

Re-thinking Realities
Europe as an Agora of Interactions
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Some lines of reflections for Round-Table II
Citizenship, Interculturality, Cosmopolitanism

On what Europe is and can be

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When Denis de Rougemont thought about Europe, he dreamt about a space of peace and creative collaboration. A few years ago the EFA group (European Festival Association), located in Ghent, published a book about him citing him: “Still so much to be done”.

As researchers/intellectuals we want to do a bit of the work: we organized a series of three consecutive symposiums over the past two years, and the present meeting in Brussels is the provisional end result of this series. In Barcelona - Spain, in Ghent – Belgium, and in Kőszeg – Hungary, we gathered ideas on an other Europe than the existing one. Not a Europe of states, but one of interactions, where citizens meet and interact in a shared space which to some extent seems to escape the traditional borders of nation states and even regions. These processes are happening now and are responsible for a lot of the unique creativity that may be the hallmark of the European space. The point we stressed is that this space of interaction is not deeply determined by the old political structures, although it may be hindered by them. Through these modest symposiums and the booklet that came out of them, we invite the political representatives and even the lobbyists of the EU to focus on this unique European space and its dynamics.

Three mini-powers in the European set of nation states, Spain, Belgium and Hungary were the consecutive chairs of the EU. A southern country, Spain, a small pioneer country of the Benelux, Belgium, and a new member from Eastern Europe. In a sense the three countries thus represent a whole series of characteristics of the Europe that is emerging: it encompasses the Mediterranean, the post-WWII western Europe, and the new eastern frontiers extending Europe to catch up with the former Habsburg countries. Culturally speaking, the three countries represent the Latin-Roman legacy with Spain, the industrious western Europe of the Benelux and the jewish-christian Central Europe of Vienna, Budapest and Prague. I think we can say with respectable pride that this variety and richness of cultural and political traditions is truly remarkable.

Nevertheless, Europe is divided and does not seem to be able to overcome its political (ideological??) particularism. In several countries we see the re-emergence of racist and exclusivist parties, which claim that nationality and ethnic cleansing is the solution for the EU,

rather than the problem. Some claim that we need a Europe of the regions, counting more than 70 odd regions at the present time, and foreshadowing an almost complete immobility of the EU. Some claim that the nation-states are the real essence, but multinational corporations manage more and more to force decisions unto nation A against nation B in this structure. Some believe that a super-state called the United States of Europe will be the solution. But what identity should the citizen have in this historically tenacious mixture of cultures, religions and styles of life? Will the French dictate their cuisine to all? Will the Germans set the rules for industry? Will the British force upon everyone in the EU what education should be? And so on. And if that was to happen, will such a strange superstructure function both efficiently and democratically? I tend to think that agreements on these lines are more likely in another Galaxy than in the present EU.

But should we worry about this and spend all our efforts in desperate attempts to reach one of these three political structures? The symposiums we had in the three countries mentioned, -Spain, Belgium and Hungary- investigated what other features of European identity would be attractive and possibly productive in the actual EU.

The line we set out to strengthen is to look at processes and interactions between individuals and groups within the EU space which are creative and innovative in the arts, the sciences and the broader cultural arena. We want to try and make explicit, conscious and hence politically productive, the concepts at work here by citizens and citizen groups, which do not bother in any central way about the regional, national or super-national political structures mentioned. At the level of interactions and cultural production between citizens and groups from different countries, a creative but somewhat unstructured gulf of citizenry seems to be growing within the common agora of the EU. Maybe this is the most powerful or at least the most promising European identity we can detect. Maybe regulations on European citizenship should not organize or constrain this gulf, but at the very least allow space for it and encourage this rather post-national emergence. The very idea of 'post-sovereign states' will take shape there, maybe in a specific European sense.

Our invitation is to look at such concepts by using the theoretical frame of the theory of self organizing systems (complexity theory, chaos ideas, etc.), thus allowing more space for dynamics and movement than for structures and their eminent constraints. It is to be explored to what extent citizens and citizen movements , especially in the urban complexes we know today, produce or induce new types of self-regulating citizenry than the structural and dominantly static nation state features of the past two centuries. It is then to be stressed that policy makers and governments can and should promote and actively sustain any attempt to create a space of interaction. A significant part of the policy can become the active creation and regulation of such spaces.

We think it is important to state and recognize that urban areas and intercity complexes play a very important role as providers of space and opportunities and as sceneries for the creative impulses by citizen groups.
