EUROPEAN HERITAGE: UNITY IN DIVERSITY?

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Heritage and the Formation of Identities

The tension between economic integration and cultural diversity within the European Union (EU) has long been recognized as a key tension within the European project. While the Member States have now opted for economic integration, at the same time they wish to maintain their diversity in terms of culture. Moreover, few of these countries are free of internal cultural conflicts and tensions. Therefore, the rhetoric of ‘Unity in diversity’ adopted by the EU in the Constitutional Treaty signed in Rome on 29 October 2004, applies equally to the union and to many of its component Member States. Moreover, it is rhetoric—what does it mean? The subsequent enlargements of the EU from the original six states of the European Economic Community to 2008’s twenty-seven countries, stretching from the Atlantic to the Belorussian border and from the Arctic Circle to Crete, have created a much deeper economic union but have also accentuated the dilemma of meaning of ‘Europeanization’ and ‘Europeanness’ by bringing more and more national, regional and local narratives—and the tensions between them—into play.

The ideas of belonging implicit in such narratives can be articulated in many ways. The focus here is on European heritage and the overarching aim of this chapter is to examine the linkages between identity and heritage against the background of the conceptual debate on the processes of Europeanization and the contested meanings of Europeanness. Identity is about belonging, about the ways in which communities are defined and made specific and differentiated. Identity is thus about inclusion but, equally, it is about the exclusion of those who do not ‘qualify’ for membership. Identity is often associated with space and place, most especially at the national scale. During the 1990s, it became fashionable to argue that identities were becoming ‘disembedded’ from bounded localities and the traditional frameworks of nation, ethnicity, class and kinship.¹ At the core

of such ideas lay the key assertion that global networks have diminished the importance of place and traditions, ruptured boundaries and created hybrid, inbetween spaces. In the bleak epoch that has evolved since 2001, this all now seems something of an exaggeration. Hybridity and transnational identities may, for example, counter and complicate nationalist ideologies but, in Europe, the national framing of belonging is seen once again as a defensible agenda. This points, however, to a prime characteristic of identity in that it operates at a number of scales—the local community, the region, the nation, the EU and even, perhaps, a global scale. Historically, however, the national scale has been the most powerful as the states of Europe emerged through a process of fusing together localities and regions around power cores and the use of ethnic criteria to delimit state boundaries.

There are many building blocks to identity—language, religion, gender, a common history, a common enemy—but the focus here is on heritage. This is less an agreed concept throughout Europe than a term with divergent meanings and interpretations. It is often invoked with relation to conservation, the German literature on cultural heritage, for example, being strongly focused on the protection of the country’s rich resource of historical monuments and the integration of the conservation of historic buildings with urban planning. The emphasis in this chapter, however, is very much more on the prevailing trend in the anglophone literature which predominantly regards heritage as a contested discourse that can be defined as the meanings attributed to the past in the present and is concerned with the interplay of memory, identity, dissonance and place. Whatever the perspective, however, all heritage involves deliberate selec-


\[\text{3} \text{ For an overarching discussion of heritage and identity, see: Brian Graham and Peter Howard, eds., The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity (Aldershot, 2008); Laurajane Smith, The Uses of Heritage (London, 2006) provides an excellent discussion of heritage as a discourse. It is also the case that English is used as a lingua franca in much of the heritage literature—see, for example, the publications of the pan-European HERMES project: Sebastian Schröder-Esch, ed., Practical Aspects of Cultural Heritage: Presentation, Revaluation, Development (Weimar, 2006); Sebastian Schröder-Esch and Justus H. Ulbricht, eds., The Politics of Heritage and Regional Development: Actors, Interests, Conflicts (Weimar, 2006); Dieter Hassenpflug, Burkhardt Kolbmüller and Sebastian Schröder-Esch, eds., Heritage and Media in Europe: Contributing Towards Integration and Regional Development (Weimar, 2006).}\]