Heimat - Anchor in a Globalized World

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Abstract

In globalized environments consumers tend to feel conformity, loneliness, and estrangement. Striving for belongingness and identification consumers rediscover "Heimat", a term without exact equivalence in English or French. Local marketers build new product and communication strategies on *Heimat* without much theoretical basis and empirical results. This study provides insights into multi-sensory elements used in individual construction processes of *Heimat*. *Heimat* turns out to be the construction of a virtual space in a familiar natural and social context that is a part of consumers´ self, which allows mental balance and self-determination. Marketers who use *Heimat* to differentiate from global competitors should provide consumers with room for self-determination and should refrain from new economic or social pressures for their target customers.

1. Introduction

Globalization has changed the nature of social life (Kjeldgaard, Csaba, & Ger, 2006). People, technology, money, images, ideas (Appadurai, 1990), consumer goods, and cultures of consumption (Ger & Belk, 1996) flow globally. In this world with plethora of consumption alternatives a growing number of consumers feel excessive demand, conformity, loneliness, and estrangement (Augè, 2012). In their pursuit of belongingness, identification, and security (Eigler, 2012) consumers can either turn to global sub-cultures sharing similar meanings of consumption-related symbols like brands, products, and consumption activities (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 1999) or turn to *Heimat* as the cognitive and emotional opposite of a globalized world (Peterlini, 2009). In German-speaking parts of Europe, increasingly *Heimat* has become an integrative part of product development and communication of regional and local brands seeking differentiation from global competitors. Such differentiation is built on shaky grounds because there is hardly a shared understanding of what *Heimat* means to consumers.

The term *Heimat* has no direct equivalent in English. It has neither the same meaning as home, home country, homeland or spiritual home. Neumeyer (1992) defined *Heimat* as the immediate, subjective and daily experienced living environment which provides familiarity, safety, emotional security and satisfying social relationships to individuals becoming accustomed to social, cultural and natural dimensions of their *Heimat* over time. Depending on the prevailing perspective of authors, however, the term *Heimat* encompasses diverse aspects such as a specific geographic area or territory (Bausinger, 1980; Bülow, 1969), a landscape and its nature (Bredow & Foltin, 1981), social belonging and marginalization (Brehpol, 1953; Huber, 1999), religion and spirituality (Sagara Ritter, 2012), culture, values, and mentality (Endres, 1967), stereotypes, tradition, and rituals (Huber, 1999), mother tongue, dialect, and literature (Améry, 1970; Hüppauf, 2007), emotions and nostalgia (Bernet, 2007; Schlink, 2000), identity (Huber, 1999; Mitscherlich, 1965), or childhood memories (Bloch, 1974; Türcke, 2006).

Literature agrees on the role of memories relating to former experiences as prerequisite for an individual's notion of *Heimat* (Bloch, 1974; Huber, 1999). Following Barsalou (1999) memories of experiences are multi-sensory and can contain experiences of taste, smell, touch, sound, sight, and emotions stored non-consciously in individuals' minds. While extant literature acknowledges the multi-sensory influence on the individual construction of *Heimat* (Irchenhauser, 2009; Maurer, 2011; Olliges, 2010), there is no published empirical research on how consumers effectively construct their individual *Heimat* in a multi-sensory manner.

To understand how consumers construct their individual *Heimat* multi-sensorially, the authors conducted an empirical study with 15 German-speaking consumers in Tyrol, a culturally homogeneous province of Austria. Since multi-sensory knowledge is largely stored on a non-conscious and non-verbal level this knowledge is difficult to access via conventional knowledge retrieval methods (von Wallpach & Kreuzer, 2013). The authors thus applied Multi-sensory sculpting (von Wallpach & Kreuzer, 2013), a projective technique that builds on findings of embodied cognition research (Barsalou, 1999) and allows eliciting multi-sensory meanings.

The findings show that the social and natural dimensions of *Heimat* extensively treated in literature do effectively exist in consumers´ minds and are strongly interrelated. Social and natural dimensions of *Heimat* reinforce or constrain a supplementary dimension never discussed in literature before: *Heimat* inside the individual consumer. This third dimension of *Heimat* comprises the process of self-discovery and reaching physical and mental balance, which got lost because of economic, social or consumption pressures. Inner *Heimat* encompasses the potential of being alone without feeling lonely and distracted by man-made stimuli. Additionally, inner *Heimat* allows consumers the feeling of being self-determined.

This research contributes to extant knowledge concerning consumer behavior in a globalized world by (1) showing how the dimensions of *Heimat* discussed in literature are interrelated in individual multi-sensory constructions; (2) pointing to the importance of physically as well as mentally experienced individual freedom for the construction of *Heimat*; and (3) identifying individual and social practices leading to *Heimat*-related meanings.

The paper first presents a review of the discussion of *Heimat* in German speaking literature compared to *home*. Then, a Multi-sensory sculpting study provides insights in the ways consumers construct their individual meaning of *Heimat*. In the discussion the authors highlight the contribution of this research to extent knowledge on consumer behavior in a globalized world, point out some managerial implications for local and regional marketing, acknowledge limitations of the empirical study, and offer suggestions for future research.

2. Literature review

The notion of "home" seems to come closest to the manifold meanings of *Heimat* in German literature and arts. Following the mainstream literature, the concept of home characterizes the emotional relationship between individuals and places, which is loaded with meanings (Altman & Werner 1985). Home is either a place (house) for self-development and family life or the place of origin that people identify with (Fog-Olwig, 1998). McHugh and Ming (1996) use the term home-as-identity to characterize rootedness, a part of the self, which is affiliated with a place (homeland). Globalization and the use of new media have resulted in a more mobile notion of home (Bardhi & Arnould, 2006; Venkatesh, Kruse, & Shih, 2001) as well as in home's potential public construction. Salient relationships, cherished possessions, temporal and spatial patterns become more important than place (Bardhi & Arnould, 2006). Bardhi and Askegaard (2009) define home as a social concept of home-as-order that people use for their orientation in time, space and social environment.

Literature treating *Heimat* is characterized by a great diversity of perspectives, which exist in parallel or have dominated at some points in time. Historically, the term finds its roots in the indo-germanic *heim* (camp), the gothic *haims* (village) and the Old High German heimuoti (home) (Kluge, 2002). *Heimat* first meant a specific location that represented the natural environment where a person lived. At the end of the Middle Ages so-called *Heimatrechte* (home rights) were established. People who possessed land belonged to the local community and had the right to be cared for when falling sick or poor (Neumeyer, 1992). During industrialization in the late 18th and the 19th century when more and more people lived in tiny flats and worked in highly mechanistic production environments, *Heimat* became romanticized. It became an idyllic place to spend leisure time, providing resort and rootedness in nature, where every-day problems did not exist (Bausinger, 1984). From the end of the 19th century to the end of the Second World War, the meaning of *Heimat* turned into fatherland, misused for nationalistic purposes. After the great wars, many people who were forced to leave their former locations rediscovered *Heimat* as a cognitive means of gathering for the feeling of security and belongingness (Huber, 1999). At the end of the last century the rather conservative meaning of *Heimat* gave place to a more future-oriented perspective. *Heimat* became a place to live, which has to be actively sheltered against harmful ecological and cultural influences from "outside" (Mitzscherlich, 1997). *Heimat* was seen as a place to satisfy the need for activity, stimulation, and the definition of identity (Huber, 1999).

Besides seeing *Heimat* as a place similar to *home,* literature discusses *Heimat* from social and temporal perspectives. From a social perspective, the social space (Endres, 1967) constituted by the relationships with others in a specific location, is the core of *Heimat*. Following Mitzscherlich (1997), this social space is able to satisfy three basic human needs: community (social embeddedness and affiliation), control (action-ability, creation, opportunity to leave traces) and coherence (making sense of the world). As a social space

Heimat is continuously in the making (Kupke, 2006). The emotional value of the social space (Heinze, 2006) is mostly felt when being away (Bernet, 2007; Schlink, 2000). As Huber (1999) points out, however, in a virtual world people´s social spaces may exist independently of locations. Social media have reduced the importance of locations and physical closeness to the meaning of *Heimat*.

The temporal view sees *Heimat* grounded in childhood. Memories of local accents, smells and sounds, rain or heat coin the first experiences of *Heimat* (Hüppauf, 2007; Maurer, 2011). Socialization in a local environment creates additional experiences that allow the construction of *Heimat* when individuals feel at a loss and reflect their childhood experiences in later years (Irchenhauser, 2009; Türcke, 2006). The reflection tends to romanticize the stored experiences (Améry, 1970; Moosmann, 1980). Longing for security and belongingness attributed to childhood is accompanied by strong emotions. *Heimat* takes a utopian-nostalgic character (Huber, 1999).

Summarizing, *Heimat* has different meanings depending on the specific stream of literature. Authors largely agree on the importance of multi-sensory memories of former experiences for the meaning of *Heimat* to individuals (Bloch, 1974; Huber, 1999). According to embodied cognition research (Barsalou, 1999; Damasio, 1994) people store their experiences in the form of perceptual states in modality-specific regions of the brain. These perceptual states contain information on what consumers have consciously and non-consciously touched, felt, smelled, tasted, moved, viewed, talked, and heard (Barsalou, 1999; Damasio, 1994). Retrieving experiences of *Heimat* is piecing together bits of information from modality-specific or episodic memory (Schacter & Addis, 2007). This retrieved information is not a literal recollection from past experiences, but can contain false memories, present experiences, as well as imagined future events (Suddendorf & Corallis, 2007) and is bound by local culture and situational contexts (Barsalou, 1999). Despite the fact that most authors mention the importance of multi-sensory memories for the individual meaning of *Heimat*, to the best of the authors' knowledge there is no published empirical research on how consumers effectively construct their *Heimat* in a multi-sensory manner. Therefore, the empirical research presented in the following aims for a first contribution to a deeper understanding of the individual, multi-sensory construction of *Heimat*.

3. Empirical study
3.1. Sample and methodology

Since the meaning of *Heimat* might vary depending on regional culture, the study focuses on members of a particular culturally homogeneous, Austrian province, namely Tyrol. Sample size was determined according to the principle of theoretical saturation: Data collection was completed once no more new meanings arose (Charmaz, 2006). The sample consists of 15 Tyroleans (see Table 1) who, except two participants, have grown up in the region and have been permanent residents since.

Table 1: Sample Structure

Respondent	Sex	Age	Occupation	Education	Location	Foreign Exp.
MSS1	m	32	employee	university	country	Australia, 1 yr.
MSS2	m	54	employee	high school	country	none
MSS3	f	25	student	high school	town	France, 1 yr.
MSS4	f	35	architect	university	town	USA, 1 yr.
MSS5	m	23	paramedic	middle school	town	none
MSS6	f	60	farmer	middle school	country	none
MSS7	f	22	nurse	college	country	UK, 0.5 yrs
MSS8	f	24	student	university	town	in Tyrol s. 5 yrs

MSS9	f	50	medical ass.	high school	country	none
MSS10	m	78	retiree	apprenticeship	country	none
MSS11	f	25	student	university	town	France, 0.5 yrs
MSS12	m	35	employee	apprenticeship	town	none
MSS13	m	28	student	university	town	UK, 0.5 yrs
MSS14	m	26	student	high school	town	none
MSS15	f	40	employee	high school	town	none

Exploring the multi-sensory dimensions of *Heimat* implies tapping knowledge that has been acquired via an array of multi-sensory experiences over time. Eliciting knowledge stemming from various sensory experiences requires methods which (1) are able to stimulate those senses that have been involved in the original experience (Damasio, 1994) and (2) allow respondents to express themselves metaphorically, that is, in a format that resembles their cognitive representations. Via metaphors consumers "understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5). Metaphors support consumers in structuring, interpreting, and expressing non-conscious, multi-sensory memories (Zaltman, 1997). Since verbal metaphors can express only   parts   of   multi-sensory   knowledge (Johnson, 2009), also non-verbal metaphoric expression (e.g., via pictures, sounds or materials) is needed (cf. Davidson, 1979).

In order to satisfy these conditions this study applies Multi-sensory sculpting, a projective technique that allows retrieving multi-sensory knowledge via verbal and non-verbal metaphors (von Wallpach & Kreuzer, 2013). Respondents are provided with a large selection of materials (e.g., cotton, glass, fruit aromas, spices, different sweets, as well as different music/sounds from iPods) that are able to stimulate the senses (e.g., vision, smell, touch, taste, audition) that might have been involved in original experiences with the research object.

Researchers encourage participants to screen the materials, to select those materials they associate with *Heimat*, and to combine these materials into sculptures that represent what *Heimat* means to them. The sculptures are non-verbal, metaphorical expressions of multi-sensory mental images regarding *Heimat* that serve as "stimuli for projective interviewing" (Heisley & Levy, 1991, p. 257). In a long, unstructured one-on-one interview researchers pose grand-tour questions to encourage respondents to explicate single materials constituting their sculptures, the materials' arrangement, and the sculptures' overall meanings via verbal metaphors. This procedure supports respondents in surfacing deeper, subjective levels of meaning via emic verbal interpretations of their own sculptures (cf. von Wallpach & Kreuzer, 2013). Researchers take pictures of respondents' sculptures and tape-record as well as literally transcribe the interviews.

Data analysis focuses on detecting verbal and non-verbal metaphors as well as their underlying meanings. Two researchers independently analyze the verbal data material and identify verbal metaphors and their meanings. Researchers continuously relate these verbal metaphors to non-verbal metaphors (materials in the sculpture the verbal explications refer to) in order to gain a rich understanding of the respondents' multi-sensory construction of *Heimat*. Researchers aggregate the results as illustrated in Figure 1 and Table 2.

3.2. Results

Data analysis resulted in the identification of three core dimensions of *Heimat*, the social-, the natural-, and the inner *Heimat*. These three dimensions are interrelated and involve several consumer practices that lead to *Heimat*-related meanings.

Figure 1: Dimensions of *Heimat*
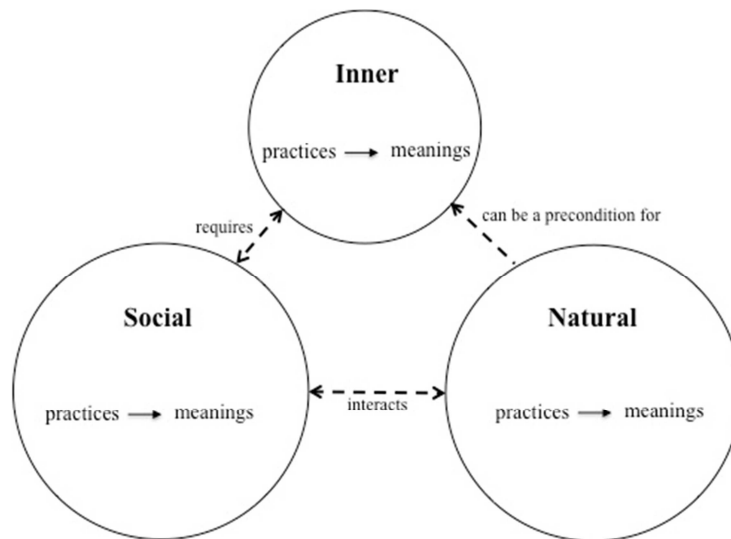
The *social dimension* describes the social relationships of consumers that can span across different regions and countries, and provide reference for identification with various social groups (e.g., family, friends, regional and national society). The identification with a specific social group, however, strongly depends on the context in which respondents construct their individual meaning of *Heimat*: *"Generally, I am Tyrolean and not Austrian. Austria has many parts in which mentality differs. I do not have strong positive emotions with Austria. However, when I am abroad, then I am first Austrian and then Tyrolean"*.

Within the social dimension of *Heimat*, respondents describe various practices like sharing common experiences, rituals and traditions, caring practices or honorary appointments. These various practices lead to meanings that are important to consumers like belongingness, solidarity, wellbeing, comfort, and much valued safety. These meanings are expressed by means of soft materials like wool, cotton, feathers, and fur that should symbolize *"the cozy plunge into a stable network of relationships that I can rely on and that provides me with security across different stages and situations throughout my life"*.

The *natural dimension* of *Heimat* is very diverse relating to landscape and wildlife, biodiversity, geographic spaces and territory, climate, cities and villages, food offerings, and the sheer inexhaustible amount of natural resources available. This natural dimension of *Heimat* finds multi-sensory expression via diverse materials (e.g., wood, stones, bird singing, smells; see Figure 2) stimulating human senses, as well as proprioception and thermoception.

Figure 2: Examples for sculptures representing the three dimensions of *Heimat*

Multi-sensory sculpture: Social dimension of *Heimat*

Multi-sensory sculpture: Natural dimension of *Heimat*

Multi-sensory sculpture: Inner dimension of *Heimat*

In their narrations, respondents describe the natural environment from their very first conscious experiences in childhood to their perception of today. Passed-on experiences as well as parents' and grandparents' practices left their imprints with respondents and led to respectful conduct with the natural environment. Resources from the natural environment allow respondents engaging in various do-it-yourself (DIY) practices (e.g., cultivation of vegetables and seeds, handicraft) contributing to self-determination and perceived independence from global companies. One respondent states: *Large companies have too much influence on food production. Regional farmers have cultivated seeds from early on, not the large ones. We lose our independence if we do not preserve our natural resources."*

Highly appreciated experiences and intense moments respondents have in/with nature allow them to escape everyday life and related problems. Rootedness in nature thus contributes to recreation and personal freedom. Respondents use verbal and non-verbal metaphors emphasizing their intense experiences of smell, sound, and emotions (e.g., *"The sunshine leads to this particular smell"*, *"I hear the sound of water"*, *"This feeling of achievement when standing on top of a mountain"*).

Finally, the third dimension of *Heimat* relates to the individual, implying feelings of inner peace and being oneself: experiencing *Heimat* within oneself. This experience is based on the comfort felt in the social environment and the rootedness made possible by the natural environment. Practices for finding inner peace include overcoming inner forces via meditation and intense experiences in nature; enjoying calmness without being distracted by man-made stimuli; or being concerned only with oneself without having the feeling of loneliness.

Practices related to the inner *Heimat* lead to relief, freedom, inner balance, and a slowdown of everyday life consumers long for because of felt social and technological pressures (e.g., job, society, technology, consumer culture). *"When I experience nature I can breathe deeply. Then I know that I belong to myself. Work-related thoughts disappear! There is no need to consume anything like music and TV, shopping around, or things like that"*.

Additionally, being oneself and experiencing inner peace allows respondents to discover the very natural functions of body and mind: Harmonizing multi-sensory perceptions, felt emotions, and thoughts via different practices (e.g., walking barefoot through the woods, enjoying the loneliness and view on a mountain top, increasing mindfulness), which often fall victim to rational thinking, technology, and progress. Respondents want to escape their role of being passive receivers with respect to work and consumption; they want to actively determine their life: *"I want to escape daily routines and electronic devices, find back to my origins in this loud world."* In the sculptures respondents use different materials to symbolize the inner dimension of *Heimat* like candle light representing inner warmth, water symbolizing self purification, or a scale made of wood and stones representing inner balance.

The social, natural, and inner dimensions of *Heimat* relate to practices and meanings respondents associate with each single dimension. Table 2 describes each of the three dimensions of Heimat identified in this research and summarizes the practices and meanings associated with each dimension.

Table 2: Dimensions of *Heimat*, related practices and meanings

Dimension	Description	Practices	Meanings
Social	Describes the social relationships of consumers and the identification with relevant reference groups.	− Shared experiences − Rituals and traditions − Caring practices − Honorary appointments	− Belongingness − Comfort/wellbeing − Security/stability − Solidarity − Sociability

	Describes the natural landscape including nature, cities and villages.	– Respectful dealing with wildlife – DIY with natural resources – Experiences in nature	– Conservation of nature – Self-determination – Independence – Freedom
Natural			
Inner	Describes the focus on the self, the relationship between rationality and emotions, and the ability to enjoy solitude.	– Meditation – Enjoying calm – Overcoming inner forces – Mentally re-experiencing childhood	– Relief – Inner peace – Easiness of life – Slowdown of life

4. Discussion

This research contributes insights to extant literature on the meaning of *Heimat* by (1) showing how the social and natural dimensions of *Heimat* discussed in literature are interrelated in individual multi-sensory constructions; (2) pointing out the importance of inner Heimat—a dimension that has not been discussed in literature before; (3) identifying individual and social practices leading to specific meanings that characterize each of the three dimensions.

Consumers construct *Heimat* via three complexly interrelated dimensions: the social, natural, and inner dimension. In line with extant literature, individuals associate the social dimension closely with the embeddedness in and affiliation with relevant social groups (cf. Huber, 1999). Within these groups, consumers receive support leading to feelings of wellbeing and comfort. The natural dimension of Heimat provides individuals with intense multi-sensory experiences that give them feelings of rootedness and freedom. Literature discussed rootedness in terms of romanticizing (Bausinger, 1984; Moosmann, 1980) and the need to actively defend nature (Mitzscherlich, 1997). Today, consumers associate nature more with recreation as a prerequisite for experiencing inner peace and consistency with one´s self.

The importance of inner peace and of having the freedom to be oneself highlights the role of an individual dimension in the construction of *Heimat*—a part of *Heimat* that exists only in the bodies and minds of individuals. Social space must provide enough freedom to allow consumers to be authentic. Natural space must provide sufficient diversity to be physically non-coercive. The levels of freedom provided by natural and social environments determine the opportunity for individuals to mentally as well as physically leave and come back to these environments. The experience of mobility allows consumers more intensely appreciating their *Heimat*. In this sense *Heimat* seems to be strongly related to the construction of the postmodern self (Gubrium & Holstein, 1994). Globalization and affluence allow consumers to choose freely from a very large number of ways to construct their selves in a continuously changing individual manner. At the same time consumers can fully appreciate this freedom only if they know where to anchor their salient self. The construction of *Heimat* may provide such an anchor.

5. Managerial implications

If well established, the concept of *Heimat* can provide a quality seal for local and regional brands. A cue indicating the origin of products can provide consumers with valuable information with respect to product evaluations. Local and regional brands wanting to successfully integrate the concept of *Heimat* into their branding activities should consider that

not all dimensions of Heimat, related practices and meanings identified in this research may fit with each brand's positioning. Brand management has to thoughtfully select and connect to meanings and practices that support the desired brand position.

Consumers show strong positive emotions, when experiencing physical, social, and inner freedom within their *Heimat*. Thus, brands that want to successfully differentiate their offerings by relating them to the *Heimat* of potential customers should refrain from restricting that mobility, for instance, by customer retention measures. In order to effectively differentiate their brands from global competitors, brands should also avoid forcing consumers into pre-determined structures by forcefully establishing specific local patterns of interpretation or behavior. Providing consumers with the opportunity to actively co-create brand-related content, ideas for new products or brand-related real life experiences may contribute to consumers' feelings of self-determination and ultimately *Heimat*.

6. Limitations and future research directions

There are some limitations to this research providing opportunities for future research. The empirical study focused on the German term *Heimat* and thus gathered data exclusively in a German-speaking context and in one province of Austria. Future research should aim to explore if or to what extent the construct of *Heimat* is bound to Germanic culture. The sample this research relies on is limited to consumers from a culturally homogeneous region in Europe. Generalizations can thus not be made. However, the study provides a fruitful ground for replication in other geographic and/or cultural areas. Furthermore, the findings provide a valuable basis for the development of a quantitative scale to measure constituent dimensions of *Heimat* and their importance to consumers. Based on such data local and regional brands will be able to segment potential customers and fine-tune their branding activities. This research provides first insights into the inner dimension of *Heimat*. Future research may be more closely interested in the relationship between the constructions of *Heimat* and the individual self. Furthermore, exploring potential relationships between *Heimat* and the country-of-origin effect could be relevant for academia as well as for brand management.

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