

LONGING OR LOATHING A »COMMON« IDENTITY

The European Strategies for Information Society as an Instrument for Constructing Identity and the Local Realities: the Case of Bulgaria*

by Assen Kanev (Sofia)

first publication

* This paper is the revised and enhanced version of my presentation, at the workshop »*Monstrous Collectives*« and the Role of the Individual.

Thus, it reflects the comments and questions, as well as the ideas of the other papers. Once again, I would like to express my gratitude to *Kakanien Revisited* and especially to Dr. Ursula Reber for the support, patience and the excellent organization.

In the light of the recent referendum in Ireland and the firm denial of the Lisbon strategy by vote, questions about the European Union's institutional politics, the will of the European peoples and the still mostly utopian narrative of a »common Europe« have been questioned again. This paper addresses several key issues of the contemporary and future collective European images, dealing with the problem of establishing a collective identity, deploying new technologies and media for the nurturing of shared belonging, and, finally, their impact on local communities and identities.

I have chosen that rather complex topic for various reasons. On the one hand, information and communication technologies (ICT's) and the information society are having and will have a fundamental impact on the development of the European society. On the other hand, the cultural heritage, the cultural memory and their »construction«, maintenance and retrieval are one of the crucial factors for the establishment of any collective identity. From these mutual relations the idea of deploying the strategic framework of information society instruments in the cultural field for building Europe's identity arises. Nevertheless, the central question of the study focuses on the application of these strategies in order to build a sustainable collective identity. It is particularly interesting for me to simultaneously witness and analyse these processes of institutionalized identity building on a meta-national scale and to study their cultural, social and political implications.

Further, I would like to explain the title of the paper, since it raises some questions: does this »longing or loathing« stem from my personal, individual hopes and fears facing an emerging collective (supposed) »monstrosity« or do these terms represent a global, regional or local tendency encompassing the expectations, wants and needs of individuals, communities, collectives and societies (at least on an European level). After presenting the EU concepts of a common identity from an institutional perspective I will narrow the scope of the analysis to the specific Bulgarian situation. Furthermore, I will try to be methodologically consistent, paying attention to the broader context of the workshop »*Monstrous Collectives*« and the Role of the Individual.

The underlying hypothesis of the paper stipulates that the concept of a shared European identity is based on utopian narratives, which strive to transform the European community of capital and consumerism to immaterial values. Yet, the social, political, and communication technologies which should lead to this face resistance and different setbacks. The situation calls for revision and the establishment of a new dialog between the Union's institutions and peoples. Thus, the present concept of a »common Europe« is sometimes perceived as a monstrous collective and a mechanical construct, where the constant interplay between feelings of »longing and loathing« still dominates the notion of a shared European identity. The paper will focus on the utilization of Europe's cultural heritage and its digitisation for strengthening a shared European identity in three chapters – the questions of strategy, of identity and of impact.

The Question of Strategy: European Information Society Initiatives

The question of strategy encompasses the overview and analysis of the four central European documents on building the information society– the *Lisbon Agenda*, the *Lund Principles*, the *i2010 Initiative* and the *Recommendation for Digitisation*.

Following the European idea of information society I will analyse the strategies for digitisation of Europe's cultural heritage as a tool for building a »common« identity. Firstly, ICT's as the engine of a »knowledge-based economy« entails a policy which will likely produce sustainable prosperity and inclusion in entire Europe, crucial for the creation of a common identity. Secondly, the launching of the envisioned cultural industries and policies will lead to the proliferation and visibility of the complex and multifarious cultures on the European level. These conditions could become the basis for dialog, recognition and the celebration of Europe's cultural diversity and create the necessary conditions for a new, »common« European identity.

1 This term is used in the *Commission Recommendation on the Digitisation and Online Accessibility of Cultural Material and Digital Preservation* of 2006, which can be accessed at http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/document.cfm?action=display&doc_id=160, last visit: 01.06.2008. The usage of such a terminology can be highly controversial.

2 I am using the following short version of the *Lisbon Strategy* (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm?textMode=on, last visit: 01.06.2008), for the main concern of the paper are the European information society strategies in general and the digitisation initiatives, in particular. The first are only slightly emphasized, the latter are still not developed in the Lisbon agenda.

3 Ibid.

4 The Lund Principles. European Content in Global Networks. Coordination Mechanisms for Digitisation Programmes. In: ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/ist/docs/digicult/lund_action_plan-en.pdf, last visit: 01.06.2008.

5 Ibid., p. 1.

6 Ibid.

7 The i2010 strategy is available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2005:0229:FIN:EN:PDF>, last visit: 01.06.2008.

8 Commission Recommendation, p. 2.

9 Ibid., p. 7: Later, this is referred to as »cultural material«, which means the »collective memory includ[ing] print (books, journals, newspapers), photographs, museum objects, archival documents, audiovisual material«.

10 Ibid., p. 2.

11 Nevertheless, it the major divisions of the current European 7th Framework Programme are worth mentioning: project activities are: digital culture, digital libraries, information retrieval and use, virtual heritage, scientific data, digital preservation, digitisation technologies, web archiving. Cf. http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/ict/telearn-digicult/digicult-projects_en.html. Also, the main digitisation projects within the European Union's information society policy are TEL - *The European Library*

I need to make a short remark on the usage of the term »information society« within this paper. It will be used primarily as a technical, »container« term connoting the central role of new media and ICT's in the contemporary world. I am deliberately not applying the diverse and sometimes contradictory theoretical interpretations of the term, because the study focuses on its aspect as a political and social strategy.

The European political and institutional agenda for creating a »common« European identity is deeply rooted in the European information society initiatives. The aim to create a »single European information space« and an »inclusive European information society« on the basis of Europe's cultural diversity and heritage/s is underlined with the implicit notion for building of a »common European« identity. To achieve that, digitisation, online access and digital preservation of »Europe's collective memory«¹ are named.

The shift towards a European information society started in 2000 with the *Lisbon Agenda for Economic and Social Renewal of Europe*.² The transition towards the »knowledge based economy« and its principles for the European information society are constituted within the strategic framework *eEurope – An Information Society for All* (2000–2005), which pursued the realization of »Europe's full e-potential«.³ The Lisbon strategy pushed the European Union towards the new ICT's and the information society. Though the European cultural heritage and its digitisation are not explicitly mentioned there, the social and economic framework is already offered. In 2001 at the meeting of the appointed *eEurope* experts in Lund/Sweden the European digitisation policy has been elaborated in a strategic document, known as the *Lund Principles*.⁴ Their main objective is »to stimulate European content in global networks in order to fully exploit the opportunities created by the advent of the digital technologies«.⁵ The framework basically addresses Europe's cultural heritage as a unique public asset for forming the collective memory of all European societies. It provides »a solid basis for the development of the digital content industries in a sustainable knowledge society«.⁶ The main objective of the project is to enhance an accessible and sustainable European heritage, and to guarantee public and democratic access to it, to preserve and to promote cultural diversity in a global environment and to preserve Europe's past and future legacy.

The current strategic framework for the development of the information society and the digitisation of the EU's cultural heritage is made up by the program *i2010: A European Information Society for Growth and Employment* (2005–2010).⁷ Once again the ICT's are recognised as a strong factor for reinforcing Europe's cultural diversity by combining multicultural and multilingual environments with the help of technology. Thus, they are making cultural heritage easily accessible, they provide digital libraries, and multimedia sources.

As a part of *i2010's Digital Libraries* section from 2006 the European Commission issued the *Recommendation on Digitisation*. The document explicitly links the new media and the cultural assets with the aspect of building a European identity. It aims at »bringing out the full economic and cultural potential of Europe's cultural [...] heritage through the Internet«,⁸ as well as at supporting the access to Europe's collective memory and its use for education, work, leisure and creativity. It presents a strategy for digitisation, online accessibility and digital preservation of the collective European memory,⁹ focussed on a multilingual common access point to the distributed European digital cultural heritage, thus increasing its visibility and underlining its common features: »The online presence of material from different cultures and in different languages will make it easier for citizens to appreciate their own cultural heritage as well as the heritage of other European countries.«¹⁰

The initiatives for digitisation of the European cultural heritage are targeted towards the *longue durée* project for creating and strengthening a common and shared European cultural identity, based on the cultural and linguistic diversity in the European Union, as well as on the different cultural heritages and identities. Their application and encoding in the ICT's instruments shall foster the improvement of life, their sustainable development, and the inclusion of all European citizens in the emerging information society.

I will not elaborate further on the actual programs, projects and initiatives for digitisation of the cultural heritage on the European level here, for this paper deals more with the political will and strategy behind them and the long-term implications.¹¹

(<http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/portal/index.html>), *MinervaEC – Ministerial Network for Valorising Activities in Digitisation*, *eContentplus* (<http://www.minervaeurope.org/home.htm>), MICHAEL – *Multilingual Inventory of Cultural Heritage in Europe* (<http://www.michael-culture.org/en/home>), EDL – *European Digital Library Project* (<http://www.edlproject.eu>). All internet links are last visited on 01.06.2008.

The underlying idea of the EU's information society politics for »re-coding« the diverse cultural heritages of Europe in the new media environment is not surprising. On the one hand, it utilizes the principles of collective memory, presented in the next section of the paper. On the other hand, it reuses the model of institutionalization of canonic »cultural capital«, which is an integral part of the legitimization of the nation state. One particular aspect of this process of »transfer« seems to be problematic to me: the almost mechanical transfer of legitimizing models and practices from the national to the meta-national level. Also the realization within a new media-scape and a new, unfolding socio-cultural paradigm – the information society – shows an »automated« and non-reflexive transfer, which undermines the common participation in the process. Instead, its plain constructedness triggers resistance and mixed feelings of »longing and loathing«. When the »transference« of cultural heritage in the new technological and cultural environment is linked with social actions and actors, following the goals of the European information society (*convergence and connection of all cultures; total social inclusion; self-sustained process of innovation*), it will have the potential to become the basis for a new, collective identity.

The Question of Identity: Cultural Memory and Project Identity

12 I am using the Bulgarian translation of Assmann, Jan: *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (1997). In Bulgarian (Асман, Ян: *Културната памет. Писменост, памет и политическа идентичност в ранните високоразвити култури*. София. Планета 3 [2001] г.); Assmann, Aleida: *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*. München: Beck 2006.

13 Castells, Manuel: *The information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Vol. 2: *The Power of Identity*. Oxford: Blackwell 1997; Castells, M.: *The information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Vol. 3: *End of Millennium*. Oxford: Blackwell 1999.

14 Jansen, Thomas (Ed.): *Reflections on European Identity*. Working paper. European Commission, Forward studies unit 1999. In: http://ec.europa.eu/comm/cdp/working-paper/european_identity_en.pdf.

15 Assmann 2001, p. 23.

16 Cf. *ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*, p. 131f.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 133.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 139f.

Europe's struggle to gain global agency and to overcome its restricting capital and consumer origins can only be achieved through Europe as political subject with common institutions. The ideology of a joint Europe does not only address institutions, but also the European peoples »united in its diversity« and by that sharing a »common identity« as a cohesive force.

The question of identity asks, how the idea of a »common European« identity is to be contextualised historically, socially and culturally. Here, I rely on the concept of cultural memory by Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann,¹² as well as on the concept of the network society by Manuel Castells¹³ and the role of identity in the interplay between domination and resistance in the networked world. The feasibility of a »common« identity is also analysed from a European perspective, on the basis of the research *Reflections on European Identity* conducted under the European Commission.¹⁴ At last, the principles appointed on the EU internet portal are to be considered.

In order to understand the concept of collective identity one has to take into account its structure, as well as its functionality. Based on Maurice Halbwachs' concept of »collective memory«, Jan Assmann introduces »cultural memory«. Collective memory is based on cultural memory as its fundamental prerequisite. Assmann focuses on the interconnection of memory (the »correlation with the past«), identity (the »political imaginary«) and cultural continuity (the »creation of tradition«).¹⁵ According to his concept every culture is build upon connective layers of two dimensions: social and temporal. The social parameter is interpreted as universal space of experience, the »symbolic and semantic world«; the temporal layer connects the past with the present and, at the same time, shapes and preserves the social experience and memory. Both the social and the temporal layers allow for belonging and the notion of identity. »Cultural memory« encompasses the continuity of tradition, the correlation with the past of memory, and political identity. Memory is »cultural«, because it has to be institutionalized in a given culture; it is »memory«, because its function for social communication is comparable to the one of individual memory for the mind.¹⁶ Collective identity comes from »cultural memory« as the image created by social groups, with which the members identify. Thus, collective identity is not given *per se*; it is the process of correlation between this image and the group. Thus, it is a »social construct«, but nevertheless »real«.¹⁷ Collective identity is »a reflected upon social belonging« and cultural identity accordingly »a reflected upon participation and belonging to a culture«.¹⁸ The consciousness of social belonging, Assmann's »collective identity«, is based on the participation and involvement in the shared knowledge and memory by the use of a common symbolization system.¹⁹

Following Jan Assmann's theory cultural heritage forms a particular aspect of the inherently social »cultural memory« and is the vehicle for creating and reproducing collective identity of a community. Cultural memory and identity are socially constructed phenomena and thus dependent on social actors, the groups and individuals correlating to them and constituting their reality.

20 Assmann 2006, p. 408: »[...] Erinnerungsräume [entstehen] durch jene partielle Ausleuchtung von Vergangenheit, wie sie ein Individuum oder eine Gruppe zur Konstruktion von Sinn, zur Fundierung ihrer Identität, zur Orientierung ihres Lebens, zur Motivierung ihres Handelns brauchen.«

21 Ibid.: »Solche an einen individuellen oder kollektiven Träger gebundene Erinnerung ist grundsätzlich perspektivisch angelegt: von einer bestimmten Gegenwart aus wird ein Ausschnitt der Vergangenheit auf eine Weise beleuchtet, dass er einen Zukunftshorizont freigibt.«

22 The concept of identity is discussed in Castells 1997.

23 Castells 1999, pp. 372-373.

24 Ibid., p. 352.

25 Ibid., p. 353: »The defence of the welfare state, of social solidarity, of stable employment and of workers' rights; the concern about universal human rights and the plight of the Fourth world; the reaffirmation of democracy, and its extension to citizen participation at the local and regional level; the vitality of historically/territorially rooted cultures, often expressed in language, not surrendering to the culture of real virtuality.«

26 Ibid.

Aleida Assmann also uses the concept of cultural memory, related yet to contemporary cultures of memory, remembrance and forgetting. According to her book *Erinnerungsräume* spaces of cultural memory are shaped by political and social interest, as well as by any changes of the technological media-scape. Contemporary cultural memory is constituted as an »inhabited functional memory« (»bewohntes Funktionsgedächtnis«) and »uninhabited repository memory« (»unbewohntes Speichergedächtnis«), where memory space is created by individuals or groups for the construction of meaning, the foundation of their identity, for orientation of their lives, for motivation of their actions.²⁰ This memory is always constructed from a given point of view – »from the present perspective a part of the past is being illuminated, opening up a future horizon.«²¹ The metaphor of »habitat« links the cultural memory to its social origin and impact. The latent past gains cultural meaning only through the social act of »illumination« (being both remembrance and forgetting).

For both Jan and Aleida Assmann's concepts, any culture is formed by experience and memory. Together with »cultural identity« and »cultural continuity« cultural memory is the vehicle of a given culture, which creates and reproduces collective identity. This shared identity is further enhanced by the interplay of the two aspects of cultural memory (functional memory and repository). According to this concept a »common« European identity had to be built on the principles of cultural memory, i.e. on a particular heritage in order to produce meaning and to reproduce itself.

When applying the concept of cultural memory and its structure to the issue of cultural heritage and its digitisation, the digital cultural heritage shall be the basis of a collective European identity. Digitised cultural heritage can be seen as a rich »repository memory«. But without the social action of its appropriation it is due to remain passive. The absence of social actors, identifying themselves with this cultural heritage of a »common« European memory is contrary to the project. Along with the relatively non-reflexive and mechanical transference in the new media-scape, the utilization of cultural heritage for building a shared identity in Europe will face many resistances.

Manuel Castells provides another interpretation of the interplays between domination and resistance, connected with the issue of identity. Accordingly, they constitute any form of social reality, including his new socio-cultural paradigm of the »network society«.²² Castells' analysis establishes three basic forms of identity: first, the »legitimizing identity«, sustained by the dominant institutions of society, secondly, the »resistance identity«, which is generated by those social actors, whose position in society is devaluated by the logic of dominance, and thirdly, the »project identity«, enacted by social actors on the basis of the existing and accessible cultural materials and thereby for the redefinition of their position in society. The project identity is able to transform the social structure as a whole. With the »rise of the network society« the »legitimizing identity« is losing its dominant role, which is taken over by the »resistance identities«. In *The Information Age – The End of the Millennium* – Castells proposes a European »project identity« as the most appropriate in face of the transformations and challenges of the network society. Project identity has to emerge from a »resistance identity« by using the symbols and the values that »spring from people's life experiences in the Information Age«.²³

According to Castells the unification of Europe cannot be fully accomplished by political engineering: »If meaning is linked to identity, and if identity remains exclusively national, regional or local, European integration may not last beyond the limits of a common market.«²⁴ Modernity's traditional values – Christianity, democracy, ethnicity, national identity, and economy – do not support an integral European identity. »It could be built, not in contradiction, but complementary to national, regional and local identities. It would take a process of social construction [...] – a project identity, that is, a blueprint of social values and institutional goals that appeal to a majority of citizens without excluding anybody, in principle.«²⁵ The project identity is »a struggle to impose alternative ways of economic development, socialability and governance.«²⁶ Although this position may seem utopian, Castells tries to remain »a moderate optimist« in his presumption that such a project identity is possible by presenting this hypothesis.

In Manuel Castells' view the new European identity can be achieved only as voluntary collective political action deploying the mechanisms and the cultural logic of the Information Age. Following his line of argument, the idea of a »common« European identity based solely on cultural memory is rather connected to »resistance identities«. Although many of its

27 Cf. http://europa.eu/abc/12lessons/lesson_1/index_en.htm, last visit: 01. 06. 2008.

28 Cf. http://ec.europa.eu/culture/portal/activities/heritage/cultural_heritage_vehic_en.htm, last visit: 01.06. 2008.

29 Schneider, Heinrich: *The Dimensions of the Historical and Cultural Core of a European Identity*. In: Jansen 1999, p. 15.

30 De Weck, Roger: *Neither Reich nor Nation – another Future for the European Union*. In: Jansen 1999, p. 107.

31 Thebault, Jean-Claude: *Preface*. In: Jansen 1999, p. 5.

32 Ibid.

33 Lejeune, Claire: *From Poetic Citizenship to European Citizenship*. In: Jansen 1999, p. 93.

34 De Weck 1999, p. 107.

aspects are fundamental for a European project identity, it is not its indispensable prerequisite *per se*. Nevertheless, the idea of the project identity is not bound to strict regulations. All values and projects could be encompassed by the social actors within such pro-active identity, including the »historically/territorially rooted cultures«, the vehicles of cultural memory.

In the light of these concepts, I will briefly discuss the self-presentation of the European Commission and the EU on the challenges of a European identity and the ways it correlates with them. On the EU web portal the European identity is presented within Europe in 12 lessons, namely in *Lesson 1: Why the European Union?* as »[i]dentity and diversity in a globalised world«. ²⁷ The key element »unity in diversity« emphasizes the unique cultural diversity, peaceful dialog and co-existence of differing cultures in particular. On the *European Culture Portal* cultural heritage is recognized as being the universal vehicle of cultural identity. ²⁸

The *Forward studies unit* by the European Commission has examined and discussed the issue of a collective European identity at the forum *Carrefour Européen des sciences et de la culture*. The results are to be found in the *Reflections on European Identity* and show two major tendencies both stemming from the consensual »unity in diversity« (or Jacob Burckhardt's »agreement to disagree«/»*concordantia discors*«²⁹ or Edgar Morin's »manifold unity«/»*unitas multiplex*«³⁰) from which the essential values of humanism, democracy and universalism³¹ can be deduced. One tendency is a more pro-active, »project«-oriented common identity with a predominantly political dimension, while the other – also sharing the centrality of political action – recognises the need for a cultural fundament, on which the future identity can be built. So, »identity appears as two-sided: on the one hand memory, and heritage, and on the other hand voluntarism and a project to be achieved«. ³² European identity, the emotional belonging to European citizenship has to be an »interface, [an] indispensable mediator between my awareness of belonging to a local, regional community and that of belonging to the world community«, ³³ as Claire Lejeune states. Regardless of the differences of the above outlined concepts, Europe's common identity is usually recognised as being in process – with »driving forces, restraining forces and opposing forces. Identity always springs from contradictions and never becomes fully – and inhumanly – coherent. On the contrary, identity contains within it crisis in the original Greek sense of *krisis* – decision«. ³⁴

Although a European identity could not be accomplished without its projective and pro-active side facing the future, I suppose that the historically embedded side turned towards heritage should neither be neglected. It is important for continuity and connectivity of a shared European idea and identity. For being successful this project identity needs memory scapes/spaces, cultural memory in Jan and Aleida Assmann's sense additionally. Thus, my hypothesis is to incorporate both aspects of a »common« identity. One has to be aware of the fact that the European cultural memory also has to be (re-)created anew in the Information Age.

The Question of Impact: The Case of Bulgaria

In the following I try to trace if and how the initiatives and projects for the creation of a collective identity are realised on a local level, in other words – to study their impact. In the first place I would like to elaborate the specific Bulgarian situation in relation to the discussed issues of the information society's strategies and the question of identity.

The analysis of Bulgaria's situation as both a SEE country and a recent EU member state seems to be particularly controversial with regard to problems of cultural heritage as a means for identity building. Bulgaria makes an interesting case for several reasons: together with Romania, she has accessed the EU in 2007 (both are the last two accession countries for at least several years); she is a post-communist country still in transition, a Southeast European country with its own ethnicity and identity issues that are peacefully managed; a country with traumatizing past legacies and a problematic heritage. Both issues of a European identity and the information society policies for digitising cultural heritage are relatively new within the Bulgarian context. The building of an information society has been initiated and its direction and progress is foreseeable and measurable. Last, Bulgaria is my native land, I am personally involved in the process, and, moreover, relatively better informed and competent to specify the local conditions.

35 Спасов, Орлин: Интернет в България: другият преход. In: Социологически проблеми. Тематичен брой: Интернет – общество – култура [Spasov, Oriin: Internet in Bulgaria: The Other Transition. In: Sociological Problems Quarterly, Internet – Society – Culture] [Sofia] 3-4 (2004), pp. 162-190.

36 The *Alpha Research Agency* gives data on the Internet usage in Bulgaria by March 2008, reaching 31%, where almost 50% of Sofia's inhabitants are using it. Home access to the Internet has been doubled in the last year, reaching 28%. Cf. <http://www.aresearch.org/internet.html>, last visit: 21.01.2009.

37 This situation has changed recently and the first digitized materials are available online. Still, organization and web design are far from the best practices in the field. Cf. http://www.nationallibrary.bg/digitalna_bibl_doklad_en.html (partly in Bulgarian), last visit: 21.01.2009.

38 A few interesting emerging digitisation projects: *Boyana Church*, <http://www.boyanachurch.org> and *Virtual Gallery of Vladimir Dimitrov – Maystora*, <http://www.artgallery-themaster.com>, last visit: 21.01.2009.

39 Of course there are also ironic opinions that the EU's days are numbered for naively enough Bulgaria has been made a member state, interpreting the Union as the next »empire« (after the Byzantine and the Ottoman empires, the Third Reich and the Soviet Union), meddling with Bulgaria and thus calling for its untimely demise.

Almost 20 years after the decline of communism Bulgaria is still in transition to a Western democratic and economic society. Although many changes have been achieved within this period and the political transition to democracy could be considered successfully completed in the face of the European and the Atlantic integration, the economic, social and cultural spheres are still by and large »under construction«. The social discrepancies and insecurity, the insufficient rule of law, the rather weak civil society, the capital divide within the EU and Bulgaria's very low GDP, the marginal position (as perceived in Bulgaria herself) in Europe are factors that have a strong and lasting effect.

Parallel and supplementary to the social, economic and political transition processes Bulgaria has witnessed the so-called »other transition«: ³⁵ the rise and proliferation of the ICT's which coincided with the changes after 1989. This »other«, digital transition has its own structure and development, almost independent from the more disruptive and fundamental changes in the social, economic and political sphere. For that reason, these changes are far less problematic and visible. Neither one of the transitions is yet complete and both are leading, hopefully, towards the European project for Bulgaria.

During the last years the ICT's and the knowledge-based economy have gained impetus in Bulgaria. Although they have not developed that far, ³⁶ they are increasing in scope and influence. In any case, Bulgaria still is far from reaching the goals of the information society politics of the European Union in 2010.

Another aspect of the Bulgarian situation is equally important for this study – Bulgaria's own problematic legacies and heritage. To a large extent images of Bulgarian identity are formed by the traditional national historiography, which makes up a considerable part of the national education system. The communist legacy, on the other hand, is still a taboo and remains unproblematised in the most cases. The lack of a broader public interest in the Bulgarian culture and cultural heritage, as well as the underdeveloped civil society do not provide the necessary means for control over the public cultural assets. This has led to the proliferation of private, often illicit interests, which is even strengthened by the inadequate Cultural Heritage and Museums Law that has not been revised since 1969. So, the cultural heritage is relinquished to new nationalist tendencies, private capitalist interests and the state's very imperfect struggle to preserve the Bulgarian canon of »high culture«. So far the Bulgarian strategies for coping with its cultural heritage and its political and historical legacies are marked by abandonment, decay, and demolition.

Thus, it won't come as a surprise that the European initiatives for digitisation, online access and digital preservation are still underdeveloped apart from very few noticeable projects and activities. The Institute for Mathematics and Informatics at the Bulgarian Academy of Science is one of the leading institutions in digitisation projects, but, on the other hand, the Bulgarian National Library, for example, is only associated to the European Library project (TEL), not a full member. It is not offering digitized collections and catalogues, nor is it supplied with adequate computer facilities. ³⁷ Still, there is no large scale digitisation of the cultural heritage to be found in Bulgaria. ³⁸

In this regard the question of a Bulgarian-European identity, based on shared emotions of belonging, a common social and political project is as problematic as the question of heritage itself. There are at least two levels of identification and interpretation in Bulgaria: First, the establishment of a European identity and integration into Europe is longed for or loathed, sometimes at the same time. At the level of everyday discourse there is a dystopian nuance that has little in common with Castells' project identity or the notion of a common cultural memory. ³⁹ To a large extent Europe is still perceived as being an external factor, and it is identified with the bureaucracy in distant Brussels, an inhuman global agency. This is precisely what Manual Castells describes as »resistance identity« – uprooted and lost in the »timeless time« and »the space of flows« of the Information Age. It is marginalized and peripheral, but nevertheless forms an irrational substratum, that can be traced nationwide and be ascribed to the above emphasized features of the particular Bulgarian situation.

On the other hand, there is the notion of identity, which can be called rational. It struggles to be in line with a European project identity. At the same time, it is seeking its fundament in a shared cultural memory and heritage along with the emerging information society in Bulgaria, in Europe and perhaps globally.

The local reception of Europe's information society strategies and identity politics in the case of Bulgaria has a limited impact so far. The specific Bulgarian situation defined by

its inner traits and all-encompassing transition process is one of the reasons that there is a strong resistance towards the notion of a »common« European identity, as probably is the missing public consent on the Bulgarian identity itself. The problematic and suppressed heritages as well as the »distant« identity projects are generating mixed feelings of »longing and loathing«.

Tentative Conclusion: Longing or/and Loathing a Common Identity

The ICT's in general, as well as the digitisation of the European and national cultural heritage/s in particular are only one aspect of constructing a »common« European identity. Nevertheless, it is of strategic importance, since it reflects the paradigm of the information society, on the one hand, and establishes the fundament upon which the new *unitas multiplex* identity could be built, on the other. For the process of building a European identity it is crucial, first because it is able to establish continuity and connectivity between the past, the present and the future: the core of the »new« European »cultural memory« – the vehicle for a sustainable collective identity. Secondly, it is capable to accomplish the structure and values of the emerging information society. Its functionality largely depends on the interconnection with social actors for the creation of cultural meaning and collective identity.

Another aspect of digitising the cultural heritage and its successful implementation as a tool for enhancing and strengthening the shared identity is worth mentioning: New Zealand offers the example of the successful implementation of ICT's in the cultural field with the digitisation of Maori treasures, bodies and environments.⁴⁰ Deidre Brown argues that the digital technology »presents itself to Developing and Fourth World people as a new frontier ready for settlement«.⁴¹ Thus, she describes a positive case where digital media can offer non-Western people the opportunity to reinterpret the mode in which their culture is managed and presented. This is a successful strategy for the digitisation of cultural heritage as a vehicle for the building of identity, nurturing and reproducing it.

I am not implying that Bulgaria is a Fourth World country or that the extremely specific case of the Maori culture can be just re-applied as a best practice. My point is that the interplay between the digitisation of cultural heritage and the process of identity building can be positively handled and offer a successful instrument for the creation and reproduction of a shared identity. Furthermore, the example could remind us on the sheer amount and scope of the digitisation initiatives. They are unlikely to create a real (or »virtual«) ground for a shared European identity in itself. The interconnection of Europe's digitised cultural heritage/s and cultural diversity requires a viable social basis to be built upon.

In its present state the idea of a common European identity as an engine for political, social and cultural cohesion is still an utopian concept. It poses challenges and triggers resistances both globally and locally. The vitalization of Europe's collective cultural memory for building a shared identity in the emerging information society requires its social actors and actions.

Thus, I would like to conclude the paper with a short quotation from Manuel Castells' book *The Internet Galaxy*, which reflects the present dynamic, »protean« state of the political, social and cultural processes in the »network society«:

The internet is indeed a technology of freedom – but it can free the powerful to oppress the uninformed, it may lead to the exclusion of the devalued by the conquerors of value. [...] But our lives are not determined by general, transcendent truths, but by the concrete ways, in which we live, work, prosper, suffer and dream. So, to act upon ourselves, individually and collectively, to be able to harness the wonders of the technology we have created, find meaning in our lives, better society, and respect nature, we need to place our action in the specific context of domination and liberation where we live: the network society, built around the communication networks of the internet.⁴²

This passage reminds us that the future is still in our hands. It depends on the will of the people if the supposed future »common European« identity will happen and whether it will be loathsome monstrous or will be »de-monstrated«.

40 Brown, Deidre: Te Ahu, Hiko: Digital Cultural Heritage and Indigenous Objects, People and Environments. In: Cameron, Fiona/Kenderdine, Sarah (Eds.): Theorizing Digital Cultural Heritage: A Critical Discourse. Cambridge, London: MIT 2007, p. 77-92.

41 Outd. in: Cameron/Kenderdine 2007, p. 6.

42 Castells, Manuel: The Internet Galaxy. Reflections on the Internet, Business and Society. Oxford: Oxford UP 2001, p. 275f.





LONGING OR LOATHING A »COMMON« IDENTITY

by Assen Kanev (Sofia)

Assen Dobrinov Kanev, MA in Cultural Studies, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski (2001); European Regional Master's Degree in Democracy and Human Rights in South-East Europe, University of Sarajevo and University of Bologna (2002); PhD student, *Culture of the 20th Century. Cultural Dimensions of the Information Society* at the Department of Cultural Studies, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski (since 2005), title of the thesis: *Problems of the Cultural Heritage in the Digital Era – Theoretical Dimensions and Cultural Policies*.

Contact: asen.kanev@gmail.com

