

## Europe – A constrained and fragmented space on the edge of the continental landmasses. Crossroad, battlefield and melting pot

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The cultural characteristics of Europe are very much shaped by its geography. This may seem a paradox, since there is no consensus about where Europe ends or begins. Perhaps Europe is best understood as a specific constellation of ideas and processes with a certain geographical centre of gravity.

If we take a broader look at the European geography, it is evident that it differs from the contiguous continental spaces of Asia and Africa through its fragmented configuration. Europe consists, to a large extent, of peninsulas and islands separated by often narrow waters that have been navigable since far back in prehistory. In itself this internal aspect of the European geography has (as demonstrated by David Cosandey)<sup>24</sup> favoured the development of partly self-supporting, mutually competing and exchanging socio-economic units.

To this internal geographical aspect must be added the external aspect of Europe as an edge-zone at the fringe of the Asian continent and bordering the African. The closeness of these two vast continental expanses with their diversity of cultures, people and resources has endowed Europe with continuous challenges and opportunities coming in a diversity of forms and shapes ranging from culture and religion, trade and technology to migrants, conquerors and temptations for the Europeans themselves to invade and conquer territories in those adjacent continents.

Thus Europe can never be defined as a static, self-contained entity, neither in its internal content nor in its external delimitation. Europe is a part of wider global processes – a part which has taken certain directions. To work with Europe's cultural heritage is to work both with a global perspective and with a sense of those particular directions into which history has taken Europe. The task of defining Europe's cultural heritage becomes important for our ability to define ourselves and the logics that have guided both our fortunes and our misfortunes through time. From this, lessons can be learned – though

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24. David Cosandey, *Le Secret de L'Occident. Vers une théorie générale du progrès scientifique*, Flammarion, Paris, 2007.

not in the sense that they will allow us to predict a European destiny, but rather in the sense that they make us more conscious of both dangers and opportunities in the process of building a better future for a self-confident and humble Europe, in a world where cultures increasingly interact with and interpenetrate one another.

## **Europe's agricultural backbone**

The cultural achievements that we may think of as specifically European are mainly products of societies based on agricultural food production. Agriculture was, however, not invented in Europe. It was a revolutionary innovation that reached Europe from the Near East sometime during the 7th millennium BC. Agriculture then gradually expanded into zones ecologically more and more different from its zones of origin.

During its long history of adaptation to specific ecological conditions and its interaction with general culture-historical development, European agriculture acquired certain characteristics, which we might like to count as specific.

Initially in the Mediterranean and later further north, farming developed far beyond what was necessary for mere subsistence. Increasing productivity made it possible to produce a growing surplus of food that could be transferred from primary producers (farmers) to the growing urban populations engaged in trade, craftsmanship, science, art and religion. The overall trend was one of growing urban populations, but there were marked setbacks following the collapse of the Roman Empire, and again following the mid-14th-century plague.

Grain (wheat and barley), wine and olives were among the first vegetable staples of European farming. They had a Levantine-Caucasian-Mediterranean origin but were combined into a unique complex that provided the basis for a significant development of palace-centred economies and cultures in the Aegean from the 3rd millennium BC. This triple complex remained the main agricultural basis during the whole of Mediterranean Europe's antiquity. It was combined with or complemented by breeding of cattle, sheep and goats. But it was the grain-olive-wine complex that formed the alimentary basis of the urban civilisations of Greece and Rome. The control over good farmland became the key to success on the fiercely competitive Mediterranean geopolitical scene. The culmination came with the Roman expansion from city state to empire, through the control of ever-greater territories of high agricultural productivity to the north and to the south of the Mediterranean. With a population culminating at 1 million, the very size of the imperial capital was only made possible through the flow of wheat, olive oil and wine from those parts of the empire that had the natural prerequisites for a particular high productivity in one of these crops. When in the early 5th century AD the grain supplies from the province of Africa were cut off by the Visigoths, the former imperial capital seriously declined.

The Mediterranean agricultural wheat-wine-olive complex remains an essential part of the European cultural heritage. It has marked our landscapes and

endowed them with unique characteristics that help us understand the background for the achievements during European antiquity.

From the 16th century AD, when the Mediterranean had begun to lose its edge as the centre of European interaction with the world outside, the focus shifted to the north-west, to the Atlantic shores. Here a highly productive agricultural system had developed already during the 7th and 8th centuries AD, with the employment of the heavy wheeled mouldboard plough (known in China since the 6th century BC) that allowed highly productive agriculture to develop on the heavy, quasi-depletion-resistant but hitherto waterlogged clay soils characteristic of much of central and northern Europe. This was combined with stockbreeding of cattle and sheep. Together they provided food and raw materials for steady growing populations in towns that became important centres of trade and manufacture. The heavy wheeled mouldboard plough marked the landscape with a functionally determined oblong field layout which since has disappeared in most places with the introduction of more manoeuvrable plough types. The oblong fields have, however, been retained by the complementary land-management system of dykes, windmills and polders, developed in the Netherlands and exported – often by Dutch engineers and sometimes settlers to other low-lying areas of Europe – such as the Po Valley, the Vistula Valley, and the East Anglian Fens where productive land could be reclaimed from water.

The dyked landscapes of intensive water management are an important part of Europe's rural heritage – testimony of the material foundation for Europe's rapid growth since early modern times.

From around 1800 followed a series of radical new political, technological and managerial transformations of European agriculture with the spread of the Norfolk four-course arable rotation system (originating in late 17th-century England) and the subdivision and enclosure of formerly open fields and commonly held grazing lands, also originating in England. This system boosted agricultural production through new crops, a much better integration of crop rotation with augmented stock breeding. The resulting improved labour productivity led to a mass exodus from the countryside. Many lost their foothold in the rural economy and were forced to seek their fortunes in the nascent urban industrial centres.

The introduction of commercial fertilisers (organic and inorganic), and from the 1830s the development of chemical fertilisers and chemical pest control, allowed further alleviation of the effects of local scarcity of organic nitrogen for plant crops, thus increasing productivity even further.

During the second half of the 19th century followed a growing mechanisation of the agricultural production in Europe. Many of the mechanical innovations came from the expansive North American agriculture. Mechanical tools for farming and industrialised refinement of agricultural products became important products of the nascent industries of Europe.

Mechanisation, artificial fertilisers and pest control together with the impact of the lowering of freight rates for shipping crops and livestock and meat over long distances by steam-powered ships and trains, combined with the

introduction of developments such as refrigeration, gradually subverted the logic of the Norfolk four-course system. Instead, increasing specialisations of agricultural production combined with the industrialised processing of crops, meat and milk led to the growth of an increasingly monocultural farming serving a global market. In many parts of Europe this development gained momentum after the Second World War, favoured by the political priorities both in East and West – the development continues to day, supported by a European CAP which still tends to favour specialised mass production of food in ever bigger farm units – especially outside of the Mediterranean region.

This – together with an accelerating urbanisation of the spaces between the proper urban communities – has introduced a process of momentous transformation of vast rural landscapes, which often obliterates traces that allow us to read the longer history of land use. This situation is part of the background for the European Landscape Convention – and also the Valletta Convention.

## **The industrial legacy**

With the development of industrial production, Europe took a decisive step in reversing the global current of technological innovation. The harnessing of non-human and non-muscular mechanical energy has a long history – also beyond Europe. But it was the development of refined mechanics of power transmission based first on technology from wind- and watermills (known since antiquity in many parts of the world) and later further refined in mechanical clocks that enabled European entrepreneurs to develop ever more potent water-powered mills – which became the key to the nascent European industrial revolution prior to the advent of the steam engine. Watermills, and to a lesser degree wind- and horse-driven mills, were used for a variety of purposes beyond grain grinding and water management. They were used in the processing of timber, textiles, metals and other minerals and for powering various sorts of mining equipment for draining and hoisting.

With the introduction of steam energy in textile and metal production from the 1780s, the momentum of the industrial revolution increased. This was Europe's decisive moment where for the first time since antiquity technological innovations developed in Europe gave the continent an edge as a geopolitical centre of the globe and for a time its very centre. The dynamics behind the industrial revolution are too complex to be addressed here. They include cultural, religious, economic, demographic, technological and of course political factors.

In the present context we should restrict ourselves to emphasise that the importance of the industrial heritage for our ability to appreciate a crucial turn in European history and identity can hardly be overestimated. At the same time, the industrial heritage is often challenging to traditional concepts of heritage management. It is often big scale and often open to rapid transformations either due to the industrial logic of ongoing technological development, or due to sudden economic shifts that leave vast industrial production facilities void of function. This has happened to much of the European mining, metal and textile industries.

It does not necessarily make sense to physically preserve defunct industrial facilities. There are many examples of well-accomplished preservation of industrial heritage. But often the scale and quality of buildings and technical facilities together with other aspects such as location imposes the need to consider other solutions than traditional physical preservation of the heritage from this period. Well-conceived co-operation among developers, architects and heritage professionals may lead to creative solutions that leave us with redeveloped sites, where the industrial legacy is reflected in the design and layout of new buildings.

### **The role of the urban communities in the shaping of the multiplicity of European identities**

Urban communities already had a long history outside of Europe before developing here. During most of history, cities bigger and/or brighter than those of Europe existed for instance in China, Japan, India or in Dar al Islam. When the Europeans destroyed the Maya capital of Tenochtitlan in 1521 they destroyed a city bigger and infrastructurally more advanced than any of the contemporary European cities.

Nevertheless, in Europe cities have been crucial in the dynamics that for a certain time gave Europe a decisive leading edge as a global centre of cultural, economic and political development.

Having different identities cohabitating within the same community (for example, a town) may in some instances prove difficult, but often, through history cohabitation has acted as a strong driver of progress and prosperity. Prosperous urban communities such as St Petersburg, Venice, Ghent, Timisoara, Istanbul, Toledo, Amsterdam, Derbent, Thessaloniki, Vienna, Bergen, Vilnius, Marseilles and London have at the height of their success been marked by a high degree of openness and multitude of identities. Therefore, their cultural heritage is very much a result and an expression of this capacity for cohabitation.

Venice could be mentioned as a particular case in point, since this was the city that for centuries was the hub in the exchange of commerce and culture not only between Christianity and Islam but also between Western and Eastern Christianity. All over the city of Venice, in its architecture and art, we see this witnessed. The Basilica of San Marco, the Fondaco dei Turchi and the Palace of the Doges are among the many examples of a strong Islamic and Oriental influence. The Venetian painted art with its special emphasis on light which it shares with the religious art of orthodox Christianity is another. In other words, Venice, as we know and celebrate it as a treasure of European heritage, is inconceivable without its strong interaction with the world outside of Western Christianity.

If we follow the trail of Domenikos Theotokopoulos, better known as El Greco (1541-1614), the famous Cretan-born painter who spent important years of his life in Venice as an apprentice of Tintoretto, we end up in Toledo, another city distinguished by the confluence for a time of various powerful cultures.

Mosques, synagogues and churches and a syncretic architecture bear witness to the important role of the city as a fertile meeting ground for Islamic, Jewish and Christian communities. Into this city – though now long stripped of its Islamic and Jewish citizens – the former icon painter fused his particular vision of light scale and perspective into a Western tradition of painting. His syncretic canvases have retained a radical expressionism capable of inspiring later artists like Goya, and schools of painters like the early 20th-century *Die Brücke*.

Istanbul or the Sublime Porte<sup>25</sup> is another long-lasting hub in the interaction between North and South, East and West. This splendid seat of two empires, first the Byzantine, then the Ottoman, and thus an imperial capital for more than 1600 years, owes its material and cultural wealth to the cohabitation through the ages of people from all corners of the empires. Far from being only Turkish, the Ottoman capital sheltered many different ethnicities. The Turkish population was the most prominent, but still a minority compared with the combined numbers of other populations such as the Albanian, the Armenian, the Bulgarian, the Greek and the Jewish. The Jews were granted shelter by the Ottoman sultan after their expulsion in 1492 from a Spain then obsessed with doing away with its multicultural legacy.

Bergen is an example of a flowering North Atlantic merchant city characterised by a population heterogenised by generations of settlers from near and far. As a major provider of stockfish to Catholic Europe and continental goods for the rest of Norway, Bergen attracted emigrants from all over Europe. Sailors and merchants, craftsmen and industrious Huguenots, the latter driven from France by Louis XIV under the motto "*un roi, une loi, une foi*".<sup>26</sup> They all contributed to the making of Bergen as a vibrant and prosperous urban community with a rich cultural heritage that is both very particular and very syncretic.

A very important part of the urban legacy in Europe is the role of many cities in the development of democratic government. However incomplete in their restricted social accessibility, the guilds, the city councils and senates of some of the rich merchant cities of the early modern period were important in the development of civic consciousness and political thinking. The groundbreaking political system of these historic cities is witnessed by their layout with the guildhalls, town halls, churches and monasteries that illustrate the crucial segregation of worldly and religious power, which lies at the bottom of our modern democratic system with its respect for the integrity and rights of the individual.

Now the point is to ask, what stories do we tell about these illustrious fruits of intercultural cohabitation and dialogue? It is of absolute importance that we take the opportunity to show how in each instance a unique cultural heritage

25. The Sublime Porte is a synecdoche for the Ottoman capital, a translation of the official Turkish title for the central office of the Ottoman government.

26. "One king, one law, one religion" was how Louis XIV summed up the identity policy in his early modern state.

of lasting value was the result of the combination of resources from more than one culture, rather than a sovereign product of a particular culture out of contact with others.

### **The road and the harbour – Symbols of interaction**

Europe's position in the world is logically bound to its means of interaction inside and outside of the continent.

The ability to concentrate economic or military resources is logically linked to the access to efficient means of transport. Speed, cost and security are vital parameters that determine the mobility of goods and power and therefore a major focus of attention for any advanced society or group of societies with specialised economies.

The achievements of Roman road engineering were a logical and necessary prerequisite both to the imperial projection of military power, and to the integration of highly specialised economic production. The same goes for naval technology, including the construction of harbours. The collapse of the Western Empire in the 5th century was a collapse of this finely integrated system of transport. The centuries following the collapse of the Western Empire meant a significant reduction of economic integration in the West mirrored in the significant decrease in the quality of the road system.

It is, however, important not be led into the belief that the exchange of goods, ideas and people ceased during the mediaeval period in the West. New agents such as the church and the monastic system facilitated exchange of important knowledge and technology. In the East, Byzantium was able, with varying effectiveness, to integrate power and resources over a vast territory. This role was later taken over by the Ottoman Empire. Cities like Venice, Istanbul and Genoa acted as important centres in the exchange of goods and ideas

Decisive advances in road construction and transport technologies were made from the time of the nascent agricultural and industrial revolutions in the latter half of the 18th century. Formal education of road engineers was introduced in France and elsewhere. Considerable investments were made in the development of networks of canals that helped the transport of raw materials and goods pertaining to the developing industrial economies. After 1850 the role of the canals were increasingly taken over by the steam-powered railways.

Linked both to the system of canals and railroads was the development of harbours and ships (big sail ships/clippers and later steamships) and later the telegraph. This communication system together with the industrial, agricultural, financial and colonial systems formed an integrated whole and must be understood as such.

European history and identity and its interaction with the wider world is mirrored in the heritage of its communication systems. It is important to preserve elements of this heritage as a visible reminder of the role of mobility and communication in the European position.

But it is equally important that some of the roads and routes, which provided Europe with decisive innovating impulses, reached far beyond the European continent. The Silk Road and the intercontinental sea routes must be emphasised as part also of European heritage.

### **Borders, and fortresses – Places of arrested mobility**

As a mirror of the systems of mobility and communication we find other elements in our heritage that were designed with the opposite purpose in mind. Controlling the populations and resources of a territory implies the ability to exercise control over their movements as well as those of goods and people across the borders to neighbouring territories. Therefore, borders of cities, fiefs, provinces and states have to varying degrees been provided with installations and facilities designed to further this control. Cities have been surrounded by walls and gates and state borders dotted with control posts, fortifications and other military installations and lined with walls and fences. From Hadrian's Wall to the Berlin Wall, today when such installations have lost much of their original functions within Europe we are left with them as a heritage that bears witness to the long history of inter-European distrust or conflicts and sometimes of totalitarian regimes. It is also a reminder of civic rights long fought for and not to be taken so much for granted that they are treated with negligence.

### **Pride and shame – Places of conflict and suffering**

Like the heritage mentioned above, we have an even more traumatic category of heritage: the places of battles or massacres, where people killed each other for power, freedom and resources, and the prisons and camps where people suffered and succumbed for reasons of political or religious conviction or ethnic affiliation.

This category of heritage is charged with so much meaning, and often themes of latent conflict, that its preservation is at the same time necessary and difficult. Here, stories can be told that might fuel a perpetuation of old conflicts. The responsibility of the heritage manager must be to make sure that room is made for multiple readings of these intensely traumatic places without negating the existence of a meta-narrative referring to historic facts and the basic values of our civil society.

### **Places of worship, learning and ideology. The heritage of Europe's religious diversity**

Europe is a continent of many religions. Many religions have been used through history to give meaning and structure to our lives as individuals and collectives.

Ironically, many religious systems tend to present themselves as sovereign and self-contained, and yet they are often indebted to one another or feed from common sources.

Until late antiquity, the most advanced European societies accommodated a plethora of religions. A reason behind the successful expansion of the Roman Empire was its ability to integrate new populations with their culture and religions into the sphere of imperial citizenship. Many religions celebrated in the imperial capital had a Near Eastern origin such as the cults of Cybele, Mithra and Christ. With the ascent of Christianity in the Western Empire the polytheistic tradition was broken, though Christianity with its many saints can be said to compensate to some extent for the loss of the earlier divine diversity. It would, however, be wrong to claim that Christianity, though dominant, became the only religion in Europe. Islam was important for hundreds of years first on the Iberian Peninsula and Sicily and later under the Ottomans in vast tracts of the Balkans and the Caucasus. Both Christianity and Islam were the religions of the rulers. In contrast, the third monotheistic religion, Judaism, remained a religion of minority communities and was never the official religion of any European state.

All three religious communities carried important treasures of worldly insight and learning with them. But Christianity, due to its position as the dominant religion on the continent, developed a particularly important role. Monasteries became well-organised centres not only of religious devotion but also of knowledge, communication, production and innovation. It has been claimed that they laid part of the foundation for later industrial revolution. Monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques remain an important part of European culture. At the brightest moments of our history, different religious communities have been able to share and treasure the value of the other religions. At the darkest moments – which we do not have to look for in the distant past – religious differences have been abused as markers of political conflicts leading to atrocities committed against people and their places of worship.

Protecting Europe's diversity of religious heritage is essential for our ability to remember and protect the plurality of identities that has shaped Europe as a unique fruit, but one nourished by interaction with the wider world.