

We picture the past ahead of us or behind us depending on the importance

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Researchers from the University of Granada have carried out the most comprehensive study to date—comprising 22 cultural groups—on the relationship between the importance that people attach to the past and how they picture it: as lying ahead of them or behind them



The authors found a linear relationship in which the cultures under study could be arranged in order, such that the more traditional the culture (attaching greater importance to the past), the greater people's tendency to conceive the past as lying ahead of them

Think of a personal episode from the past. If someone were to ask you if you were visualising it as lying ahead of you or behind you, what would you say? Researchers from the University of Granada (UGR) have demonstrated that the answer depends on the relevance you assign to the past in your personal value system. To arrive at this conclusion, they carried out the most comprehensive study to date—comprising 22 cultural groups—on the relationship between the importance that people attach to the past and how they picture it. The results of the study indicate that people for whom the past is of greater importance (for example, because they belong to a highly traditional culture) tend to visualise the past as being ahead of them and the future behind them. Conversely, those who attach more importance to the future (for example, those from a progress-orientated culture) tend to picture the past as being behind them and the future ahead.

The principal researchers of this study are Carmen Callizo-Romero and Julio Santiago of the UGR's Mind, Brain and Behaviour Research Centre (CIMCYC). Nine other international co-authors are collaborating in the investigation.

Callizo-Romero explains that “we tend to think that the future is located ahead of us and the past behind us because we walk forward. Ahead of us are the places where we will be in the future, and behind us are those where we have already been. However, although this pattern may seem universal, it is not. There is at least one other factor that moderates it, and this is what we have investigated.”

More information in [Canal UGR](#).