

## *European Identity Evolution<sup>1</sup>*

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### **Abstract**

The goal of this paper is to portray a crossroads in which a European (Union) identity is: on one side the matter of identity as the making of a cultural identity framed within a social context such as citizenship, and on the other side, a most natural – evolutionary conception of European (Union) identity as a more complex, random, and open pattern: farming minimal social, technical, and economical facilitating free circulation of peoples, wares, ideas, knowledge, and broadly speaking, capital and easy home letting mobility, the combinations and recombination of genes and memes coming to shape new identities very naturally. The word “meme” was coined in 1976 by Dawkins in his *The Selfish Gene* (1976), where he defined it as “a unit of cultural transmission”. The word, which derives from the Greek root “mim-”, meaning “to imitate”, “to mimic”, recalls, from a phonological point of view, the word “gene”. This paper begins with an overview on cultural constructions, the old way of heritage, then shifts its focus to the construction of identity and nevertheless, ultimately provides proof that the most viable conclusions are very likely ones of a genetic-memetic nature.

*Keywords:* european identity, cosmopolitanism, cultural process, meme, europeanization

### **Riassunto.** *Evoluzione dell'Identità Europea*

L'obiettivo di questo articolo è quello di osservare come viene rappresentata l'idea di identità, da un lato come la costruzione di un'identità culturale inquadrata nell'ambito dell'idea di cittadinanza, dall'altro lato, invece come un naturale processo evolutivo che casualmente, autonomamente prende forma. Se viene facilitata la libera circolazione delle persone, delle merci, della cultura, della conoscenza, in senso lato, dei capitali ecco che la ricombinazione dei geni e memi sarà estremamente facile e si darà vita ad una nuova identità culturale, in modo spontaneo e per nulla costruito. La parola “meme” è stata coniata nel 1976 da Dawkins nel suo *The Selfish Gene* (1976), dove veniva definita come “un'unità di trasmissione culturale”. Questo articolo inizia con una panoramica sulle costruzioni culturali, per poi concentrarsi sulla costruzione dell'identità e solo nelle conclusioni riusciremo a che molto probabilmente – per ipotizzare un'identità europea – la via più praticabile è quella genetico-mimetica.

*Parole chiave:* identità europea, cosmopolitismo, processi culturali, meme, europeizzazione

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## **1. An attempt of Europeanization**

This paper is a sociological based analysis of the cultural concept of Europe in its role as an extremely flexible entity in relation to its colonial and postcolonial interconnections with the rest of the world. The recovery of institutional sovereignty never meant the making of a new civilization or of a local culture regardless of what it means. The European Union

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<sup>1</sup> For a more correct attribution, paragraphs 2, 3, 5, and 6 have been written by Sara Petroccia; paragraphs 1 and 4 are the result of a common reflection.

moreover is not a synonym of Europe. It is an artificial Leviathan born on technical requirements and institutional needs to guarantee peaceful cooperation and trades on a global scale following the tragedies of WWII. The EU became more and more artificial, cosmopolitan, and open through the global trade of intangibles, but also through peaceful life and quality standards such as the human rights advocated via the Treaty of Nice. The EU is an evolution of cosmopolitan Enlightenment, thus religion is not a factor by which any significant difference is made. Pivotal instead is the fact that human right standards are respected by all member states and would be ones. More Globalization means more globalization, more nationalism means more globalization due to the principle of continuous memetic recombination and reconfiguration.

Let's start with the idea that the Europeanization is intended as a conception of the present aimed at the future, for which identity consists of being on the street, in creating, leveling, founding, organizing, building, in being lost and confused, in the process of searching and endeavoring, in discovering and pioneering (Beck and Grande, 2006). The description of the processes of transformations underway seems to be more effective in relation to the use of the transnational term, in this work often preferred to the international term, which underlines the separation of spaces in terms of national-state borders. The complex relationship between the processes of Europeanization and globalization has stimulated the development of an extensive literature on the social changes taking place in Europe. In recent years, in fact, the sense of belonging to Europe has been increasingly questioned in the face of the many contradictions that have emerged both in regards to the idea of a European cultural heritage that unites EU citizens, in a context characterized by an extraordinary ethno-linguistic, institutional and cultural variety and with regard to the European integration project itself. Over the years the advantages and successes achieved by the EU have now faded into the background compared to the failure of the EU which has been disruptive in recent years: the inability to ratify the Constitutive Treaty of the European Union and the impasse in the process of territorial enlargement and cooperation in foreign policy; the absence of common immigration policy in response to the problem of refugees and asylum seekers on the continent's borders and the widening inequalities between

European citizens; the emergence of Eurosceptic and populist parties in many of the member countries and, not least, Brexit, are all factors that demonstrate the serious difficulties and deep political, social, and economic instability that the EU faces today.

Tackling the issue of the sense of belonging in contemporary Europe, therefore, means starting from a different perspective of understanding, of conceiving it as an identity in the making (Beck and Grande, 2006), an entity in constant redefinition no longer linked to a single territorial, social, and cultural dimension. This type of identity can then be analyzed by looking at the configurations it takes on due to changes in the organizational structure of society linked to the integration process, by analyzing the social practices included in the transnational dimension, and the meanings through which individuals refer to Europe. These meanings are constructed through intersubjectivity and shared in networks of social relations, practices that give meaning to the linkage with Europe itself. Since Europe can mean something completely different according to various contexts and circumstances, as well as to individual characteristics and experiences, it is crucial to understand how and by whom Europe is conceptualized and what is the best way to go about analyzing the changes that are occurring. The key variable running continuously through this work is that of cultural processes.

## **2. A process of strengthening European Identity**

European society, in a context of global interdependence, tends to overcome old distinctions and dichotomies and to develop lifestyles reorganized within the transnational framework. Societal development is stimulated by a process of cultural adaptation from below that produces multiple identities, composed of different values and chosen lifestyles that co-exist peacefully. The EU is conceived of as a manifestation of the reflexivity that characterizes late modernity and a cosmopolitan society, open to the variability and permeability of its territorial boundaries, to the multiplicity of its citizens' belonging and based on values such as inclusion, the enhancement of different cultures, and the

opportunity for participation (Beck and Grande, 2006).

European identity, in this work, is therefore not considered as an empirical dimension, liable to be measured, but as a discursive product, whose meaning is still controversial and sometimes contested.

Europe cannot be clearly defined either culturally or geographically; it can neither be clearly demarcated from the outside nor is it homogeneous within itself. Accordingly, Europe or European identity are terms that have different – sometimes even contradictory – meanings. Differing notions of collective European identities compete with each other, interact, and overlap. [...] These complex systems of articulated differences are in permanent motion and do not form a singular, coherent construction of Europe, but rather a field of discourse (Quenzel, 2005, p. 95).

It seems appropriate to point out that the use made of the term identity in the social sciences is therefore multiple and equivocal (Delanty and Rumford, 2005, p. 51). If the term identity is already problematic in it of itself, the term European identity is even more so.

Despite the extensive academic debate on this issue, it is not possible to give a clear definition of the concept:

The [...] notion of European identity has led to a confused debate, not because Europe cannot have an identity or because the bearers of such an identity, Europeans, do not exist, but because the very idea of identity in this debate has rarely been clarified (Delanty and Rumford, 2005, p. 50).

The discourse on European identity, that is, the attempts to attribute meaning and significance to this term and its instrumentalization, occur for social, ideological, or even populist reasons.

So, based on this, how could we structure and strengthen the concept of European identity?

Let us introduce the theories that are the basis of our analysis.

The first one is the concept of identity defined within the theory of personality of Talcott Parsons (1983), through the current of structural-functionalism. A central element of the

personality system, identity is the most stable sub-system that performs the functions of pattern-maintenance, latency, and subjective orientation. Therefore, being in relation with the social and cultural system, identity relates the personality system with that of codes and norms shared by society, connecting the individual with the normative aspect of the cultural system. At this point we might wonder about the possibility of finding the integrative criterion that makes individual identity coherent with oneself and what the characteristics are for it to be shared through systems of cultural codes.

Into this framework, we add our second one that fits, certainly, within the analysis of the relationship between identity, system, and environment by Niklas Luhmann. From his systemic theory emerges an internally stratified subject, by which a combinatorial identity allows him to manage conflicting elements of his own self through the impermanency and convertibility of each depiction. Faced with contradictory roles and the amplification of possibilities and conditions, perceived as true-life alternatives, whatever action the individual takes, he considers it temporary and reversible. Therefore, the identities play a fundamental role: they structure the memory, thanks to which it is possible to recognize the world that presents itself in a new form at every encounter, without having to start anew again.

This kind of identity is not a problem in this work: identity cannot be incomplete because there is no model of completeness to refer to. There is no normative approach to a criticism of inadequate, incomplete, or inconsistent identities.

The third one, is the development of increasingly complex and differentiated social units. These units are linked to the dynamics of individualization and associated with the birth of the nation state, as initially described by Norbert Elias (1990) in his theory of social integration. Adopting a procedural perspective, Elias describes the increasing integration of humanity through different steps of “survival units”, i.e. different stages of social organizational forms, ranging from small and undifferentiated units, such as tribes, to large, increasingly differentiated and complex social units, such as the nation-state, ultimately reaching a plan of supranational integration. Therefore, we can infer that at every level of societal development there is also a change in the position of the individual within them and

from one stage to another, identity is transformed and the balance between Ego (identity) and We (identities) is thereby modified.

Finally, the constructivist approach inspires those types of identities defined in literature as post-national or cosmopolitan (Beck and Grande, 2006; Eder, 2009), which refer to a conception of the EU as a social-political design and interpret European identity as a belonging that emerges from the complex interweaving of institutionalized social practices of cooperation and participation.

Based on these theories, our idea of European identity takes shape: fluctuating, transitory, and with uncertain boundaries, such that we could hypothesize a hyper-identity, that one is endowed with Hypercitizens (Pitasi, 2012). Several scholars have tackled this issue, and here too the interpretative keys are different and sometimes divergent: some interpretations accentuate the effects of disengagement from society and disorientation of the individual, describing weak, temporary, and unstable identities, seen as units that lose consistency by fragmenting into a biography that Beck may have called do-it-yourself (2000).

The process of globalization is flanked by a parallel process of regionalization, through which local systems once again become central to global society. Furthermore, the effects of liberalization as well as the possibilities of realization and emancipation are counterbalanced by an increasing dependence of individuals and the community on the global order. Ulrich Beck, recalling Elias' theory of social integration, points out that in the "risk society the self-production of social life conditions becomes a problem and an object of reflection", and maintains that the perception of global risks can favor a social solidarity on a planetary level because «it is perhaps for the first time possible to experience the commonality of a destiny that – in a rather paradoxical way – awakens, with the absence of boundaries of the produced threat, a cosmopolitan daily consciousness» (Beck, 2000, p. 255).

The idea of European Identity described here is understood both as a process and as a project: it is not given once and for all but rather is in continuous evolution, through the dynamics of construction and reconstruction that follow the evolution of the political project and the social processes that take shape on the continent. It is not an identity built only rationally, since it is the result of a reflexive process on the completion of a European

society beyond the references of the nation state, which takes shape through a process that derives from the ways of thinking and living as a European (Kaelble, 1994). This system from social, relational, and interactive practices that develop in a transnational context, teaches us, forces us to evaluate and 'readjust' cognitive structures, behaviors, and value systems. This identity idea is associated with a critical and reflective attitude, but it is also strengthened by the sharing of a mythology that is formed through the distribution of narratives (Baraldi and Corsi, 2017) and symbols that characterize the post-national context, linked to supranational institutions, to the reinterpretation of the European past and to the stories of everyday life of community citizens, a manifestation of how national differences, social conflicts and contact with otherness can give rise to a European people (as defined by Kostakopolou, 2001) and a multinational, polyethnic, multi-religious, multicultural, and polyglot community.

### **3. An attempt of structure of European Identity**

The construction of a fluctuating and transitory European identity with uncertain boundaries must also pass a diverse multicultural challenge considered not just in opposition to each other, not simply as the mere summation of different national identities, but rather as an open process. Identities built on ethno-national traditions, religious ties and cultural communities, and exclusive identities, emerge in the narratives collected on the case of Turkey (As a non-exhaustive case in point, the public debate that has formed in this long period of negotiations between Turkey and the European Commission influence the stories so much so that Turkey's entry is narrated as one of the most 'frightening' factors from the point of view of identity hybridization. The cultural process present in the narratives against Turkey's entry into the EU, where it is described as a poor country with a young population, could be a burden on the EU budget).

The sociological analysis of Europe instead investigates the individual and collective actors who inhabit the European social space and how their way of acting and belonging

changes in light of the process of Europeanization. It is believed this level of analysis is fundamental to move from the normative perspective, which looks at the rights enshrined by the EU, to the more concrete dimension of the rights experienced and of the social norms and daily practices implemented by Europeans, of their transnational forms of involvement, participation, aggregation and action, determining the development of new bonds of solidarity and mutual belonging, focusing on the evolution of cultural process.

Accepting the challenge of looking at Europe as a single social context and interpreting the interaction between the local, national, and supranational levels that comprise it, requires rethinking the categories necessary to study it, starting from that of identity, adapting them to trans- and post-national social contexts. Going beyond the definition of belonging calibrated on the national model, an essential identity determines the boundaries of territoriality and refers to static norms and values. To consider an identity under construction that takes shape in the post-national context necessitates the initiation of thinking from a different way of understanding it, keeping in mind some contemporary phenomena that condition it, considering the different components of identity referring to Europe, the spatial, political, historical and cultural dimensions that characterize it. The European identity (Beck and Grande, 2006) is linked both to its peculiar political-geographical conformation and to the historical-cultural roots that distinguish it. These characteristics of processualism and reflexivity that characterize social belonging in late modernity cannot be ignored. However, it is believed that the growing individualization of society, the possibility of choosing between a large number of reference groups and differentiated roles suggest, here, that identity is not acquired and not inherited, but instead built and negotiated in experience and through reflexive processes.

The European cultural pluralism that influences the process of identity construction in the late modern age, will have a future effect on the spatial and symbolic change of belonging. Social relations and cultural manifestations, uprooted from the territorial context of reference, are recontextualized in the virtual space of communication where a dense and articulated network of individuals and groups exchange uninterrupted flows of information in real time, experiment with new forms of interactive relations, use and confront a

multiplicity of cultural resources that give rise to new forms of belonging, association, and solidarity, but also present with novel fractures and conflicts, though perhaps could lead us toward the need for intercultural communications (Gudykunst, 2004).

Based on these assumptions: What is the European position in the world that has changed? What is Europe? What can we want by virtue of European self-awareness (Jaspers, 2019)?

To describe, in more detail, the characteristics on which European identity (at least of the idea we are arguing about here) should be based, we use the three words chosen by Jaspers (2019): freedom, history, and science, which will support the already described (in the previous paragraph) concepts of fluctuating, transitory, and with uncertain boundaries. This features the concept of identity and what most belongs to Europe, from the author's point of view, of course.

Freedom could be a European identity transnational or cosmopolitan and is based on a story about Europe as a place where cultural differences transcend national differences. This model is developed around networks of social relations that go beyond national and community borders. This network structure differs from the others because it does not arise from the link between different national narratives but directly from the creation of new social relations and transnational stories. A transnational story promotes the narration of hybrid collective identities, mutual recognition of differences, and equal opportunities for participation in a multicultural context. Narrations of a hybrid Europe are all examples where different cultural traditions and religions – if they manage to live together in peace and with mutual enrichment – exhibit cultural intermixing as a part of identity, as it has happened in particular historical periods in the South of Spain, in the South of Italy, or in Turkey. This kind of narration is carried out by those actors who daily reinterpret the sense of lack of boundaries beyond the 'tear' and develop a multi-ethnic cultural framework based on living together. The counter-stories of transnational Europe tell of Central Europe, or "tribal" Europe, similar to primordial ties and claiming homogeneity on the basis of a common origin.

History is a post-national type of European identity: in this model, the European Union

has the collective of national stories united through direct links, which do not necessarily pass through a central point, thereby enabling the European identity to appear as a system of national networks. Post-national identity emerges as an added value from the merging of national stories, which become summated narratives. Such European stories contain the relationships between national lore and their protagonists: winners, losers, heroes of the past and present trying to connect their respective stories to those of others and to reposition themselves within the emerging post-national European web. Post-national stories are, for example, the critical narrative of the Second World War, told including the narratives of the losers, or of the Holocaust, a traumatic story that unites actors beyond nations and which projects the image of a united Europe based upon a feeling of peace. Part of these narratives are the collective memories of events, episodes of history and peoples, remembered and reported, and the values of pluralism, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and non-discrimination emphasized by European intellectuals. Places that represent these networks are locations where commemoration rituals related to such events take place, but also all occasions of meeting where social relationships between European citizens are redefined, giving meaning to narratives beyond the nation, such as European film, music, or football festivals. Post-national identity also emerges in counter-stories where tales are told of the skeptical Europe, of the “losers” of Europeanization and globalization, of nations as an exclusive place of solidarity, or of Europe as a “regional history” that maximizes distances from other stories inside and outside of Europe.

European science takes place without restriction to everything that exists and within conception. There is nothing towards which its interest is not directed, gathering connections in every domain, like a supranational European identity: this identity is based on a narrative that unites different national stories with a supranational narrative, representing the center of the network. In this case the national stories do not have a direct link between them, only through a central thread do the national identities integrate into a superior and singular whole. The closer they are to the center of the network, the more the national stories provide elements for the emergence of a narrative that is different from those related to the nation, a European story. An example of supranational history is that of

Jean Monnet, the founder of the EU and a symbol of political, economic, and moral integration. The stories of the founding fathers of Europe are linked to the narrative of a peaceful Europe: the stories of cooperation, the pooling of resources, and the will to give life to the European community are foundational components of it. In this plot the question of the openness of Europe's borders has always been a constant. The official narrative of continuous enlargement aimed at the inclusion of all Europeans has permeated the debate since the time of British participation, during the period of accession of the Central and Eastern countries, and still today on the accession of Turkey, Israel, and the other candidate states. The locations that represent the center of the network are Brussels and Strasbourg; the actors involved are of an institutional nature; the rituals that represent this European history are European daily activities and summits and the symbols that import meaning include the EU flag, anthem, and coin. Even counter-stories join this supranational narrative. The criticism of "Europe Empire" against the EU's power of territorial and cultural expansion, the mobilization against fortress Europe which excludes those who remain outside the Mediterranean border and the criticism, in general, of Brussels as a place of meddling power far from the European citizens, also contributes to the creation of the model of Europe's supranational history.

#### **4. Identity expands: methodology evolves**

The first examples of narratives of the EU, include stories of events linked to the construction of the union with references to figures such as Jean Monnet, Altiero Spinelli, Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman, and all those who are considered the founding fathers of the EU as it exists today. Personalities who, after the Second World War, wanted, inspired, and laid the foundation for a common Europe between peoples and countries previously divided and contentious, working to transform it into a continent of peace. These narratives are disseminated and exalted by the EU in order to provide values and institutions that can be shared by all Europeans and in which all constituents may recognize themselves.

Its foundation – from the European Coal and Steel Community, to the European Economic Community, to the Maastricht Treaty on the EU – the various successive enlargements, the achievements, the challenges and the goals that the EU has set itself, are narratives of an economic and political Europe transmitted through the official communication channels of the EU.

The narratives of Europe are still open and are influenced by developments in the European integration process itself. Brexit, the economic measures adopted following the financial crisis started in 2008, the migrants' issue at the gates of Mediterranean Europe, the enlargement process to the East and the relationship between the EU and Turkey, as well as the internal political dynamics of the nation states, are all factors that affect the meaning of Europe's history, changing its plot and direction (Scalise, 2017).

From this perspective, the national outlook appears very primitive and cognitive, derived from the most ancient and darkest side of our species evolution and utilizing the most elementary tool of trivial common sense to redraw old boundaries and rebuild old walls, boundaries and walls totally meaningless and useless in a global and cosmopolitan age.

The national outlook as based on a strong and linear idea of culture is a very tricky piece of obsoledge (i.e. obsolete knowledge) in a complex cosmopolitan age in which the current systemic paradigm after the post-parsonsian shift inspired by Luhmann's *Warum AGIL?* (Luhmann, 1988) may consider "culture" as an enormous constellation of cosmopolitan, memetic recombinations and reconfigurations on a global scale and no longer the reproduction generation by the production of behavior, opinions, and attitudes shaped by tradition though the ages with no effective chance of meaningful change. Likewise, protecting and conserving memory, human heritage while also improving radical scientific and technological reconfigurations do not represent the problem (the old) and its solution (the emerging new) but represent a bigger problem still: the expanding obsoledge as adapting the new to the old simply generates the inflation of the old. The systemic evolution of mankind on Earth affects individual choices and experiences at the key bifurcation kunhnian revolutionary challenges (Pitasi, 2011; 2012; Pitasi and Angrisani, 2013).

## **5. Possible scenarios: Identity and Citizenship**

It is possible to deduce with the tool kit at our disposal today that the description of Europe as an institution of political and economic regulation still appears incomplete in the process of European integration.

From this point of view, as European citizens share narrative, cultural, and emotional imagery, and it is rather the absence of a unified political response to the challenges of the weakening of their rights, the issue of migration and threat to their freedom and security calls into question the legitimacy of the European project. Europeanisation, therefore, is not just a question of economic and political regulation. Likewise, the concepts of belonging, citizenship and the debate on social justice need to be recontextualised within the process of Europeanisation and wider global transformations. In this global and cosmopolitan context, there is the need for a paradigm shift of the social sciences, as assumptions are necessary to be able to deal with the complexity of the existing systemic relations. Cosmopolitan theories influence the idea of citizenship in different ways. Cosmopolitanism has deep roots and inspires institutional reform projects. It has been repeatedly underlined as crucial for a new reality characterized by the progressive increase in relations and exchanges at a global level because the economic, political, and cultural fields require new conceptual schemes in order to be decoded, to foresee future developments, and face the effects that these changes are producing. Thus, on a theoretical level, contemporary cosmopolitanism reveals the existence of a reality that is already strongly cosmopolitan in itself and represents, at the same time, an attempt to solve the new problems that it entails, to rethink some traditional conceptual categories in light of the changes that have already taken place or that are currently ongoing, to develop new ones as well, and to inspire and direct political-institutional reform projects (Petroccia and Pitasi, 2019).

The cosmopolitan theories influence the idea of citizenship in different ways, one such way possibly being traced back primarily to the basic meaning of “citizen of the world” or to the commonality and equality of all human beings (Lombardinilo and Petroccia, 2018).

Turner (2013) states that since the concept of citizenship and the rights that go along with

this idea are unavoidably linked with the development of the nation-state, and given the continued predominance, despite all the current talk of globalization and of the nation-state in world affairs in the twenty-first century, there is a growing theoretical need for a concept of “denizenship” with the increased settlement of people throughout the world in countries in which they are denied full citizenship rights (Ruzzeddu *et al.*, 2018).

Various attempts have been made to refine the idea of citizenship for a global world, such as flexible citizenship and postnational citizenship, allowing for fluctuating, transitory, and uncertain boundaries

Despite the simplifications made necessary by the work of schematization, which could lead us to identify a new type of European identity as well, Europe has accumulated an immense narrative and imaginary heritage, which gives rise to a unity of meaning and experience, to a shared collective identity. We situated the described narratives approach within an interpretative paradigm that allows us to question the essentialist and mononational definition of identity through which it is still problematized in European public and political debate. So what are the mechanisms that produce transnational belonging and solidarity? Europeans not only share stories of their national past but also participate in the present and carry out practices of social, civil, political, and citizenship participation that lead them to adhere to values and ideas capable of generating a bond.

From the scientific point of view, multi-level dynamics in identity building emerge. Interactions between the local, national, and supranational levels are at the basis of the evolution of a process identity referring to Europe, in which the different territorial references do not conflict with each other, but rather combine through a set of symbolic and value references that find coherence in a narrative plot of belonging. The three territorial dimensions, therefore, cannot be kept separate when researching the European social dimension, as they dialogue and influence each other. In terms of policy, this result translates into actions not so much aimed at supporting convergence towards a single and homogeneous European identity, which unites EU citizens under exclusive symbols and values, but rather at defining belonging in an inclusive sense of the many specificities and values of European regional territories. The issue of inclusion of Europeans and proximity

to citizens has a primary role in the crisis of legitimacy of the EU and in the spread of EU skepticism as well as the idea of the renationalization of Europe.

In this work of ours we can conclude by stating that in addition to the concepts of freedom, history, and science, there are other factors that must contribute to the strengthening of European identity, so that it be can fluctuating, transitory, and with uncertain boundaries.

Undoubtedly deserving of attention amongst these other factors is the linguistic plurality of European citizens. This could be one of the biggest obstacles to the construction of a transnational discourse space. There is a need for the languages of conversation and narration rather than reading and writing, of memory and remembrance rather than record (de Swaan, 2001). Above the huge layer of peripheral languages sits a thin layer of central languages. De Swaan describes a hyper-central language and his global-language-system is intended to demonstrate communicative reach: speakers of a peripheral language need to learn a central language to communicate outside of their local community; speakers of a central language need to learn a super-central language to communicate internationally; and speakers of a super-central language need to learn the hyper-central language in order to communicate globally.

Even if the diffusion of languages will be enhanced and involve more and more different social strata and cultural environments, the public sphere and the European media system must adapt to a multi-level and multilingual model, not reproducing the characteristics of the national public sphere, but entering at national and local levels. Public discourse on Europe is a central element in the construction of European society. Identity exists when it is expressed in the world (Eder and Giesen, 2001). Building such spaces of communication can and should be part of the European political project.

There are several factors, both on an individual and structural level, that influence the construction of a link with Europe and allow us to understand the different ways in which European identity takes shape. Firstly, identity is linked not only to the subject but also to the social environment in which it takes shape. The network of social relations, therefore, influences the construction of identity. The type of network, the characteristics of the

members of the network, transnational openness or local rootedness, the type of capital circulating in the network and, in general, the set of social relations available to the members of the network are able to foster cooperation and trust because the network makes cognitive and normative capital available and circulates elements that influence the construction of identity. All of this leads us to another concept, fundamental in this study of ours, which is that of citizenship, in particular a relatively neglected dimension of citizenship as a learning processes. Linking learning to citizenship suggests a model of cultural citizenship, which entails mechanisms of translation whereby the different levels of learning are connected. In this article, the idea of cultural citizenship is conceived of in terms of learning processes: an example is the Hypercitizenship (Pitasi, 2012). People endowed with global awareness not automatically able to feel like cosmopolitan citizens, hypercitizens represent a conceptual revisitation of the concept of citizenship whereby the global intertwines with the local interacting in a decreasing mediation of nation states. The hypercitizen is cosmopolitan, entrepreneur (as forma mentis), and science based not in the sense that he or she is a scientist by profession but that he or she is aware that the burning issues of our time passes from knowledge intensive organizations and no longer from the humor of the political square, at least in economic realities.

The innovation in citizenship policies starts to result from economic, social, legal, and cultural development. It is a proposal that overcomes territorial boundaries and appears as emerging within the global social system. Having this assumption as a point of departure, what is defended in this piece of work is that the theory approached by the scientists mentioned offers a useful toolkit for the identification of development from the relations within the social system, taken as a complex system, so that based on law the aimed innovation can be promoted and maximized (Petroccia, Ferone and Dib, 2018, p. 464).

It therefore emerges that local identities are more open towards Europe when they manage to consider it as an everyday fact, an element that is part of their everyday reality. Knowledge and contact with European institutions, even on their own land, means greater awareness that Europe intervenes in everyone's life and that our way of life is also regulated by the European level, not only by local and national ones. Daily experiences are the way

local and global interactions are negotiated through context-sensitive narratives. The internationalization of lifestyles and the intensification of branched networks at the European level through flows of communication and people across borders, and the activities of transnational civil society, leads to linking different local realities and influencing the narratives that shape identities through systems of meaning shaped by territories.

This would, in part, confirm the 'elitist theory' of European identity and its own citizenship. A sense of European belonging felt as though a link within a wider than national context is more widespread in the networks of social relations amongst those who are better educated, internationally involved, and from higher social classes. As some studies have shown, there is a positive correlation between the sense of belonging to Europe and the educational qualification, professional position, and socio-economic status. It is, therefore, experience and daily practices that influence the openness to Europe of European citizens, and this therefore does not only apply to the European elite. Those who have experienced Europe and are part of social networks where local and transnational narratives are negotiated, share meanings that allow them to give purpose to these experiences and develop solidarity beyond national borders. Those who do not live abroad and have not had direct contact with the international reality, yet interact with other Europeans or international institutions for work reasons, for interpersonal ties, because they share participatory practices, values and ideals and perceive the sharing of a common destiny with other Europeans, also feel that they continue to belong to Europe as well.

Developing more community policies in synergy with the territory, enhancing local culture within the European one, where the many local subcultures can be represented and combined, facilitating access to Europe within the lower social strata by approaching the contexts where these people live, would favor the diffusion of a narrative of European citizenship that is not only an institutional narrative, but also a narrative of belonging, determining an awareness of their own identity, the European one.

## **6. Paradoxical and Strategic Conclusions**

The educational and life paths of each individual (internationalization, type of profession, social and cultural prestige) weigh on the construction of the European imaginary and effect the training with which we contribute to life probabilities: economic resources, educational qualifications, cultural capital (including the knowledge of several languages), and social position (symbols of status, prestige, power) that impact opportunities (Dahrendorf, 1981) to experience and thus make sense of Europe. An open and integrated social life on an international level, based on interactions with heterogeneous people, the other Europeans, gives rise to narratives embedded in a plot with a global reach, which arises from the increasing familiarity with more and more cultures.

The intensification of relations between subjects and groups of different nationalities, which takes place in a local context but goes beyond state borders, through integrated transnational networks, leads to cosmopolitan attitudes. We can attribute this to several factors: the problems that the European societies are encountering as they undergo various forms of regulation, the question of the balance between provisions and entitlements (Dahrendorf, 1995; Leonardi, 2014), and the problem of continuing to ensure that economic development, social cohesion, and democracy are perceived by European citizens and are expressed by public opinion as the main concerns for Europe.

Further extension of the discourse on the level of communication process can be considered both as a consequence of the intertwining of the academic world with that of the mass media and as the result of a whole series of cultural events that typically provokes and is connected with the question of a European.

Within the discourse on European identity, one can trace different models of identity based on different conceptions of Europe and the European Union. However for a more differentiated reconstruction of the European discourse on identity, it would be necessary to broaden the basis of the analysis both spatially and thematically, as we mentioned in paragraph 5.

So, in conclusion, in this work from one side it maintains the existence of common

historical and intellectual roots, common values and the culture of European people, exploring the powerful legacy in the positive creation of a sense of European unity, the ways in which it has been exploited for ideological purposes, and its impact on state communities within Europe. From the other side it is considered appropriate to argue on memes as cultural units as compared by R. Dawkins to the biological concept of gene: fidelity, fecundity and longevity being their main characteristics (as mentioned in the first paragraph). Just as internet memes, they share some of the same properties ascribed to memes in general: they are considered capable of self-replicating and spreading from person to person. Much like cultural process get propagated across populations, internet memes are communicated from person to person, spreading across virtual networking groups and communities. Being interpreted by the addressee user whose cultural identity can be different from that of the meme creator or sender user, internet memes undergo a number of alterations in attempt to obtain the right interpretation. A cultural unit requires shared background knowledge within a community to be successfully interpreted, particularly so if the meme creator belongs to a different culture. Thus, a meme should be altered so that it obtains a certain shift in its cultural identity, impacting the addressee's cultural identity and self-awareness. In other words, meme communication is about sharing and forming community bonds and not merely passing cultural units along to other internet users.

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