Educate European identity?

Enrique Banús

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Abstract:

In the last few decades, the demand for a „European identity" has sometimes been declared as the solution for the citizens' distance from the European project, and sometimes also as a precondition for a further development of the project itself. This paper submits these declarations to critical evaluation, bringing to the fore some problems connected with the concept of collective identity. It distinguishes between identity and identification, underlines the relevance of the latter, asks how this identification can be implemented and in which way education can contribute to this effort. The knowledge of cultural heritage is underlined.

In den letzten Jahrzehnten ist so manches Mal die Bedeutung einer „europäischen Identität" unterstrichen worden, manches Mal, um die Distanz der Bürger zum europäischen Projekt zu übrebrücken; andere Mal, um die Vertiefung dieses Projektes überhaupt zu ermöglichen. Der Autor unterzieht diesen Begriff einer kritischen Überprüfung, im Rahmen der Problematik der kollektiven Identitäten überhaupt, und unterscheidet zwischen Identität und Identifizierung, deren Bedeutung unterstrichen wird. Gefragt wird wie diese zu vermitteln sei und welche Rolle dabei die Erziehung spiele. Schliesslich wird auch Bezug auf die Allgemeinbildung genommen und speziell auf die Kenntnis des sogenannten „europäischen Erbes".

Even the non-experts in education know that education has a socialising effect. In other words, it transmits the categories, values and stories that help classify one in society, to have „a place in the world"[1]. This specifies the tendency (and the need) of the person to avoid emptiness[2] and to share with others. This way, collective identities are presented or created and consolidated (verbs that express very different convictions in relation to identities) with the values and attitudes that are inherent in them[3]. Should European identity be included in the educational process?

1. De identitate europaea, prima pars

No affirmations are known by the „founding fathers" of the European communities on European identity[4]. It also does not seem they consistently doubted about the fact that the project in which they were getting involved with was maintained by a common substratum. But their idea was to carry out a political project, with a firm objective: peace, and have a clear instrument for it: the opening of the frontiers of economic exchange, free movement, non-discrimination by nationality. In the beginning, there was no public consultation, no civic participation. There was also no resistance to this project. The experiences of the break up of Europe, of desolation and death, were too recent. The alternative that was being shaped on the other side of the „iron curtain", with the annulment of freedom and dignity was also too clear. It can be said that the European Communities are based on an implicit social consensus. They are the production of a project that means fulfilling a general longing. The technical details do not seem to be of much interest. Only some protests by

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1   This is the title of a movie by the Argentinian, Adolfo Aristarain (1992).

2   There is no place to develop the relevance of the „horror vacui" not only for Arts History, but also for the development of the human being and society, but at least it should be mentioned here.

3   The concept of the collective identities will be discussed further on in the paper.

4   Jean Monnet's sentence about the role he would give to culture if he could begin again with the European project is probably not true (cf. Banús 2000).

farmers perturbed this image of serenity with which the project was being implemented. The difficulties and turbulence came from the very own political arena (the problems that France caused in the 60's that culminated in the so-called „empty chair crisis", Banús 2002) or the world economy (the oil crisis in the 70's).

However, one also relatively quickly gets the impression that the European fervour is deflating, that by moving away from the foundational moments and getting into the daily routine, always more grey and complex, people don't perceive the intensity of the project, they don't want to know anything about it. It is in this context when the „European identity" emerges. Probably, the Tindemans Report in 1975 is the first official document to mention it. It places it directly in relation to the advancement of European integration. It considers it a necessary condition so that the project can continue being delved into. It is the implicit recognition that the situation has changed in relation to the beginning, that a political construction is now not possible without the support of the people. From here to the „Citizens' Europe" that would be proclaimed in 1992, there is only one step. But this Europe remains basically just a good intention. It is true that the Treaty of the European Union, in 1992, would normalise „European citizenship" as a legal concept, that is linked with the citizenship of each state and means the foundation for some rights, the most important of which are free movement and freedom of residency[5]. However, the approach to citizenship is not achieved. This can be strongly demonstrated, not only in the high percentages of abstention in the European elections[6], but above all in the rejection of the „Treaty that established a Constitution for Europe" in the referendums called in France and the Netherlands. And it was precisely when the elaboration of this document had opted for a more open, more transparent and more participative method than the previous reforms of the Treaties, made only by the governments and some of the Community institutions[7].

This is, then, the context in which the idea emerges that a „European identity" is necessary[8]. In fact, a solemn declaration was produced about the European identity, approved in 1983 first by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and later endorsed in a Communitarian summit. This declaration, however, makes reference to only a series of civic values that are considered constituent of the Europe that is being built. A Europe that, of course, is a political project anchored to these values. And not because, as the text may suggest and as it states in so many other documents, these values are intrinsically anchored in the history of Europe, but because they are considered strictly necessary for the survival of this Europe. In other words, when indicating that parliamentary democracy, the respect of human rights or democracy are elements of the European identity, it is not describing the history of Europe but rather the pillars of this political project[9].

The idea of associating „Europe" and its identity with values has been postponed throughout time, until reaching the constitutional Treaty, which includes a very broad description of what these values are[10].

The Treaty of the European Union does not talk about identity, but introduces the concept of „common cultural heritage" to grant certain (few) competencies in cultural matters to the European Community. Although the major concern in article 151[11] is to contribute to the blossoming of

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[5]   In the Treaty of Rome the free movement was mentioned, but limited to the workers. Only with the Maastricht Treaty these rights were extended to all the citizens.

[6]   In the first European Parliament elections in 1979 (with 9 member states), the turnout was 63%. 2004, with 25 states, the turnout was only 40%. Also in the 9 countries that participated in the first elections, the turnout was considerably lower (with some exceptions like United Kingdom, in which it has grown from 32 to 39%).

[7]   This is the aim for establishing the „European Convention", in which representatives of the national Parliaments are also members. An Internet forum has been opened with the idea to encourage citizens to send their proposals.

[8]   Brigitte Boyce comments that in the last few years „it has been argued to various degrees that the construction of a common European identity has become indispensable, if the dynamics of economic and political integration are to be sustained" (Boyce 1998, 306).

[9]   It is relevant to underline that the European project, including in the years in which it is realised as an economic project, has always been a political project, with which a Europe should be „created" that is based on some values, that have not always dominated Europe's history. In the „Constitution's" Preamble it is said that it is inspired „from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law have been developed". This is the result of a long and difficult process.

[10]   In article I-2 is said: „The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the member states in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail."

[11]   When it was approved it was article 128; the numbers have been changed.

European cultures in their diversity[12], also this „common cultural heritage" has to be shown[13], that, of course is not defined in the Treaty (perhaps it is not the place for it). Nor do other official texts establish a coherent delimitation of this term (cf. Banús 2002a).

„Identity", „common heritage", „civic values" – a triad that seems intensely related. In fact, with the appearance of these elements of political and social life, a replica is being made of the situation that has been customary in National governments.

2. Identity in the Nation State

The nation-state is, without a doubt, one of the great creations of modern Europe. So convinced has Europe been of its quality that, on the one hand, it has exported itself as a concept valid for social life in other continents, also for those (see Africa) that have not yet developed starting from their own tradition. The idea of laying down borders in Africa, even with geometric criteria, gives the idea of the European conviction on the validity of the nation-state. This is the same as the fact that, at least from the Congress of Vienna, the states have tried after each war, to guarantee peace through a redesign of the map of Europe, changing borders and national configurations that were considered obsolete or pernicious. This would also happen in the Treaty of Versailles and in the Conferences of Yalta and Potsdam to reorganize the Europe shattered by World War II. In fact, European integration is the first peace project that is not based on a reorganisation of the map, but that, accepting the frontiers, tries an internal reconfiguration, a new relationship between states.

The nation-state was based on cohesion, territorial of course, and political, but also cultural and, if possible, religious and linguistic. The history of the formation of the modern states presents many examples of how it unites to the „solution" of the „problem" of the minorities. The minorities are often forced to adapt themselves to a cultural model that is not always of the majority, but of the political and social forces or simply those in power that are starting off the national project. They must adapt or emigrate[14].

In this context, we can talk about an attempt to guarantee „identity". It is understood that cohesion comes from an identity that emerges from a common past and makes the shared project of future possible. The famous sentence attributed to Massimo D'Azeglio after the Italian unification in the XIX century, „We have made Italy, now we have to make the Italians" is an example of this[15].

And it is in this context in which education, which the state controls the content of, is converted into an instrument of selection and interpretation of the historical, artistic and literary accounts that form part of the collective heritage of the society in which the state is founded[16]. This way, education is converted into a great hermeneutic and narrative effort, carried out from the perspective of educating citizens about a specific state, whose horizon of expectation should be made up, among other things, of co-ordinates common to the rest of the citizens. Of course, the transmission of the story about identity can not be done without accounts of the otherness, a necessary contrast to better understand one's own.

Indeed, the perception of the identity was often fulfilled, and was transmitted as such, in antagonist form, in other words, by indication of what „we are not" and by excluding what „they are not", which consistently leads to definitions „in negative terms" (Boyce 1998, 306). And this, „easily slips into a nationalist affirmation of the superiority of one group over others" (Mattelart, Delcourt, Mattelart 1984, 110).

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[12]   In article 151 is said: „The Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the member states, while respecting their national and regional diversity".

[13]   The same article adds: „… at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore".

[14]   „El Estado nacional ha nacido a través de una lógica impuesta sobre la contraposición entre una mayoría étnica, identificada por una historia común, una cultura común y lengua (...) y las llamadas 'minorías étnicas', consideradas como marginales y peligrosas para un desarrollo armonioso del Estado. El Estado nacional ha sido construido sobre la base de una explícita e intencional negación del Estado-multinacional" (Donati 1999, 14).

[15]   „Abbiamo fatto l'Italia, si tratta adesso di fare gli italiani". This sentence is attributed to Massimo D'Azeglio (Massimo Tapparelli marchese D'Azeglio), during the opening session of the Italian Parliament, on February 18th, 1861.

[16]   A society has cohesion also because it shares some stories, for example – among many others – the foundation stories (sometimes known also as „myths"), with the common heroes, but also the „traditional" enemies, and in any case with the elaboration of the history which becomes „stories".

3. The New Identity Complexity

Cracks have started to appear in this model over the last few decades. The nation-state has entered into crisis – at least in Western Europe. In the countries that have emerged from communism in Central and Eastern Europe, the situation is different, partly because they have new nations (in the Balkans, for example), and partly (as in Poland) because their own identity has been condemned to be clandestine to some degree. But in Western Europe, identities emerge hard from below the state level. Sub-state regionalisms and nationalisms create important identity cohesion and make pluri-national states possible, although the modern logic is so strong that, in many of these cases, the objective is independence. In other words, it reaches an entity which, as has been customary, identifies state, society and territory. In addition, according to many authors, globalisation also diminishes the importance of the state (Beck 1997, 49ff.; García Canclini 1995).

On the other hand, the coexistence of different cultures in the same society, as a consequence of immigration, already consolidated as second generation in many countries, has strongly suggested that the question of what is the necessary common denominator so that a state can survive. Theories based on a civic consensus, which add mutual recognition of cultures, have been received with open arms[17].

In this context, the subject of cultural relativism appears on the horizon as key for, (putting to one side the already outdated Eurocentrism), reaching coexistence that respects the different identities. However, some recent events seem to point out that perhaps these theoretical proposals are not sufficient and that the „better years" of cultural relativism have already passed and currently a common ethics is needed that is capable of guaranteeing peace in democratic societies.

It is not a question of developing all the issues of these options here. In part, these are very much from the laboratory. For example, those that want a society based on civic elements, regardless of cultures, would have their rights in the private or group areas, whenever they respect the basic laws of co-habitation. Even issues from a logical point of view can be included. For example, abandoned for obvious reasons (the impossibility of condemning certain acts leaves the person in a situation of ethical defencelessness with which they cannot live), complete cultural relativism, and because we are in an ethical debate on the limits.

It only deals with pointing out that the question of identity has become enormously complicated. It is not strange that the idea of multiple identities has arisen[18], although the term seems confusing (and contradictory with the same notion of „identity"). Perhaps it would be preferable to speak of identity as something not monolithic, but complex, rich, with many facets that have also been evolving throughout time, even though it maintains a nucleus that allows the affirmation of the metaphysic continuity of the historical subject.

An important consequence for the European theme is precisely derived from this vision of identity, as will be seen.

As briefly indicated, one should not overlook the fact that this evolution coincides with the decline in identity of the nation-state. The identity has been subjected to a process of deconstruction over the last few decades of the XX century, in which it has been considered as a construct, like an imagined reality, a myth[19].

Beyond these opinions, opposed to what some have named „essentialism" from previous times (Spiering 1996, 115), one can even ask, as many already have, if the application of the concept of „identity" aside from the person, makes sense. For example, Lapierre says: „Le concept de l'identité collective (...) n'explique rien" (Lapierre 1984, 196)[20]. In fact, there are authors that affirm, „only individuals can construct identity. Groups cannot. Societies (or 'nations') as well have no proper identity" (Kreckel 1994, 13). For this, one can affirm with Straub (2000, 69) that „every casual transposition of the concept of personal identity onto collectives must (…) be rejected" and conclude with Straub: „the foregoing manner of speaking of 'collective identity' is scientifically untenable" (Straub 2000, 71).

This figurative use of a concept appears to be a consequence of romantic ideas, and that these on the personal level have radical importance for the collective level. And it is a consequence of

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[17]   Jürgen Habermas defends this civic consensus under the name of „Verfassungspatriotismus", whilst Charles Taylor has been the defender of the mutual recognition (Habermas 1992; Habermas 1991; Taylor 1992; Taylor 1994).

[18]   Lewis' book (1999) is well-known. See also Cable 2005.

[19]   Sørensen (1995, 10) calls „inventionists" the authors working in this field. For Spiering (1999, 116) they are. The title of Anderson's famous book (1983) is very expressive; he follows in a certain sense the direction marked by Peter L. Berger (1967 and 1972). Also the titles by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) or by Citron (1987) are eloquent.

[20]   Authors like Berger, Luckman or Gallino say that the concept of identity can be applied only to individuals, not to collectives.

romantic ideas besides all the attempts of literature, especially at the end of the XIX century and at other points since then, to demonstrate the problems of identity[21]. It is as if individual characteristics were reproduced in it. It is later that psychology, from the middle of the XX century, speaks of collective identities[22].

With this, the organisation considered substratum of this identity (the nation, the people or that corresponding to each system and moment) is given almost personal qualities. Among others it has a nucleus that should be inaccessible and cannot be violated.

All these issues shape the undercurrent in which to propose the question for the „European identity", and its treatment in education.

4. De identitate europaea, secunda pars

The debate surrounding the Preamble of the „European Constitution" has shown that there is no consensus about the roots of „Europeaness" or, at least, on the advisability of mentioning them. The arguments do not consist of denying the undeniable, but of the reasons for opportunity. They also consist of the supposed risk the mere mention of it could have for the laity of the European project[23]. A laity which, certainly in the context of the „constitutional" debate, nobody has cast a doubt on and that is also considered an advance by the Church[24], (and different from laicism), perhaps with surprise to some secularists.

If the consensus lacks such a clear reference point (referring to history, which is what we were talking about), what „identity" should be transmitted? Is the evocation of certain civic values sufficient? For example, those mentioned in article I-2 of the „Constitution"[25]? So, what do these values add to those in force in each one of the Member states, which have undoubtedly granted adherence as conditions for the Union membership? On the other hand, doesn't civic education already refer for itself to roots, a heritage, in which each one of these values has been developed? For example, is it possible to talk of Western democracy by only making reference to the Athenian democracy? This, by the way, lacked the characteristics we consider essential in Western democracy. And that seem difficult to develop if it does not start from the concept of „person" that in principle equals all the individuals in their dignity and rights. Isn't this concept intrinsically related to the Christian message[26] (even though the historical form of this message was not given until centuries later and going through secularisation of the Christian categories)? Is it possible to speak

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[21]   Although Thomas Mann with *Tonio Kröger* (1904) and many others could be mentioned, Luigi Pirandello's books like *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (1903) and *Uno, nessuno e cento milla* (1926) are especially remarkable.

[22]   The transition to the collective identity is often attributed to Erik Erikson, although his most popular book „Childhood and society" (1950) speaks – like his other books – mainly about the development of a personal identity.

[23]   The web site devoted to present the debates about the „Constitution for Europe" comments on this point: „When the Italian Presidency, at the start of the IGC's work, asked all the delegations to present any suggestions on non-institutional aspects, the inclusion of a reference to Christianity in the preamble was immediately suggested by seven governments. Other delegations were completely opposed to any reference of that kind and also called for the reference to dialogue with the churches to be removed. The delegations in favour of a reference to Judeo-Christian values finally accepted that it would not be included. The two succeeding Presidencies failed to come up with an alternative wording" (http://europa.eu/scadplus/cig2004/debates2_en.htm#PREAMBLE). The Italian Presidency's document says it more concrete: „include a reference to Christian inheritance of Europe (ESP, IRL, MT, PL, PT, SK, LT; CZ wishes to enlarge even more this proposal to a reference to Ancient Greek philosophy, Roman law, Jewish and Christian roots and rationalism. T and CY opposed to such a mention.)" (Document CIG 37/03, 24 October 2003, in http://www.consilium.europa.eu/igcpdf/en/03/cg00/cg00037.en03.pdf). In December 2003, after the Brussels meeting of the European Council, the Italian Presidency informs: „While some delegations stressed the importance of a reference to Christian values in the preamble, others felt that the text proposed by the Convention made an even-handed response to the various concerns that had been raised. They therefore propose that it remain unchanged", what means: without mention of the European roots (Documento GIC 60/03, ADD 2, 11 December 2003, in http://www.consilium.europa.eu/igcpdf/en/03/cg00/cg00060-ad02.en03.pdf). Some months later, the Irish Presidency concludes: „As regards the Preamble, the Presidency notes that, despite the strong support of several delegations for the inclusion of a specific reference to Europe's Christian or Judeo-Christian heritage, there is no sign of consensus on this matter" (Documento CIG 80/04, ADD 2, 12 June 2004, in http://www.consilium.europa.eu/igcpdf/en/04/cg00/cg00080.en04.pdf).

[24]   Cf. „For Catholic moral doctrine, the rightful autonomy of the political or civil sphere from that of religion and the Church – *but not from that of morality* – is a value that has been attained and recognized by the Catholic Church and belongs to inheritance of contemporary civilization" (Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life, January 16, 2003 , n. 6).

[25]   This Treaty has not entered in to force – and nobody knows whether and when it will happen –, but there is no doubt about the consensus on these values.

[26]   Saints Paul's vision of the equality of all human beings is probably relevant in this context.

of fundamental liberties without alluding to the School of Salamanca, to Hugo Grotius, to the Enlightenment? All this refers to beyond civic values and opens the perspective for a reflection of ideas from history that form a part of the undercurrent of the civic European „identity".

Will it not it also be necessary to show, when talking about these civic values, that this „Europe" is a construction, a project and a desire and not the natural consequence of an essence that resulted this way because it couldn't turn out any other way? In fact, in the history of Europe there have been more periods in which many of these values have not been in force, and therefore must be considered an arduous conquest and very difficult to achieve.

5. Identification with the European Project

It is precisely this consideration that brings us to highlight an important aspect in this whole debate – the need that exists for identification with the European project. Indeed, this project is an achievement after centuries of pain and desolation. It is an original project, born from a generation of great personalities in a very specific historical moment. After World War II, they met to discuss the idea that a disaster of this kind could not repeat itself. Marked by a mitigated liberalism and in many cases by a Christian humanism, but also by the personal experience of the collision with the Strong state[27], they set the basis for a new relationship between the states. They hoped would offer, in the long run, a new relationship between citizens. The experience and the consolidation of the national identities should not take place as confrontation with another identity, but by meeting and negotiating with it. The chosen field is the market, because other projects of integration fail – bear in mind the case of the European Defence Community at the beginning of the fifties[28]. The free movement in the world of trade should not only favour exchange but also diminish the importance of borders, a consolidated symbol of national sovereignty.

This project is based on a broad, although not always explicit, social consensus. The society that is living these beginnings of the European integration is, as has been said previously, a society that has lived through war. In many cases, it is even two wars. They have experienced destruction, the loss of people, (family in many cases, acquaintances, in all), and also the cold, hunger and misery of the post-war years. And, earlier, the Nazi horror, collapse of democracies, civil confrontations and persecutions. The perspective that these ghosts could disappear is sufficient motivation for an also sufficient implicit support.

Now, the current situation is completely different. On the one hand, we are on the verge of an important generational change. This can be seen in politicians. There are now very few politicians in important positions that have personal memory of the war and post-war years. Society, at least with regard to those who are in the position to make decisions in politics, economy, culture, etc., has principally grown in some areas of freedom and prosperity. In many cases, even the borders in Europe do not mean anything. Crossing them now is a „normal" event and it is very difficult to perceive the change of paradigm behind it.

On the other hand, the generation of '68 consciously or unconsciously provoked social changes present in the system of values, in the mentality of all the later generations. And the relationship with the state has substantially changed. The generation of '68 produced a rift with the state and introduced the logic of suspicion. Post-modernity joined it in terms of a general distancing with regard to ideologies[29] and the emergence of alternative demonstrations of people's individuality (cf. „the street"). Also, the European construction had fallen under this new relationship and the distancing of people was quite noticeable[30].

It seemed possible to give a new impulse of proximity to the European model by the people of those countries that had become members of the European Union in 2004 and that came, in their majority, from very recent experiences of lack of freedom, stubbornness of borders. In other words, contrary to states that promoted closed spaces, both spatially and mentally. However, European enthusiasm, very high immediately after the fall of the Berlin wall, began fading away in the negotiations of adherence, which are always dense. After this, the enthusiasm that remained was

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[27]   It shall be remembered that Alcide de Gasperi and Robert Schuman were imprisoned, and that Adenauer was removed as Major of Cologne by the nazis.

[28]   On February 15th, 1951, a meeting was held in Paris for establishing the European Defence Community. On May 27th, 1952, six countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxemburg and The Netherlands) have signed the Treaty establishing this Community. But in the ratification process, the French Parliament has rejected the Treaty; this was on August 30th, 1954.

[29]   Some authors – within the vogue to speak about „the end of..." – have theorised about the „end of the ideologies" (Bell 1964).

[30]   The introduction to the „White Paper on a European communication policy", presented by the Commission on February 1st, 2006 (Document COM (2006) 35 final) has the eloquent title: „Closing the gap".

residual, as could be clearly observed in the low participation rate in the first European elections where the citizens of those countries were called to vote[31].

Therefore, if we want to keep the European model alive, a new philosophy is needed. One that is not based on the overcoming of the era of national conflicts and opening of borders, as this does not evoke experiences or provoke adherence in the majority of the citizens. It is simply the world they have grown up in. What is needed is a new (not just renovated, but new) communication project, that reaches the people with convincing messages about the need for the European project[32]. In this communication, a relevant role is obviously played by the community and national institutions. In addition the role of education is important because it transmits knowledge as well as values and attitudes.

6. The Role of Education

It is clear that the role of education cannot be to create uncritical adherence to a specific model (the current one) or European enthusiasm that can be expressed in pins, caps or t-shirts. The role of education, in relation to the current model of European integration, can, however, contribute very decisively to shaping a society capable of sustaining a European project, which seems necessary, at least for two reasons.

On the one hand, the alternative is the stubbornness about „ours", understood as small space. With this attitude, it is very easy to repeat already-known dynamics of excluding nationalisms that operate on the basis of latent fears in many people, which end up seeing the other as a threat[33].

On the other hand, many of the challenges that society is facing (and will face in the future) have a reach that only allows co-ordinated solutions, migratory situations, competitiveness in a globalised space that maintain a specific protection of social standards. The resolution of international conflicts, the attainment of adequate levels of environmental protection or the fight against spreading terrorism are examples of problems that surpass the capability of the state.

Evidently, the educational project cannot be based on the substitution of identities or on the confrontation between them, but rather should take into account the complex structure of the identity mentioned before, with its different levels that interact with each other. This same approach can be useful to play down monoliths and excluding conceptions of identity, which in turn facilitates opening-up, meetings and dialogue.

On the other hand, it seems necessary to also transmit, as has been the case although not sufficiently enough, basic knowledge about the Community's world[34], a world considered technical, cold and distant. This knowledge can contribute to diminishing prejudices, correcting assumed „information" transformed by different mediators, information that doesn't aid comprehension. Only a certain level of knowledge allows the comprehension of decisions and deciphers the information of the media, and this is not always appropriate. It also permits responsible participation in Community life, at least to the minimum but essential level in democracy, to be able to vote in parliamentary elections. In general, knowledge will overcome the distance regarding „Brussels". This mythical Brussels in the mind of so many people, synonymous of a distant and closed world, and contrary, therefore, to current sensitivity, where values such as proximity and openness are key as well as the characteristics of good governance[35].

On the basis of knowledge, one can obtain a justified position. The objective should not be enthusiasm, but the seriousness of any attitude before this project, based not on spontaneous affinities but on reflection. This reflection is framed within a broader educational purpose, which is participation in city life, without a „couldn't care less attitude". The only effect of this attitude in the long run is to leave the public space in the hands of the political professionals, who can do and undo under the sole control of the professionals of political criticism. Meanwhile, the citizen can go

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[31] Except in Cyprus and Malta, the turnout in the other countries was under 50%, with 28% in the Czech Republic and in Slovenia, 27 in Estonia, 21 in Poland and 17 in Slovakia.

[32] In the quoted „White Paper on a European communication policy" it is said: „It is therefore essential to any communication policy that the EU should deliver an effective policy programme. But delivery by itself is not enough."

[33] As stated by Boyce, the construction of an identity often implies „the construction of images of undesirable 'Others'„ (Boyce 1998, 305).

[34] The quoted „White Paper" recognises: „In Eurobarometer opinion polls carried out in recent years, many of the people interviewed say they know little about the EU".

[35] This word is in. The official dictionary of the Spanish Academy defines it as follows: „Arte o manera de gobernar que se propone como objetivo el logro de un desarrollo económico, social e institucional duradero, promoviendo un sano equilibrio entre el Estado, la sociedad civil y el mercado de la economía." The European Union is also concern with this topic; cf. the Commission's document from 5 June 2002: „European Governance: Better lawmaking" (COM (2002) 275 final).

back to „the private", without realising that the public-private separation, in this manner, is false and that the public always has consequences on the private.

In the case of European integration, education will have to overcome, as is so often the case, the historical distance with regards to its beginnings, without which it is difficult to understand. European integration is intimately related to the history of Europe in the last few centuries, whose terrible culmination is seen in the wars of the XX century, whose outcome favours the European project. The opinion on this project is often unjust if these circumstances are not taken into account. Knowing them should not lead to the almost archaeological conservation of a project that has to adapt to the circumstances of each moment. Rather facilitate the more just evaluation of the change of paradigm that has meant and could also be a call of attention in order to not return to the previous paradigm.

However, this knowledge also has to position itself basically on a rational level, although with certain elements of emotional proximity. Models are appearing that propose identification with the political system (that have always been based on a system of values) on a civic basis in the last few decades. These are emerging in the more culturally complex societies and in those that do not consider it adequate that the dominant culture imposes itself on the others. They are related to the acceptance of values that form part of the co-habitation system, but leave aside tradition that would not be shared, the culture in a stricter sense – because, in a broader sense, these civic values also form a part of the culture. European integration is not outside this line of thinking. The system of civic values, as has been mentioned, has been expressed with more clarity and would have culminated in article I-2 of the „Treaty that establishes a Constitution for Europe", if the Treaty had been put into effect. The declarations included above on European identity point in the direction of being based on these values.

7. „General Culture", Common Cultural Heritage?

Nonetheless, leaving aside the already developed discussion, is it sufficient that these values are anchored in a culture? Identification with a collective identity seems in many cases to be given through the emotional level, which also recognises the symbolic values established for objects inside this group. The most classic case is that of the flag, in which a determined disposition of colours and, at times, objects subscribe to a identification that goes beyond the outward appearance of the object and the real value of the colours. It is sufficient enough to watch sporting events to perceive how these colours can be used in diverse ways (even as face paint) to demonstrate membership to a specific collective identity. This collective identity will be pleased or suffer in a very similar manner, even though it is made up by very different individuals that probably differ from each other greatly in many other situations.

Also, in the last few decades, one can observe how the identity processes are very strongly emotional. As mentioned earlier, a certain identification crisis with the state has been established in these last few years in many countries (except, in many cases, in the sporting world, like that just mentioned). And there has been an emergence of other identifications (regional or sub-state national) characterised precisely for their proximity, for their immediacy.

Therefore, is the mere evocation of some civic values enough to provoke a need for identification? Is it an identification that always has emotional connotations, that includes the know-how, often not reflected on, that „has something in common" with others, of shared „culture", specific stories?

Here, a different acceptance of „culture" could come into play which appears in many languages and that is associated with a specific heritage of knowledge. It comes close to what is often called „general culture", a concept that sounds out-of-date and bourgeois and whose deterioration is so perceptible, putting aside the fact that, indeed, on many occasions it has been transmitted in a stiff and not very interesting way.

Following Ernst Gombrich, one can consider this culture as „topos", a meeting place, a place to create relationships (cf. Gombrich 1979, 9-24). Knowing these cultural parameters, the environment, the characters, the arguments, the stories are not unknown. It is, to develop the idea with an image contributed by Gombrich, like a family party in which people are associated with certain stories that have been experienced together or certain tales, certain „stories" that circulate about them in the family.

The „general culture" provides knowledge on characters and stories that, due to so much wandering about Europe, actually form a part of the common heritage. In fact, there is a series of cultural elements that have been successful, if we want to put it that way, that have overcome the boundaries of they culture they emerged from. And, they have been told time and time again in multiple versions, they have been incorporated into other cultures, they are known in different „topoi" that are often distant amongst themselves. The „general culture" also provides, therefore, knowledge on characters and stories that have originated in other cultures, which helps establish links so that these other cultures don't seem completely foreign. It helps, therefore, to overcome distances.

Education with a less national perspective could also help to understand different perspectives. In fact, education does not only transmit knowledge, but transmits it from within a story, in other words, from a perspective. Perspective, we must not forget that has a lot to do with the history of discipline, forged under certain circumstances[36]. Of course, the same story, told in diverse narration, will provide distinct „knowledge"[37]. The knowledge of these other perspectives greatly facilitates the comprehension, the dialogue.

The opening that offers „general culture" understood as such collides with the tendency of the state to maintain under its control the contents of education or, in any case, to yield this control to regional entities, although not „upwards", toward the European level. In fact, the current attribution of competencies (and in this point the predicted „European Constitution" did not introduce any changes), explicitly excludes the contents. The action of the Community can refer to co-ordination or to exchange, but the state continues to reserve the „hard nucleus" exclusively and without exceptions[38], although it is true that exchanges can produce (and in fact do produce) an opening towards other perspectives.

Despite this legal impediment that will make certain stories and certain contents take precedence, the shared European heritage appears with great profusion and it deals precisely with making it visible. It appears in great profusion because, in accordance with a complex and dynamic vision of culture, it is not an addition or special level, but exists in the national, regional and local cultures.

Perhaps it is easier to explain with some examples.

Together with the flag, another of the traditional symbols of the national identity is the hymn. Hymns are developed in a system of musical notation that is typically European (as can be quickly seen when listening, for example, to oriental music) and that, of course, do not respond to national canons. The history of music has been developed within supranational categories, regardless of specific influences leading up to the perception of harmony. Again, the comparison with oriental music, often perceived as disharmonies, allows the appreciation of how „the European" of European music is considered „natural"[39]. This basic frame of reference is maintained not only in the music that is usually called classical, but also in rock, metal, etc. Only dodecaphonic music splits away from this, as it specifically looks for its source of inspiration in oriental music. Within this basic framework, the plurality of local or regional music has been developed, with its peculiarities that make it possible to associate with a certain identity.

In the way of thinking that judges events but not necessarily in a reflective way there is a certain vision of history, united to the idea of progress, and understood not necessarily as continuous improvement but as an advancement. This idea opposes the cyclical visions of the history present in many civilisations. It is probably a contribution from the Judaeo-Christian culture to the European mentality, a contribution that has been secularised and forms one of the bases of the western modernity. By the way, this idea perhaps also marks the preference for a certain type of narrative that tells stories that move forward, that progress.

Perhaps it seems risky to present a third example that comes from gastronomic culture, whose origins, besides, are non-European. The example is coffee. It is not a question of reconstructing here the history of the arrival of coffee in Europe, but pointing out the cultural consequences that it had when it became popular. This was probably as an emulation of Viennese coffee and later Parisian at the end of the century (in other words, at the end of the XIX century, the „end of century" pars excellence). Coffee displaced hot chocolate in Spain as the most popular drink, and gave birth to a whole variety of „coffee shops", places in which one spends a part of your social life (and, at times, cultural) including in small cities or towns. Coffee impregnated life in other cultures, with diverse displays, such as the continuous offer of „Kopje coffee" in the Netherlands or the (by the way quite hypocritical) denomination of the German „Kaffeetrinken" for the solemn Sunday brunches. If you want to compare this culture with another oriental one, that of tea, you have to make an exception with England.

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[36] The Swiss philologist Max Wehrli explains the relevance of the historical view of a science as follows: „Wissenschaftsgeschichte (...) kann selber Methodologie sein (...), kann (...) zur Bestimmung und Abklärung des eigenen Standorts beitragen, zur Einsicht führen in die zeitliche und räumliche Bedingtheit der jeweiligen wissenschaftlichen Positionen und Vorsicht lehren im Gebrauch einer immer geschichtlich vorbelasteten Terminologie" (1969, 30).

[37] Only one example: what the Spanish historiography calls „invasiones de los bárbaros", is mentioned in the German books as „germanische Völkerwanderung".

[38] In article 149 of the European Community Treaty is clearly established: „The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between member states and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the member states for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems". The „European Constitution" would not introduce changes in this point".

[39] In some very specific moments of the history of European music, especially in the 20th century, some composers (like Messiaen) have introduced elements from Oriental music, always as exotic elements.

These are some of the more or less risky examples of how local cultures are marked by European elements. These go beyond the undeniable similarities of stories (many stories have transnational dissemination), and popular legends (of saints, for example, a very wide spread genre in some periods and very popular), architectural styles, ways of dressing. All this comes into contact with the broad world of characters (from literature, plastic arts, painting, music, even from the fountains in the cities) coming from what we could call „fountains of the European culture": the Greek-Roman world, Christian world and medieval world.

The transmission of this knowledge and the familiarity with this world makes the European cultural space be seen as a substratum. Without opposing other cultural spaces it allows identification with the projects that are implemented to highlight the agreements in this space and not so much the oppositions based on highlighting the national standpoint, of antagonistic manner to other national standpoints.

Therefore, it is not necessary to educate about European identity, but to facilitate the knowledge that helps recognise this European standpoint as a real one, that is present in the imaginary even when we are not thinking explicitly about it. Europe is in the „galleries of the soul" (to use an expression by Antonio Machado) just as it is in the streets and plazas.

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Author:

Enrique Banús has studied Comparative Literature, Romance and German Philology in Bonn and Aachen. His Ph.D. thesis is dealing with Johann Gottfried Herder's relevance for the development of a comparative mentality. From the Imagology he has evolved to the European Studies, where he researches mainly on culture and identity issues. He is Director of the Centre for European Studies at the University of Navarra and Jean Monnet Chair ad personam "European Culture". In the last years he has participated in several projects on Intercultural Dialogue.

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