the future demographic aging, while the eastern will experience significantly losses by the year 2050 (Bundesamt fuer Bauwesen und Raumordnung, 2003 and Berlin-Institut fuer Bevoelkerung und Entwicklung, 2006).

The above mentioned demographic developments have also triggered the governmental mechanisms. Policies and plans have been developed in order to ease the forthcoming economic impact of the demographic ageing and decline. Economic areas which will be affected include the pension and health care system, the nursing care and of course the insurance system. These areas have been extensively analysed but the burden falls almost completely on the impact of the forthcoming population ageing, and less on the event of population shrinkage or the birth decrease. Little attention has been given to other areas of the importance, like the housing market on regional level and how the demographic future realities affect specific house types currently existing. Furthermore, in an environment like the one observed in Germany little attention has been given to the geographic location of the city and its past population.

The relationship between financial markets and age distribution has attracted a lot of interest. Milestone to that direction is considered the seminal work by Mankiw and Weil (1989) who found a significant positive relationship between average house prices and demand. A correlation has been identified between age distribution and real housing prices in the U.S. by Engelhardt & Poterba (1991) with the use of time series data. Poterba conducted a regional analysis on the U.S. market and found a significant correlation between house prices and housing demand. Few years later Poterba (1998) didn't manage to establish a relationship between specific age cohorts and certain asset categories and the main reason for such an outcome was the fact that the available data at the time were limited. On the other hand, Bergantino (1998) managed to establish this relationship by using data from the Survey of Consumer Finances. More specifically, he managed to establish the link between real stock prices and aggregate demand for financial assets. In the same field of research, Brooks (1998) also presents evidence that there is positive correlation between stocks, bonds and people that were currently middle-aged. DiPasquale and Wheaton (1994),

proposed a gradual price adjustment process and also found significant house to demographic correlations.

In the field of housing demand, Ermisch (1996) found out a strong correlation between age and the housing services demanded while Lee et al. (2001) in his study for the housing demand in Austria found out that demand is affected by the demography.³ In one of the most recent studies in the field of housing demand, Neuteboom and Brounen (2007) based on their model predicted that there will be an increase in housing demand which is strongly affected by the household age. Same results were presented by Eichholtz and Lindenthal (2007) about demographics and housing demand. Their study area was English households while their research showed that human capital is affecting highly the housing demand. Another important conclusion reported in their study was that variables like education affect the demand positively, and on the other hand variables like chronic illnesses have a negative effect.⁴

From the above, the relationship between age distribution and housing demand is quite obvious. On the other hand, as far as we are aware, there is no investigation of the impact of population decline on specific housing types like, for example, terraced single-family houses. German states offer a unique environment for such an analysis and this is because, as we have already mentioned, many cities are already experiencing population shrinkage while terraced houses are a unique house type which is very favourable. Our current work attempts to investigate average terraced single-family house prices on the level of regional metropolitan areas (referee Staudte) and big cities (Grosse Staudte). The states selected for this analysis were Bavaria, Northrhine Westfalen and Baden – Württemberg. Population effects are of central importance, while other variables have also been included like births, net immigration, gross domestic product, construction costs and constructed building space.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF HOUSING SUBMARKETS

Current literature presents two main theories that explain the existence of housing submarkets. According to the first, housing submarkets exist because the real estate market exhibits multiple states of equilibrium (Goodman, 1978). This means that every submarket reaches the equilibrium state at a different time than another submarket and this assumption goes along with the mainstream and dominant economic approach. The second theory supports exactly the opposite which is the event that the housing submarkets exhibit different disequilibrium stages (MacLennan et al., 1987). Variables such as search and information costs have been found to be highly associated to prices of housing submarkets, but these variables make the idea of

equilibrium inappropriate to be assumed. Moreover, the hypothesis regarding the state of equilibrium wants the housing market to “clear” but this does not occur for a number of different reasons, like the durability characteristic or the financial and psychological costs that affect households when they decide to relocate. All these factors make the “clearing” process really slow (Pryce, 2005).

There are also other factors that affect housing prices and as a result they shape housing submarkets. These factors affect prices of residences at a different degree and this results in the creation of housing segments that respond with the same way to possible attribute changes due to heterogeneity of the good house (Bourassa et al., 2002). In addition, for every group of residences there is a corresponding group of households that share common characteristics and based on this assumption the market can be segmented. The idea that lays behind this assumption is the fact that each residence gathers a set of attributes that make the residence more or less desirable (Kauko, 2001; Maclellan et al., 1986).

Housing submarkets are also created due to constraints created from buyers that want to benefit from lower prices (Kauko, 2001). The process of house acquisition is twofold. The household consumes capital but at the same time it invests in a good. In addition, each household expects to acquire different future gains from the investment and this affects its decision. Due to the transaction, information and search costs, the adjustment is hard to be achieved because most buyers are poorly informed regarding the dynamic of the market and even less informed regarding the alternatives they have. This obstacle can be overcome if an attempt is made to gather as many information as possible. However, this procedure is very costly and time consuming (Maclellan et al., 1987). From this point of view, agents play a major role since they are responsible for distributing information regarding residences which, in return, results in the segmentation of the house market (Palm, 1978). On the other hand, it must be pointed out that to the author’s knowledge and based on the available literature the role of agents and their contribution to market segmentation has not been fully investigated.

Academic literature has revealed many different ways based on which scientists have attempted to divide the housing market. Some make use of the administrative boundaries (Clapp and Wang, 2006; Maclellan et al., 2006; Cheshire and Sheppard, 2004a). While others make use of political ones. (Strazheim, 1975; Ball and Kirwan, 1977; Adair et al., 1996). Socio-economic and environmental characteristics have also been used (Galster, 2000) while at the same time we have even found a study which creates submarkets based on the number of rooms available in a residence (Schnare and Stuyk, 1976). Bajic (1985) and Rothenburg (1991) found that the market can also be divided based on the area they cover, and others based on the cost of the information (Palm, 1978; Michaels and Smith, 1990; Bourassa et al., 2003; Keskin, 2009). Finally, the type of the property or the type of the residence has also been extensively used (Goodman 1981; Hancock, 1991; Pryce, 2004; Adair et al., 1996).

All the above methods used in the definition and analysis process of housing submarkets show how complex this field is. A large number of variables must be taken into account. In addition, the cities, regions and neighbourhoods are constantly changing, creating more difficulties in the analysis process, since markets change as well. The interest however among scientists to investigate this field of science remains unchanged. The reason for this is the fact that housing submarkets reveal information regarding the asymmetries in adjustment to local shocks (migration, environmental shocks etc.), interact with variables such as employment, transportation and criminality and provide information regarding the value of amenities and the consumer behaviour (Bates, 2006; Pryce, 2005).

3. METHODOLOGY

Our study makes an attempt to analyse average terraced house prices of the German metropolitan cities and big cities, making use of the model developed by Dipasquale and Wheaton (1994) and the log-log approach previously used by Engelhardt and Poterba (1991). The variable “Terraced Value” is the arithmetic mean of the house prices recorded for the years 2000-2005 and were supplied by RIWIS and IVD. As we have already mentioned, our analysis includes metropolitan areas and cities from three distinguished states of Germany and these are Bavaria, Baden – Wuerttemberg and Nordrhein Westfallen. In total, we have available data for 101 cities and from these, 36 are located in Nordrhein Westfallen, 25 in Baden Wuerttemberg and 40 in the state of Bavaria. Riwis supplied the house prices for almost all the available metropolitan areas of the three states and more specifically they provided the prices for the 36 areas in the state of Nordrhein Westfallen, 15 of the cities in the state of Baden Wuerttemberg and 17 from the state of Bavaria. The rest were supplemented by IVD (Immobilien verband Deutschland).

The analysis follows the equation developed by Dipasquale and Wheaton (1996) where population changes of the available cities are tested. Population data were provided separately from the three statistic offices of the three states. In general, data revealed that in most cities the population fell in average 4% to 6%. Similarly, to the population data, the number of births, immigration statistics and the total number of constructions for residential buildings, houses and space were provided by the three statistical offices of the states. The variable GDP (ln of Gross Domestic Product) is freely available from the BBR online database and it was included in our estimation equation as a significant influencing factor. Finally, the variable RENT (ln of rent prices) was provided by both RIWIS and IVD.

The equation finalizes as follows:

$$\text{Ln (Terraced_Value)} = b_0\text{Ln(REN T)} + b_1\text{Ln(Pop)} + b_2\text{Ln(GDP)} + b_3\text{Ln(Costs)} + b_4\text{Ln(Constructions)} + b_5\text{Ln(City_Size)} + u \quad (1)$$

Where u is the error term. The variable “costs” are the construction costs per square meter with an arithmetic mean of about 1.347 Euro.

4. REGRESSION RESULTS OF TERRACED HOUSE PRICES

In table 1 we present the results of the regression analysis conducted for terraced house prices. Following the cross-section approach of the model proposed by Dipasquale and Wheaton (1996), rents (Rent), the total housing stock (Const) and the number of new constructions are the basic variables that affect the housing prices (model 1 in Table 1). Due to high collinearity between the number of new constructions and the current total constructions, we substitute the first variable with the mean constructed new space of the period 2000-2005 (Con N). The results of the model can be seen in Table 1. Both Rent and Cost variables are significant but the variable New Constructions seem to have no significant effect on the prices of Terraced houses. Still, all three variables have the expected signs.

We also tried to estimate if there is a significant relationship between Rent and terraced house prices in the case we use Rent values of houses that were new (RentF). However, due to the fact that none of the other two variables (Const and Const_New) reacted well in the model, we gave a preference to the Rent variable (model 2). In model 3 we added the Pop (population) variable which is also the basic variable of our research hypothesis. The results show that Population affects positively the prices of terraced houses at the 1% level. This result means that an increase on the total Population leads to an increase in the mean prices of the house type under investigation. Same significant results appear when we add the mean GDP in our model, only this time the relationship is negative, which means that an increase in the mean GDP results in decreasing terraced house values (model 4). Although difficult to be explained, the result that lies behind this negative relationship is the hypothesis that an increase of the mean GDP probably means that also the construction sector activities increase as well. At the same time, increased construction activities lead to more constructions and as a consequence more houses are available to the market. In other words, we have increased supply that tends to decrease terraced house prices.

The variable Birth added in model 5 affects the dependent variable at the 5% level with the expected sign. To our knowledge in similar studies to ours, the number of births had never been used before as a determinant variable of house prices. Still, in some studies, the fertility rate was used and it was found that it affects significantly house prices (Hill et al. 1994). In model 6, the variable COST was added, which represents the mean construction costs for a new residential building during the under analysis period, and it is given as price per square meter. Costs also supported by other studies (e.g. Green et al, 1996) is a significant variable that affects house prices. In our case, construction costs affect our dependent variable at the 1% level with the expected sign making this specific variable a very important one. At this point it

should be noted that in the last two models, the variable GDP has no significant influence on our prices.

So far we can also see that R^2 adjustment is gradually improving; starting from 0.408 in model 1 and reaching 0.663 in model 6. This means that until now, the model is constantly improving something that indicates increasing goodness of fit.

The addition on the mean immigration variable (model 7) showed that it has no significant influence of the prices of terraced houses. Furthermore, we also experienced decreased goodness of fit and this is probably due to collinearity issues between the variable POP and the variable Immi which gave a value of 2.045 suggesting high collinearity. A dummy variable was added in model 8 (when city's population was less than 100000 people then =0, and 1 more than 100000 people). The variable was not significant. On the other hand, in the question of whether the city had more than 200.000 people (model 9) we found a strong relationship at the 1% level indicating that an increase in the number of cities with more than 200000 citizens leads to decreasing terraced house values.

A third dummy variable was introduced in our model (model 10) for the population change (PopCh). When the city's population increased during the years 2000-2005 and were given the value 1 and 0, the opposite occurred. The result was also very interesting. At the 1% significance level, and with the expected sign, population change plays a significant role as a determinant of our dependent variable. Finally, the geographic location of the city (0 when it is located in Bavaria or Baden – Wuerttemberg, and 1 when it is located in Nordrhein West fallen) had no significance on the value of terraced houses.

TABLE 1: FACTORS AFFECTING TERRACED HOUSES PRICES IN GERMAN CITIES

	Rent	Const	Con_New	Pop	GDP	Birth	Cost	Imm	RentF	Pop100	Pop200	PopCh	Region	Radj
Mod1	0.578*** (5.690)	0.341* (1.842)	-0.112 (0.583)											0.408
Mod2		0.012 (0.101)	-0.61 (0.500)						0.875*** (17.597)					0.756
Mod3	0.462*** (4.901)	0.739*** (3.911)	-0.232 (1.342)	0.470*** (4.261)										0.533
Mod4	0.538*** (5.738)	0.942*** (4.854)	-0.161 (0.967)	0.558*** (5.089)	-0.346*** (2.767)									0.578
Mod5	0.451*** (4.640)	2.039*** (4.128)	0.061 (0.329)	0.805*** (5.457)	-0.211 (1.586)	-1.263** (2.399)								0.608
Mod6	0.334*** (3.447)	1.905*** (4.142)	0.099 (0.542)	0.827*** (6.039)	-0.171 (1.377)	-1.221** (1.377)	0.267*** (3.306)							0.663
Mod7	0.296*** (2.792)	1.739*** (3.500)	0.067 (0.382)	0.760*** (4.849)	-0.174 (1.402)	-1.252*** (2.552)	0.263*** (3.248)	0.219 (0.887)						0.662
Mod8	0.318*** (3.183)	1.917*** (4.147)	0.096 (0.556)	0.836*** (6.052)	-0.195 (1.508)	-1.158** (2.320)	0.279*** (3.364)			-0.078 (0.692)				0.660
Mod9	0.306*** (3.334)	1.982*** (4.560)	0.003 (0.016)	0.956*** (6.998)	-0.212* (1.802)	-0.876* (1.842)	0.306*** (3.957)				-0.343*** (2.903)			0.700
Mod10	0.351*** (3.828)	1.935*** (4.451)	0.108 (0.665)	0.762*** (5.800)	-0.248** (2.062)	-1.209** (2.621)	0.201** (2.521)					0.218*** (2.867)		0.699
Mod11	0.315*** (3.270)	1.742*** (3.740)	0.046 (0.264)	0.700*** (4.452)	-0.149 (1.212)	-1.025** (2.059)	0.248*** (3.076)						-0.155 (1.578)	0.671

* = significant at the 10% level

** = significant at the 5% level

*** = significant at the 1% level

Values in parentheses are t-values, while each model has been tested for homoscedasticity with the use of P-Plots and the White Correction.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the research presented above, regarding 101 cities, located in three specific states of Germany, for specific house type (terraced house) prices, appear to be very interesting. First of all, this house type is affected by the same variables as general houses. Furthermore, empirical results of other studies confirmed that rents, housing stock, population and construction costs are important variables in the determination of the terraced house prices. In addition, the number of immigrants as well as the geographic location of the city proved to be insignificant in the price estimation. On the other hand, the number of births and the size of the city seem to play a much more active role in this relationship. Still, the city must have more than 200000 citizens, otherwise less than that shows no influence on the prices.

Last but not least the model can be further expanded. Two directions are significant to be studied. The first direction should be Germany's states complex demographics. For example, although immigration had no significant effect on terraced house prices, net immigration falls from 79.000 in 2005 to 20.000 – 30.000 people in 2006 and it is expected to fall even more. Another example can be towards population shrinkage observed in many cities in Germany and the fact that it is expected to shrink even more in the near future. Demographic developments must be seen even more closely since big changes are coming and should be investigated. The second aspect which this study can be directed to is the significance of the geographic location of the cities. For example, we just need to think of the situation in Germany. Western states in the future will lose a significant number of their population, either due to lower fertility rates or because of the people's relocation to other states with more opportunities for work, such as Bavaria. It will also be fruitful if we test the model on other specific house types, like standalone houses, or even housing rents.

NOTES

1. For more information and literature sources see United Nations (2003).
2. In 1946, 922,000 births were recorded.
3. *"The housing markets of Poland, Russia, Hungary, Germany and Austria, for instance, are exposed to declines in population of up to -20% in the coming 40 years"* (United Nations (2007) cited in Eichholtz and Lindenthal (2007)).
4. Eichholtz and Lindenthal (2007) made use of the model proposed by Green and Hendershott (1996) concerning future housing demand. Their additions were that they used their variables more carefully and they separated them in life-cycle variables and cohort – variables. They also made use of a very detailed micro-dataset which included over 900 variables (two thirds of the variables were describing house characteristics while the rest one third described household characteristics). Finally, their data was describing English houses and households, something that is very important since the European

empirical studies are quite limited and also the European environment is very different from the one that exists in the U.S.

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