



“Europe is a goddess who juggles with the stars of a nation so that its future becomes balanced within a climate of peace and prosperity“ (Galienni)

The identity of Europe and the magical alchemy of diversity and unity

Has Europe an identity? This was one of the questions we were discussing when participating to the European Identity Cultural Caravan in April 2004. The “Journey of exploration; Composing Europe” started in Bled and finished in Prague after having stopped in Ljubljana, Krakow, Budapest and Bratislava so as to get a clearer perspective with five countries joining the European Community on May 1st 2004. We were approximately 130 people representing at least 24 countries. Placed together in buses for a period of 7 days, we had the unique opportunity to discuss different topics concerning Europe. Our discussions went in a very positive way and were complemented by local artistic interventions. Certainly, the outcome of the journey is different for each participant but our individual stories are linked through the same experience. In a way we have modelled Europe meaning that Europe is diversity with a deeply rooted sense of unity. And here is my story.

When discussing about Europe we often address “the European construction”, the way to integrate new members and our vision of Europe in 10, 20 or 50 years. Though these items might be relevant to structure our discussions, it seems to me that Europe is not “under construction” but more like an emerging picture. In my perception Europe has already an identity. One way to perceive this identity is to go out of Europe. Indeed, ask American or Australian citizens: they do perceive the identity of Europe, even if they have difficulties to define what it means.

However, there is another way to consider the identity of a system, of a group, of a nation or of a continent. In fact, identity is like music. It surrounds you, you hear it, but actually you are not aware of it. Then again you will become aware of the music once it starts impacting on you. To become aware of the European music, we may de-compose this music into fragments and into the way the fragments are linked together. De-composing and re-composing the music of Europe is an art. And if we regard this exercise as an artist would do it, we can at least identify three main fragments: the specific positioning of Europe - the melody -, the way Europeans are linked – the dialogue - and the way Europe is represented – the European leadership.

A European melody

Europe benefits from a long tradition, a variety of experiences, and a diversity of perspectives. Today, as everything moves faster, complexity grows and dilemmas increase, you need a body, a person or a system able to remain silent and to listen to the overall music of the environment and to its different interpretations. This overall variety, its individual interpretations and its common patterns once heard you are obliged to accept that there will never be just one solution but a variety of answers, options and solutions.

Take the so-called law of “requisite variety” which states that the variety within a system must be at least as great as the environmental variety against which it is attempting to regulate itself. More succinctly, only variety can regulate variety. What does that mean for the position Europe can take in a global system? Europe could be a sort of platform, a sort of body or simply a space, where various people would ideally come together and connect, so that they can discuss and search a variety of solutions in order to respond to the variety of challenges they are facing.

An example: Europe has always been and still is a place of conflicts. There are confrontations between countries, discords between people and quarrels about ideas, strategic alliances and influences. For long, Europe has

therefore made the sad experience that choosing war to solve a conflict is not really effective, especially on a long term basis. Europe can now propose other ways, much more human ones, to bring people together so that they can find their specific solutions to their various conflicts. Solutions which are not based on “have something we have already done” but which are new solutions combining opposites, which are unique and which are emerging. Europe could become a “facilitator” or a “mediator”, whose goal is not to find solutions but rather to make people come together in order to create their specific solutions.

As a matter of fact, the strength of Europe resides in its diversity of experiences, of ideas and of emotions. Its positioning in a global system could therefore be described as the “human centre of space and mediation”. And a “space” never remains empty. It can be filled by the variety of solutions and answers found by everyone to respond to the variety we are facing in our constantly moving environment. In other words the European melody is about “human space, diversity and unity through common experience”.

However, a melody is a weak construction, if not supported by robust instruments. In my opinion we need two essential instruments: interpersonal dialogue and a specific European leadership to play our music to the rest of the planet.

Dialogue

Our specific type of European “dialogue” allows people to share their individual and collective experiences, opinions and ideas and to transcend the “normal” way to discuss. Instead of a simple “catalogue of questions”, arguments, discussion on the “pros and cons” ending up in a “weak compromise”, successful dialogue ends by creating something new : this “something new”, the musicians call it “coda” ; it is the closing section of a musical composition. Coda is not the addition of different positions, melodies and themes. Coda happens when you integrate opposites, mix opinions and connect ideas in one culminating new theme.

When dialogue happens individual opinions are not anymore the centre of discussion. Something more important, the overall goal, is in the middle of the discussion and requests attention. Individual opinions and ideas are pushed together in order to create new answers, new ideas and new perspectives. In addition, the group’s energy increases, the group spirit grows up and the collective intelligence of the group becomes somehow visible. Every participant develops and finally shares a common sense of belonging to the group, feels respected and valorised.

Why should this dialogue be the “European way”? Because, when people of 5 or more nationalities come together they have to find a common language -- which often is based on English. The fact that, more or less, everyone except for the British, or Irish has to express himself a foreign language makes each speaker focus on the essence of his message. The listeners on the other side have to pay attention more than carefully to get the essential message. The sense behind the words becomes therefore more important than the words.

In addition, simultaneous “help-translation” between individuals can become an additional source of clarification. Often, Europeans speak more than one language and while participating in a dialogue they can ensure simultaneous translation if necessary. Individual attention and implication is thus much higher than in a normal discussion. Europeans are getting aware of the potential misunderstandings of words or concepts and tend to clarify very rapidly the meaning of it. A concept such as “leadership” has different meanings in different countries. Discussing these different meanings obliges them to find a common understanding. In a way people have to make transparent the way they are thinking. They take then a personal risk and start to get transparent and somehow vulnerable. They tend to focus on interpersonal relations, look for similarities and shared experiences. In doing so they create a mutual atmosphere of trust where the common meaning become more important than individual opinions.

To conclude, the European way of coming and creating together goes through a special quality of dialogue. Dialogue is the essence of a group building process. Since Europeans can offer the space for such a “dialogue” they support the European melody. To a certain extent, the European melody of “human space, diversity and unity” will stay secret, silent and somehow useless without this “dialogue”.

Leadership

In addition we need a specific European leadership to express our melody to the world. Immediately the question of European leadership arises. However, I doubt that the word “leadership” is appropriate in that context. Does Europe need to be a leader in a game whatever it is, or isn’t it better to be a central player in the game? In addition, “leadership” is rapidly connected to the concept of “power” and may therefore jeopardize the European position as a “human centre of space and mediation”. In fact, a “strong leadership” could slow down any process of communication, of mediating and of bringing people together.

That is the reason why I consider we are bound to go in a different way of leadership, let’s say maybe, a more feminine way to lead. It could be called “leaderless leadership”, “distributed leadership” or even “hidden or servant leadership“. The idea is that a group does not always need an “established” leader but rather a representative “speaker” or a “player” who reflects the somehow hidden consensus of a group. In fact, the group is more important than its “speaker” or “player”. United by its self-confidence created by “dialogue” the group accepts that the appropriate speaker will emerge at the right moment to express the unconsciousness of the group. By the way, let us consider the political European life: is there a European leader to emerge soon in the Community, a traditional one? Maybe not, maybe never: could be our style of leadership...

European “speakers” should moreover be aware that they serve a higher cause, i.e. the European position and its values of human solidarity, respect and freedom. They know that every situation is unique and needs a unique speaker and a unique response. What however remains -- the connecting principle for everybody -- is the idea of Europe as a “human centre of space and mediation”. A European player therefore holds and models the position of space by putting aside its own opinions and inviting other people to share and to create the appropriate answers.

Conclusion

When integrating the melody, the way to discuss and the way to lead, we should be able to hear the final composition, the music of Europe. And the music tells us that Europe is a human project and a possibility to build a world people want to belong to.

The music of Europe is also the story of its people and the story of a deep connection between the people, built on their common experience.

The music of Europe asks us to be European players who are leading from the backstage and who are serving a common higher goal which is human connectedness, freedom and respect. Our role as European players consists in creating a space where people can connect to each other so that they can create the variety of solutions we need in order to respond to the variety of problems and dilemmas we are facing.

In the end the music of Europe is a magical alchemy between experiences, similarities and differences. In other words, Europe is diversity with a deeply rooted sense of unity. Perhaps only an artist can play our music or paint our picture. A painter, Galienni, said: “Europe is a goddess who juggles with the stars of a nation so that its future becomes balanced within a climate of peace and prosperity“. We definitely need artists to help us in finding and expressing our music. The human language and its words will never express the essence of the music or the essence of a picture. The combination of art and words improves our options for understanding and gaining meaning...

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