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EUROPEAN IDENTITY THROUGH CULTURE

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Abstract

Confronted with the disenchantment of the world caused by post-modernity, it is difficult to bring back into discussion a well-defined identity, based on specific, often cultural, elements. European identity is a complex notion defined both by characteristics common to the cultures of various ethnicities and people in the European geographical area, as well as by their specific characteristics. In this article we will study the relationship between identity and culture in relation to the European construction as an institutional project to see how the concept of Europe, its cultural sources and the EU political project can be combined. European culture (as well as its bases of identity) does not only have an evolution composed of all local, national and sub-national cultures, but it also consists of all exchanges between the national and local cultures that have come together for centuries. In this sense, Europeans are "heirs" of the plural and unitary history of their continent, but what role does this feature have, impregnated with pluralism and unity, in an identity perspective? In order to answer this question, we will focus on the links between culture and the sphere of identity, seeking, on the one hand, to know the elements that, in a scientific way, bring together or divide these two key concepts, and, on the other hand, studying the way in which plurality acts within the identity.

Keywords: Europe; EU; European culture; multiple identities; euro-symbols;

1. INTRODUCTION

The EU construction is today, in the context of a rapidly evolving world, the main way to preserve the identity and values that characterize the countries of the old continent. But if we look at Europe in the last 20 years, we see that the West has been a major participant in stimulating Europe's culture, so Europe has suddenly woken up not only in terms of political and economic diversity, but also in the face of intercultural relations challenges. Of course, they have been present in the past, but now they have achieved another realization. We observe an economic adaptation to the integration process and at the cultural level there is "a kind of rebellion against the trend of leveling the world" (Altermatt, 2000, p. 135). In the common sentiment, as well as in official discourses, we refer to Europe as an entity that evokes a common history of the Member States, despite a past with conflicts, tears and wars. We are thus witnessing a sort of assimilation between the concept of Europe as an identity and cultural source and the European Union as a formal structure. Furthermore, we cannot deny that the EU monopolizes speeches

about Europe as well as its symbolic-cultural connotations (Sassatelli, 2002). As a result, we can consider that the idea of Europe as a foundation of identity is determined by the necessity that EU to create means of legitimacy beyond the economic sphere. However, the symbolic production around the culture / identity binom in the EU is quite delicate because the comparison with national consciousness and the state (a political and social structure that has the capacity to produce a true sense of identification) implies a double perspective. On the one hand, the influence of the EU is irrelevant to the creation of a European identity due to its remote rhetoric and its difficult structure to be identified through the three classic pillars of the state: territory, people and sovereignty. On the other hand, European construction is seen as the carrier of a new enlarged national ideology.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Starting from the definition of cultural identity as a "feeling of membership resulting from adherence to a group sharing the same values, traditions, practices, orientations, symbols and accounts" (Meyer, 2004, p. 20), we will review the identity approaches. Thus, understanding the process of identity formation as primarily based on the variables of the cultural environment is at the center of the so-called essentialist approaches. According to the essentialist logic, "ethnic elements or gross cultural material directly produce identities" (Cederman, 2001, p. 10). Being a supreme interest in the contemporary constructivist approach, identity involves „citizen involvement and participation in the functioning of a polis" (Weiler, Haltern & Mayer, 1995, p. 21). The sense of belonging originates in a set of shared political and social values recognized as decisive for that group, so that the notion of political identity is, in Cederman's (2001) opinion, „independent of the essential, ethnic, pre-state, such as culture or descendancy, while promoting policies and an active process of identity building" (p. 10).

Considering that an alternative explanatory trajectory that starts from the premise of European identification would be more appropriate, the approach I use in this article is one specific to socio-anthropology. I examine through this approach the mechanisms for shaping European identity, starting from the concepts and resemancing of culture in relation to identity in the new socio-political context of Europeanization.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this article, we will study the relationship between identity and culture in relation to the European construction as a project, to see how the concept of Europe, its cultural sources and the EU political project can be combined. European culture (and its identity bases) is not only an evolution of all local, national or sub-national cultures, but is also formed of all the exchanges between these national and local cultures that have widened over the centuries. In this sense, Europeans are „heirs" of the plural and unitary history of their continent, but what role does this feature impregnate with pluralism and union in an identity perspective? In order to answer this question, we will focus on the links between culture and the sphere of identity, seeking, on the one hand, to know the elements that, in a scientific manner, bring together or divide these two key concepts, and, on the other hand, studying how plurality acts within the identity.

4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of our approach is to understand the role and contribution of cultural and identity stakes to social engineering in Europe, especially in the current political context, where the main issue under discussion is the European supranational identity and the acceptance or rejection of membership to the united Europe. Through a socio-anthropological approach to European cultural identity, the paper aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the evolution of this type of collective identity, on the one hand, but also to a concrete, systematic presentation of the contemporary processes of European identity formation. In order to recognize and be able to analyze the revival of nationalist and ethnicist currents taking place in today's Europe, we must focus our attention on the historical and cultural traditions of each country, but at the same time we need a new analytical comparative framework to help us address

issues such as collective, minority and individual identities in an increasingly polarized and more divided Europe.

5. RESEARCH METHODS

Our approach is among the dominant approaches that characterize the research of European identity, being of a theoretical nature. The identity issue around which we want to focus our work will lead us to a reflection on the need for definitions that clarify the link between culture, identity and Europe.

5.1. A discourse on the link between culture and identity

"The Identity of Europe has always been uncertain and imprecise, a source of pride for some and hatred or contempt for others. Like all identities it is a construction, and an elaborate palimpsest of stories, images, resonances, collective memories, invented and carefully nurtured traditions" (Padgen, 2002, p. 33).

Today, the concept of culture is often associated with another term, the identity one, and vice versa. If these notions have common borders, they cannot be mistaken. Culture is much more important in the sphere of social action, while identity is more related to the sphere of affiliation. If the former refers largely to the unconscious components, which have constituted it as a system, the second, the identity, seems to rely rather on symbolic oppositions between systems, which are therefore more conscious (Padgen, 2002).

Culture is an evolving symbolic system that allows a subject to connect to the present, past, and future, in a nonlinear path, to build himself as a social being. Throughout this path, culture acquires properties, such as its dynamic character, which gives it a socio-anthropological sense. Thus, culture evolves with time, but in a relationship of coherence-incoherence, in the sense that it has different degrees of acceptance / reaction to the external elements coming into contact with it. It is therefore permeable, making it difficult, due to contamination, to set up its own borders. Culture is diversified and stratified, so it varies depending on a multitude of factors. It is characterized by a certain degree of fragility, especially in a context of *liquid modernity* (Bauman, 2000), in which the conflict between the public and the private context, between explicit and implicit, increases with the increase of its relational dimension (Hannerz, 2001). On the other hand, culture is operational, meaning it allows the transition from the abstract sphere to the practical field, facilitating an adaptation to the real context. This is where the identity filter comes into play, which makes possible rationalizing the meaning of a *cultural idea* and translating it into action.

In addition, culture can be used in the noble sense of the term (great works, music, etc.) or in a more particular sense, related more to the cultural identity of a group. In these two dimensions, it cannot remain locked in the barriers dictated by social determinism, which does not take into account the openness to individual autonomy, nor does it remain stuck in the concept of social structure. In other words, culture can be defined as a *habitat of significance*, in other words as a symbolic or physical space of actions and meanings in which *agents* (groups or individuals) act (Hannerz, 2001). Finally, culture can be, depending on the context to which it refers, individual or collective. This particularity leads our debate further, to the more complex dimension of objectivity and subjectivity. If culture has, on the one hand, an objective component, i.e. it occupies an autonomous position that overcomes individuals and influences them, on the other hand, it is also formed by a more delicate subjective dimension, corresponding to the role individuals assign to it. In this context, we can say that identity is entirely inseparable from a cultural or a social process.

The constituent elements of collective culture indicate that it is a system recognized by the collectivity, in which identity becomes the code of an ensemble of signs. Under these conditions, culture can be defined as a collective system of meanings, and identity as a conscious mediation that allows an individual to be found in a social system. This is the first way to explain the link between culture and identity. However, it is difficult to adopt an entirely objective or purely subjective approach when dealing with this topic because it means to reason without taking into account the relational context "which alone can say why, for example, at a certain point in time, an identity is affirmed or, on the contrary, repressed at another time" (Cuche, 2010, p. 83).

Indeed, in an (objective) "cultural approach", for example, identity is considered pre-existing for the individual. In this case, the focus is on the cultural heritage that is related to the socialization process of the individual in a social group. In this model, the person concerned is oriented towards the internalization of the cultural patterns he finds in the social system and which, to a certain extent, are imposed on him (Cuche, 2010). In other approaches, objective as well, identity is a property of the group, as it is the most fundamental of the social affiliations. It establishes links based on a common genealogy and is transmitted "into and by the group, without reference to other groups" (Cuche, 2010, p. 85). Since it is a matter of defining identity based on specific criteria, we face an objectivist conception of identity, especially in cultural terms: common origin, language, territory, traditions, etc., all elements that often refer to ethnic or which are identified with the nation-state. On the contrary, if we approach identity from a subjective point of view, it cannot be reduced to these elements. Indeed, according to subjectivist approaches, identity is, first of all, identification with a more or less concrete collectivity and/or more or less imagined. It is rather about taking into account the representations that individuals have within a particular group or a certain community in relation to this social reality. If this last statement helps us to consider identity as a variable and unclear element, instead, it also emphasizes the ephemeral and rather subjective aspect, which depends more on the individual, than on the social ensemble. For this reason, neither the first approach nor the second is really satisfactory as such. It is necessary to find a middle way between objective (cultural) vision and subjective vision, which can be the relational context. According to Fredrik Barth (1998), for example, identity is a way of categorization used by groups to better organize their exchanges.

A specific culture does not in itself produce a differentiated identity; rather, it is the result of interactions between groups and organizational systems that are put into practice during these exchanges. This aspect necessarily leads us to a relational perspective that takes into account the collective manifestations, as well as their dynamic aspect. We will notice that there is no identity in itself, but that it is always linked to the relationship it establishes with another identity.

5.1.1. Identity issue: between individuality and relational context

Whether we are at a European, national, collective or individual level, defining identity always implies difficulties because it takes us into a sphere that is increasingly based on personal perception, and which is formed mainly in the relationships between groups or social systems.

Starting from a definition to the limit, identity is the very condition of existence and existence-in-the-world, which cannot be reduced to an unequivocally and much less to an individual dimension. The most common attitude is to treat identity as a self-signifying concept, that is, which does not need to be explained because it is related to the innate quality of an individual or a community: "identity refers to collective identifications by surname or nickname" (Gallissot, 2000, pp. 134-143). However, these identifications come from a representation to the outside: they are not an illusion that depends on the pure subjectivity of individuals or on a self-signifying concept, since they always refer to a dynamic relational report.

Identity representation inevitably enters the individual in collective forms, and identity is thus formed through circles of belonging that get crossed. This dual game between *individualization* (the process, the consequence of post-modernity, in which the individual is being built as a social being outside a collective system) and *collective naming* (reflecting the collective personality) leads to collective attributions covering almost all roles in a system of collective culture. Identity becomes thus a social construction formulated by opposition rather than by juxtaposition. First of all, its construction needs social frameworks to form; therefore identity often refers to interpersonal relationships that function by *assigning* a precise status and formulating *differences* that lead to discrimination between different circles of belonging (Gallissot, 2000). Secondly, it always needs a *comparison object* to exist, and this implies that one object/subject is needed, the other, which, the more distant from the forms of intimate representations, the more it is perceived in a negative way. This process belongs to the sphere of inter-ethnic and social relations and manifests itself through the barrier between us and others, as well as through the exclusion and inclusion practices.

All these scientific speeches result from the fact that identity has become a social sciences theme when it has begun to be perceived as a problem related to modernity, because with modernity we see an

increasing need for individual autonomy (Sassatelli, 2002). In this context, identity is considered at the same time an expression of individuality and a task of the subject, which can be constructed only by a context made significant by the reality that transcends the individual. Bauman (1996) expresses this by the following words: "[...] since no time did identity become a problem; It was a problem from its birth – was born as a problem, (that is, as something one needs to do something about – as a task), could exist only as a problem, and thus ready to be born, precisely because of that experience of under-determination and free floatingness, which came to be articulated ex post-facto as a disembedment" (p. 19). The analytical concept of identity was therefore reformulated from a constructivist point of view, being more intimately linked to the cultural and social context.

Despite this, identity is in an unclear position. It is not enough to relate to it in dynamic and relative terms (depending on context and subjects). It is important to take into account the manner in which this term is used and to distinguish it from *identification* if we want to understand why in the European case the identity poses the problem of nationalist danger. Indeed, we must consider identification as a component of identity that encompasses *differentiation*. That is, if there is no identity in itself (identity and alterity are linked in a dialectical relationship), identification goes hand in hand with *differentiation* (Gallissot, 1987). In the identification process, identity is the result of a *relational* and *relative* situation that includes the difference as a founding, positive element, instead of a threatening element. This creates a vision that could be more acceptable, especially from the perspective of the European citizen. On the contrary, seen from another angle, it could *simply* become a compromise between the identity defined by the individual and the one defined by others, that is, between self-identity and exo-identity (Cuche, 2010). This process may cause, as it often happens, tensions in the perception of identity at collective level, as it is often considered an inheritance conferred by a pre-established entity that gives it a permanent, if not invariable character (Gallissot, 1987). Thus, it can become another basis for addressing culturalism, which leads to a fixed identity concept: a defensive fundamentalist postulate that attributes inferior characteristics to the identity of the other. In other words, collectively, where the concept of identity is often interpreted as an assertion resulting from pure assimilation, collective identities are still reduced to "irreducible fractions" and become more easily the object of dangerous political or social instrumentalization. From there, there is only one step to nationalism, which appears as a mere consequence. Indeed, regardless of context, identity is more strongly perceived in an essentialist way, therefore rooted, unitary, solid, permanent, and falsely authentic (even though this concept does not fit properly with the dynamic dimension admitted by social sciences).

In any case, in spite of the interrelational aspect, identification may still take certain directions that lead us again to the essentialist danger: for example, by a claim to affiliation (the claimed identity), a transfer of cultural, racial and ethnical stereotypes or stigmatization of certain social groups by *exaltation* of identification. This is possible because it is done by externally designing what has been internalized; thus, the resulting identity is conceptualized starting from a tough nucleus, with well-marked borders, so that what is far from these concepts is automatically labeled as *alterity / threat* (Sassatelli, 2002).

We can see from the above that identity is a true paradox, difficult to decompose. It really gives the impression, quite rightly, that it is unresolvable: an unidentifiable object that should remain as it is, so as we cannot reduce it to one of its components (Sassatelli, 2002). Identity presents less difficulty when focusing not on its components, but rather on its *construction process*. Moreover, the construction metaphor is often used to better explain the elements that would otherwise be considered opposite. This metaphor allows the removal of the essentialist impasse and the possibility of making the identity a multigrade course, a mobile, concentric construction that we can call multiple identities. It synthesizes in itself the dynamic, dialogical concept and the plurality of identities in an ever-relational and relative system. A vision that is sufficiently indefinite to allow us to coordinate a plurality of situations or an *oikoumene* (Hannerz, 2001, p. 10) of relationships of alterity without a mandatory involvement in the criticisms already mentioned. Moreover, the metaphor of construction allows us to choose, from the many identities that coexist, the one that suits us most from this ensemble of cross circles, and which may at the same time be local, regional, national or European collectivity.

Having multiple identities (i.e. more identifiers) has added value that does not only apply to a wider scale (for example in the European case), but solves the conflict that post-modernity has generated

within the state-nation. As a result, it appears that the very national identity itself could lose its status, despite the place that the nation-states grant it. Multiple identities have allowed national consciousness, previously saturated with more specific elements (e.g., more rigid and less differentiated values, more nationally recognizable features, etc.), to become aware of post-ethnic identifications within the same political, social and geographic ensemble. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of national discourse on identity, despite its artificial construction, remains more plausible than the European discourse.

5.1.2. Formation of cultural identity in the European case

The end of a binary logic between homogeneity and heterogeneity, with post-modernity, has projected us into a complex symbolic reality in which culture makes identity a true identification bazaar. Even within national borders we can increasingly see a true fragmentation: the correspondence between nation and culture has never been perceived as so fictitious. Confronted with this multiplicity (in which each identity intertwines with other affiliations, regardless of their level), the dual model of reality is no longer to be conceived. As such, essential identity and cultural models have never been so reproducible.

After the consolidation of the nation-states and with the post-modernity that weakened the borders, identity became a state issue and cultural identity a political instrument. We often notice that political engagement within states is prone to mono-identification. The tendency toward mono-identification of cultural identity, i.e. the attempt to recognize only one cultural identity for the definition of national identity, gains ground in contemporary societies. It is, moreover, present in Europe not only in relation to the external borders of the European Union but also within the Member States. We also notice the tendency of mentioning in singular form the collective identity when referring to a Member State and in plural form when talking about the European ensemble. Indeed, contrary to our perception of traditional societies, contemporary societies are more rigid in terms of identity conception, being societies more and more flexible within. As such, although each individual is more or less explicitly aware of having a multiple identity (for example, each individual integrates a plurality of identities present in a state, in a history, etc.), the fact that this aspect is highlighted stirs up restlessness and worry. That is why we are clinging to a political response to overcome the fear or an "old" conception of cultural identity (for example, a defense concept). The *cultural identity* expression was born in the colonial era, when colonized populations sought to claim their own autonomy in the face of an imposed, dominant, and universalistic claim that originated from the West (Sombart, 1994). The process of independence and decolonization involved a special interest in the affirmation of cultural autonomy and awareness of one's own cultural identity. For this reason, it is often perceived, even today, as a sort of assertion built in opposition to any kind of domination (as an identity based on cultural systems for preservation and defense). Cultural identity represents the elements that should constitute a community, a people or a specific group that possesses a particular culture and a system of common values. But, gradually, the cultural base on which the individual (the nation) was built has diminished. Now, cultural identity refers to cultural groups whose boundaries do not coincide, or coincide to a small extent, and share non-uniform features such as, for example, family traits. In this composite ensemble, there is no unique connection, but a multitude of cross-links, and we need to see when and where a link has crossed with another, when and where it influenced it, touched it, contaminated it and so on (Sassatelli, 2002). Thus, cultural identity should be considered as an awareness of difference (born from a continuous exchange), perceived as such by a group towards another group, nation or people.

It is precisely this interpretation of cultural identity that will be taken up at European level. "Europe after 1945 tries to find out what is the difference to other parts of the world. Because it unites, it highlights what unites the Europeans, the substantial foundation of solidarity sought" (Obaton, 1997, p. 11). The phrase is well known since the 1970s, especially thanks to a series of meetings organized by the Council of Europe. One step was taken in 1976 when Georg Von Ackermann, the then general secretary of the organization, highlighted the role of European cultural identity in European construction at a symposium on Europe's cultural identity (Obaton, 1997). Subsequently, a resolution is adopted at the Athens Conference in 1978 by the European Ministers responsible for Cultural Affairs where the affirmation and protection of cultural identity in Europe are presented as of particular importance. In 1985, the Committee of Ministers adopted another resolution on "European Cultural Identity", which emphasized inter alia that cultural cooperation makes an indispensable contribution to European

awareness (Council of Europe). Little by little, the expression has gained ground in scientific and institutional spheres, where it is now widely used, but also in current language, contributing to its diffusion.

Cultural identity is approached from a multi-dimensional point of view, being at the heart of social phenomena, whose understanding, even control, is a major issue in a society where claims for recognition of regional, local or ethnic cultures are becoming stronger. In the European case, the reference to identity lies in the fact that, starting from the idea of Europe, especially as it is expressed in official EU speeches, there is an imagined community (Anderson, 1983) which brings together an ensemble of families. Anthony Smith's essay, *National Identity and the Idea of European Unity* (1992), brings further clarification about this imagined community, exploring the possibility of coexistence between national identity and another wider European identity on a European scale. The author starts from the assumption that an ethnic group differs from the nation in the sense that there may be more than one ethnic group in a nation. According to him, nationalism does not require individuals of a nation to be necessarily culturally similar, but they must instead feel united by solidarity, by a sense of belonging that is usually produced by a dominant ideology. If we force the note and assume that a strong ideology is enough to create a sense of belonging, we might think that if there is a strong European ideology, there would be a common feeling that is strongly felt. However, Smith also asserts that national identity, unlike other types of identities, contains solid elements: a collective memory, places of memory, myths, a defined territory, etc., as well as a common cultural system empowered by rights and obligations. According to him, national identities are therefore persistent. However, he also states that modern individuals have multiple identities, but only these individual identities are variable, therefore multiple. Consequently, if other levels of belonging are possible (in our case at European level), they depend almost exclusively on the degree of involvement of personal individuality. In other words, he claims that national identities are multidimensional (many dimensions that can be combined), but they are not multiple (many identifications), because their historical anchoring, linked to the ideology of the nation-state, prevents a true opening towards transnational melancholy.

Thereby, on a European scale, we can only have families of cultures that mingle superficially: "the problem here is that there is no pan-European system, only national system; and what they teach, or omit to teach, is determined by national, not European, priorities" (Smith, 1992, 72).

We agree with Smith that in Europe elements that characterize a national identity are not present in the same form. But we do not share the direction of his approach, which starts at the national level to reach the European level. If we always start from *national building* to refer to a European collective identity, we will never come out of the impasse created by the nation. If the identity must have a certain standard, especially cultural, the same essentialist danger also appears for the models and criteria established by an official system. And the imagined community, this image of Europe, can only reproduce a "false" image, an *invented* identity (Sassatelli, 2002) more artificial than national identity, and its ideological construction remains fictitious. Under these circumstances, European cultural identity can be considered a mere sum of different nationalities, perceived as more authentic and more substantial.

Especially at the moment, the European identity is a fragile construction; it is sustained by a currency in crisis and a sense of unstable feeling of belonging that is still part of the *national building*. European identity is a combination of specific national products that does not help us to perceive it as transnational. Indeed, it is easier to perceive an ensemble of identities that share elements than a European identity, especially in cultural matters. Smith (1992) reminds us of this: "here lies the new Europe's true dilemma, a choice between unacceptable historical myths and memories on the one hand and on the other a patchwork, memoryless scientific 'culture' held together solely by the political will and economic interest that are so often subject to change" (p. 74). Moreover, it is not enough to mention a glorious past, sometimes described nostalgically, focused on noble culture, the classical world, the beauty of architectural styles, etc., to make us feel a common identity.

Since they belong to the same type of logic, the elements cited by Smith, such as the glorious past, are not necessarily useful to break out of the essentialist and nationalist impasse and to determine the existence of at least a common identity. Rather, we should start from the concept of culture in a socio-anthropological sense (which should exist in Europe), linked to the relationship between the specific

cultural identity and the identity of the universal cultural values. We know the problem of the ill-fated potential of universalism, especially its ethnocentric side, but also the danger of nationalism, which is falsely ethnocentric: the two consist in designing our cultural model, enlightening and rational, as the only real way of life that should be disseminated. On the contrary, the ability to relativize a specific cultural experience proves an intellectual consciousness that requires our experience to not be the center of the cultural universe. This approach is not spontaneous but needs to be discussed, learned and "mediated". This *rational mediation* instrument could be an institutional way to transcend the state structure. *One way to do* this would be to adapt to the context of political and cultural mediation that Europe has long relied on since liberal sentiments coexisted with universalism. But the idea of a united Europe and expanded to 28 states, soon 27, without the UK, is faced with this challenge: how to make this rational mediation work in cultural practice and in the national and European institutional architecture? Once again, we are surrounded, on the one hand, by a form of respect for the European universalism, a beneficial form of culture in a civilization sense and, on the other hand, by the attraction of preserving the integrity of local practices for the *authority* of the nation-state and its sovereignty. In this dilemma, we will often choose a simpler approach to the detriment of cultural identity (in the sense of encouraging differences) and of the supranational context, by rethinking it as a notion resulting from a long tradition, specific and delimited. However, while admitting this trend, we are also convinced of the permeability of culture and the dynamic and fluctuating side of identity, in short, an authentic paradox.

On the contrary, if we interpret differently the discourse surrounding *European cultural identity*, we could probably achieve more satisfactory results. Europe could follow a different path, introducing an identity based on other directions. It would be better to leave aside the national elements, as elements that come from a common historical-cultural discourse, which is insufficient in our day. And to think of Europe as an imagined community that cannot be distinguished by its authenticity or its *invention*, but rather by the *way it was imagined*. Therefore, we must focus on the *construction* process and on the *symbolic significance* of this *imagined community*, which has become the European Union.

5.1.3. A new image for Europe and its identity aspects: the symbolic dimension

The European Union could produce new definitions of identity due to its institutional character and its symbolic aspect. Through its new symbolic dimension, it could build a reality that avoids the previously mentioned difficulties (especially the nationalist danger) and create new specific content. This symbolic dimension could allow the European Union, through its communicational logic, to adopt a framework dimension rather than a content one (Sassatelli, 2002) and to give rise to new meaning horizons in terms of identity and culture.

Through its framework dimension, the EU can assume certain properties such as *indexicality* and *totemism*. It could be indexing in the sense that it does not explicitly mention precise content in its mediation practice in the logic of construction, since these contents could be used in a dangerous or essentialist way. In choosing how to refer to these specific contents (for example, what is the proposed identity and what is the culture to be chosen), the EU prefers to remain vague, ambiguous in relation to a particular context. Through the second quality, the totemic property, the EU could, despite the absence of the definition of its essence, insist on a positive and mythical aspect of the identity discourse that sums up its motto. Through the summary of the identity spirit of its states, the Union raises its own identity speech to a "superior" rank, without having to specify it. The European framework becomes a mediator between the supranational level and the local level, where multiple identities are found. Thus, in the communicative logic of the EU, the concept is represented by a specific expression, which has become its motto: unity in diversity. A symbol that marks, despite the differences that exist, an expression of unity. Research on European cultural identity tends to define it as a combination of differences without homogenization. Thus, it seems that the EU expressly uses, in its identity development, the dialogical and dynamic aspect of its construction process.

But how do we determine this communication logic? And why is it important? We need to take a step back and distance ourselves from identity research to estimate the *usefulness* of the notion of identity in European construction.

At the beginning of the European adventure, the major concern was twofold: peace between nations and the ability to cope with the threat of the Soviet Communist bloc. In this context, there was no

explicit reference to identity, but rather philosophical reflections from, among others, the efforts and contributions of personalities such as Richard de Coudenhove-Kalergi and Denis de Rougemont to mention only the most famous. After the fall of the Communist bloc, the enthusiasm for ideals came to the fore after being somewhat weakened by the economic and political dimensions of European construction. This change in the pattern is due to the fact that only economic integration is not enough to guarantee cohesion within the European construction. Consequently, the institution building process begins to take a wider and more complex path. The European construction, which has long been reduced to the common market, then to a unique one, becoming more and more a reality affecting many sectors where the Union is involved in different degrees. To the regulatory, normative policies, actions that can improve its image have been added: symbolic "policies". These "policies" give more attention to the discourse developed by the institutions and propose more interventions in the cultural sector to reach the hearts of its citizens. The EU thus becomes a kind of humanistic enterprise with the aim of bringing nations and individuals closer and stimulating their consensus, which means referring to the production of meanings rather than the explicit results of its actions (Sassatelli, 2002).

However, this symbolic aspect also shows the power relations and instrumental logic related to the relationship between power, culture and identity. Indeed, this symbolic dimension was quite criticized for generating a kind of *manipulation* of individuals by political elites. The symbolic content of the *framework* (i.e. of the EU) has been *a priori* designated as *misleading*, even though it has never been truly studied. Maybe because policies studied through *policy studies* are still focused on *policy*, its nature, and the direct consequences of decision-making, not on the rhetoric or symbolic meaning of policies (Sassatelli, 2002). With the neo-institutional approach, since the 1980s, this has changed little. The cognitive approach specific to this theory and the focus on the expressive element of politics (and not just the instrumental role) has led to a reconsideration of the decision-making process. The symbolic dimension of policies is considered to be of the same interest as the rational, concrete dimension. Thus, symbols and metaphors become key concepts in this construction path, even more than the comparisons of the national example or the debate on the genesis of a common identity destiny. In this context, we can adapt to the European case David Kertzer's (1989) proposals on the state, and us say that if Europe's image is ambiguous and difficult to perceive, "we must personify it to perceive it and give it symbols to love it" (p. 21).

However, we see that in the choice of symbols, rituals, cultural actions or not, the EU reproduces a kind of model that consolidates, within a nation, identities. But Europe differs from this model by the fact that, by its nature, it appears as a transnational and post-ethnic identity example, that is, as a counter-model. Its context is so *complex* that it becomes almost impossible to follow the same symbolic logic: rather, it is necessary to practice a mediation of this symbolic logic. Therefore, in this context and in line with the image of an EU framework, the ambiguity and complexity of some symbols contributes more to its force than to in the national case, because ambiguity allows the Union to produce a common destiny, even if in a situation of difficult consensus. This is precisely the importance of its indexing property. In other words, if the content leaves some room for interpretation, this facilitates acceptance of its motto and amplifies the communication impact on the recipients, as they have a greater margin of interpretation.

6. CONCLUSION

Culture has become a place of interaction, in which the individual acts according to the sense he attributes to different situations; this sense resides in the interaction with the other. Identity representation inevitably enters an individual in collective forms: identity is thus formed from membership circles. The end of a binary logic between homogeneity and heterogeneity that characterizes today's societies has projected us into a complex symbolic reality where culture faces identity as a true identification bazaar. These reflections have also had a repercussion on the European construction process and the image of Europe as to the formulation of its identity and culture. Nevertheless, this image of Europe has evolved, the institutional project gradually reconsidering the terms of culture and identity and their symbolic implications in the building of identity and cultural development.

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