

CONSTRUCTING EUROPEAN IDENTITY

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The idea of European identity is frequently approached in political discourses and in the mass media. Moreover, programs are structured and financed, at a regional and European level, in order to construct a European identity that would harmoniously combine but also transcend the national identities of the member states. The manners in which this concept is turned into reality as well as some of the strategies employed in constructing this identity constitute the main focus of the present article. The dynamics of globalization creates a certain type of post-national scenario, where local identities are expressed, blended, submerged and resurfacing, while, simultaneously, they interact with supranational actors. And the European identity is but a new stage that furthers the case of the collective imaginary at work on a pan-continental level.

Keywords: Europe, European identity, nation, nationality, country branding, globalization, imagined community, integration, culture.

*“Where in the world am I, are we?
Who in the world am I, are we?”*
(Pred apud McNeill 58)

The idea of European identity is frequently approached in political discourses and in the mass media. Moreover, programs are structured and financed, at a regional and European level, in order to construct a European identity that would harmoniously combine but also transcend the national identities of the member states. The concept can be placed at a meta-identity level – without contradicting or destabilizing the national identity of the subjects, as the European identity aims to become superposed on the former without suppressing it, on the model of a unifying umbrella encompassing all the identities of the member states.

The rationale of this endeavor to construct a European identity is obvious, as it functions as a link connecting all community policies together and trying to organically generate a system that was formally sought due to economic and political reasons. As a more recent addition, it is meant to help project a coherent and consistent image of the European community, to grant the latter a conceptual

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solidity that cannot be obtained by the mere contractual binding of the member states. Nevertheless, European identity must work at a governmental level as well as at an individual one, so as to support and give validity to community policies. The manners in which this concept is turned into reality as well as some of the strategies employed in constructing this identity constitute the main focus of the present article.

“The fundamental dilemma of the EU lies in the fact that the «European public», or demos, barely exists as a recognizable category, and almost not at all as a self-aware subjective body – with the exception, perhaps, of a small coterie of European politicians, administrators and businessmen.” (Shore 19)

Starting from the thesis of Benedict Anderson about the national elites that actively construct an “imagined community”, where the citizens are created by education and vote, we endeavor to view Europe from this perspective. If we accept that the spaces are imagined, namely socially constructed and represented through specific symbolism, then Europe does not have a pre-determined existence, and thus it is an imagined space. Europe is being *Europeanized* (McNeill 9), and this process has supporters and also dissenting voices, with different strategies.

Europe is an imagined community, and this means that its identity is a project currently under construction. How is such a construction articulated and how does the European Union become the *new* Europe, a new space? What are some of the pillars of this construction and is this project successful? What is the role of intercultural communication in this difficult task to assemble different identities into a given space? How is European identity being constructed? These are some of the questions addressed in this article.

“Territorial entities, such as cities, regions and countries are being given a brand just as in the case of companies or products. The corporate brand has become an essential part of business identity, helping the public identify itself with the company and – lest we forget – encouraging said public to buy its products and services. In a similar manner, territorial branding is seen as adding value in the relation between territorial entities and individuals.” (Van Ham apud McNeill 48)

Ever since its inception, the European Community evolved according to the following goals: to increase its areas of activity and common policies, to create an area without borders and consequently the Single Market, to consolidate economic integration and strengthen policies of cohesion and solidarity, to progressively continue the enlargement, to increase the power of the European Parliament in the legislative process, to assert the role of the Commission as a decisive force in the integrationist process etc.

In a now famous decision from February 1963, the European Court of Justice from Luxembourg referred to the European Community as being “an autonomous interstate organization”.

Later on, by signing the Treaty of Rome, the member states of the EC renounced, even if in some cases only partially, their sovereignty in favor of the decisions taken by the supranational authority. The scope of the decisions ranged from public policies to economic ones. The Single European Act (1986) and the Maastricht Treaty (1992) mark the triumph of the federalist forces against the push for national sovereignty. However, one must argue that the defeat of the latter party does not necessarily entail an ideological stance that seeks to annihilate national identities, rather that the systemic approach at the institutional level favors unification and centralization of policies. From an ideological standpoint, the neofunctionalists had to acquiesce to the reality that nationalism and nationalistic fervor is and will continue to be an intrinsic characteristic of European peoples and intergovernmentalists were granted the satisfaction of witnessing the nation state at the core of the unifying process and its entire dynamics. Yet, as De Gaulle and Thatcher were forced to acknowledge after losing the support of their voters, being at the core of things does not mean being solely the core of something.

The interplay between the national identity and the European one raises a question of primacy. In other words, is this relation one of complementarity or one of mutual exclusion? Taking into account the starting point of this discussion, namely that Europe, and thus European identity, is an “imagined community” and therefore a construct, it cannot exist but through the mediation of the various European nations. Yet in the context of creating a European citizenship (see the Maastricht Treaty and the Amsterdam Treaty, 1997), several problems arise, among which, the ones of representation and legitimacy are paramount. Is the European citizenship a regular type of citizenship? Or does it involve mainly a social, cultural and economic dimension? Being a European citizen entails rights to work and move freely from one EU country to the other, as well as residence in said countries. This has not only administrative consequences but also cultural ones. Becoming imbued in the cultures from the various European countries that one travels to, works and lives in gives a certain cultural and social dimension to the process of European integration at the individual level – integration here being used more in the sense of *acculturation* than a political statement. Acculturation being one of the key terms to be taken into account when talking about Europeans and European-ness. While equality is another key factor in the concept of citizenship, even more so in the case of the European citizenship. In a particular state, all citizens have the right to be treated equally from a juridical and political standpoint. In the European Union, the concept of equality is more comprehensive, as it must provide an environment of equality for deeply unequal (as in different, with different histories) peoples, as well as individuals. Therefore, the challenge is infinitely greater, even when compared to a federalized continent, such as the United States of America.

In a postmodern frame of mind, the European citizenship currently being constructed is not and cannot represent the conflation of various identities into a

greater national one, thus making Europe merely a “bigger nation”. But a *new citizenship* has emerged, which employs formal as well as informal criteria of identification. It is absolutely essential here to take into account the context of globalization, where the external pressure is enormous (think Asian behemoth). As such, another question arises: is Europe ready to assume a unitary stance, positioning itself as a new alternative on behalf of Western civilization, or will it continue to trudge on an immense puzzle? The current economic crisis seems to give a currently negative answer to this question, however it does not negate the premises.

It is noteworthy that the European Union, as we know it today, is not a historical heritage, or a circumstantial reality, but a structured project that, using political, economic and cultural means, pushed towards the construction of a new space, a new vision for a continental alliance. Often times, collective memory tends to forget the process and only retain the result. In this case, we can reference the famous words of Marshall McLuhan “The medium is the message” and extrapolate to the European context, where the result is the actual process, the process of Europeanization. And the space of the Union is continuously changing, with countries that have already expressed their intent to become part of it (see Croatia, Turkey), continuing the process of enlargement. New countries, new cultures, new challenges.

THE SYMBOLIC CONSTRUCTION OF EUROPE

Furthermore, given that the idea of New Europe is an economic and political project driven mainly by elites, through the administrative apparatus of functionaries from Brussels and the Ministers from national governments, it is not very clear how a bridge of communication can be built between the masses and the European project, as an abstract entity. This problem, known as a “democratic deficit” (McNeill 13), remains a source of contention but also a creative opportunity.

How is a new space being symbolically constructed? One important tool is intercultural communication, namely creating the aforementioned bridge to facilitate the process of acculturation. Anthropologically speaking, there are also specific means that Shore identifies as a group he calls “agents of European consciousness”, namely “those actors, actions, artifacts, bodies, institutions, policies and representations that, singularly or collectively, help generate collective consciousness and promote the acceptance of the «European idea»”. (26) Shore refers here to objects and actors as well – the Euro coin in your pocket, the approximate English of an Erasmus student etc. He maintains that the European Union has an entire set of agents who promote *the process of* Europeanization, and who are dedicated to the construction of a supranational state. What are some of their tools? According to McNeill, a few examples:

- educational initiatives such as ERASMUS and SOCRATES, which facilitate student exchanges in the countries of the Union, promoting trans-European friendship through cultural exchanges and free circulation;
- structural funds and common policies in agriculture have offered financial support for many eligible projects and contributed to the construction of a cohesive economic profile of the Union;
- the flag of the European Union now present everywhere in member states, from state institutions, to billboards marking sites of projects financed through structural funds, and touristic landmarks;
- the anthem of the European Union, Beethoven's "Ode to Joy", a celebration of humanity as an entity united in diversity;
- the standard format of the European passport, which is a marker of formal membership;
- the introduction of a centralized statistical system, through the Eurobarometer and the Eurostat. (14)

These instruments are "[...] not only powerful political instruments in order to create a more important, quantifiable and thus more tangible and governable «European population» and «European space»: but, that are also powerful molding agents of consciousness that provide the meta-classifications within which identities and subjectivities are formed." (Shore 31)

Currency is obviously a very strong agent of unification and identity construction, being a central part of day to day culture, and we can also refer back to many examples throughout history, if we are to consider, for instance, what a common currency meant in the Roman Empire. Traditionally, currency and coins functioned as symbolic means of defining the borders of empires, kingdoms and nations. The very usage of the likeness of emperors and kings as symbols of state power was a means of imposing dominance over territories, just as they do today. Nowadays, banknotes and coins are also used to propagate national symbols in order to promote cohesion and state dominance in an ever-increasing ambiguous reality. Unwin and Hewitt (2001) provide an extensive portrayal of how banknotes and coins were used as a means of identity construction and readjustment in the Eastern and Central Europe in the 1990, as the Euro was slowly extending its area of use and the national economies were adapting their symbolic imagery to fit the new aspirations of their countries. In the case of the Euro, it is cohesion and a sense of common belonging for different nations in a supranational Union (the common side), while still maintaining a national side specific to each country. Matthias Kaelberer's paper (2004) shows how the monetary policy of the Euro zone is deeply connected to structures and processes of collective identity and European integration. Although the author seems to take the romantic notion of symbolism from the identity role of money (stating that the affective relationship is replaced today by the trust relationship, and the symbols on coins after the

modernization process represent a rather abstract and institutionalized version of trust), the idea that the Euro still provides a strong base for a common identity is still supported (the author arguing further that such a diffuse identity, based on utilitarian or contractual factors and as part of evolving hybrid identity structures, is sufficient in today's shifting world).

Thomas Risse (2010) argues against the idea that the European Union lacks a universal infrastructure in communicative spaces based on the lack of a common language. Instead, he claims that we can speak of an irrefutable emergence of transnational European communities of communication, established "through the interconnectedness of Europeanized public spheres" (5). Though the author expresses great faith throughout the book that Europeans share a sense of community among each other, he also warns, using Eurobarometer data, that a sense of community strong enough to guarantee a future for the European Union can only be achieved when as many people as possible start seeing themselves as European-national rather than national-European. And considering that there are still many people who declare themselves to be only "national" (according to the same author), European identity seems to have a long way ahead before reaching a solid status.

There are of course analysts who are skeptical that all these maneuvers will lead to the construction of a coherent and legitimate identity, given the fact that most of them are created by a bureaucratic body in an intangible citadel (Brussels), which has proven time and again that it can grow out of touch with the public opinion that it should supposedly represent (see the rejection of the Treaty of Nice in the Irish referendum of 2001).

"It is thus doubtful that the introduction of a European anthem, European flag, European monuments for «glorious heroes», European ceremonies, universities and museums for «European heroes» or «founding fathers» of Europe, will generate the feeling of historicity, common roots and belonging. Even in an era when the image has become the main method of collective appeal and public speech, the notion of Europe has so many competitors that it will be difficult to capture a market niche in the public awareness of the European society." (Van Ham 77)

Nevertheless, if we analyze pop culture a little, we can easily observe that although European consciousness does not yet exist, or it or not sufficiently crystallized, European cultural identity already has a formal structure (as seen in the above) and an informal one. The informal agents that promote European cohesion are by no means spontaneous phenomena, but concerted activities working at the level of public awareness and individual interest triggers, such as European sports competitions, music and film festivals, pan-European television channels (such as Euronews or Eurosport) etc. We should also mention here the significant initiative to award the European Capital of Culture each year to a different city from a member state, which functions as a major cultural center. This

has a particular significance as in Europe the city is a symbol of cultural evolution, much more than in other areas, see for instance the role that Rome, Athens, Florence, Barcelona, Vienna or Paris have had throughout history. As pointed out by Giorgia Aiello and Crispin Thurlow (2010), the competition for awarding the European Capital of Culture is more than a mere entertainment and tourism-related initiative: it is a matter of symbolic capital and cultural exchange; which provides an excellent base for the delicate and volatile processes of identity construction and reconstruction.

Another area of interest in EU promotion is the food market. European cuisine is collectively seen as composed to various typical recipes that are labeled as a national and identity product/marker, this of course as a concerted EU strategy, but at the same time being part of the trend of food globalization. A few examples: Italian pizza and pasta, French baguettes, German beer, Spanish paella, Greek salads etc.

Yet globalization means also the transformation of the elements of national specificity into commodities that are consumed at a global scale, just as the burgers and Coca-cola represent an American symbol, curry and Indian one, noodles an Asian one etc., through a process that was called “Euro-commodification” (McNeill 19).

But we should take note that although such elements of cultural identification are convenient, it does not mean that they become part of common whole that Europeans identify with. Just as we do not identify with (aside from an emotional level of identification brought on by empathy in a specific context) Hollywood stars, for instance. They can be part of our routine, in the sense of elements that we are exposed to, but that does not mean that we are part of them or that they become a national cultural identity market. As Shore points out:

“People consume the products, but the cultural meanings vary according to the context. The preference of the British for Indian food or for German cars does not inexorably lead to the identification with India or Germany. [...] The question is, from what point on does the experience of Europe become «European consciousness?»” (229)

The process of forming an identity is a complex one, and the mere consumption of some national symbols does not lead to identification, particularly when there is no political engagement. And political engagement is sensitive to other imperatives that more often than not have to do with economic issues or matters of security and less with common histories or cultural backgrounds. More pragmatism and less symbolism.

Another vehicle of cultural exchange in the European space is also the set of interactions with national specificity (which is often stereotypical, but stereotypes create here also a reference system that acts as a common denominator) with regard to profiling. Certain characteristics are given to Europeans peoples that can be

more or less flattering or sometimes downright stigmatizing: Italians are loud-mouthed, the French are good lovers, Spaniards are hot-blooded, Germans are efficient robots etc. However, they do stick in pop culture (reinforced by representation in Hollywood movies) and thus become icons of cultural exchange.

Keeping that in mind, there is another important aspect in the symbolic construction of identity that we would like to point out, namely the drawing of borders: how far goes my “self” and where does the anthropological “Other” begin?

“With its millions of (illegal) immigrants and residents, Europe has many minority groups within its borders who are perceived as a threat to its cultural and social cohesion. The Other is not comfortably distant in space, but often lives across the road and confronts us with the different customs, values and practices that represent a challenge for the hegemonic cultural models.” (Van Ham 195)

EUROPE AND NATION

Coming back to what we call national space, it begs the question: how does a particular space acquire the characterization of “national”? Namely what are its limits and how is it populated by the collective imaginary? In this day and age, it is abundantly present in the mass media and particularly in the visual media aimed at a (national) community of viewers with a whole range of imagery about space, more precisely ideological territories, iconic spaces, daily spatial landmarks and references already part of the collective consciousness. Thus, technology acts as a proxy for the national landscape providing people with a mediated experience of nation and national symbolic spaces. “The elements of the national space are linked together to form practical and symbolical geographies that confirm the nation as a special pre-eminent entity.” (Edensor 65-7)

The most part of the political life of the 20th century was dominated by nation state. European nation states were the main framework for the social, cultural, political and economic life of the continent. It would be safe to pinpoint the nation state as the definitive political form of organization of the European continent during that time. Notwithstanding, in the context of globalization and the new dimensions associated with the European Union, these entities appear to be in danger. There are many voices decrying the death of the nation state, invoking such concepts as sovereignty, legitimacy and nationalism. However, one need look no further than the common realities associated with territoriality in order to ascertain whether national sovereignty still exists: borders are still real, immigrants are still treated as a separate group and receive a different status than regular citizens, and security policies are still deeply rooted in the need to protect the nation, not to mention that political parties are still almost exclusively national in their programs and interests (with the exception of parties representing specific ethnic groups). And yet, it is obvious that the nation states from the European state answer to the

European Union, which does not mean that they lose all autonomy. The relation is much more complicated, and it involves “a more complex process of repositioning, redrawing of maps and re-composition of the *branding* of the national state”. (McNeill 36) This includes the manner in which the state responds of external military threats, cultural flows and terrorist networks, as well as the guidelines of national policies etc. It should be duly noted though that globalization and Europeanization can be simultaneously accepted or rejected by various groups in that very same national society. Heterogeneity is the key concept for understanding any postmodern assemblage of peoples and factions in almost any given territory, not matter how small the group or how “traditional” the setting, one cannot speak of homogeneity anymore. From this standpoint, the European cultural discourse of celebrating diversity – *Vive la difference!* – gains even more realistic ground: it is not a mere means of imposing an artificial and potentially harmful relativism (as some critics claim), but (also) a simple recognition of what the current social reality looks like. Hence, in this omnipresent heterogeneity, one cannot speak of what this or the other group or institution or state “thinks” about accepting the process of Europeanization, since no such actor has a completely homogenous attitude towards anything, and within each group opposing factions strive to their own purposes.

Vam Ham makes an interesting distinction among the various perspectives on nationalism, classifying them as “primordial” o “provisional”. What he means by “primordial” is that the nation can be viewed as a natural entity that “accentuates the difference from «others», who are considered foreign and cannot be converted or even adopted. [...] This entails the fact that such foreigners are often perceived as a threat to the natural homogeneity of the collectivity.” (60) By contrast, a perspective that he calls “provisional” describes nationalism according to several historical stages. As such, in a preindustrial society, a society relied very much on locality and face to face contact. Your co-national were people who live in the same area as you did and you could interact with directly. The predominant referential was the *gene*. With the dawn of the industrial society and the ever-increasing mobility of the population, the states were faced with the prospect of *creating* a common identity and a collective understanding by “inventing tradition”. And this shifted the reference framework to the *meme*, namely that tiny carrier of cultural and social information that people from various spaces and backgrounds can relate to and thus become integrated into a human mass of people that share thoughts. Many people argue that this type of intellectual cohesion is far superior to the one rooted in blood and proximity. In the present context, the new communication technology and mass consumerism are viewed as a homogenizing force that undermines national identity.

“This is the cosmopolitan postmodern culture that some consider to be the zenith and others the nadir of human progress. It is a pastiche of cultures rather than a specific culture. It is eclectic by nature, uninterested by space and time, not preoccupied with

the ethnic or national origins and disarmingly ignorant with regard to history.” (Van Ham 63)

In such circumstances, the national idea and nationalism were also forced to change and evolve towards the national imaginary, using as reference Benedict Anderson and his “imagined communities” that we have mentioned before. How can this national space be defined? What are its characteristics? According to McNeill, there are four levels to be taken into consideration:

1. Firstly, we have the “story” of a nation, which is transmitted both formally (through the educational curricula) and informally (through myths and traditions) (see also Bădescu 63). Symbolic elements such as the classic institutions of the nation state (see the parliament), currency, media (channels that become intertwined with national tradition such as the BBC) – are all essential means of defining a national identity. It should also be noted that a vast resource of narratives for this “story of a nation” is also the literary fond of said nation, but this imaginarium of nation-related stories can be a two-way street: as much as a country’s literature can provide support and an esthetic to the national idea, it can equally provide criticism to it as well.
2. Secondly, we have the use of symbols such as flags, national anthems, national sports, or other more informal ones, for instance food (see pizza).
3. Thirdly, and essential for our discourse, we have the idea of nation as a territorialized space with various connotations. In our world, space has been territorialized and associated with the people that inhabit it. Different people with different activities now become the anthropological map that we unconsciously associate with specific lands. For instance, Romania is associated with rural landscapes and traditions, Holland with a network of colorful polders and canals, Ireland with wild rocky coasts, the US with cowboy ranches and wide spaces, Japan with carefully manicured gardens. These specific landscapes are an abbreviation for the description of these nations, through stereotypical images that anyone can recognize. But also, they are laden with symbolic values and national virtues, as one of the most important prints of a nation is the way it relates to nature, shaping and using it, and at times being defeated by it.
4. Fourthly, we have the idea of nation and the “Other”. We should keep in mind here that one of the most powerful identity markers of a nationality is to define it by what it is not. The drawing of mental or symbolical borders is just as if not stronger than the drawing of state borders. (39)

Another interesting ramification of the national idea in the imagined/created context is the one of performance, or in other words how the nation is *performed* or *practiced*. Having as reference Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical sociology, we can

imagine the national performance on an elaborated stage, where the actors play their pre-established roles behind the curtains in order to obtain what he calls “*impression management*” – namely, for our subject, that specific particular image associated with a given national space.

“Performance is a useful metaphor as it allows us to observe the modalities in which identities are performed and reproduced, informing and (re)constructing a sense of collectivity. The notion of performance also sheds light on identity as being something dynamic; as always in the process of production [...] Further analyzing other theatrical concepts we can then explore the relevant contexts in which such an action takes place, [...] visualizing the symbolic locations as stages, we can explore *where* identity is performed, transmitted, shared and reproduced, how these spaces are modeled to allow for singular performances, and how opposing performances are focused around spectacular and ordinary spaces.” (Edensor 69)

In the discussion on *performance* and national identity from his book *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (2002), Edensor distinguishes between three types of significant activities pertaining to daily life, often times without backstage planning or deconstruction, which are a crucial part of what he calls “national lives”. These can be regarded as differentiating factors among the distinct nationalities within the European Union, and at the same time one of the greatest organic obstacles for the construction of a European identity.

Firstly, we have what he calls “*popular competencies*”, which refer to the ability of the citizen to be integrated in the frame imposed by the state, but also to that type of abilities that guarantee success in social integration, such as: “where to buy certain things, where to look for discounts, where to buy theatre tickets, where to enroll in local libraries, where to go to worship”. (93) The list can go on, but the main idea is that when we leave the national space and move to a different society “we find a culture of people who do not do things as we do them, who appeal to different practical resources in order to carry out daily activities”. (Ibid.) These differences determine the ability to relate to other national cultures, and here the role of intercultural communication become paramount in creating a bridge between what familiar and what it unfamiliar to us. A key ingredient here is also cultural relativism, namely the capacity to analyze a society from the perspective of its own social and cultural context, divorced from the one of the analyst. Thus, through intercultural communication we can reach a common language that helps us imagine what was incomprehensible beforehand, and to accept/respect what was alien to us before.

Edensor then refers to “*embodied habits*”, which includes manners of walking, standing and talking and “unconscious emotional communication – gestures, smiles and body language”. (94) These competencies – “the national «ability» to be good in bed, at cooking, dance, football, gardening” – are the material that fuel stereotypes and solidify national identities. A question arises: is

there a European manner of expression or just a sum of national manners of expression? (McNeill 41)

The last category refers to the manner in which societies organize themselves from a temporal point of view, through what Edensor calls “*synchronised enactions*”, which are important elements to analyze as “without recurrent experiences and non-reflexive customs there would be no consistency in experiences, not temporal framework in which the world would make sense”. (96) Many of these temporal geographies are familiar and synchronized in a given national space, for instance in Romania loud noises are not considered acceptable on Sunday morning (due to the national religious framework), lunch and dinner hours tend to be similar throughout the country, wedding and funeral customs are similar and coherent in the entire territory etc. These references can turn into stereotypes, see the *siesta* in Mediterranean countries (Greece, Spain, Italy).

Edensor posits these three aspects to be fundamental in the understanding of national societies. On this basis, McNeill argues that such customs and norms are mixed in the European context and that through this *pastiche* of essential attributes of various national cultures, European identity becomes very fragile, if not downright illusory. In his words:

“It will remain to be seen to what extent could the state (the Europeanized state – broadly defined so as to include the manner in which national states operate within a wide scope of European policies) alter the temporal geographies, accepted rituals and social norms in order to become integrated in a European.” (McNeill 41)

CONCLUSIONS

It is often argued, even more so in the present economic and political context of the EU, that European integration undermines the national state. In the words of Hutchinson, this perspective starts from erroneous premises, for three reasons:

“Firstly, national identities often predate the era of the national state, and the persistence or intensity of national identities cannot be explained by the success of the process of modernization led by the state, for the modern period is also one of displacing state authority. Secondly, the decentering of sovereignty is not a new and revolutionary development given that nations have continuously varied in power and the degree to which they wanted to regulate the sectors of social life. Thirdly, many, if not the majority, of the national European identities have been developed either together with or in close relation with a sense of Europeanism, and most perspectives on «Europe» have their roots in the previous national perspectives on the world.” (Hutchinson apud McNeill 64)

We have attempted, in the present article, to support the idea that European integration does not destroy national identity. In some cases, it even promoted in

the cultural *pastiche* that forms the European Union. It is however true that this model only works in a postmodern context, which reduces “boundary consciousness” at the individual level. (McNeill 64)

The map of a nation is no longer the mere contour from the geography schoolbook, with clear-cut borders. The physical world of mountains and rivers is transformed by pollution and tourism. The business world is almost impossible to chart, given the speed and the virtual nature of the investment decisions and the global character of multinational corporations. The dynamics of globalization creates thus a certain type of post-national scenario, where local identities are expressed, blended, submerged and resurfacing, while, simultaneously, they interact with supranational actors.

Also, we would like to stress the importance of performance in the way we perceive national identities, as well as country branding. The brand, in conjunction with the meme, makes up a cultural construct with various manners of expression that is the main reference point in how we relate to the concept of national identity today. And the European identity is but a new stage that furthers the case of the collective imaginary at work on a pan-continental level.

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