Imagined Europe
The Shaping of a European Cultural Identity through EU Cultural Policy

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Abstract

The EU has recently introduced a cultural policy. This includes symbolic initiatives, among which is the creation of the 'European Cities of Culture' (ECC), that are a primary example of EU attempts at awakening European consciousness by promoting its symbols, while respecting the content of national cultures. This goes together with the realization that the idea of 'Europe' as the foundation of an identity is key for the legitimization of the EU. This article addresses the question of European cultural identity as it is appropriated and shaped by the EU in the process of becoming an 'imagined community'. It is grounded on a critical systematization of current ideas of Europe as a cultural identity and on a fieldwork analysis of the nine ECCs in 2000. The article argues that if we are to appreciate how Europe is imagined, it is important both to take EU symbolic initiatives seriously, and to try and grasp the specificity of these symbols and the peculiar conditions of their use.

Key words

■ cultural policy ■ Europe ■ European Union ■ identity ■ imagined community

Introduction[1]

The idea, identity, and enterprise of 'Europe' are today the subject matter of an increasing number of studies in all the social sciences, stimulated by the development of European Union (EU) institutions. Now that the limits represented by the adjective 'economic' are gone, these institutions just call themselves *European*, without other specifications. This appropriation goes together with the realization that legal and economic integration alone will not create a united Europe, thus the emphasis is on Europe as a cultural unit stemming from the history of the European nations and their long-standing cross-fertilization. In short, the

idea of 'Europe' as the foundation of an identity is stimulated by the EU's search for instruments of legitimization.

In particular, this is given shape in the recently introduced European cultural policy, which was conceived, even more self-consciously than at other levels, as an instrument to build a cultural identity for the Europe of the European Union. So far the main outcomes of EU action in cultural matters are sponsorship and subsidy campaigns, exchange programmes, along with the regulation of the cultural goods market. These are quite well accepted and considered successful even if insufficient (Bekemans, 1993). There is also, however, a set of symbolic initiatives directly aimed at creating a sense of common belonging (CEC, 1988; Fointaine, 1991) that range from the flag to the anthem, to a new ritual calendar, to the creation of the 'European City of Culture'. The latter is the object of this study.

Among the symbolic initiatives of the EU, the European City of Culture (ECC),[2] is gaining success, and thus attention.[3] It is an intergovernmental action established in 1983 and started in 1985. One city was selected for the title by the European Council each year until 1999.[4] The role of the European institutions in the actual organization and implementation of the ECC ends basically with the conferment of the title and of the small fund that goes with it. Each city is free to determine its own cultural programme, so that the ECC have been very different in duration, scale and scope of their programmes, ranging from cultural festivals on specific topics to year-long programmes (Myerscough, 1994). The ECC is a salient example of the attempts at awakening a European consciousness by diffusing its symbols, while respecting the contents of national and local cultures. In particular the year 2000 provides a particularly relevant case as nine cities were nominated and called upon to 'organise a European cultural space for the year 2000'.

Often dismissed by the EU officials themselves as a mere wrapping to 'sell the Community', these measures are instead key for consideration of the role of the symbolic dimension in the construction and legitimization of social reality (Cohen, 1985; Shore, 1993). The Europe referred to by the EU can be envisaged as an 'imagined community' in the making. The notion refers to a community that does not lie in the tangible relations and binding ties between its people, but exists as a reality of the mind, as the *image* of the community its members share (Anderson, 1983). It is crucial to study what kind of a reality this is and what its corollaries are.

In what follows I will argue that in order to appreciate how Europe is imagined it is not only important to take EU symbolic initiatives seriously, reaffirming the role of cultural symbols in the shaping of communities, as the classics taught us (Durkheim, 1912; Barth, 1969), we should also try to grasp the specificity of the symbols and of their use (Billig, 1995). 'Europe', as I shall try to illustrate, is becoming more and more like an icon, if not a totem, whose ambiguous content seems to reinforce the possibilities of identification with it. EU attempts at creating Europe can be an exceptional standpoint for reconsidering the very meaning of 'imagined community' today and of the identity connected to it. This

perspective also allows for an understanding of Europe as a case of the wider reshaping of cultural identities in the framework of contemporary processes generally summed up under the label of globalization (Hedetoft, 1999).

I will base my argument by combining a review of current ideas of Europe as a cultural identity, both for scholars and for the EU itself, with an analysis of the thus far unique case of nine ECCs nominated for the year 2000. This part of the study is based on an analysis of EU official discourse on the ECC programme – legislation, statements, assessments – and on document analysis of the ECC 2000. As it develops from my fieldwork within the staff of *Bologna 2000*,[5] it also draws on interviews and informal conversations with staff members from the ECC 2000 and from the EU itself.

European Cultural Identity: a Review

A new wave of studies on Europe is identifiable and deserves the definition of 'new' precisely because it reflects (sometimes fosters, more rarely questions) the 'invention' of Europe by the EU. These studies appear in the 1980s and have their basis in the founding fathers of the European institutions themselves. They are also related to an earlier wave of studies on the idea of Europe that attracted many scholars, especially historians, after World War II, when negotiations on the European Coal and Steel Community were also taking place, the two levels reinforcing each other.[6] Although the warnings against the confusion of discourses and myths of Europe with EU institution building are relevant (Garcia, 1993), a clear-cut distinction would be false; it is instead important to grant some theoretical scope for conceptualizing the link between them. There-fore, in order to account for the visions of Europe in terms of cultural identity emerging from the recent literature, it is important to consider their links with current models of European integration. In so doing a parallel emerges between the notions of what is essentially European implicit in the two rival models of European integration politics – federalism and (neo)functionalism[7] – as well as in the critique of both, and discourses about the European cultural identity.

On the one hand, the common version of the opposition between federalism and neofunctionalism[8] (Spinelli, 1957; Bekemans, 1990) sees federalism as relying on radical political integration to create from the start a supra-national structure, subsequently informing all other aspects (Brugmans, 1969). On the other hand, in European studies under the label of neofunctionalism, approaches are classified claiming that political unification can only be the effect of gradual economic integration, which leads in time to unification in other fields, thanks to the so-called 'spill-over' effect (Haas, 1958; George, 1985). As neofunctional-ism, the only one to be translated into a concrete dominant politics, has shown its inner limits both at the theoretical and practical level, a third model yet to be constructed works on the critique and synthesis of the previous two, while claiming to be founded on culture. This scheme provides a grid to understand how Europe is being conceived of recently:[9] as characterized by the *unity* of

European culture, by its *diversity* or, third, by *unity in diversity*. As we shall see, the latter is not only dominant in recent scholarly approaches, but also, perhaps not surprisingly after these premises, in official EU discourses and policies, including the ECC.

Unity

Federalism was inspired by the belief in a deep, rooted *unity* and a common *destiny*. Something called the European spirit, which, according to the classic formulation of Denis de Rougemont (1966) is based on the legacy of Hellenic rationality and beauty, Roman law and institutions and ethics; or, stated even more generally (and with an eye to modern renaissances of those ancient legacies): freedom, civilization, democracy and science (Krali, 1987; Couloubaritsis et al., 1993). Modernity itself is referred to as a metaphor of Europe (Heller, 1992).

Federalism was never really translated into a direct strategy towards integration, and this still seems out of question today, yet the underlying belief in the deep unity of European cultural identity that informs federalism is far from extinguished, even if it is expressed more as a wish or a challenge than as a description (Rijksbaron et al., 1987). Certainly this perspective is not the dominant one, however, it is still significant. Critiques are varied, their main argument is normally that to choose a core European tradition results in an arbitrary, ideological, selection towards the inside (Delanty, 1995) and an imperialist, Eurocentric vision of the world towards the outside. Europe creates itself by marginalizing its Others (Said, 1978) and easily forgets its dark side in order to claim the universalizable character of its good one.

If the simple version of this approach is just not defensible in the contemporary intellectual field, recent ideas of cultural globalization theory applied to Europe sustain a renewed version of it. Advanced capitalism brings about unifying processes that not only globalize the scope of capitalist economy but finally make the world a global village, in which allegiances have cosmopolitan character (Inglehart, 1977; Featherstone, 1993). According to this version, culture needs to be standardized and universalized to keep up with the increasing complexity and global scale of the social structure, as it once was for the nation-state (Gellner, 1983). The unity of European culture is not so much seen in past and myth, as projected into the future as the result of an 'objective' acting of Europe as a singular subject (Duroselle, 1990).

Diversity

A radical critique of the old as of the new version of European cultural identity as unity is at the heart of the approach stressing its *diversity*. For this approach, there is no such thing as a European culture, there are instead many European cultures and identities (Macdonald, 1993; Gowland et al., 1995). With respect to those that focus on the unity of European culture, this approach is more – so to speak – minimalist and therefore has a 'family resemblance' to neofunctionalism.

As in neofunctionalism, 'technical' solutions acknowledging the plurality of European traditions are seen as the only possible Europe. Europe should be, above all, a kind of institutional shelter to protect, valorize and diffuse knowledge about European cultures. Culture cannot be the 'glue' of European integration, on the contrary, the idea of a European identity is sometimes presented as detrimental because it would endanger the cultural multiplicity indicated as the key feature of Europe. Or, in other words, there can only be a European identity if it is *civic* – based on a 'social contract' – and not *cultural* – based on a shared tradition (Delanty, 1995; 1998).

However, it is possible to critically point out that this neutrality ends where the question of what to count as a pre-political shared tradition and what to include in the civic community emerges: the problem of the first approach – what to include – here is only displaced. National identity as the standard of a cultural community is the usual assumption, but one that can more easily encounter criticism, as suggested by the literature on the constructed character of the nation itself (Gellner, 1988). In this respect it is relevant to note that, as the renewed version of Europe as unity stresses cultural globalization, a renewed version of Europe as diversity responds to it stressing the recent phenomena of nationalist or ethnic recrudescence.

Unity in Diversity

Both focusing on Europe as diversity and Europe as unity seems therefore to lead to an impasse. New localisms and globalization can both be seen as characterizing, if contradictory, features of our world and demand an approach able to consider them together (Scott, 1998). What is specifically European, as opposed to cosmopolitan, if we espouse cultural globalization? Why should the national level be the atom of analysis when smaller, and sometimes bigger but crosscutting, allegiances are also emerging? Both the approaches described above are prone to criticism of naive realism, as they tend not to thematize and question their categories. Moreover, the neofunctionalist reaction to the essentialist language of federalism is based on a vision of individuals as totally rational, interest-oriented beings, thus failing to understand precisely questions of identity as background for the creation of interests (Pizzorno, 1983).

A third model is thus emerging from a combined critique. This claims that both Europe as unity and as diversity is simultaneously true and false, and thus European cultural identity can be seen as *unity in diversity*. Edgar Morin, in his much quoted *Penser l'Europe* (1987), states that the unity of Europe, as well as its uniqueness, lies in its *dialogic* nature, that is the combination of differences without homogenizing them, making of this attitude towards difference the expression of unity. Here difference is a value. It is not only the basis for co-operation, but a cultural feature itself (Derrida, 1991; Habermas, 1992). Seen above all as a community of destiny, the European dimension is conceived of as a mediating instance between the global scale and local allegiances (Lenoble and Dewandre, 1992). They are no longer seen as opposite phenomena, but as the

expression of the complexity of the modern world, in which different layers of allegiance constitute what is often called the *multiple identity* of the contemporary subject (Smith, 1992; Garcìa, 1993; Panebianco, 1996).

The ambiguity of this 'solution' is the major subject of critique. If it is true that the available cultural identities are nowadays multiple, it is also true that just to name them is not an explanation, and that there is no guarantee that they will be harmoniously nested either. Indeed, often the concept of multiple identity remains optimistically undifferentiated. The 'unitas multiplex' has thus been criticized as a *formal* solution with no substance, a superficial if successful *motto* that can easily fall into a new version of Eurocentric triumphalism (Passerini, 1998).

Cultural Identity and Cultural Policy in the EU

Despite being criticized, this formal solution is today dominant not only in academic studies but also in official EU discourse. This emerges in particular with the recently introduced cultural policy of the EU. Article 128 of the Treaty on European Union signed in 1992 in Maastricht (now 151 in the amended Treaty of Amsterdam) states, 'The Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore' (CEC, 1992). Culture is seen as a rather static and bounded whole that lies at the basis of the formation of identity, without, however, being exclusively connected to a particular community – and in particular to a national one, even if protestation is made in that sense – as a more classical 'anthropological' concept of culture would suggest.[10] Therefore, the assumption is that if the *corpus* of European culture is sufficiently promoted and protected, a European consciousness will naturally emerge. This emphasis on the role of culture in the construction of community makes more obvious the contradiction that affects all cultural policies: *promoting the spontaneous* flowering of culture, using culture as a legitimizing tool while claiming that culture deserves to be safeguarded as the highest product of human activity, thus as an end in itself. Moreover, the EU has to deal with another sensitive issue, that of fostering the common European heritage without provoking the reaction of national or local cultures (that is, of the much older respective institutions).

The familiarity of EU discourse with concepts of the social sciences proves useful here, as shown by the ability to adopt the complex discourse of 'unity in diversity', recently also chosen as the official motto of the EU. The major consequence of this is that the EU has been able to avoid filling in the idea of the European cultural corpus with specific elements. If for academic studies a blurred, formal concept of culture immediately stands as a matter of critique, the EU argues that an institution cannot define a concept such as culture. It should instead approach the question in a pragmatic way, in the limits of what is formally present in official texts and policies (CEC, 1996: 5), as if pragmatic meant neutral, a legacy of the neofunctionalist 'technical' approach. Such a claim is

bound to generate the critiques it tries to prevent. It is in particular in the work of Cris Shore that a critical assessment of the hidden content, or better, the assumptions underlying such an approach can be found. According to Shore, the EU, having internalized concepts of multiple identity – in which multiple stands as an alternative to conflictual – assumes that the different layers of identity will create harmonious figures of concentric or nested circles, fostered by patterns of European culture. This excludes *a priori* the possibility of conflict, all the more so as culture is considered only for its European dimension, forgetting all that divides a nation, a region from another. Moreover, the discourse of *unity in diversity* is seen as a rhetorical *escamotage* to hide an effectively centralizing, top-down approach, still failing to give a definite content to its abstract and ambiguous slogans (Shore, 2000).

Along that line of thought the critique can be even more radical, as the ambiguity of the content reinforces, so to speak, the exact reproduction of the form. In creating a style of thought, institutions not only frame the reality they control, but also set the limit and the style within which 'resistance' will be possible (Douglas, 1986). However, this suggests also that a slightly different perspective can be taken. If the assumptions hidden in mottoes such as 'unity in diversity' are analysed, it should not be presupposed that they simply trickle down to 'Europeans'; it should instead be remarked that their ambiguity does allow for different, contrasting uses. The ambiguity of EU discourse about cultural identity and about the very meaning of 'Europe' is not *per se* a flaw, but an element to be thematized (Kertzer, 1988). Before struggling to define the elements of a European identity, we should consider the type of means employed in creating such an identity, not so much because we want to evaluate their effects, but more importantly because they are clues to the type of identity they are addressing. Especially when considering an emerging social identity, it is crucial to address the means deployed to build it. It is from this perspective that the following analysis of the European Cities of Culture in the year 2000 takes off.

A 'European Cultural Space for the Year 2000'

The idea of the European City of Culture was launched at the meeting of Ministers of Culture of the European Community in 1983 in Athens, thanks to the initiative of the then Greek Minister of Culture, Melina Mercouri, who is often reported to have said, 'it is time for our [the Culture Ministers'] voice to be heard as loud as that of the technocrats. Culture, art and creativity are not less important than technology, commerce and the economy' (quoted in Myerscough, 1994: 1). Being an intergovernmental action, mainly funded by the city involved, the ECC is designed and implemented locally. The EU, however, sets the mission, that is 'to highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures and the features they share, and promote greater mutual acquaintance between European Union citizens', clearly reflecting the complexity of EU discourse on cultural matters.[11]

In reporting these official statements I want not only to give a background to the analysis, but also to draw attention to what has already become a traditional account: the story of the ECC is always told in the same way. This is particularly true for the 'highly symbolic' nominations at the turn of the millennium. The year 2000, we learn from EU and ECC documents, is exceptional for the ECC programme, as all the cities that presented their candidature were given the title, with the justification resting on the special significance of that year. As a consequence in 2000 there were nine ECCs, three from the North (Bergen, Helsinki, Reykjavik), three from the Centre (Brussels, Cracow, Prague) and three from the South (Avignon, Bologna, Santiago de Compostela). This account could obviously be submitted to critical appraisal. It could be remarked, just to give two examples, that the three groups of cities are not as straightforward and clearly reveal their contingent nature, or that the reason for naming all the cities was due more to the strong pressure by the national governments than anything else. My aim here, however, is different: to follow the accepted version to see how it works. For instance, on the web-site of *Prague 2000* we read:

> Due to the uniqueness of the turn of the century and millennium and due to the extra-ordinary interest of European cities, the Council of Ministers of Culture of the European Union . . . awarded the title to a total of nine European cities. The vision of a future unified European continent, consisting of diverse regions, nations and cultures yet comprising a cohesive and communicating whole, was thus demonstrated by the appointment of these cities that differ in size, population, history and financial potential. (Prague 2000, 2000 Online)

The European dimension, it is thus claimed, is brought to the fore. Moreover, the EU explicitly invited the ECC 2000 to co-ordinate their programmes so as to organize a 'European cultural space for the year 2000'. During the preparatory years quite a lot of attention on the part of the organisers[12] was on to the European dimension of the event. In the conference presenting *Bologna 2000* to the town in 1997, the then city councillor in charge of cultural policy, Roberto Grandi, stressed this aspect, inviting everybody to collaborate in the important task of 'representing Italy in Europe, and Europe in Italy'. Europe, he continued, is still at risk of being reduced to an economic entity, thus the official mission of creating 'a European cultural space' is particularly relevant: the nine cities should first and foremost use this occasion to reflect on the role of culture in the shaping of the identity of Europe.

As ECC 2000 the nine cities were asked to form an association. The AECC (Association of European Cities of Culture in the year 2000) was established in 1996 and was based in Brussels. According to the statute of the association, the nine cities 'act together in order to organise a cultural space for the year 2000' and '[t]he activity of the Cultural Capitals is aimed at drawing closer the peoples of Europe through culture'. Apart from its lobbying tasks to the EU, this association facilitated international meetings, the definition of specific themes for each city, the choice of a common logo and the organization of common projects. The development of the latter deserves attention. It was agreed that every city would

propose a project, of which it would be the leader, ideally attracting all other eight cities as partners. These projects were all quite ambitious and were normally given a separate status in the programme as well as being presented separately on the websites. However, the initial enthusiasm faded and very few projects were shared by all nine cities. As many of the directors of the nine cities pointed out at the last AECC meeting of 2000, held in Bologna, the few 'joint' projects were in fact those that travelled from one city to another, while the original aim was to give shape to common ideas. During this meeting it was thus decided not to continue the activity of the AECC, as on the whole it was not felt to be a success. Interestingly, the opinion expressed by the secretary-general of the AECC was quite different from the dominant one, drawing attention to the fact that in comparison with previous ECC and in consideration of the differences among the cities, the ECC 2000 did increase the 'European dimension' of their programmes. However, the secretary expected her opinion to be unpopular among the directors of the ECC. Robert Palmer, former director of *Glasgow '90*, then director of *Brussels 2000* and advisor of many others, confirms this expectation. Commenting on the experience of the nine ECCs in 2000, he said to me during an interview:

> My view is that it was an interesting experiment, but it did not really work, except on an entirely symbolic level. It's very nice, I suppose, to look at the map of Europe with nine dots, you know, all connected: three in the North, three in the Centre, three in the South, some former Eastern European cities, some not, some big, some small, and then you can create some kind of symbolism about European diversity. But on a practical level I think the disadvantages far outweigh the advantages. I think it means less of a focus for a city, it means enormous difficulties in trying to generate cooperation or collaboration between these nine cities which have not come together for cultural reasons, they have come together because they were designated by politicians . . . However, I think it was a useful experiment, there were some interesting bilateral projects . . . I wouldn't say it was a total failure, but I think those projects were probably minor in relation to the entire programme of most of the cities.

The designation of nine cities is thus experienced both as a thought-provoking experiment and as a source of practical problems, the bureaucratic origin of the network never being forgotten. However, the conceptualization of such 'practical' difficulties is interesting. As a member of *Bologna 2000* in charge of European projects in their preparatory phase explained to me, even if efforts were made to collaborate in the very creation of projects, '*cultural* differences' between the nine cities made shared projects very difficult. Therefore, according to him, in order to be successful, projects should rely on their 'international key'; that is, they should involve an international active participation rather than having a European, or international, theme. As an example he mentioned *Voices of Europe*, a choir of young people from the nine cities, proposed by *Reykjavik 2000* and accepted by all the others. In this case – the European project most often quoted as successful by ECC 2000 staff – my interviewee stressed 'cultural difference is used as a value', and when this happens 'working with people from Reykjavik, Praga, Santiago is easy after all. And you realize that, in fact, there is a common

identity. Twenty, fifteen years ago this was unthinkable.' The consistency with EU official discourse is even more striking considering that the same person declares himself sceptical of the EU, believing that it will always be just an economic alliance, and that this feeling of common identity is not linked to it in any way.[13] It should be stressed that often in ECC 2000 discourse the existence of differences and a feeling of unity are both underlined, accompanied – as EU official discourse – by a lack of clear vision of what would constitute the common experience referred to, and by a positive connotation of differences as long as they remain 'cultural'. Unspecified cultural differences are both a limit to unity and a peculiarity of the union. People I spoke to from the ECC 2000 remarked upon the official aim of the ECC in a way very similar to the EU official I interviewed – a detached national expert working with the European Commission on EU cultural activities (including the ECC). The latter, asked about 'European culture' and EU cultural policy, said: 'The preservation and promotion of this shared culture are one half of EU cultural policy – the other half relates to cultural diversity, our cultures.' The ECC mission is thus not a contradiction, he continued, but 'a duality'. Cultural diversity's ambivalent role in the ECC 2000 and EU discourses of *unity in diversity* share a clear family resemblance.

Similar considerations emerge from the programmes of the ECC 2000 as a whole. If 'European' enthusiasm faded in the direct relationship of the nine ECCs, it did so even more in the organization of the overall programmes. Looking at the programmes of the nine cities it seems that Europe is not so much an issue, the real focus of attention is on the specificity of the city itself and on big events, regardless of their having a European dimension or not. If preliminary printed programmes (generally published in 1999 or before, aiming at introducing to the public the whole initiative) always contained sections on the history of the ECC, the specificity of the year 2000 and in particular on the European 'vocation' of their town, this aspect is less visible in the final programmes. The emphasis on the European dimension in the sense of international collaboration meant that there was no need for a specific European 'theme' or category,[14] thus general programmes of the ECC 2000 do not contain much in the way of introductory remarks and are almost always divided into the classical categories of cultural festivals (theatre, music, art, and so on).

However, what has been maintained in both published programmes and on websites – and remarkably so in the context just delineated – is the standardized history of the ECC and of the year 2000 in particular. This may be interpreted as just a formal obligation towards the EU, however, the markedly limited influence of the EU on the programme and, above all, the results of a search of the ECC 2000 websites suggest a different interpretation. Doing a quantitative content analysis within each city's website we discover that the word 'Europe' is repeated almost as many times as words such as 'music' or 'theatre', it is more popular than a more specific category such as 'architecture', and is not much less popular than the word 'culture' itself. By and large, 'Europe' is among the most frequent keywords of the ECC 2000. Often projects have 'Europe' in their very title or in descriptions: 'Europe' and 'European' are used as many times as

possible, often in place of words – such as international – that would do just as well.

Briefly considering the wider context of the ECC, from John Myerscough's study of the first ten years of the programme, a similarly blurred picture emerges with respect to the 'European focus'. This is said to have been consistent, even if lamentation is made about its role in the programmes, that could have been more emphasized. In the concluding remarks about a 'Common European culture?' (the question mark is in the text), T.S. Eliot's sentence is quoted: 'the cultural health of Europe requires two conditions: that the culture of each country be unique and that the different cultures recognise the relation between them' (Myerscough, 1994: 40), noticing, however, that the ECC have achieved more in highlighting differences than in bringing the European dimension to the fore. What is wished for, however, are not 'formula approaches, taking examples from each member state [that] have rarely proved artistically valuable and should be viewed with some caution' (Myerscough, 1994: 20). It is rather on 'cultural networking' and international exchanges that hopes are placed: 'The international visits . . . were a practical contribution to "making the cultural unity of Europe"' (Myerscough, 1994: 20).

The interpretation of this apparently contradictory picture proceeds from considering that the point here is not to establish who or what is more truthful and far-seeing between those people, documents and indices that claim that there was strong co-operation, successful projects and the creation of 'a European cultural space', and those who claim the opposite. Interesting insights can be gained looking at what these positions share. There are in fact aspects that are not questioned by the disagreement on the most evident ones. This, with special reference to the year 2000, can be made evident by two overall remarks. The first is that official discourse is always reported literally, ritually, I would say. This aspect is indeed linked to the ambiguity of EU discourse in cultural matters: it cannot be followed because actual indications are not there, it can only be repeated. Second, and descending from the above on a practical level, by 'European dimension' what is meant is European collaboration, the working together of various sub-European subjects on common cultural projects, more than the realization of projects having a European 'theme'. This may be justified, again, as a more technical, objective requirement, that is also what the criteria of EU funding in cultural matter require. As the official of the European Commission I interviewed put it: 'We are looking more for a high level of co-operation than a "European" theme. Many of the projects we support look at regional/local culture, but are promoting them at a European level.' This allows a European dimension to be claimed without ever having to single out what constitutes the 'common cultural heritage' often referred to.

The combined effect of these two aspects is that 'Europe' emerges as a value, attached to everything valuable or in need of valorization. The phrase 'a European cultural space' may be quite abstract, but it shows how Europe maintains a positive connotation, a quality, giving to what can be put next to it a positive tone per se. The ambiguity of Europe and its corollaries implies both that debate

is open about specific meanings *and* that an unchallenged assumption that they are good passes through. The very name of Europe becomes a legitimizing tool: it may not provide much in the way of content, but hovers in the background, emerging in critical or strategic moments, a name with totemic power.

Final Considerations

This connotation of Europe could be a sign of a surreptitious European integration, via the diffusion into everyday life of EU symbols, whose relevance is both difficult to measure and contentious (Leonard, 1998; Shore, 2000: 227–30). The perspective of this article cannot provide a solution to that debate, but tries to look at it from a different angle: not to measure the actual diffusion and practical efficacy of such a European identity, but to consider its nature, as suggested by the means deployed to create it. The EU's scarce reach on substantial matters of cultural identity (e.g. education instead of just exchange programmes, managing cultural heritage instead of just sponsoring single actions) is often both complained about by the EU, and used as an instrument of critique by scholars. However, the analysis above reveals the possibility of a different scenario.

The analysis of the ECC 2000 suggests that the content ambiguity of symbolic actions of the EU is strictly connected to the exact, ritual repetition of their formulae. Ambiguity thus does not mean confusion or weakness. However, its peculiarity (and its flaw as an ideological instrument) lie in that it can work for opposite ends. What 'Europe' actually is remains contentious and its positive connotation can sustain both its conflation with the EU and a critique of the same. Indeed, this is borne out by my fieldwork. What Stephen Swedberg noted about how 'Europe' functions in the recent literature on the European idea seems relevant here: its very name becomes a kind of fetish, highlighted whenever it appears, traced back from the origin of history, juxtaposing ancient myths and modern institutions, geographical areas and utopian movements. 'Europe' works as a community-creating symbol of a type that recalls Durkheim's analysis of the totem, a symbol that is itself part of the sacred it represents (Swedberg, 1994: 383). Needless to say, the notion of totem-like symbol has to be used as a heuristic tool and to question the process of imagining a community in the specific contemporary context (Ullock, 1996). What seems to be in question today is not only the shift from a cultural allegiance to another, but a questioning of the very meaning of allegiance through culture and, therefore, of the analytical instruments we use to interpret it. The EU is not inventing the language of *unity in diversity* in a void, trying to inculcate people with it. On the contrary, as we have seen when reviewing the literature on European cultural identity, the EU appropriates discourse most suitable to the type of multiple identity which is the more likely to accept a European 'layer' of allegiance. If the analysis of discourses about multiple identities – or, in EU rhetoric, *unity in diversity* – need not to be as fleeting and superficial as they claim the reality described is, an essentialist

language of identity than can only see imagined communities as false and weak, often implying a nostalgic look at deeper forms of belonging, is also to be avoided. Both would prevent a serious consideration of what is currently under construction in the European context.

Notes

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2 In the following this acronym will be used for European City, or Cities, of Culture. When reference is made to a particular ECC only the city and the year will be mentioned: e.g. *Athens '85*. In the literature the programme is sometimes also called 'European Capital of Culture'.

3 See the section devoted to the programme by the *International Journal of Cultural Policy* (Richards, 2000; Heikinnen, 2000; Hitters, 2000; Roth and Frank, 2000). The growing success attracted the EU's attention as well: in 1994 the Network of previous ECC commissioned a study, funded by the EU, of the first ten years of the programme (Myerscough, 1994).

4 *Athens '85, Florence '86, Amsterdam '87, Berlin '88, Paris '89, Glasgow '90, Dublin '91, Madrid '92, Antwerp '93, Lisbon '94, Luxembourg '95, Copenhagen '96, Thessaloniki '97, Stockholm '98, Weimar '99.*

5 As part of research that involved fieldwork during the whole duration of *Bologna 2000*s organization and implementation (summer 1998–spring 2001). This has included: participant observation within *Bologna 2000* (including plenary meetings of the nine ECC 2000), working as an assistant in the cultural programming sector; semi-structured interviews with staff and other cultural operators involved in *Bologna 2000* and the other eight ECC 2000; document analysis (published and unpublished material related to the nine ECC 2000 and to the programme in general).

6 These studies, that flourished from the end of the Second World War to the early 1960s, have invented a genre and possibly an object of study, even if it is precisely in them that we find emphasis on the mythological and ancient roots of 'Europe' (see, for instance, Chabod, 1947; Hay, 1957; Duroselle, 1965). For comparison between this group of works and contemporary analyses see Kaelble (1998).

7 The term neofunctionalism has been legitimized by use in European studies and political thought, however, it can be quite confusing, especially for a sociological audience, for which it evokes an altogether different approach. In European integration studies, neofunctionalism is the definition usually attributed to E. Haas's revision of an earlier functionalist approach by D. Mitrany, similarly based on the concept of functional spill-over (Mitrany, 1943; Haas, 1958).

8 It should be remarked that the dichotomy between federalism and neofunctionalism is a reduction of complexity. It is useful here as it directly recalls a more fundamental level to consider, that is ideas of what is Europe, of what Europeans share and thus of what they can be motivated by in the development of allegiances. However, this scheme can also be confusing, especially as federalism and neofunctionalism are not on the same level. Neofunctionalism is a theory, and a practice, of integration, federalism a form of integration as well as a political ideal, that has been shared by many neofunctionalists, and some of the 'founding fathers of Europe' among

them. For detailed analysis of several approaches to European integration see Nugent (1999).

9 From a different perspective, U. Hedetoft (1999) has elaborated a scheme of concepts of European integration that partly overlaps with the one I propose. In consideration of the debate involving primordialist and constructivist theories of (national) identity, Hedetoft suggests that they also inform opposing visions of Europe: the first sees it as a threat, the second as an opportunity. The latter can be then categorized into three types according to the degree of emphasis on what is common: common cultural identity, common but multiple cultural identity (*unity in diversity*), or finally exclusively political, instrumental identity. In this way, however, Hedetoft takes into consideration only the link of nationalism with primordialism and of 'Europeanism' with constructivism, and not the possibility of a 'Europeanist primordialism'. The vision underlying federalism, and thus the cultural presuppositions of many of those who stress the common cultural identity, risks being overlooked.

10 This is made possible by a vision of culture mainly in terms of high culture: the arts, architecture, literature; in short, cultural heritage. According to a common scheme, this is mainly contrasted to the vision of culture as 'way of life', that is values, customs, ideas, politics, etc. It is in this second meaning that culture is the defining feature of a community, while the products of high culture tend to claim a universal value. A contradiction thus emerges in the EU use of the concept of culture, as the emphasis on high culture is functional to the overcoming of national cultural boundaries, but becomes a weakness when applied to the construction of a new community (Williams, 1976; Eagleton, 2000).

11 Currently, the European City of Culture is classified as an 'emblematic cultural action' within the framework programme *Culture 2000*. The ECC programme has evolved throughout the years; worthy of notice are the decision to open participation to European cities outside the EU and to set criteria for selection, beforehand only based on decisions of the Council of Ministers on the basis of a rotating nomination among EU countries (Decision of 12/11/92 of the European Council of Ministers). The other main revision was introduced in 1999, following the new competence on culture established with Maastricht: from 2005 the programme becomes a direct action of DGX (Decision 1419/1999/EC of the European Parliament). The procedures for candidature and selection are also redefined, and the sequential nomination among EU countries reintroduced. Along with one city from the EU country of turn, a city from outside the EU can apply. The first city with the new system will be Cork in 2005. For the period 2001–2004 the nominated cities are: Porto and Rotterdam (2001), Bruges and Salamanca (2002), Graz (2003), Genoa and Lille (2004).

12 So far three main organizational typologies can be singled out: direct administration by local government structures, independent promoting companies, or a mix of the two, that is, a new structure with at its top representatives of local authorities (see Myerscough, 1994). For more details on the organization of the nine ECC 2000 and the AECC, see the final report by the secretary-general of the AECC (Cogliandro, 2001).

13 As I learnt from fieldwork at *Bologna 2000*, the exposure of staff to official EU discourse is not increased by being part of that programme.

14 *Compostela 2000* being somehow an exception: its theme was 'Europe and the world', stressing the role of Santiago in the shaping of Europe through pilgrimages. Interestingly, *Bologna 2000* included an exhibition on 'Europe born through pilgrimages',

however, this was not considered a 'European project' as it was not developed within the AECC or with other European partners.

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