

We love Europe
Do you?

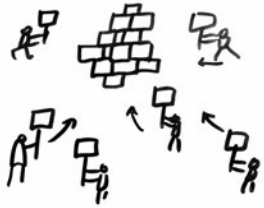


European Cultural
Foundation

Annual Magazine
2018

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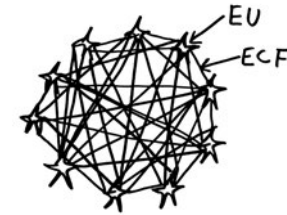
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EUROPEAN

Editorial

André Wilkens

It is 2019 and Europe is under attack. It would not be an exaggeration to describe these attacks as the Battle of Europe. The attacks are coming from inside and out. From the inside, they are coming from those who want to re-nationalise Europe, seal it off and turn it into a copy of its former self – a Europe that was almost destroyed twice by hostility between nations. Those attacking the continent from the outside have long regarded a united, supranational, cooperative Europe as a thorn in their side, because it sets a utopian example to the rest of the world.

This Battle of Europe is being fought not with tanks and missiles, but with ideas, narratives, bots and social media. The majority of Europeans do not yet realise that their continent has become the site of a global battle – and the outcome will have international implications, as history has shown so many times. It's time to defend the European idea of peace, stability and prosperity before it's too late.

Standing up for Europe is not about defending a boring status quo, but about fighting for a viable future. Europe is not perfect. Of course not. Inequality has been growing for more than 30 years, political and economic elites have lost touch with ordinary citizens. 'Brussels' is incapable of explaining how it makes Europe better and for whom. National leaders sabotage common action where it is needed most. Europe urgently needs reforms that put people and the environment first. Europe needs to generate excitement with its vision, utopian ideas and practical measures that improve people's lives. But we must also win the Battle of Europe. Because otherwise there will be nothing left to reform.

What can culture do?

Culture can connect and divide. Culture can create communities and divide them. Culture creates public spheres. Culture can create European experience. And European experience creates European identity. Culture can also provide resistance against neo-nationalist cultural ideologists who put national identity and national culture first. Culture is essential now for the survival of European unity. Culture is much more than a 'nice thing to have' or an accessory.

These are challenging times. This is not the time for business as usual. We need to take a hard look at ourselves: What went right and what went wrong? The current challenges create space and urgency for new thinking, readiness for experimentation and risks. Our response and contribution to the Battle of Europe is *Democracy Needs Imagination* – the 2019 annual theme and Call for Action of the European Cultural Foundation.

As 2019 marks the 65th anniversary of the European Cultural Foundation, we will invest in telling and sharing its history and story in an innovative, creative and engaging way. As a companion to our Annual Report, we hereby present you with our online Annual Magazine which aims to tell stories from our work and reflects on highlights of the past year. It brings together a diverse range of voices from people who have either contributed to or influenced our work in 2018. And more often than not, have done both.

Culture can challenge prevailing prejudices and build bridges, against all odds. Read, for example, about the cultural centre Borderland and research agency Forensic Architecture – our two 2018 *ECF Princess Margriet Award for Culture* laureates. Both have been recognised for their outstanding work addressing urgent challenges of today through a cultural lens. Or find out more about our *Tandem Cultural Collaboration Programmes* and *STEP* travel grants through the experiences of participants like Vasilena Radeva, who has written us a good old letter. And Sjoerd Bootsma describes his journey from participant to co-designer in one of our new adventures: *Tandem Fryslân*, the lessons he learned, how he sees the future, and why culture should be the backbone of every policy.

Our *Displaced in Media* programme provides some exciting and often shocking insights into the perceptions of migrants in the media and resulted in the essay collection *Lost in Media: Migrant Perspectives and the Public Sphere* published by Valiz in June 2019. As a preview to this book you can read

an essay by one of the authors, *Guardian* columnist Nesrine Malik.

In May 2018, the European Cultural Foundation organised the *European Cultural Challenge* which brought together about 100 people from our different networks to look at the challenges Europe is facing and how to address these from a cultural perspective. One of the participants, writer Igor Stokfiszewski, explores the topic of 'Municipalism and Culture', while another participant, Filip Zieliński, shares his energetic thoughts for a united Europe.

To find out in more detail about the work of the European Cultural Foundation in 2018, I invite you to browse through the following pages or read our Annual Report.

We look forward to hearing from you, about this magazine, about our work, about new ideas. If you have any comments or suggestions, send us an email, write us a letter or share your thoughts on social media.

Tot ziens!

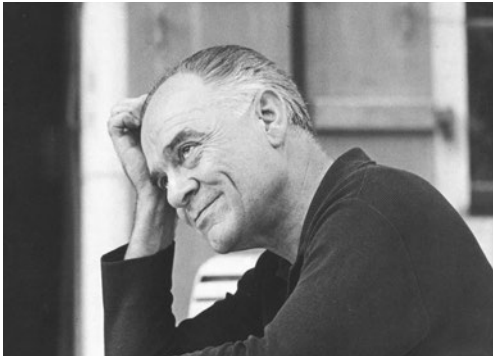
André Wilkens is Director of the European Cultural Foundation.

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[ECF Annual Report 2018](#)



Erasmus couple on
Europe Day at the
European Cultural
Foundation
Amsterdam (NL), 2019

65 Years European Cultural Foundation



Denis de Rougemont



**Congres Europese
Beweging**
The Hague, 1953
Queen Juliana,
Prince Bernhard,
Robert Schuman
(from left to right)

65 
European Cultural
Foundation
Years

2019 marks the 65th anniversary of the European Cultural Foundation and coincides with key political and historic moments for Europe: the election of a new European Parliament and the establishment of a new EU leadership, the conclusion of Brexit and 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The European Cultural Foundation was set up in Geneva in 1954 by the Swiss philosopher Denis de Rougemont, who believed that culture and media could help advancing a peaceful future of Europe; a Europe not driven by fear and national interests, but by a collective and federal effort to make democracy work. The Foundation's first President was Robert Schuman, one of the principle architects of the European Economic Community (ECC), which later evolved into the European Union (EU).

At the initiative of HRH Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands – who was the European Cultural Foundation's President from 1955-1977 – the Foundation moved to Amsterdam (NL). He set up a strong partnership with the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds that continues to this day. The Foundation also started working closely with eminent organisations as the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation and the Council of Europe. The current President of the Foundation is HRH Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands.

The European Cultural Foundation works for an open, inclusive and better Europe. It was created 65 years ago for the promotion of European unity by encouraging cultural and educational activities of common interest.

In 2019 the Foundation's theme is *Democracy Needs Imagination*. Because culture can provide resistance against divisive forces. Culture can tell the story of Europe. Culture can imagine a better future.



Courageous Citizens

Ivan Krastev

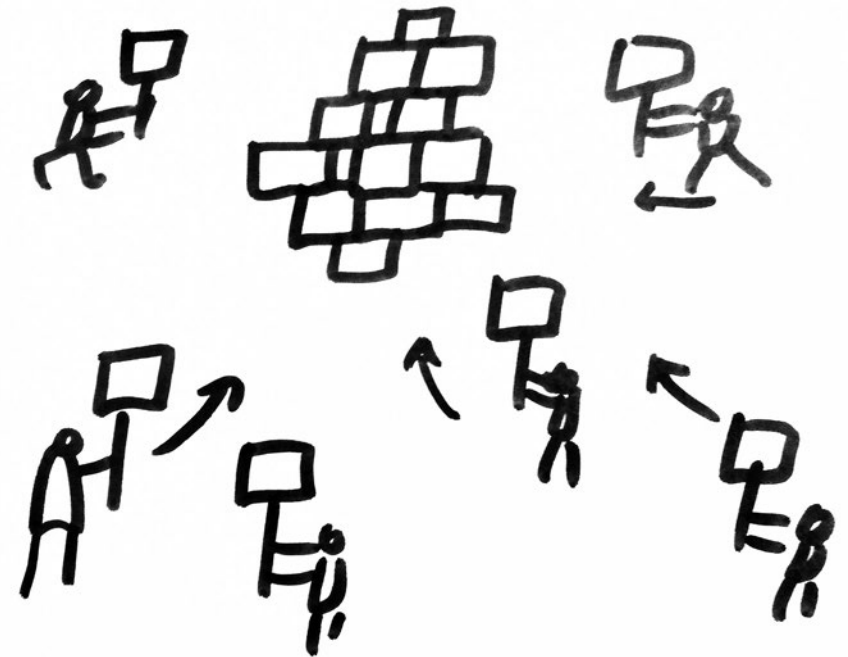
Courage has long been out of fashion in Europe. The revolutions of 1989, for example, were inspiring yet utterly unheroic: the fall of the Soviet Union brought the battle of political ideals to an abrupt end, with democracy and representative governments, individual and minority rights protection, and prosperity based on open markets winning the hearts and minds for lack of plausible alternatives.

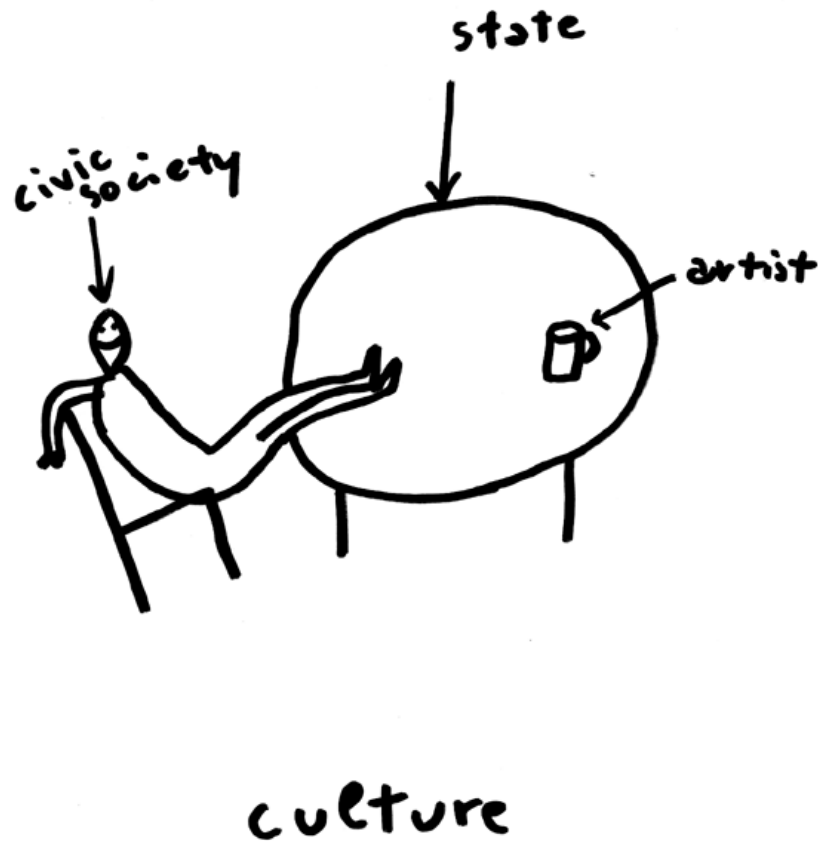
Reforms were often treated in the sense of bureaucratic obligations, rather than as a real chance for transformation. Less fortunate parts of the world – where neither welfare nor democracy is on the menu now or in the foreseeable future – also rarely saw (and are unlikely to see) heroic revolutions, as a way out. Emigrating to other parts of the world seems the rational choice for many.

Courage is back today as the cardinal civic virtue. What has changed?

The results of the hard institutional work did not meet the high expectations. Both in 'new' Europe, where people almost religiously believed in the promised land of a radiant liberal democratic future, and in 'older' Europe many failed to see the benefits of opening towards the East, deepening EU integration, globalisation. The reason was that the benefits were not justly distributed, and the weakest often bore a disproportionate share of the burden.

The anxieties of the global crises after 2008 deepened the sense of injustice among those left behind. The 'moral' panic around the refugee crisis fuelled further dissatisfaction with the rapid changes, as many who feared they wouldn't be able to cope saw those changes as a threat. New (or just 'refurbished') leaders seized the moment and started using each opportunity to deepen the ruptures





within and between societies rather than offering workable solutions to existing problems. Citizens – in some countries more than in others – often turned into angry majorities, quick to find culprits, be it the cosmopolitan elites, the unpopular minorities, or the universal enemy: the refugees. Rather than healing injustices in their societies, anger and hate deepened them. Dehumanising the 'enemies' blunted the moral sensitivity to the pain of the different other.

This adverse societal 'climate change' opened a space for the re-emergence of a forgotten figure – that of the courageous citizen. Yet their courage, their revolutionary stance, is different today. They are concerned with our divided societies.

Their cause is to rebuild bridges that were broken and to think things through in more inclusive ways. They fight injustice and prejudices, not in battles turned into zero-sum lethal games by fuelled passion, but in conversations and encounters that aim to recover the lost common ground, the lost shared values.

Recovering the common ground may allow for fruitful redefinition and questioning of those of our values that are at the root of the injustices and ruptures in our societies. Because deeply hidden beneath a passionate concern for ourselves at the expense of the others, a concern that divides us internally and closes us from with-out, there may be a common core – a concern for the joys and the pains

of the others, a concern that brought people to live together in a community in the first place.

Culture is the 'natural' space for such reinvented conversations. It keeps the memory of our shared values alive, turning them into moral sensibilities we rarely notice.

Contemporary cultural practitioners and social and political activists embody this new meaning of courage – in questioning the status quo, in reinventing the lost meaning of solidarity, they contribute to change and healing in our societies.

Ivan Krastev is the Chairman of the Centre for Liberal Strategies in Sofia and a permanent fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna. This column was first published as a foreword to the book *Courageous Citizens: How Culture Contributes to Social Change* (Amsterdam 2018), which was published by the European Cultural Foundation and Valiz to mark the 10th anniversary of the ECF Princess Margriet Award for Culture.

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[Courageous Citizens](#)
[ECF Princess Margriet Award for Culture](#)
[Centre for Liberal Strategies](#)

Culture Means Solidarity

Krzystof Czyżewski, Borderland,
in conversation with Wietske Maas

Wietske Maas *Borderland* was established in 1990 at an important moment in European history. It was just after the fall of the Berlin Wall and just before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Societal change was imminent. How did dealing with lost memories go hand in hand with defining the contours of a new imagined future?

Krzystof Czyżewski Right from the start, from 1989 onwards, we wanted to move forward and build a new country. When we came here to Sejny (Poland) and to this borderland, we discovered that taking a step forward also meant stepping on ashes, on memories. The ground we were walking on was full of memories, suffering, forgetting.

We decided to slowly, step by step, unearth the memories and rediscover what had happened. Oblivion does not exist in the borderlands. You may claim that you have

forgotten but the memory lives on inside you, within the community and in the relations between people. Touching on this network of human relationships meant touching on painful things – things that we, as outsiders, were not aware of. In hindsight I think that made our situation easier. We could view things from a distance without the burden of the past that paralysed the local people.

WM *How did your approach take shape?*

KC It takes time to unearth memories and open wounds with the intention of healing them. So we slowly developed our workshop to deal with all these issues, all these memories. Our first gathering took place in the former Jewish synagogue.

We invited people from various minority groups, nationalities, cultures and religions. There were Lithuanians, Russian Old Believers, Ukrainians,



Sejny Chronicles
Performance
Borderland Foundation
Sejny (PL), 2016

Russians, Protestants, Catholics, Greek Catholics, Orthodox people, Roma – all different groups in one circle. It was an emotional moment. For the first time, they were able to meet each other again and share their stories and memories with their neighbours.

During the gathering we invited the children in the community to carry lighted candles between the groups. It was then that we saw how grandparents and children connected. The grandparents were sharing their stories for the first time and the children were hearing something they had never heard before. We realised that this intergenerational approach worked. The young generation are messengers of our work, going to old people and asking for stories, for memories. They transmit this knowledge to us as artists, to use it in a performance or film or any art form that will do justice to the experience.

WM *Memory is an incredibly important aspect of Borderland's work. But working with memory is also a very volatile terrain. We see myriad memory cultures that are lucrative for an experience economy, or even used as a weapon, so to speak, in a 'war of cultures'. Yet, Borderland aims to engage in a more nuanced and layered way with memory. What is your approach to working with memory, and how does it differ from a spectacularisation of memory?*

KC We focus on three types of memories. The first one is critical

memory, which is very difficult in the borderlands. You have to start with your own guilt or bad behaviour, with your own personal battles with your nation, with your group. It builds the trust that makes others open to doing the same.

The second and perhaps most difficult type of memory is the good memory. There is a good memory in every person, but we don't always have a way of expressing it in our community life.

We were working in Mostar in Bosnia just after the [Balkans] war, with the local Muslims and Christians. The young people from Borderland asked them: 'Did you help your neighbours?' It was a very emotional moment. These young people were the first to ask them about good memories. During the war it had been heroic to harm your neighbour, not help them. But neighbours had of course helped each other in daily life and carried those memories with them as their burden. We developed a workshop to help these good memories to come to the surface.

The third layer of memory is what I call 'common memory'. Memory is very divided. We all have our own memories. Memories of our district, of our neighbourhood, of our family. But our memories are not the complete memory of the community. Our work focuses on extending these individual memories by embracing the memories of others. To hear other people, to let them speak, even if we may disagree with them. It takes time

and sometimes there are struggles and conflicts. But that's the way to embrace others and that is what the Borderland is all about.

WM *We are currently witnessing a crisis of democracy in Europe. The work of Borderland is ever more timely because it brings the contemporary into dialogue with the complexity of the past, which can't be reduced to a singular narrative. Is there a specific experience in Borderland's cultural work that is especially relevant to this?*

KC From the very beginning of our work, which is very in tune with people at the grassroots level, we have been giving different groups of people room to speak and listening to them. They were telling us 30 years ago, 25 years ago, that our democratic society is in danger when we no longer trust each other. Over the past years the economic transformation and the free market have created new systems. We asked ourselves: do these systems offer room for caring for people or are people getting left behind?

Caring for people, continuously connecting with them, is how I understand culture and education. Get off the stage, step out of the festival and go to the people. The change we need to create in society will not be achieved through an event. It will be achieved through continuous, organic work. We lost sight of this in the 1990s and the 2000s. We shifted towards big events and fireworks,

a new life based on consumption. And now we are paying the price for it.

Poles, Hungarians, Romanians – or indeed any other people in Europe – are not intrinsically anti-Semitic or xenophobic.

That explanation is too easy. Those of us who are tolerant and liberal feel we are on the right bank of the river and want the others who think differently to join us. But that's no way to build a bridge! It has to be built from both sides and quite frankly, we have done little to meet the others halfway.

Fascism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism are not part of the character of people. These ideas are rooted in solitude, abandonment, poverty and many other things.

And remember: no one is born a xenophobe. Something happens to people in life to make them that way and we all carry responsibility for it. I feel we should be much more aware of this and consider how we

contribute to it, through the media and our activities.

WM *What can culture do?*

KC Culture can help build the bridges to cope with these eruptions of aggression, the xenophobic fears. I used to think that culture was freedom but now culture means solidarity to me. Not the artist as the genius, the creator of all, but seeing the genius in everything and everyone. It's about encouraging creativity in all, approaching them as creators and partners with whom you can build great things – with whom you can build bridges.

Krzysztof Czyżewski is one of the founders of the Borderland Foundation and Centre, which was named as one of the 2018 laureates for the *ECF Princess Margriet Award for Culture* for its work in Sejny – a small community in North-Eastern Poland close to the Lithuanian border. Revitalising lost memories and building bridges between the past and possible futures plays a central role in Borderland's work. This interview was conducted by Wietske Maas and was first published on the Featured People section of the European Cultural Foundation's website.

Wietske Maas is curatorial advisor for the *ECF Princess Margriet Award for Culture* and curator Discourse and Public Program at BAK – basis voor actuele kunst.

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[Borderland](#)
[Featured People](#)



The Mystery of the Bridge
Borderland Foundation
Krasnogruda (PL), 2015



Rafah 1: The Image Complex, Rafah: Black Friday

The story of Rafah, on 1 August 2014, lies somewhere between hundreds of images and video clips existing in disparate locations, on the smart-phones of activists, press clippings and social media posts. Three-dimensional models provided an optical device and a means of composing the relation between multiple images and videos in space and time. This evidence-assemblage is what allowed for a narrative of events to emerge.

Image (detail): Forensic Architecture, 2015

Space is an Optical Device

Eyal Weizman, Forensic Architecture,
in conversation with Wietske Maas

Wietske Maas *Forensic Architecture overturns the institutionalised notions of both forensics and architecture. How did the combination of the two disciplines in forensic architecture become a relevant subject for you?*

Eyal Weizman Over the past decade, I was personally involved in various human rights initiatives, in Israel and Palestine, as well as in several cartographic projects. Architecture was very much seen as an analytical frame through which politics could be analysed. Not politics in the mundane sense of the word, but politics as an act of radical confrontation. I then realised that architecture could become a very unique framework to look at how political forces articulate themselves in the physical world. At the time, we were focusing on architecture as buildings, but using architectural methods to read political realities as forms of construction.

So we read reality architecturally, rather than looking at buildings per se. The result of that project was something that colleagues and myself referred to as 'counter-cartographic'. If the map of cartography is used as an instrument of domination, then in a counter-cartography way, it can also be used to expose this reality and resist it. Forensic architecture is like counter-cartography accelerated. In a very zoomed-in way, it could start capturing moments of eruptive violence that cartography could not. The moments in which the slow violence of planning and architecture, the slow transformation of the terrain that favours one ethno-political group, erupts into an incident.

So forensic architecture really had to emerge as a sort of counter-forensic practice to respond to several challenges of the present. These are connected with the proliferation of first-hand testimonies

recorded on digital media and satellite imagery, etc.

As a civil society organisation, we have the capacity to really use space as an optical device to help us synchronise and make sense of this flood of signals and images that proliferate in the public domain today.

WM *Your work is also about 'forensic aesthetics'. How do aesthetics relate to forensics? What is 'forensic aesthetics'?*

EW Forensics operates across three domains. The first domain is the field where a crime has taken place – so the scene of a crime. The second is the lab, or in our context here, the studio. The third is the forum where it is presented. The notion of forensic aesthetics operates slightly differently in each one of those domains. Aesthetics is that which pertains to the senses. That which could be perceived by sight, smell, hearing, etc. A forensic aesthetic is a certain heightening of our ability to perceive. This hyper-sensitivity enables us to register an event though a general sensorium. We prefer to use sensorium instead of referring to the five classical

senses because sometimes they are mixed – for example, vision and sound flow into each other.

This notion of aesthetics is also in the object itself. An object in the world, organised as various types of material surfaces, responds to other material surfaces. How it responds is registered. If I put a hot cup of tea on a table with a Formica surface, the molecular composition of the material reacts. When I remove the cup, you see how the material has expanded slightly, leaving a ring. We can read backwards. We can read the surface of the table as a photograph of the proximity of the tea to the table. It's the material of the table that holds that relationship. With our technology and perception, we make the material hyper-aesthetic, hyper-sensitive to the surrounding phenomena.

WM *Much of the sensing that you do in your investigations is remote. Many of the places you investigate are under siege or impossible to access. What you work with is often a representation, rather than the actual direct building, the material or object itself. What role does architecture play in this?*

EW Initially, the question is 'how close does one need to get, and how close does one get to the site of contact'? One of the main principles of forensics is the Locard Principle. Every contact leaves a trace. We need to get to the site of that material contact. As professionals we want

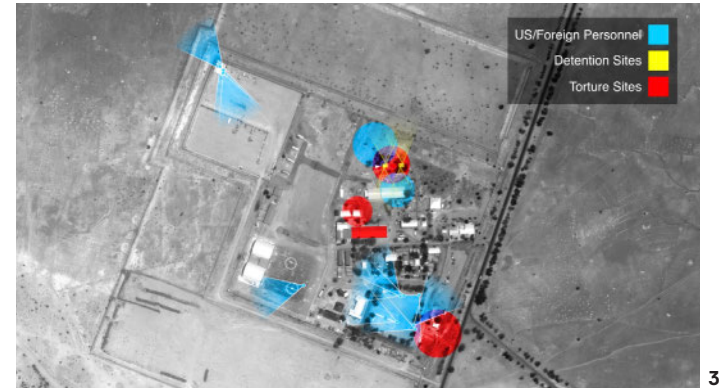
1. Cameroon Salak fly through: 3D reconstruction of Salak base. The red circles indicate sites of torture. Image: Forensic Architecture, 2017



2. Cameroon Entrance to Salak: Photographs posted to social media by US personnel confirmed their presence through Salak and assisted in locating and reconstructing various locations throughout the site. Image: Forensic Architecture, 2017



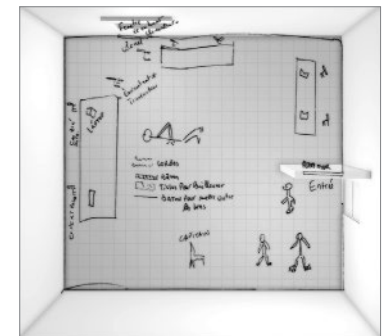
3. Cameroon Salak with legend: A map of Salak, a regional military headquarters, where detainees are held illegally in inhumane conditions and tortured routinely. This map shows the proximity of US personnel to the locations where torture and detention occur. Image: Forensic Architecture, 2017



4. Cameroon window hole: Through small holes in the covered windows of the cells at Salak, detainees could see torture and killing taking place in the open as well as the presence of foreign personnel throughout the site. Image: Forensic Architecture, 2017



5. Cameroon DGRE Room Sketch: Using witness testimony and hand drawn plans like the one pictured, we confirmed that detainees were routinely tortured and interrogated at Salak in the building known as the 'DGRE'. Image: Forensic Architecture, 2017 (using witness drawings gathered by Amnesty International in 2016)



to be closest in space and time to it. Sometimes we can't get close. A site could be cordoned off, for instance. In that case, something from inside that site needs to communicate itself outwards. This can happen in different ways. You have people remembering things and giving you their testimony. Sometimes you have leaks.

So if you can't visit the site yourself, the question becomes: 'how does matter record itself in memory? How does matter record itself in media? How does matter record itself in a leak?' And you start looking at mediations of the site. You need to see how matter registers itself on another piece of matter. The principle of archaeology is always one of mediation. You simply look at material realities as a cascade of mediation and translations.

WM *Several of Forensic Architecture's cases have investigated crimes in Europe and have looked critically, for example, at border policies in the European Union. Why?*

EW In Europe, people tend to think of human rights violation as something that happens out there... in the Middle East, in South or Central America, and not something that happens within Europe.

It has become very important for us to bring our methods and our focus back to Europe, to look at the present, difficult issues that Europe has to deal with. Issues of migration, for instance, issues of racism, issues of violence against

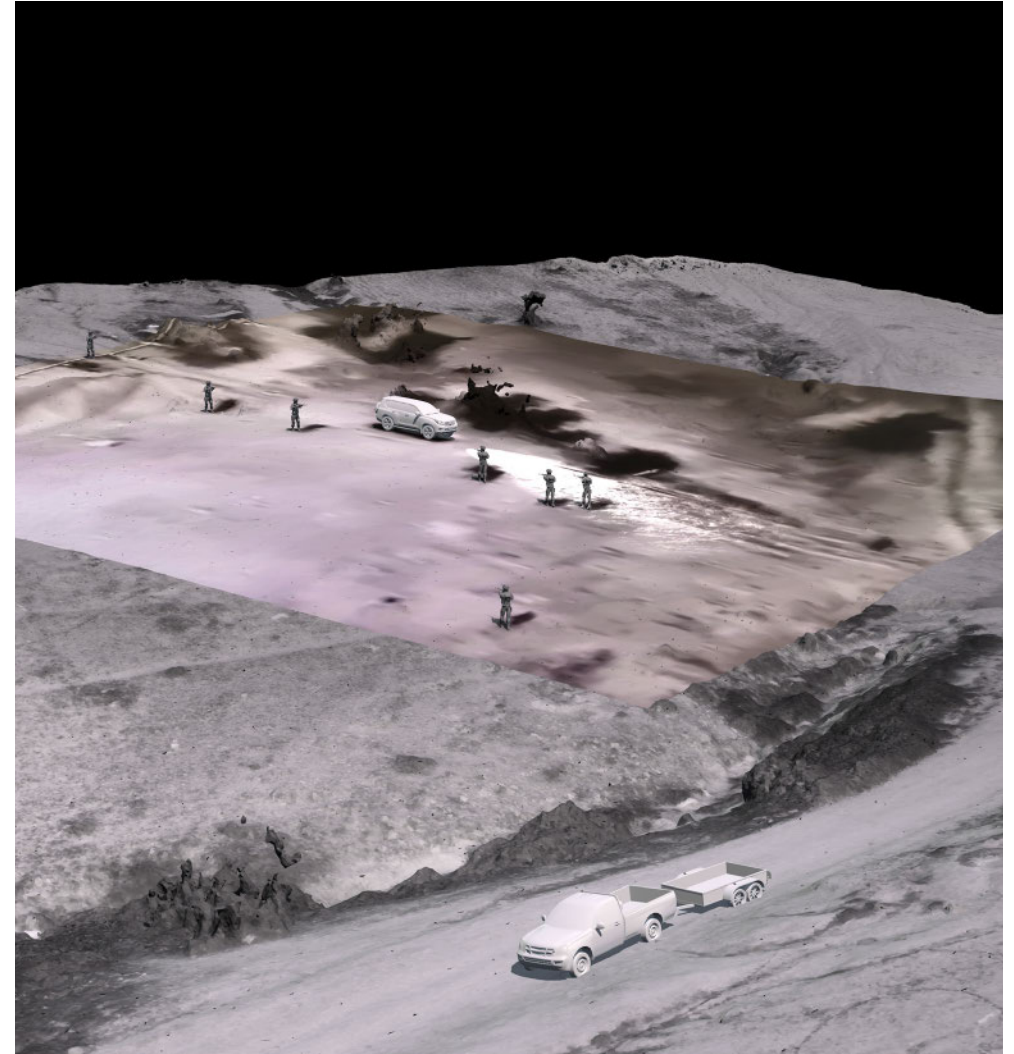
migrants and refugees that happen here, in Europe, as issues of human rights. This is a major line of focus for us right now. This is about what Europe is and how we understand what it means to be European today.

Eyal Weizman is Professor of Spatial and Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths University, London, and founder of Forensic Architecture. This international multidisciplinary research group is one of the 2018 laureates for the *ECF Princess Margriet Award for Culture*. Drawing on architectural knowledge and using novel technological and aesthetic methods, Forensic Architecture analyses matter to make sense of the ways complex realities are organised and transformed by conflict. This interview was conducted by Wietske Maas and first published on the Featured People section of the European Cultural Foundation's website.

Wietske Maas is curatorial advisor for the *ECF Princess Margriet Award for Culture* and curator Discourse and Public Program at BAK – basis voor actuele kunst.



[ECF Princess Margriet Award for Culture](#)
[Forensic Architecture](#)
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Killing in Umm Al-Hiran

Projecting thermal footage from a police helicopter establishes the spatial relationship of figures and vehicles, reflected in a photogrammetry 3D site model. Image (detail): Forensic Architecture, 2018



Looking for Europe's Next Erasmus

André Wilkens

Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus – or Erasmus for short – was a European Super Hero. He grew up in Rotterdam, studied in Paris, lived in England, wrote his doctoral thesis in Turin, worked in Basel and in Freiburg, Germany – and that was 500 years ago. He was a commuter in Europe throughout his life, long before the days of EasyJet and high-speed trains. He had a lot of different professions too. He was a chorister, theologian, priest, philosopher, philologist and the author of numerous books. He always wrote a lot, putting around 1,000 wise words to paper every day. This amounted to around 150 books and more than 2,000 letters (a type of thought-provoking e-mail from one person to another, which was written by hand on paper and then transported by stagecoach).

As a critical thinker and committed European, Erasmus was one of the pioneers of the European enlightenment. He trusted in people's reason to attain lasting peace without war and religious violence. By doing so, he was at least 500 years ahead of his time – and perhaps even more. Of his many remarkable texts, oddly enough it is the short satirical exercise in style, *In Praise of Folly*, that stands out. This is his most-read work to date, which he dedicated to his English friend Thomas More, the author of *Utopia*. On account of his extraordinary service to science, human progress and Europe, roads, squares, bridges, hospitals, schools, a university, a Metro line and even an asteroid have been named after him.

Fast forward to 1987. That year,

the European Cultural Foundation, in collaboration with the European Commission, created the biggest study programme in the world and called it Erasmus. Since then, Erasmus has truly become one of the best-known and most popular brands of Europe.

Thanks to Erasmus grants, students and lecturers are able to change universities in Europe for a semester or two. For a couple of hundred euros per month, the respective academic performance abroad is also recognised. To date, more than 4.4 million students have taken part in Erasmus schemes as part of their studies. Almost a third of all participants have found a life partner from a different European country thanks to Erasmus and around a million 'Erasmus children' have been born as a result. In Europe, with its low birth rates, you can include demographics in the success story of Erasmus, even if it's little more than a drop in the ocean.

So what has the Erasmus programme done for Europe? Erasmus was incredibly successful at building a better Europe. Perhaps more so than anyone else. Perhaps.

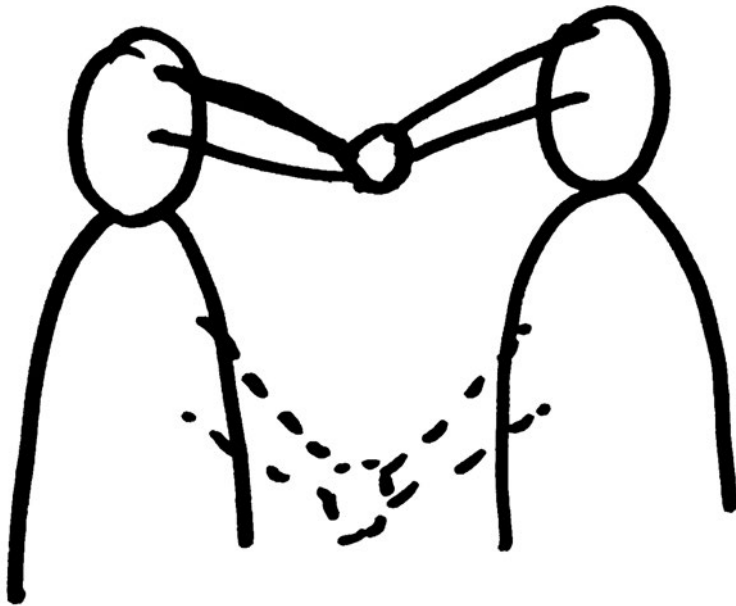
The combination of education and exchange is an extremely simple idea. It's not rocket science. You give students money to study in another European country and recognise their academic performance there. That's the basic concept, and it is so simple

that it obviously already existed. Grants for students have been around for centuries and international exchange programmes have existed for almost 100 years. Erasmus is an honest, simple grant scheme with a few accessories. What makes it innovative is that it was a large-scale project from the word go.

With 200,000 recipients of scholarships each year, it is by far the world's biggest exchange programme. It could also be bigger; after all, Europe has around 512 million citizens. But that's a pretty decent number for a grant scheme. Some ambitious thinking right there.

With Erasmus, Europe is investing directly in people, not in a roundabout sort of way like complicated free trade agreements, which hardly anyone really understands, and nobody can predict the outcomes. No. Erasmus is direct, with side effects that have, to date, been much better than could be predicted. It is a constant, long-term investment. Like a savings account with a good but not speculative interest rate, which generates a stable and exponential profit over the years. Irrespective of the ups and downs of the political troubles and stock markets.

The direct investment in education and exchange is successful because it can be experienced, touched, it can almost be grasped. You can see it, feel it, hear it. It gives rise to European stories, which you can write books and make films about.



Such as *Pot Luck*, the Euro-friends classic film from 2002, which tells the story of Xavier from France, Soledad from Catalonia, Lars from Denmark, Alessandro from Italy, Wendy from England, Tobias from Germany, Isabelle from Belgium and their shared Erasmus flat in Barcelona. They drink and dance, argue and fall in love, laugh and cry. They probably do a bit of studying too. The *New York Times* saw the charming chaos of the European flat share as “an appealing and persuasive picture of European integration, in which national differences, which once sparked military and political conflict, are preserved because they make life sexier and more interesting.” These Americans get it.

Erasmus is also successful because it is embedded in a wider context, namely the Europe-wide harmonisation of study courses with the objective of creating a common European framework for higher education.

To that end, the European Minister of Education signed an agreement in Bologna in 1999, which aligns European standards of education, introduces a two-tier system of

Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in principle and throughout Europe and makes it easier to recognise and transfer degrees and parts of degrees across Europe.

The recognition of academic achievements means that it is, for the first time, possible and attractive to study in different European countries and to put different study programmes together to form a European education that is also acknowledged in the job market. The bit about harmonisation is still a work in progress; it’s not running smoothly just yet.

In the past, people would generally lose study time as a result of mobility. But was that not always the case? The old Erasmus could have certainly spent more time actively studying in Rotterdam alone had he not spent years travelling around Europe by horse-drawn carriage. But then he would not have become the outstanding European person and scholar, and the biggest academic exchange programme wouldn’t have been named after him.

Erasmus is not just a nice success story whose praises can be sung all over Europe and that can be used in comedy films. It is also part of hard-line pragmatism of European politics. Through Erasmus Europe is investing in the education of Europe’s young generation.

These people discover other parts of Europe through Erasmus: their peculiarities and beauty, their

cuisine, traditions, drinking habits and football vulgarities. They meet people from other European countries, examine their own and foreign clichés, experience north or south, east or west first-hand and analogue, not only through phone screens and the media. They share flats and more, have parties, become friends and fall in love. They learn another language, not just English. Multilingualism is good, experts claim, with benefits going beyond communication itself. European networks are formed, in both analogue and digital terms. European families are created. An excellent formula to combat nationalism and neo-nationalism. In this way, a European identity is created. And this is necessary for the survival of Europe.

Europe needs to invest in education in order to be up there in the top third internationally. That was always the case, but the jobs of the future are going to require more and more high-quality education. And social competence, the ability to improvise, to think creatively, working in multi-cultural teams and human intelligence are becoming increasingly important for this.

These are all characteristics that are promoted by European education à la Erasmus. If you have mastered Erasmus, you are more likely to possess the skills for the world of tomorrow, in which young Europeans will not only be competing with young people from other countries, but also

increasingly with intelligent machines. The scientific and human experiences and the networks from Erasmus will be of great benefit to this.

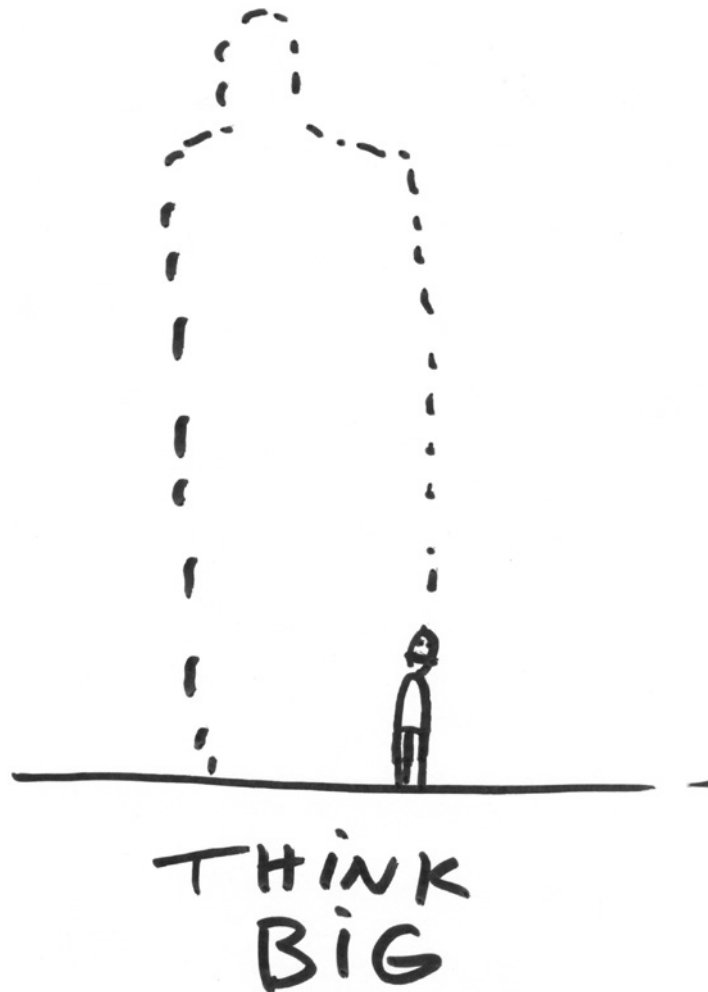
So what can Erasmus teach us in terms of creating a better Europe overall?

First of all, keep it simple, if it can be simple. Take something tried and tested, Europeanise it and don't be stingy. Too many things in Europe are too complicated. Reduce it to the max.

Second, long-term investments in Europe pay off. In the long term, Erasmus is perhaps the best investment that Europe has ever made. At over 2 billion Euro in grants per year (Erasmus+), it costs just over 1 percent of the annual EU agricultural expenditure. Can we not turn this relation around? Is Europe setting the right priorities here?

Third, Erasmus is investing rather directly in people and is having a lasting effect on their lives. Around 4.5 percent of all European students are already benefitting from it. That's a lot. But if we were to





redirect a few of the billions of euros spent on agriculture to Erasmus, there'd be a lot more. How much identity does the EU agricultural policy create in comparison with Erasmus? That should be factored into the next budget and a 'European identity factor' should be introduced in the budget distribution. The higher the factor that creates European identity, the better the chances of receiving more money from the EU budget.

Fourth, where else can you apply the Erasmus principle? A free European railcard for all Europeans on a gap year, for example, and not only for the young. European holiday camps. Supporting all sorts of things which make Europeans actually do something together, experience things together, outside their own national bubble. A European Facebook aimed at creating and maintaining friendships, as opposed to the current Silicon Valley version which is ripping its members off through advertising and data theft. A European media channel with European programming and content production, better than Netflix and YouTube put together.

Even a European army fits into all this somewhere. Such an army would create security, identity and save money to boot. And the money that would have been saved could be put back into more Erasmus grants, providing education, fun and identity.

Or why not think even bigger: free education for all Europeans, everywhere in Europe? A full European student grant scheme as an extension of Erasmus.

Or even a European school exchange for everyone, so it reaches those who don't go to university as well. That's a plan – a plan for more European identity. Let's do more Erasmus.

André Wilkens is Director of the European Cultural Foundation. A German version of this essay was first published in André Wilkens. *Der diskrete Charme der Bürokratie. Gute Nachrichten aus Europa*. S. Fischer Verlag, 2017. The essay was translated into English by Alice Tetley-Paul.

→ [ECF and the Erasmus Exchange Programme From Erasmus to Erasmus+](#)

The End is a Real Beginning: A Letter for Tandem

Vasilena Radeva

Sofia, 28 November 2018

My dearest Tandem,

I know you are not a person – you're a programme – but I want to write to you nonetheless. I want to write to this invisible creation that the Tandem team and the Tandem participants built together. I want to write to you.

So, my dearest Tandem, more than a year ago you entered my life. I have been dreaming about you, have been struggling with how you fit in my life, and I've had moments of trouble with our relationship. That being said, above all else, we have great memories together, and we need each other, for the lessons we taught each other help us to continue to grow.

But, this story starts at the beginning, not at the end. Let's look back to when a friend of mine told me about you, and I read about your mission and activities. I didn't know it was possible to do serious work while having a lot of fun and making new friends. In our crazy first days of fast and slow dating, I felt so pushed to find a partner and so not ready to be in this competitive game of entering your family that I almost gave up on you, thinking that you're a bit too 'Western European' for me and my small theatre company.

At the time, observing how most of your other guests were doing great with your rules of "be attractive; know what you want; choose a partner; (and most important) be chosen" I had some kind of existential crisis because I wasn't ready to open my local intimate world to you. But then you surprised me with your understanding of the way I felt, and you even took care of my feelings, preparing "the cloud – a safe place for confused and unhappy guests". And there I saw that I was not alone. I found my Tandem Partner in the cloud, and together we brought our common idea to light, under your piercing gaze. And you gave us your trust and belief and committed to supporting our project and accepting us into your family.

So, before our first meeting in Sofia in November 2017, I didn't realise that you were such a great matchmaker!

Did I ever say thank you for that? Probably not, because at that time I was too proud of the way I managed to attract you. Like a small talented kid, being praised by her new teacher. Then you met me again in Portugal (well, technically you met Nathan, the other 'me') and gently kicked us off into a year-long journey full of ups and downs, crossroads – in total harmony with our project You Can't Walk Straight on a Crooked Road. With our Italian partners, we planned our project a bit too ambitiously; trying to make a positive impact on Roma communities in Bulgaria and Roma immigrants in Italy, all while doing research, gathering stories and shaping them into a dramaturgy for a future performance. (Who isn't inspired to change the world, to impress you and your family, dear Tandem?) But we failed very early with our attempts to work with Roma organisations. And we had to reconsider our project, and in the process found a better understanding of your generous viewpoint – that work within your family is not just about 'community' but also about personal growth.

So we decided to focus our project on an interdisciplinary skill-exchange among the small circles of our two companies. Our partners, Echis, who do great work in the field of documentary radio, would teach us how to do better research when approaching a specific group of people – and we, from Panic Button Theatre, wanted to give them know-how about shaping collected materials into dramaturgy, based on our experience with devised performances.

Oh, Tandem! Nowadays, it turns out that one year is a lot of time in our modern world, especially for freelancers. The whole year I felt like I was leading parallel lives in multiple families (in a nest with small kids and in the darkness of a theatre); I felt like I wasn't giving enough of myself to this programme, and I struggled with this. I constantly asked myself why I wasn't getting more out of this programme. I felt like you gave me more than I had given you, but I'm sure that's the way you work. And anyway, I found that even though I didn't realise it, I was taking bits and pieces from unexpected places. I've grown so accustomed to working towards a product that the free form you gave us for exploration was confusing, and yet to my pleasant surprise, rewarding. The less I fought to find meaning, the more meaning I found.

The end of our period together was the best for me because, finally, there weren't any expectations causing tensions between us and our partners. We opened our minds again to reflect on all the wonderful meetings, ideas, methodologies and new family members you brought to us. And I realised that the end is actually a real beginning. Our being together won't be quite as intense anymore but will be deeper and more mature. There is a great shift in my company, from a participant in your year-long programme into a member of your big family; working for our common cause of social innovation and consciously growing with small steps.

I'm so happy that I already have an idea for a next project together called 'Room N8', but I will write more about it in my next letter.

Take care, keep giving, and keep inspiring, because you do it very well!

Yours,

Vasilena



Vasilena Radeva (right), Panic Button Theatre, Sofia (BG) and Nerina Schiavo, Echis – Incroci di suoni, Rome (IT)

Vasilena Radeva is a theatre director. As a participant in *Tandem Europe 2017-2018*, she has worked on the project *You Can't Walk Straight on a Crooked Road*. Her letter was first published on the Tandem website in December 2018.

→

Tandem

Panic Button Theatre

From London to Marseille in Six Steps

Lessons learned from travelling
with a STEP travel grant

Fié Neo

1. Google Translate is my best friend

Language! I had studied French when I was 13, for just two years. But that was ten years ago and I realised how important language is, not just for this collaboration in a French city/country, for the ability to carry out job tasks, but also even just day to day and for the ability to make new friends.

2. Climbing the ladder up, from the very, very bottom

There were many, many, many new things to learn. From social structures to administrative procedures in France. First, access to information in websites are all in French. Second, this country works very differently from Singapore or UK, countries that I am more familiar with.

I had to learn from scratch how projects are carried out, how funding is given, what the relationship is between organisations and governments how companies and taxes work in Corporate Social Responsibility... I'm thankful to Eurasianet for the time they gave to explain all these things. It was so important to have an experienced and local organisation guide me through this labyrinth.

3. Big ideas are just words on paper

I had many grand lofty ideas, but not enough experience to realise them. In part it was what drove me to search and connect with other people



Rooftop cinema at La Friche
Marseille (FR), 2018

and organisations that could help me fulfil my goals, but also I couldn't help but doubt myself when I realised how much support I needed to learn the ropes and how much I didn't know. All of a sudden, I didn't know what I was bringing to the table apart from just these big ideas. It took me several calls to close friends to realise that everyone goes through that, especially as fresh graduates, and that organisations will invest their time and energy because they believe there's something they can gain from my contributions. So, have faith everyone! Don't stop believing in yourself.

4. Starting a project is difficult

What I basically did was to split my main ideas and projects into smaller sub-projects and then connect with organisations that might have similar interests in any of the sub-projects to get support. As a fresh graduate without much experience of working in the non-profit field or with governments and all the administrative aspects that come with it, I thought the smartest thing to do was to partner up and then learn from them while working together. However, with small non-profit organisations, funding is precious and finances are often tight. Each funding that gets approved will finance the current projects and any introduction of a new project will require a fresh round of funding application, which might take a year or more. I had to work pretty independently in developing ideas, fine-tuning them to also benefit the organisation I was working with, writing everything down into proposals, getting these proposals checked and amended, searching for funding etc... The list goes on. But if I hadn't had this opportunity to come and work these things out, it would have taken me much longer to find out the concrete steps I needed to take and who to contact.

5. Attend everything

My stay in Marseille coincided with the month of economy, social and solidarity that is organised annually in France. There were many events, presentations and discussions organised to discuss different aspects of social engagement, which was perfect for what I was starting. I was genuinely surprised by such an initiative as it is extremely supportive and a great way to connect with practitioners in this field. I got to know many people working in engagement through the events and it's been very helpful to get started.

Everything was in French and I didn't understand everything but I still attended as many events as I could, nonetheless. Through these events I met Emmanuel, who works in the French government's civic engagement department and is developing a project called The Campus to bring together organisations and individuals working in various disciplines within engagement to find ways to work together. There was a way that INSEP (International Network for Socially Engaged Practitioners) can maybe fit into the framework of The Campus and we've been in conversations since. There was the problem of finding funding and space for the project, which we are still looking for. Through some events I also got in touch with the regional youth information centre and there is a possibility of booking spaces there for free to host events. I am currently planning to organise monthly activities sharing different innovative practices in social engagement, technology and new organisational structures to open up conversations and possibilities in the future.

6. Connect the dots (non-profit providing spaces and platforms for engagement with people > art interventions can be done through these platforms)

Eurasianet – the organisation I work with – has an event every fortnight called Kafe Calangues. It is a language exchange event based in a cafe that allows people to learn new languages and cultures. I have been participating in the organisation of the activities over the past couple of weeks. It made me realise that the conversations I had been having within Kafe Calangues were not that different from the conversations I had initiated through my art interventions. The problems I faced with not being able to find a space to present my artistic interventions and to connect with members of the public could perhaps be solved through collaborations with NGOs that already had such activities organised and a space negotiated with the host. Instead of being an artist having to find a space to present the art and to work on contacting and building a relationship with a space-owner, perhaps it is more efficient to collaborate with organisations that have already settled the administrative steps. This way artists can simply focus on engaging with people.

I thought the best way to test this framework out would be to introduce a project that builds this partnership. This requires more discussion and a more concrete proposal when I have a better idea of its feasibility and the resources available to execute it. Through this framework, artists will also be able to

work with social workers and learn through them other more formal methods of engaging groups of vulnerable people.

One of the biggest ethical challenges I found with my art while engaging with public is ethical boundaries. I didn't know how I could create a safe space that protects my participants when they open up and share personal stories. In such instances of vulnerability, great care is needed to ensure the conversation or interaction is ended properly. By creating a project in which the two different groups, artists and social workers, can come together and exchange experiences, I'm sure artists without formal training in social work can learn from social workers how to draw boundaries and work better in social engagement.

Fié Neo is an interdisciplinary artist exploring socially engaging practices through wearable art, interactive art and film. As a STEP grantee, she travelled from London to Marseille for her project INSEP: An international network for socially engaged practitioners. Her travel story was first published on the ECF Labs at ecflabs.org in December 2018.

→

[STEP Travel Grants](#)
[ECF Labs](#)
[INSEP](#)



Cargo train converted
slide at La Friche
Marseille (FR), 2018

Opening the Door to European Collaborations

Sjoerd Bootsma, Leeuwarden European Capital of Culture 2018, in conversation with Philipp Dietachmair

Frisian music and festival manager Sjoerd Bootsma participated in *Tandem Community & Participation* in 2013. This European collaboration has opened many doors for Sjoerd, who has since become co-artistic leader of the Leeuwarden-Friesland European Capital of Culture 2018. The European Cultural Foundation's *Tandem* Programme Manager Philipp Dietachmair sat down with Sjoerd to discuss his *Tandem* journey from participant to co-designer of one of our new programmes: *Tandem Fryslân*.

Philipp Dietachmair What did it mean to you personally and for your regional music organisation – at the time of *Podium Asteriks* – to be part of a programme like *Tandem*?

Sjoerd Bootsma The typical *Tandem* journey of reflection, confidence-building and scaling up is

made possible by the fact that the programme is focused on process and not on results. There is the cooperation with your *Tandem* partner on one side, which is important because you grow on a personal level, and then there is the cooperation within the whole *Tandem* programme community. This is really helpful when it comes to your self-confidence – it really helps you broaden your perspective. It really is an enrichment of your practice.

PD How important is it that this happens on a European level? Would it be different if it happened only on regional levels?

SB It is important that it happens on an international level, for a number of reasons: it has more impact because you tend to know all your regional levels and players already, so that's not really broadening your perspective. The sharing notion

Tandem Fryslân –
Final Meeting
Leeuwarden (NL), 2018

and experiencing the fact that you are part of a much bigger European community that has the same values is truly important, and that helps you when you are working locally. You know you are backed by something!

PD *Now you're one of the organisers of Leeuwarden-Friesland European Capital of Culture 2018 – when did you start there, and what role did Tandem play in it? What lessons did you learn from Tandem that you have implemented in this role?*

SB I got involved in the European Capital of Culture in late 2011, so before my *Tandem* experience, but this was a very helpful and concrete way of involving yourself in a European movement. That's why *Tandem* was really useful. As part of the European Capital of Culture programme, we asked all organisations to step out of their comfort zone and into their communities, presenting ideas they hadn't worked with before, reaching people they had not reached before. *Tandem* was a lesson for me in that sense, showing me what was possible, and that such thinking will enrich your practice. So that's important.

I always had to convince people to work on that European dimension, because most people don't see it as a very useful thing: they know everyone locally, they know how to do their project and just go on with their way of working. In order to convince people of the importance of working

on a European level, you need to have experience and *Tandem* was key for me in that sense. Also: European collaborations don't always need to be big. You can work smaller and still be meaningful: just like *Tandem*. If you start out with a lot of small European collaborations, you will probably end up with a lot of bigger projects that work. That's my experience: we started with smaller projects and now we do a lot more.

PD *European Capital of Cultures come along with many different opportunities, i.e. also on an economic level, like developing tourism, investments in local infrastructure, next to the arts and culture scene as such. It's all considered a pretty wonderful way to present your city to many international visitors and important local stakeholders. But looking at the level of residents, citizens and local communities, how do you make sure you don't only do programmes for tourists?*

SB In our main programme we formulated five important factors that all projects should incorporate: empowerment, ecology, experience, entrepreneurship and the European dimension, which gave us a tool for measuring and addressing the importance of the European dimension. In our open programme we did not make this compulsory, but we suggested that it should be included. We worked with *Tandem* in a similar way: most projects coming from *Tandem Fryslân* are in our open programme, as grass-

roots initiatives. We offered it as an opportunity.

When it came to the European dimension, we hoped to achieve a working method that included European or international cooperation. We hoped that people would notice it is not as difficult as they might have thought it was and that it is a normal thing to do. Which allows you to include new communities in your project. We also had many more successes on European fundraising than the years before. I think Europe has become a factor in Friesland in the last few years.

I think it is important for Friesland to see itself as a European region, instead of just a province of the Netherlands. That's an important factor, because this is a different century. I hope that organisations might sooner look for European partnerships rather than looking for possibilities in Amsterdam, for instance, because I think that is more useful for them. I also hope that they have learned, either by doing it themselves or through the partnerships they made, that it is actually not that hard if you put in the effort.

In order to become a European Capital of Culture, you need to work together with many people, so a lot of people contributed to the programme and we got there together, which gives Europe a more positive vibe than it may have had before we started this whole process.

There is Europe, the institution, and Europe, the continent, including all the different communities: the narrative from Brussels and the narrative made by the communities across the continent.

People usually link the idea of Europe to spending holidays in Croatia and travelling with no borders, but they don't tie it to the idea of being neighbours with different communities on an entire continent.

PD *How do you believe the Cultural Capital event will influence cultural policies and future policies in general – for example in working across different sectors?*

SB What we want to achieve with our legacy is that in regional, provincial and local policies, culture is not just one paragraph, but that culture is the backbone of a policy, whether it is economic or social. At one point I realised that this European Cultural Capital is actually about democracy. A project like *King of the Meadows* – whose focus is highlighting the importance of cultural and biological diversity – is a good example. I realise that through culture, we have actually – on a couple of themes – succeeded in making coalitions that are economic, social,

cultural, and that they have been building up a new way of policy-making. That is one of the things we should be proud of. I hope that it stays like that.

You see the power of culture, the power of the arts is that you can touch someone in their heart and mind. Often democratic processes are more focused on the rational, the mind, but a movement only starts when you feel it first, and that's what those people of *King of the Meadows* achieved. They used culture to have a wider impact.

PD *Your own Tandem journey is quite exceptional, starting as a participant and becoming co-designer of one of our programmes. It is exactly the direction we want to follow, also in the future: you can be a programme participant and co-develop a new one with us at the same time. What thematic threads do you think should be at the heart of future Tandems?*

SB I think that the core aim of *Tandem* is giving local initiatives a European experience while also building their self-confidence. This will help them to gain weight also in the local community. But as you've been around for a little while now, your network has grown, and all your alumni have different needs, so you should also work on new goals. The question for me is: how do you become an active European community? *Tandem* is quite a practical network already, but how do you influence policies on the Brussels

level when it comes to European grass-roots and activist movements? I am curious how *Tandem* will go ahead with that, and I'd be very interested to find out! Based on our recent *Tandem Fryslân* experience I also thought about another idea: *Tandem* should organise its events in rural areas rather than cities. Even a *Tandem Rural* might be an idea that sounds quite appealing to me.

Sjoerd Bootsma is founder of Podium Asteriks and the Welcome to the Village Festival in Leeuwarden. He was co-artistic leader of Leeuwarden-Friesland European Capital of Culture 2018 and now works as artistic director of the LF 2028 legacy organisation. Sjoerd is a former participant of *Tandem Community & Participation* and has co-designed the *Tandem Fryslân* special programme edition which the European Cultural Foundation has realised during the 2018 European Capital of Culture year. This interview was conducted by Philipp Dietachmair during a *Tandem* community meeting in Praputnjak, Croatia. A longer version is available on tandemforculture.org.

Philipp Dietachmair is Programme Manager at the European Cultural Foundation.

→
[Tandem
Interview \(long version\)](#)



Tandem Fryslân –
Kick-off Meeting
Praputnjak (HR), 2018



Can Foundations Contribute to Social Cohesion in Europe?

Rien van Gendt

I want to explore with you how foundations can contribute to the European agenda of democracy, diversity and social cohesion. What is the unique role that foundations can play in this context? Do they actually play that role and what are the challenges they have to face?

But first two premises. I believe in Europe: European countries share so many common interests with respect to economy, climate, culture, environment and security; and above all, they share common values. I believe in Europe, despite the fact that the European project is challenged. More than ever, we realise that the forces of nationalism and

populism threaten a Europe that we have taken for granted. I am Vice President of the European Cultural Foundation and for years we felt that we could focus a large part of our resources on the relationship between Europe and its neighbours, whether in Eastern Europe, the Middle East or North Africa.

However, over the last few years we gradually realised that Europe is internally divided and fragmented, that the concept of Europe is under threat and that we should allocate more resources to the internal dynamics of Europe. Of course, we also realised that we cannot strengthen Europe, if we do not include other regions, but yet we started to put

more focus on the internal dynamics. In our case in the European Cultural Foundation we do this through culture. We see culture not primarily as something to celebrate but as an instrument to bring about social change.

My second premise is that civil society organisations, including philanthropic entities like foundations, can play an important role in setting the European agenda. Governments, both on the national and European level, have no monopoly in serving the public interest. There is an important role to be played by civil society. Although Europe is fortunately often seen by its citizens and by people living outside as a beacon of hope, there are worrying developments: sudden flows of refugees; rising populism and nationalism; increasing inequalities; illiberal democracies; religious conservatism; political fragmentation; the dilemma of security versus privacy and liberty; lack of political courage and, maybe related to this, a loss of trust in political institutions. If we want to build a Europe that is inclusive of different populations, a Europe that adheres to the values of liberal democracy, then social cohesion is of strategic importance. For that Europe to emerge, civil society organisations are an essential partner, including foundations.

Foundations are not a substitute for governments; governments in many ways are and remain important not only because of the size of the resources they have at their disposal

but also because they have adequate systems of public accountability that give them their legitimacy. Yet foundations can play a prominent role. This cannot only be explained by the retreat of government and by the distrust in politics and governments but also by the distinct role foundations can play in comparison to government. Foundations can play a strategic role because of the quality of their resources rather than the quantity. Also the fact that governments are locked up in siloed structures is a disadvantage. It makes it difficult for them to address issues of social cohesion, as this requires an interdisciplinary and a holistic approach. And that is exactly what foundations can offer.

Foundations are also in an ideal position to address sensitive challenges around social inclusion because of their independence and their long-term orientation; it allows them to go to the root causes of a problem; they can deconstruct xenophobia and antisemitism and root out prejudices.

Governments are increasingly confronted with political fragmentation. They are obliged to rely on the

cooperation of a growing number of political parties to create the majority needed for making formal decisions. Governments have to form complicated coalitions to reach even more complicated compromises. And when a complicated compromise is reached, they realise that nobody actually owns the compromise. Foundations can compensate for this and can take this opportunity to position themselves.

Foundations may lack an extensive form of democratic accountability, but they can turn that to their advantage and capitalise on their unique features of independence, taking risks and having a long-term horizon.

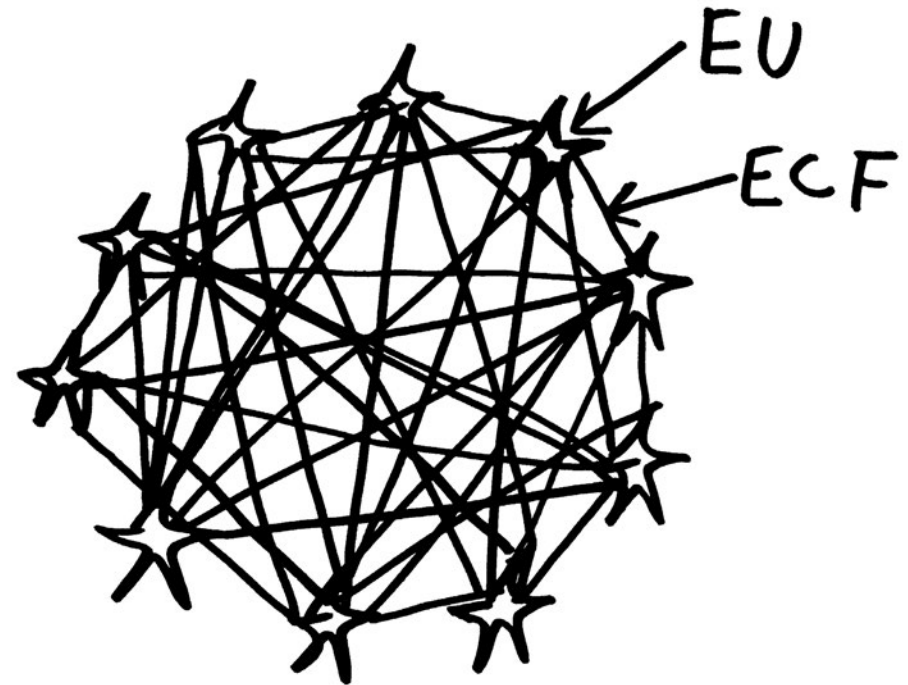
Forging partnerships is important for foundations to play a more important role. Partnerships can be created between foundations. The philanthropic initiative for democracy and solidarity in Europe, called Civitates, is a recent example. It was created by a consortium of 16 foundations under the umbrella of NEF – the Network of European Foundations – to uphold democratic values in Europe. In the US the recent creation of Co-impact, a global collaborative for systems change is yet another example.

Partnerships are also being made between foundations and other stakeholders, like the government and the corporate sector. The Major Alliance in the Netherlands was created three years ago to make a concerted effort to bring government, foundations and corporates together on complex issues that require such a multi-stakeholder approach.

A cohesive society needs a strong civil society and the foundation sector in Europe can play an important role here. There are approximately 150,000 public benefit foundations in Europe with estimated assets of €510 billion, spending around €60 billion every year. The sector is growing rapidly with hundreds of new foundations being created every year.

There is a large diversity of foundations: family foundations, corporate foundations, private foundations, lottery foundations and community foundations. More than 50 percent of the foundations in Europe were created after 1990. And another interesting feature is that more than 50 percent of these foundations were created not by bequests but by founders while still alive. This is giving rise to a more engaged form of philanthropy, called venture philanthropy.

If I look at these developments, based on my experience of many years in Europe, the US but also in regions like Latin America, Asia and Africa, I see some trends that are





relevant for this discussion. There is a wish on the side of many foundations to address global problems, a wish to look at the root causes of a problem, before activities are being initiated; there is a wish to look at effectiveness; a wish to not only donate but also invest in society.

Having said all of this, there are also challenges for the foundation sector; there are bottlenecks and roadblocks ahead.

First of all, foundations and civil society organisations, as well as governments, are being met with distrust from the citizens and the media: issues around salary levels cause irritation, inappropriate sexual behaviour damages organisations like Oxfam, Plan International and Save the Children. Endowed foundations also face distrust; an example is the Eleanor Helmsley Trust. It was created by Eleanor Helmsley in the US with a donation of around \$5 billion for dog welfare. All of this forces us in the foundation world to look at our legitimacy. We have to decide, with great integrity, what we define as the public good. We have to demonstrate that we, with our private money for the public good, have a distinct role to play, that there is an added value in operating a private foundation, that we are transparent and accountable.

A second challenge for the sector is that, although in absolute terms our resources are significant, in comparison to government

resources, they are minute. We never could substitute for governments and we never should.

The challenge is to lower expectations that foundations can step into the vacuum left by governments in retreat. Foundations can play a role that complements what governments can do.

Let me take the issue of refugees as an example. Where governments focus on issues of asylum procedures, housing, shelter and jobs (the hard/tangible issues), foundations tend to play an important role with respect to the soft topics, like social cohesion, the narrative, buddy systems, the process of guiding refugees to the labour market.

A third challenge is that foundations should be more self-critical, reconsider their own practices and improve upon their strategies and activities. They should, for instance, think more in terms of how to serve the needs of their grantees more effectively. They should have the finger on the pulse of society and anticipate upcoming problems instead of rigidly adhering to a mission that stems from the past. With respect to the donor-grantee relationship, foundations sometimes

behave like quasi government. Instead of using the advantages of private money (namely to take risks) to the full, there is a development in the direction of bureaucratic practices that jeopardises the essence of philanthropy. If we ask a small NGO in Haiti, requesting a grant after the earthquake, what its theory of change is, we demonstrate our alienation from the real world. A rigid application of KPIs and a wish to measure everything demonstrates another whim of fashion. Of course, it may be relevant to set targets and measure results, but let us not forget that philanthropy allows us to do things that cannot always be measured; that we can contribute to the intangible social capital in society.

The complexities of cross-border grantmaking in Europe can cause roadblocks for foundations to freely operate. And there are challenges of another nature: the shrinking or even closing space of civil society in fellow European countries. In recent years, we have seen how cumbersome it is for NGOs in China, India, Turkey or Russia to work freely and how difficult it is for foundations in Europe to support these NGOs.

Governments do not always want to be confronted with a critical third sector. Politicians often play into gut feelings and sentiments in their societies that thrive because people are afraid of the outside world. This becomes particularly worrying when it happens inside Europe, for example,

in Hungary and Poland. The governments in these countries may want to work on social cohesion but it is not based on diversity and other European values but rather on exclusion, national nostalgia and anti-European sentiments.

The complexities of cross-border grantmaking become especially acute when fellow European countries put restrictions on the funding of their civil society by outside funders and thereby close the space for their own civil society.

Our sector should show that it stands by its partners in countries where we observe a shrinking space for civil society. Promoting a level playing field for philanthropy and facilities for the freedom of foundations to do their international work is an important mission. But quid pro quo: it puts on us also the obligation to give a higher priority to our international work on social inclusion than we do at present.

We should also have the courage to address controversial issues. At present there are a limited number of foundations that serve the European agenda through their grantmaking

and social investments. I can imagine that the European Commission, when cooperating on the introduction of a better fiscal and legal framework for us, would want to see that the foundation sector is indeed interested in contributing to the European agenda and wants to work on a European level. Individual foundations should get from their founders, trustees or Boards more discretionary space for such new developments.

I have the impression that we should put more energy into becoming politically relevant in the eyes of the European institutions. For this we have to do two things: step up the international nature of our philanthropy and pay dedicated attention to communicating what we are doing. The European Commission came up with its new Multi-annual Financial Framework, which shows that partners are needed to breathe life into the European agenda. May 2019 sees elections for the European Parliament. This is the moment to show that we are a relevant partner that can play an important role in building social cohesion in Europe.

Rien van Gendt is Vice President of the European Cultural Foundation. This essay is a shortened version of a speech he made during the Humanity in Action International Conference, which took place in Strasbourg in July 2018.

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[Network of European Foundations](#)
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Philanthropy Needs Imagination

Vivian Paulissen

It is exciting and it is needed. Why not consider philanthropy as a lab in which we can learn from our mistakes and advance our work by working together on a profound level with partners and grantees? One community of practice in which we share a concern and learn how to do it better as we interact regularly. A true civic-philanthropic collaboration... Is it that difficult to imagine?

To begin with, we have to get rid of the paradigm of philanthropy as a culture of 'giving' that is equal to a gesture of altruism. This is a problematic stance. Selflessness is the concern for the welfare of others. To characterise philanthropic giving as the selfless return of capital to society for the welfare of others just feeds ongoing paternalism. It implies goodwill by the one who cares to give and a dependency on it for the one who needs the care; it unites them by an obligation in the sense that the one owes the other something. What it does not imply is any other reciprocity in the relationship beyond the giving and the receiving.

This donor-versus-recipient doctrine marks a strict boundary between philanthropic players on the one side and their grantees on the other side. It is an unhelpful perspective, held actually both by philanthropy as well as by the civil society actors it supports. If we continue to think along the divide between the ones with power because they have financial resources to give and the others who are merely receiving, we will not make any progress. We have to come up with a new scenario and narrative. We simply have to imagine a We.

A daring, genuine attempt to build a mutual philanthropic-civic collaboration model (or better even, ultimately a collaboration between philanthropy,



Idea Camp, Walk
with La Liminal
Madrid (ES), 2017

civil society and public institutions).

This model will face many challenges, for sure, but through it various types of resources should be acknowledged and shared with equal value attached to them. A model in which time, talent, knowledge and money are exchanged across the involved stakeholders of foundations and civil society actors/grantees in a non-dichotomist dynamic. Such a model should be based on more peer-to-peer interaction and should also embrace a peripheral focus rather than frontal one. Sure, this is a provocation, but we should at least try to imagine it together as foundations in a shared community of practice towards social change.

What would it take us to get there? It requires guts by the philanthropic community to recognise the limits of the current system of which it is a product itself. Foundations hold an inordinate amount of leverage in any grantmaker-grantee relationship. This imbalance forces many organisations that are funded, for example, to focus on projects rather than on processes, as they have more visible impact and measurement potential. Consequently, philanthropic foundations can narrate more easily stories of success that help them in their own accountability towards their boards and the public. Slow change-making processes are less 'sexy' for foundations that need to demonstrate how wisely they are spending their money. However, philanthropy could catalyse change much more effectively by shifting more resources to processes, organisational support and seeding experiments.

Building movements takes time and a lot of effort. Support for the building of strong connections between actors of different movements working on climate, social justice or culture is even more crucial for a deep structural change. If we as philanthropic foundations join forces, we can provide an overview of the various key agents and movements in the wider ecosystem and play a meaningful role in connecting them across silos and to public institutions in the policy-making arena.

As foundations, we acknowledge that the philanthropic universe has to be held accountable for its decisions and their impact and has to adopt the same standards of participation that it is asking of institutions, communities and its own grantees. We are committed to expanding access to the resources of philanthropy, be it grants, networks or outreach. At the same time we should acknowledge that our grants, networks and outreach are enhanced by a diverse, skilled and engaged community of activists.

Democracy needs imagination, as the Belgian author Peter Vermeersch has claimed. It does have imagination: democracy is a creative act that engages

people in a conversation beyond the ballot box. As a cultural foundation that supports democratic renewal in Europe fuelled by local citizen's movements, the European Cultural Foundation also has to reinvent our own institution so we can practice what we preach.

Over the past few years, the Foundation has been developing various programme pilots with grantees and partners that have been changing our own grant-making and operational mechanisms. This was partly successful and partly not, and that is exactly the point: trust doesn't come in a ready-made package. It's a long breath – it's quarrelling and fighting over small details that do matter and over big issues that need attention.

Working in a very intensive and complex networked way with hubs and their communities, the Idea Camps, the participatory grant-making, Research & Development grants instead of project grants... these all are attempts to work with grantees and other partners in a more direct and reciprocal relationship in which – apart from money – the European Cultural Foundation is also facilitating knowledge, time, convening opportunities and networking.

It is all one big learning lab: we don't have the final answers about the best way to do things. It is not as if we are simply peers and that the roles are interchangeable between our foundation and our grantees. We need to be alert at all times and be clear about our roles and our functions in this world that emerges between us. It is not easy to imagine this relationship that, obviously, still holds power imbalances, in a world that is still organised largely around who holds the purse strings.

But if democracy has imagination, then the same is also true for philanthropy. Let us be learning 'organisations' all together: funders together with activists, movements, change-makers, idea-makers.... We need to know each other's strengths and weaknesses to rely on developing a qualitative collaboration. The adagio that foundations should listen more to grantees and learn from them is not enough. Moreover, it would be a mistake if philanthropy thinks this is good because it would 'help' partners to do their best work.

Instead, we should claim it is good for funders as well as for grantees if we treat each other as equally important players in an ecosystem that is aware of the urgency of the need for systemic change.

The essence is to really do it together and to establish a new relationship. Yes, it does require a lot of guts, trial, error, trust and imagination from the 'philanthropic side' and from the 'grantee side' too. But as one community of practice, we can challenge public discourse and policy making to become a joint advocate for a different era.

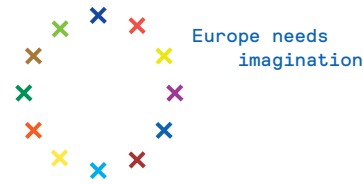
We can support seeds of change and the much-needed experiments if we only dare to take risks, be open and transparent, be creative and learn how to give and receive in multiple directions. Then we can seize the opportunity in a way that expands our notions of what is possible: we can imagine and create something new! It is exciting! And it is very necessary!

Vivian Paulissen is Programme Manager at the European Cultural Foundation. This essay is a shortened version of a text that was first featured in *Communities of Practice Towards Social Change: A Journey Through the Idea Camp (2014-2017)*, which the European Cultural Foundation published in 2018 together with Krytyka Polityczna.

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[Communities of Practice Towards Social Change
Idea Camp](#)



Idea Camp, Moving
Communities
Madrid (ES), 2017



Culture Meets Europe's Challenges

Filip Zieliński

Eurozine was invited to both report on and participate in the *European Cultural Challenge* in May 2018 in Amsterdam, a two-day advocacy retreat organised by the European Cultural Foundation, bringing together a hundred participants from 17 European countries, with the general aim to “re-think and build Europe as an open, inclusive and democratic space in which courageous citizens dare to imagine different futures.” A challenge, indeed.

The event was far from introspective: In fact, it did not at all limit its focus to the cultural field. Instead, it recognised that the challenges that Europe faces involve many aspects of life, including the economy, media, urban development, or how societies deal

with diversity, to name a few. Thus, the Challenge discussed the interconnectedness of culture and society and the relevance of culture for other ‘sectors’. Understandably, in two days, all of this could merely be outlined.

Diversity

One of the working groups discussed diversity in Europe, taking the European Union’s unofficial motto – *in varietate concordia*, united in diversity – as a starting point. This motto is a plea for pluralism. It claims that diversity and unity do not contradict each other: In Europe we have a rich diversity of languages, political views, memory cultures – and we can strive to accept, even embrace, these differences, and live, work, decide together, also on a trans-national,

European level. Nationalism, on the other hand, dreams up a homogeneity that is necessarily at odds with reality and makes diversity seem like a problem that demands a solution.

A participant said that ‘diversity’ is part of the ‘DNA’ of the European Union. But how far is the cultural sector really a role model when it comes to pluralism? Many cultural organisations recognise the importance of cultural diversity, but their actual practices will tell a somewhat different story, according to the introduction to the Dutch Cultural Diversity Code. The working group agreed that there is still work to be done, and that cultural organisations need to set a good example.

Creative Europe

Another main focus of the working group was to discuss current developments in cultural policy, both on national and EU level. The European Cultural Challenge in May 2018 coincided with the publication of the first draft of the EU budget for 2021-2027, including the budget for culture, realised first and foremost via the ‘Creative Europe’ programme. Thankfully, Culture Action Europe – a co-organiser of the Challenge – had been advocating for a substantial increase of the Creative Europe budget (much like is the case for national budgets, if you compare it to the overall budget, it’s a bit like two bowls of peanuts, instead of one). Later on, in March 2019,

the draft passed the European Parliament including a doubled budget, a strengthened Creative Europe programme and more funding for culture in other strands such as science or education programmes. But interinstitutional negotiations will continue only when the next EU government has formed – after the EU elections in May 2019.

When it comes to European cultural policy, it seems that culture is subject to several priorities that are not inherently ‘cultural’: Foreign relations with non-EU countries, economic (jobs) and social development.

The dominant narrative of culture as ‘creative industries’ makes a valid point but tends to pull culture towards commercial interests.

While it makes sense to argue for the value of culture by pointing to its inter-connectedness with other aspects of life, it would be a mistake to neglect, simultaneously, the value of culture as an important aspect of life in and for itself. The question, thus, is not only about the size of the budget for Creative Europe, but the narratives and priorities that determine which activities and organisations become eligible for funding.

I keep my fingers crossed for one particular new priority that the European Council added to its

EUROPEAN

proposal for Creative Europe already in May 2018, which reads: “(...) to promote cross cutting activities covering several sectors aiming at adjusting to the structural changes faced by the media sector, including enhancing a free, diverse, and pluralistic media environment, quality journalism and media literacy”.

Meeting challenges together

In 2019, ahead of the second *European Cultural Challenge*, many challenges need to be addressed, and the ‘information crisis’ is certainly one of them. Today, we see the effects of years of political and economic pressure on Europe’s media spheres.

In 2011, the historian Timothy Snyder wrote in the *New York Review of Books* that “We should have bailed out the newspapers back in 2008: it would have cost a tiny fraction of what we spent on bailing out the banks.” I would add independent media here, and otherwise couldn’t agree more.

If we want robust democracies, we need our newspapers, cultural journals, podcasts, public broadcasters, investigative journalism blogs and all sorts of cultural media, to be independent and strong.

Quality journalism, appreciation of critical thinking and a common European public sphere make the prospects of Europe going down the ‘Road to unfreedom’ (see Snyder’s recent book) much less likely.

When markets and politics fail, civil society has to step in. There are numerous efforts that create a European public sphere, both top-down and bottom-up. *Eurozine* is one of the latter, as it links up existing cultural media with each other and with European audiences. What started 35 years ago as an informal meeting of cultural journal editors became the basis for *Eurozine*, founded in 1998 as an online cultural journal and editorial network. The informal meetings have become annual conferences with over 100 participants. The online journal *Eurozine* has been publishing on European culture and politics for two decades. Many of the articles are contributed by *Eurozine* partner journals from all over Europe.

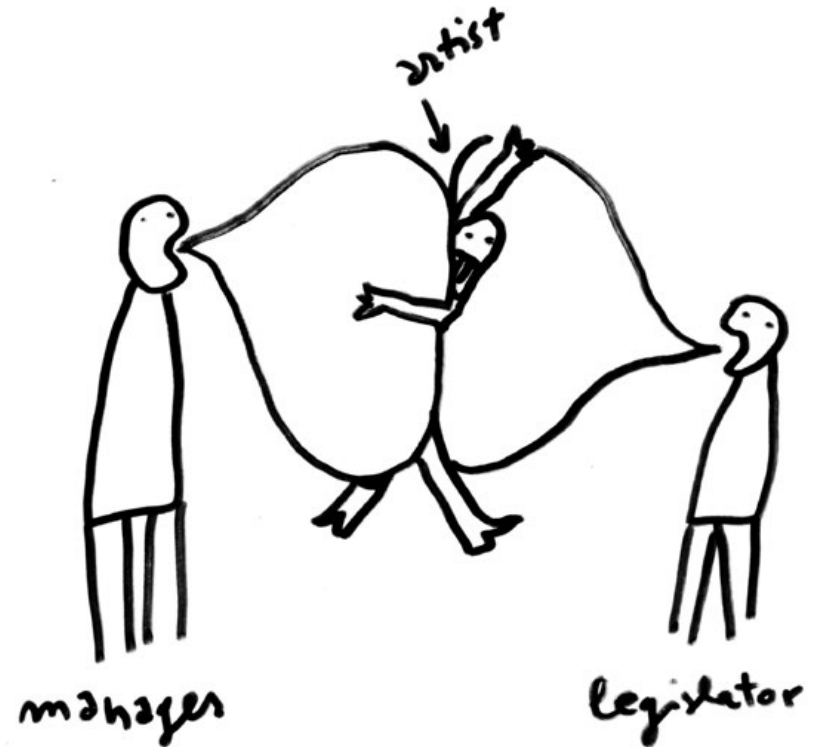
We are proud of the diversity of our network, of the content we publish and the people that make up *Eurozine*’s team and boards. And it all started with a meeting of colleagues.

The first *European Cultural Challenge* may not have found all the answers to all the challenges. But it showed that one of the strengths of the cultural field is the ability to collaborate and form alliances based on common

goals: It is prepared to work together and to ensure that the cultural sector is strong and independent enough to offer to all of us in Europe the means to understand, critically evaluate and also shape the developments and challenges of our times.

Filip Zieliński is Managing Director at *Eurozine* – a participant in the 2018 *European Cultural Challenge*. This was a two-day 'advocacy retreat' organised by the European Cultural Foundation, bringing together 100 participants from 17 European countries. The aim was to re-think and build Europe as an open, inclusive and democratic space in which courageous citizens dare to imagine different futures. This is an updated version of an article published on politicalcritique.org

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Igor Stokfiszewski during
the European Cultural Challenge
Amsterdam (NL), 2018

New Municipalism, New Culture, New Democracy

Igor Stokfiszewski

Municipalism + Culture = Democracy

Culture helps you build the world you want to see.
Democracy needs your imagination.

Today the forces of municipalism and culture are interdependent and merged to create a profound and sustainable shift in policy and politics and, most critically, in lived experience for the many and not the few in the journey towards a new democracy. The desire to have greater agency and creativity in our own lives, and the possibility of shaping the realities that surround us – not just accepting predetermined options – are vital impulses of our time. The loud and consistent demands for the establishment of a ‘real democracy’ resounded for many months on the squares and streets of cities in Europe and far beyond. This was driven by people expressing their belief that, after the global economic crisis of 2008, it is impossible to maintain the current political and economic regime. The toxic regime that itself caused the crisis in the first place resists all calls for change, yet cannot provide a meaningful life and sense of influence and imagination to shape the world we want.

The most crucial responses to this system failure have been in two areas. The first is the political expression of ‘new municipalism’: the institutional practice of city governance, in the spirit of respect for the right to the city and the commons, by grassroots political civic platforms. The second has been the flourishing of ‘new culture’: a set of practices and organisational solutions that follow the principles of participation, critical thinking, empowering others, creating community and ultimately transforming lived realities and possibilities.

New municipalism and new culture express the same fire of the era. They are founded on self-organisation, self-determination and self-governance as essential sparks of the new democracy.

As ever, this new fire has multiple competitors: deeply entrenched nationalism, populism and neoliberal dogmatism. These malign forces oppose the desire for a new democracy and strive for an accelerated authoritarianism. To counteract these forces, we must redouble our efforts to practice, understand and implement solutions for civic participation, critical thinking and the strengthening of community to help change realities in line with people's expectations and dreams. Many municipalist actors and cultural activists are experimenting to find new practices and narratives that challenge power and change realities within their own communities, however, the duplication of their efforts means that we also need to nurture closer and stronger local and transnational alliances and build collective intelligence and action. The flames of new municipalism and new culture leap together and we need to understand the relationship between these two phenomena to most fully respond to the call for a new democracy. This essay tries to lay the foundations for this understanding.

Municipalism and Culture: Interdependence

Let's start with two questions: firstly, what do cultural perceptions of reality, cultural practices and cultural studies bring to municipalism as a new institutional political activity? And secondly, how can municipalism positively influence the rise and flourishing of a new culture?

What distinguishes new municipalism is that it is the only institutional implementation of the new democracy available to us. There are ongoing experiments to establish national political parties and transnational social movements reflecting the need for a policy based on self-organisation, self-determination and self-governance, but only municipalism has the experience of actually being in power. Hence its unique character. To what extent can a new democratic policy be implemented? Where are the barriers that block its effective execution? We will find answers to these questions only in the experience of civic political platforms of governing cities or of operating in municipal authorities.

Municipalism needs culture because only social and political movements, which are also cultural movements, are capable of establishing a new reality. And, municipalism is threatened by impermanence – what if the movements lose elections? Only when politics constitutes new types of subjectivity, (re-)imagination, collective relations, communities that use a language that reflects their identity, through a combination of their codes and symbols, is it possible to undergo a lasting social transformation that is the driving force behind

a lasting political change. Municipalism conceiving of itself as a cultural movement is able to create and root a new democratic political culture – ways of acting, understanding and experiencing reality in all its dimensions – making a lasting transformation of the institutions of power in the spirit of a new democracy.

Why does culture need municipalism? Because the new approaches in culture emerged primarily outside of the institutions of power – in social movements, informal groups, civil society organisations and social economy entities. Like municipalism too there is therefore the threat of impermanence. The new culture needs public policies that will value and validate it, allow it to develop and, consequently, permanently influence the political and democratic culture. And today, municipalism is an essential, if not the only, context in which such policies can be understood, developed and implemented. The basic interdependence between municipalism and culture lies in the fact that municipalism can develop only strengthened by cultural transformation, which can only be established through a new cultural practice supported by municipalism.

Political Culture of Municipalism

Municipalism, strengthened by the cultural dimension, reveals its greatest potential for changing reality by forging a new political culture. This is a democratic culture founded on civic – and not on economic or market – values, drawing upon needs and ideas collectively generated by citizens themselves and practiced in the everyday, lived experience of what it is to be human. These values are focused on two core tenets in particular: the feminisation of politics and political ecology.

Feminisation, according to Laura Roth and Kate Shea Baird, means in the first place “changing the ways of doing politics”. “Feminisation aims to shatter masculine patterns that reward behaviours such as competition, urgency, hierarchy and homogeneity, which are less common in, or appealing to, women. Instead, a feminised politics seeks to emphasise the importance of the small, the relational, the everyday, challenging the artificial division between the personal and the political.” “Feminising politics,” concludes Laura Roth elsewhere, “means

- a) gender parity in all spaces, acts and roles;
- b) political programmes that fight against a patriarchal system reflected in institutional structures and public policies;
- c) changing the way we do politics: breaking the separation between the ‘public’ and the ‘private’, horizontalising decision-making, withdrawing from confrontational approaches and instead emphasising the common and relational, and embracing diversity as a natural element of politics instead of an anomaly.”

Feminisation also enhances the reproductive activities related to care, regeneration and solicitude for the common good, the exercise of which is a condition for sustaining life. Secondly, the ecological approach that characterises the political culture of municipalism has two dimensions. The first is care for the natural environment. This care is derived from attachment to the commons as a central category that differentiates the new democracy from the one oriented towards private property, personal gain and the exploitation of natural, material and non-material resources by the political and economic order prevailing before the economic crisis. High quality of the natural environment is a condition for high quality of human life.

The other dimension of the ecological approach goes back to the ecological imagination as the basis for shaping a common life. This imagination is associated with sensitivity to the renewal of the collective body, the understanding that social processes are organic processes and seeing the social system as an ecosystem of many interdependent actors or entities. Renewal of the collective body is dependent on valuing reproductive activities over material production alone. This organic approach to social transformation is a process that takes into account the realities of people participating in it and is sensitive to their contexts and their inclusion in the process itself. It is also able to adapt to the changing situation and the effects of the process – its impact on people and the environment. The ecological approach both analyses relationships between different entities, social groups and classes that coexist on symbiotic principles, whether antagonistic or parasitic, and recognises the value of diversity as ‘a natural element of politics instead of an anomaly’.

Both the feminisation of politics and the ecological approach are the foundations of the political culture of municipalism. They define a new approach to relations between institutions and their social context, to relations within political institutions themselves and to the development of public policies.

Municipalism and Public Policies

How does the political culture of municipalism determine the creation and implementation of urban civic and public policies? Following the path of feminisation and ecology, municipalism first asks what entities should be involved in their creation. The urban ecosystem in each of its contexts is a collection of people creating a given area of life, their social partners, citizens of the city and finally – the municipal authorities. The creation of public policies in the spirit of feminisation happens through a dialogue of all the entities. Municipalism works with and through a new urban

subjectivity – mediators, facilitators, moderators supporting the viability and effectiveness of social and political dialogue. These can be civic organisations, social movements or individuals able to skilfully carry out collective and creative processes. Finally, the political culture of municipalism has to look at the social, cultural, ecological and economic impact of public policies.

Organic thinking also sets a new standard for the implementation of public policies: it prototypes solutions based on an open source approach and evaluates the results, and most of all it continuously sustains citizens’ participation in the implementation of public policies, because the impact of these policies belong to the citizens.

Municipalism and Cultural Policies

The interdependence between culture and municipalism begins with the cultural dimensions of municipalist strategies, and leads on to the creation and consolidation of a new political culture forged in the institutional practices of municipalism, then eventually to the kinds of cultural policies proposed by the municipalist paradigm.

Municipalism understands culture as far broader than the traditional cultural institutions of municipal authorities. It sees culture as the result of the social connections of the city ecology. Cultural policies must therefore reflect the multiplicity of culture-creating actors and the diversity of their subjectivity, with particular emphasis on the validation of grassroots, civic forms of making culture. The foundation of the municipalist approach to culture is ‘cultural democracy’, but also includes the ‘democratisation’ of the existing culture. That is why it is so important to introduce innovative organisational, institutional and managerial solutions focused on participation and the democratisation of decision-making chains, the prototyping of organisational and institutional solutions and their evaluation, towards the decentralisation of culture.

The cultural policies of municipalism must work to enhance reproductive activities as the basis for cultural production. This means validating culture-creating activities that care for the common good and regeneration, and undermine the primacy of twentieth-century models of cultural economic production, extraction and commodification. Environmental responsibility must accompany the design, creation and implementation of policies for cultural production.

Municipalism and Culture: Tensions

The urban culture ecosystem is made up of entities that remain not only in a symbiotic relationship with each other, but also at times those in the antagonistic relationship. Culture is created in the public sector, the social sector,

the commercial sector consisting of cultural industries and creative industries, and can also be carried out in the sector of religious institutions. Not all of them remain in the alliance with each other. Sometimes they are almost exclusive. Laura Roth emphasises the existence of indelible ‘productive tensions’ within municipalism: between political institutions and social movements, between uninterrupted dialogue and the need to implement solutions, between the paradigm of participation and an endemic patriarchal culture, that is antithetical to participation and does not respect it.

‘Productive tensions’ exist and will always exist inside the urban culture ecosystem. Tension between the social and the commercial, the public and the religious sectors. And the tension between opening up culture to unrestricted citizen-driven collective action and participation and the treatment of cultural products as goods designed for market commodification. As well as the tension between social classes and their lifestyles.

But these tensions and choices can be fuel for critical thinking and the process of a new democracy. Generating and positively working with ‘productive tensions’ is perhaps a key element of the political culture that municipalism establishes. They maintain diversity as a natural element of politics with continuous participation, dialogue and collective action. Whether municipalism it is defined as a political or cultural movement, or as both, the most important things is to retain the fire of ‘the movement’.

Igor Stokfiszewski is a researcher, activist, journalist and artist. He’s a member of the Krytyka Polityczna organisation team and of the board of trustees of European Alternatives. He is a lecturer at the Institute for Advanced Study in Warsaw. Igor was a participant in the 2018 *European Cultural Challenge*. This was a two-day ‘advocacy retreat’ organised by the European Cultural Foundation, bringing together 100 participants from 17 European countries. The aim was to re-think and build Europe as an open, inclusive and democratic space in which courageous citizens dare to imagine different futures. This is a shortened version of an article first published on the website of the European Cultural Foundation.

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[Municipalism and the Feminization of Politics](#)
[Which municipalism? Let’s be choosy](#)
[European Cultural Challenge](#)
[Krytyka Polityczna](#)



**Filip Zieliński during the
European Cultural Challenge
Amsterdam (NL), 2018**

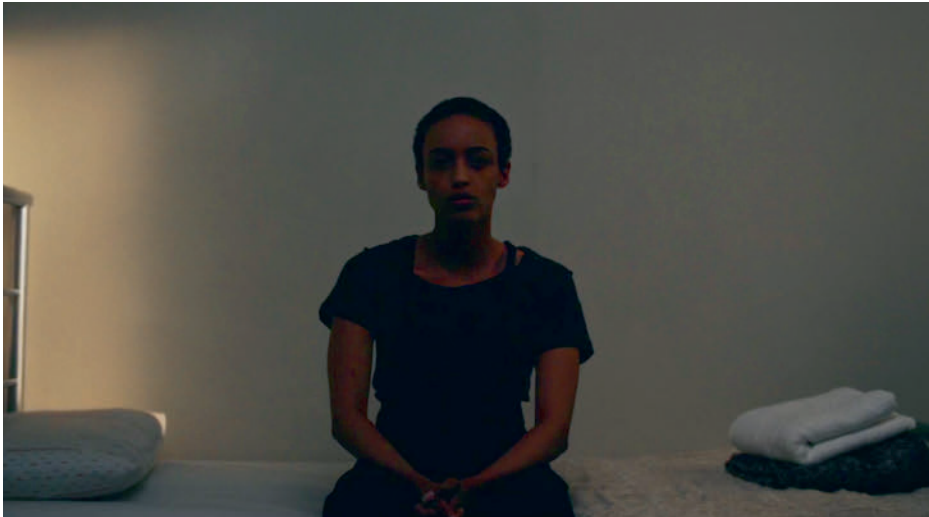
Humanising Stories: Migrants and the Media

Nesrine Malik

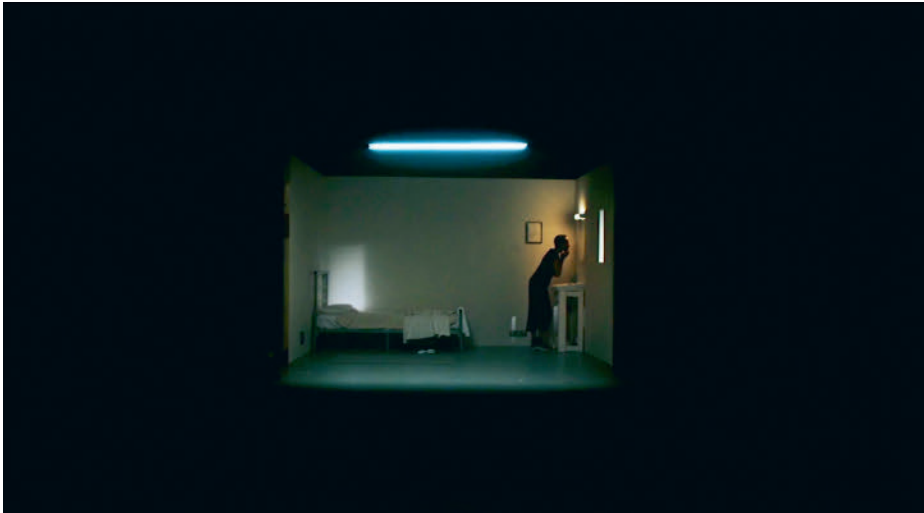
'Humanising' is a tricky business. We are always told that migrants need to be 'humanised' if they are to be accepted, if an effective counter narrative to the populist one is to be written. And so there is now a cottage industry of humanisation, a whole sub-genre of reporting and factual entertainment starring the human migrant.

In the mainstream media there are documentaries from the migrant trail by sea and land, and Hollywood adapted scripts, by Lena Dunham no less, about refugee stories. On social media there are curated threads, life-affirming stories, short videos cut to go viral about how the story of this one migrant woman will totally renew your faith in mankind. But the message is uniform. There are broadly two things migrants are allowed to be: positive success stories, or objects of pornified pity. They are either drowning children or cheeky entrepreneurs; they are either camp dwellers or restaurateurs, cutting a ribbon on their third site. They are either utterly dispossessed, or Nobel prize winners.

This is caricature. What they rarely are in these humanising stories is complicated, fractured and profoundly displaced. Their stories are told with a backdrop of an evacuating devastation. Think of the collage of images that accompanies a migrant story. There are buildings collapsed into rubble, parents mourning dead children, starved hollow faces, queues, always queues, in camps, at borders, at processing centres. Once they arrive at a safe harbour, they are invisible unless they somehow distinguish themselves, either by reward for their suffering en route, or riches for their toil once landed. Migrant stories are told like parables, with endings that tie up neatly, reaffirming our faith



Calling Home
Jade Jackman (UK), 2017



Calling Home
Jade Jackman (UK), 2017

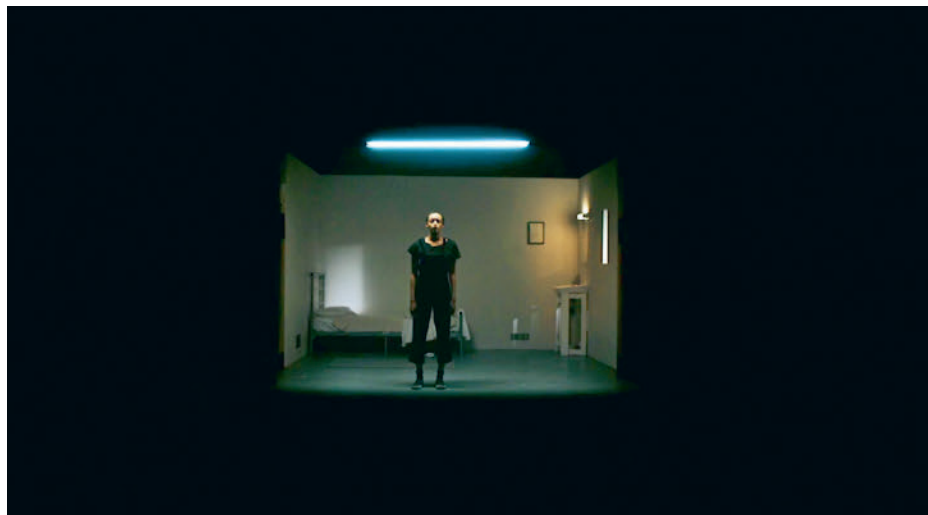
in mankind, or sounding a warning about what mankind is capable of.

These are one-dimensional images, told flat, heavily edited and primarily recounted from the host's perspective. That is the heart of this failure of humanisation, which it is told from the host's perspective. It is spun to fit into a larger fabric, stitched in neatly, blending into the host society's values, agendas and even storytelling techniques. There is something grotesque about it sometimes, the sight of a migrant performing awkwardly to cameras, uncomfortable with the scrutiny but aware that it might bring help or relief, aware that they must concentrate their story to small resonant chunks. And when they are happy, they reflect the host society back to itself.

European media in particular is fixated on the binaries. The migrant is either a threat, collectively nounced as a 'swarm', or a benefit to the country. The latter is mostly in reaction to the former. It is understandable that, in order to counter the ambient xenophobia in the right-wing media, the migrant must be cast as exceptional, hardworking, tax-paying, a net good to the economy. There is even a sort of superhero migrant story favoured by some in the media: the French spiderman who scaled a tall building in a single bound; the British Asian doctor who helped victims of the Manchester attack through the night, only to be subjected to racial abuse the next day returning from his shift. I myself have fallen in the trap, writing in haste to defend and demonstrate the value of the migrant to the host country, but realised that in doing so, I had validated the very premise that I was trying to refute – that a life had to be justified.

In London, there is a Syrian man who owns a falafel stand. He chants selling his wares as he makes little falafel balls so quickly his fingers blur. "Falafel, falafel, come get your falafel, Syrian, vegan and gluten free – Tommy Robinson's best restaurant, welcome, welcome." A woman films him and laughs, then posts it on social media. It turns out the man is a BAFTA winner, for a documentary about his precarious trip to the UK. He is described by the *Radio Times* as

"today, every inch the modern Londoner. Leather bomber jacket, designer jeans and on-trend partially laced boots. Yet little more than two years ago, fleeing from Syria where he'd been imprisoned by President Assad's brutal regime, Hassan was in an overcrowded dinghy between Turkey and Greece fearing for his life as waves threatened to overwhelm the boat and tip him and 68 other desperate refugees into the sea. They were rescued by Turkish coastguards and he was able to complete the crossing the following day."



Calling Home
Jade Jackman (UK), 2017

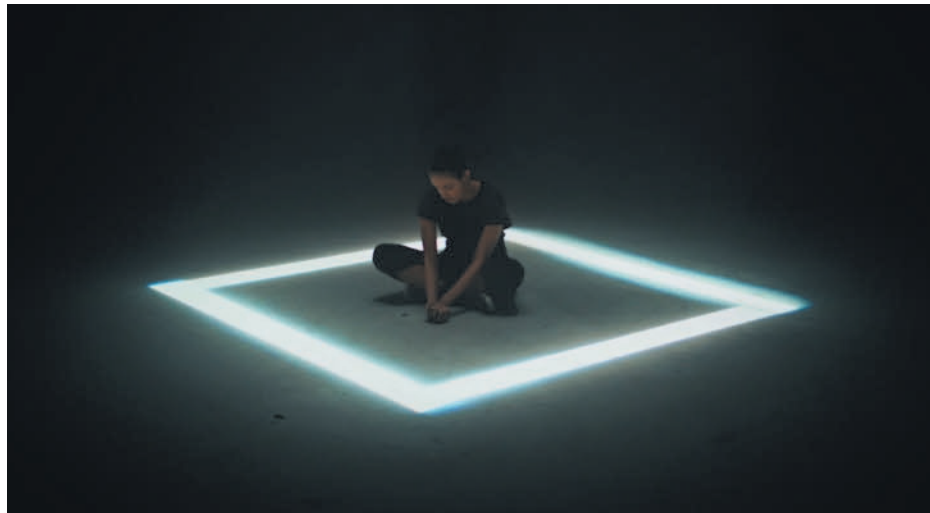
Here was a perfect sweet spot migrant protagonist, both successful and integrated, and a survivor of a treacherous journey.

But what of those not “every inch the modern Londoner”? Those whose journeys did not take them over the seas and frozen roads of Europe, but the banal and expensive bureaucracy of moving to a new country, the disruption of leaving a home from which you thought you would never move. Those whose new lives remain strange and unreal, who are reduced, in almost every way, as they try to learn a whole new world and language and way of being in no time at all. What of the ways every single day wounds them?

New lives are not made organically, they are fashioned through the violence of small unfamiliarities. It is only because the migrant is ‘other’, that they are depicted in ways that highlight the route that brought them to a place, rather than the route once they get to a place. But intuitively, to make migrants feel welcome, or to incorporate them into the casual normality of life, it makes more sense to just show, rather than tell. I would watch a whole documentary about the tyranny of electronic checkout tills, the navigation of the recycling bins and rubbish collection days, the bewilderment of the train system, the random moments of melancholy that pepper the life of a migrant, standing rain soaked in clothes not yet optimised, trying to figure out their way, to collect little pieces of Western city bark and straw, to nest in a hostile unfamiliar environment.

In the world, nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes, as Benjamin Franklin wrote. But there is another certainty. People will move. They will move for necessity, for opportunity, for love, and on a whim. They will move between countries and within countries. Our very DNA is a product of the movement of people, mapped across races and continents. It is not only the most human story, it is the human story. Its essentialising, both positive and negative into an exceptional phenomenon, is really a sort of cultural narcissism. It is also a fallout of the utter monopoly of the media by a certain reductive ideology and by a certain demographic, that which sees the story of a migrant and sells it to Lena Dunham. And it is a flattening that has accelerated because there is an inversely proportional relationship between the expansion of the entertainment complex and nuance.

In the 1980s, the making of the British film *My Beautiful Launderette* from a screenplay by Hanif Kureishi seemed like a seminal moment, a work that finally told a story of migrants and their children with all its intensity and indignities, featuring thwarted parents, gay children and fascist friends. But in fact the opposite happened. It took another 30 years for another film to be made, Sathnam Sanghera’s *The Boy With the Topknot*, which focused on mental



Calling Home
Jade Jackman (UK), 2017

health and cultural dislocation, for there to come another moment when a migrant experience could be told with nuance. Filmmakers and authors in the UK frequently complain that publishing houses and commissioning editors reject their pitches on the basis that they ‘already’ have a Muslim, black, or immigrant work in production, because there is clearly only one story to be told at a time.

The contrast with media organisations or independent documentary makers not based in large Western European or American cities and studios is illustrative. One of the most powerful accounts of the Syrian refugee crisis was that of a 90-year-old couple, married for 65 years, who told their story as they joked, reminisced and wiped tears in their camp tent. It was made by a Turkish channel, TRT World, and managed in a few short minutes to encapsulate a lifetime of love, marriage, family, loss and death.

There is no way forward other than handing the tools back to those from migrant backgrounds to do what they want with them. The narrative cannot be curated because the bases are loaded with expectation of a certain product – one which ends up inadvertently reifying all the dehumanising stereotypes about migrants that it wishes to avoid.

Nesrine Malik is a columnist and feature writer for the *Guardian*. This column is a preview of a new book that is due to be published in June 2019: *Lost in Media: Migrant Perspectives and the Public Sphere*, edited by Ismail Einashe and Thomas Roueché and published by Valiz in cooperation with the European Cultural Foundation. As a reflection on and continuation of the *Displaced in Media* programme, the book brings together critical responses to the representations of migrants in the media in Europe through nine essays written by prominent writers, artists and journalists.

→

[Lost in Media](#)
[Displaced in Media programme](#)



Migrant Voices on Radio Študent Ljubljana

Mirna Berberović, Radio Študent Ljubljana,
in conversation with Friso Wiersum

Friso Wiersum *What is the Migrant Voices project about?*

Mirna Berberović At Radio Študent Ljubljana we believe that being an actor in media means having the power to be seen or heard, the power to be visible. That is why it is important for media to reflect the (cultural, ethnic, political, gender...) plurality that can be found in the actual society we live in.

Since refugees today represent an important but also vulnerable and silenced part of our society, they should have an opportunity to represent themselves in media instead of being represented by others. That is why we decided to establish a refugee broadcast hosted by refugees and asylum seekers at our radio station. Having their own radio show enables the refugees in Slovenia to be creative, express their opinions, present their cultures, tell their personal stories, explain the situations

in their home countries and so on. For us the importance of this action lies in challenging the dominant representations of refugees in the mass media, which are mostly characterised by homogenisation, generalisation, victimisation or spreading fear.

FW *How did your participation in the European Cultural Foundation's Idea Camp help you transform your idea into an effective project?*

MB Idea Camp mostly provoked us to think about target groups, especially the refugee target groups. It helped us to re-think our approach in the personal interaction with refugees when reaching to the potential hosts of the show. It also helped us to think outside of the box regarding the reception of the broadcast, especially regarding the problem of preaching to the choir, which is something that we kept in mind during the whole project.

FW *What difficulties did you face in implementing your project? What do you see as the main obstacles?*

MB In the beginning of our project we had several challenges. The first one was finding candidates for the pilot trainings. After we presented our project idea to many different groups of refugees, we got some of them interested in the opportunity to host a radio show. However, the refugees and asylum seekers are in difficult existential situations and their situations are constantly changing, which made it hard for us to motivate them and especially maintain their interest in visiting the radio trainings.

Conceptualisation of the broadcast presented another challenge since there were a lot of differences between the trainees: in their education, interests, age, status, country of origin. Soon we learned that the cultural approach to the show would not be adequate in this case. However, the trainees shared a common experience of being a refugee, going through the asylum process and facing similar challenges in their host country – Slovenia. They showed mutual interest in the political aspects of migration, asylum laws, the socio-political situation of refugees in Slovenia and especially the integration procedures in their host country. It was also interesting how their focus regarding the listeners turned out to be different than we expected. They have a great interest in informing other refugees and asylum seekers

on certain challenges they might face while staying in Slovenia and they aim to provide them with some useful information. We also learned that the people staying at the asylum home gathered together to listen to the show when it was aired, which means that the show reaches its target group. This is good to hear.

FW *How do you see the further development of your idea in the future?*

MB For the future we are hoping for an international breakthrough. We have already established some connections with the hosts of migrant radio broadcast in other European countries and we are discussing the possibilities of programme exchange – for example, with Refugee Radio from Brighton, England and Migration Heute from Oldenburg, Germany. Also we might benefit from some international media attention for Slovenia because Melania Trump was born here.

More importantly, our content can travel internationally. Our journalist Ahmed Shihab Hammood carried out an interview with our Prime Minister Miro Cerar. The English interview got many shares on social media, mostly on Twitter, and provoked diverse reactions, mostly positive, others xenophobic.

We see another possible development is including more refugee and migrant women in the production of the broadcast. At the moment there is one woman out of four producers of the show, but others have already



Live broadcasts for refugees
Radio Študent Ljubljana, (SI), 2018

shown interest in radio production. One of the women will join the group as soon as she finishes her training. We think it is very important for refugee women to become more visible, since in the mainstream media they are usually forgotten or portrayed in passive situations. More women hosting a migrant radio broadcast could help to challenge this perception.

Mirna Berberović has been working as a journalist at Radio Študent Ljubljana in Slovenia as well as writing columns and creating radio shows on topics related to the questions of gender, film and culture. Currently she is working as the Head of the Project Office at Radio Študent,

where she is looking for ways to include migrants in Slovenian society. Their project *Migrant Voices* is one of the European Cultural Foundation's R&D grantees. They offer refugees a space on the airwaves and host live broadcasts on Radio Študent Ljubljana. This interview was conducted by Friso Wiersum and first published on the European Cultural Foundation website in January 2018.

Friso Wiersum is Project Coordinator Communications at the European Cultural Foundation.

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[Radio Študent Ljubljana](#)
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Breaking Up is Never Easy

Isabelle Schwarz

The Brexit referendum in June 2016 – in which a 51.9% majority of UK voters opted to leave the European Union – was a huge blow to Europe, and among others, a manifestation of mounting frustrations and anxieties among Member States and European citizens regarding the workings of the EU and prospects of further integration.

Three years later governments and citizens are tired of ‘The great Brexit kabuki’ in which protagonists, like in the ancient Japanese theatre art, employ masks, make-up and illusions (see Andrew Moravcsik, *Financial Times*, 8 April 2016. Brexit is ‘a masterclass in political theatre’, but the context is grave and the horizon undefined. Urgent responses are needed to bridge the widening

gap between the UK and the EU, including powerful cultural responses.

In the negotiations of a deal fixing the conditions of the separation, fears are exploited in a manipulative way and political party manoeuvres come into play. The state of uncertainty resonates in fierce debates on unemployment, migration, radicalisation, not enough or too liberal Europe, matched with issues of sovereignty and subsidiarity. But the fact is that the UK relies on the EU to secure and stabilise trade, investment, travel, national security and political values. Globalisation cannot be managed by EU members alone, but it can be co-shaped between partners within the Union.

Membership of the EU has long been a topic of debate in the UK. It encapsulates the drive of individual Member States to secure their national interests and aspirations within the Union rather than to consider themselves contributing to a bigger picture of a better Europe. In the case of Britain, the vote on its membership promised to end a lengthy and unsettling debate but instead it has ushered in greater divisions and more polarization. Nobody knows for certain of the time-span and the full implications of the Brexit process but whatever the final result will be, an orderly withdrawal on 31 October 2019, based on an agreement, a crash out with no deal, or further extensions and negotiations, it will have profoundly impacted the UK, EU and their global partnerships.

Repercussions are being felt on all levels. On a global and EU level, the image of a ‘united Europe based on common values and principles’, and the credibility of the EU as a reliable political and economic partner for international players has been damaged. In this sense, Brexit is a victory for the Trumps and Putins of this world. It has set in motion an unprecedented process with multi-layered spill-over effects resulting in an EU with less influence globally. The EU is better off with the UK, also on global stage.

On a Member State level, at a time when many national egoisms prevail

and populism is on the rise, some EU governments use the state of uncertainty to attack the Union from within and revisit the value of the EU and of their membership. Some might ask for special treatments that will at the best ‘only’ slow down EU internal reforms, and at the ‘worst’ lead to further fragmentation and risk of disintegration impacting those countries that stay committed to the EU politically, economically, socially and culturally.

On a regional level, the outcomes of the Brexit referendum have led to significant political moves in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. With a majority of Scottish voters having chosen to stay in the EU, the prospect of Brexit has resulted in a call for another Scottish independence referendum that challenges UK integration. The capital issue of a frictionless Irish border and ‘backstop’ adds another layer of complexity to the political impasse that threaten to undermine future cohesion.

On an individual level, according to the Bank of England (see *The Guardian*, 14 Feb 2019), the cost of Brexit to the British economy is running at £40 billion a year, or about £800 million a week of lost income. For individual households, Brexit represents about £900 each in lost income and affects the economic and social rights of millions of UK citizens, in the UK and outside the UK. It is

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also projected to affect the security level of people.

Britain's bargaining position with its 27 partners is weak because it is much more dependent on the EU for exports and investment than vice versa. As the Swiss and Norwegian know very well, one certain outcome of the negotiations – if it ends with the UK exiting the EU, with or without a deal - is that Britain will have to follow EU rules but will not be sitting at the EU table to shape and decide on these rules.

So, what can be done to overcome the Brexit impasse and counterweigh the negative effects by positive action? What can public and private actors do to maintain and even strengthen the UK-EU relationship? What can culture do? Europe has always been more than coal and steel, free trade and one currency. Europe is about people. People are about culture. Culture shapes our identities. The EU can only thrive if it puts culture at the heart of the project, and recognizes culture central to its identity-building process. This means positioning culture transversally, across policy fields, and significantly invest in culture, mobility and exchanges involving citizens from all walks of life, and bridging different political traditions and aspirations.

Culture is essential in the creation of emotional bonds to Europe. It is this conviction and fundamental

understanding of what drives individuals to connect, engage and belong that motivated Robert Schuman, Denis de Rougemont and Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands to create the European Cultural Foundation in 1954. This vision of Europe that is more than an economic association of nation states, but a union of people and cultures is what drives our work still today. On the eve of its 65th anniversary (October 2019), the European Cultural Foundation remains committed as ever to invest in cultural bridges that transcend geopolitical divides. We must not let the channel become a wall.

Culture, ideas, emotions inspire people beyond political borders. We must keep this free flow of creative experience, cultural exchange and European cooperation between the EU and the UK.

This is why we partnered with the British Council and BOZAR in the expert workshop Moving Beyond Brexit: Uniting the Cultural and Creative Sectors (24 September 2018, Brussels) assessing the potential impact of Brexit on the cultural and creative sectors on both sides of the Channel. The workshop addressed quickly emerging

challenges affecting cultural work, such as the cancellation of the running bid process for UK cities to become European Capital of Culture in 2023, and elaborated policy recommendations concerning legal issues, mobility, funding and partnerships pertaining to the EU-UK cultural relationship.

It is about time to follow-up with concrete measures and projects, create synergies, pool resources. The European Cultural Foundation is committed to put even more efforts into safeguarding existing ties and generating new UK-EU connections through cultural exchange and creative encounters. With partners we will launch a 'Greater Together' initiative offering British and continental Europeans an array of new possibilities for meaningful, personal, cultural experiences. Culture as an antidote to Brexit forging a European sentiment and building Europe together.

The EU is not perfect but a unique project worth fighting for. We all agree it needs reforms but attacking it from within, as Brexiters and others keep doing it, puts it at risk and harms all of us, now and in future. EU membership is about values and principles but equally about hard-core pragmatism and interests. Brexit does not offer a return to the great empire but is a retreat to a castle of illusions.

My hope is that at the end, we will stay together! Even if the UK remains 'un cas à part' in the European family, we are "greater together", and certainly more powerful and cool.

Isabelle Schwarz is Head of Public Policy at the European Cultural Foundation. This essay is an updated version of a speech on the essential role of culture in the Brexit debate that Isabelle delivered at a debate on *Brexit: to stay or to go, is that the question?*, organised by the European Movement in the Netherlands and the Netherlands Society for international Affairs in The Hague. In September 2018, the European Cultural Foundation – together with the Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels (BOZAR) and the British Council – organised the expert workshop *Moving Beyond Brexit: Uniting Cultural and Creative Sectors*.

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[Moving Beyond Brexit](#)

TOGETHER TO GET THERE



Who is We?

An exchange with Bas Mesters by Friso Wiersum

In 2017, the angry citizen was supposed to topple the political establishment at the elections in the Netherlands, France, the UK and Germany. Europe was supposed to erupt. It hasn't happened yet. Dutch journalist Bas Mesters set out to investigate and found the seeds of a 'revolution of fraternity'. In his series of essays for the Dutch weekly *De Groene* ('*Wat bindt Europe*'), Mesters travelled to France, the UK, Germany, Italy and Poland and is due to visit more countries in future. Mesters talks to changemakers who not only dare dream of new democracies but live them.

He discusses with thinkers and policymakers and discovers an unsung revolution of fraternity happening across the continent. We discussed his project with him and interweave our interview with excerpts from his essays.

Friso Wiersum *Bas, tell us what got you started on this project?*

Bas Mesters Newspaper commentaries along the lines of: Europe is a volcano. Overheated poisonous streams of lava are boiling beneath the surface; 2017 would become the year of the eruption of fragmentation. Books with titles such as *The End of Europe* or *After Europe* cast their shadows ahead. Following Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, the if-then-logic of the media predicted in January that Geert Wilders would destabilise the Netherlands, Marine Le Pen would make gains in France and Frauke Petry would gain hold in Germany.

Europe would collapse under the pressure of immigration, globalisation, digitisation, the hiatus between world citizens and locals, between immigrants and natives, between young and old, city folk and provincials,

knowledge workers and makers, state and people, elite and mass. At the time, I was wondering: what if the volcano doesn't erupt? Why wouldn't that happen? In order to prepare for this unlikely scenario portrayed by the media, I decided to seek out the geysers, the breathing vents of the volcano. Places where the pressure may be alleviated and where perhaps fertile grounds might emerge.

FW *What do those fertile grounds look like?*

BM Contrary to doom-mongers, I did not believe the two widely felt frustrations – a growing inequality and a sense of not being recognised – would only become public at the ballot boxes. People want to act, need to do things together, want to feel close to one another. All over Europe we have seen new bonds emerge between self-organising citizens. It was during my visit to Paris that I found out what I wanted to explore. I met community organiser Hadama Traoré and philosopher Mathieu Niango, who are both collaborating in one of those bonds.

Following the lines of thought of the French Revolution with Rosanvallon one could say that the equality revolution of the nineteenth century, that ended up bringing about the welfare-state, was followed by a liberty revolution in the West. The liberty revolution, which for all intents and purposes began with the invasion of Normandy by the allied troops,

gave us the freedom to think for ourselves and be heard without the fear of oppression and violence. That newly found liberty instigated experiments, fantasy, creation, flower power, a lust for travel, the fall of the Wall, an urge to discover, a development fever. Starting in the eighties, the market-driven liberty revolution culminated in hyper-capitalism, speculation, bubbles and the financial crash of 2008, and it will end up in the impending climate stroke if we don't do something about it.

All of this has caused a new crisis of equality. Equality will have to be restored once again. However, now that individualisation and privatisation are a fact, and the market is controlling the flow of capital like never before, the state is virtually incapable of organising it. The citizen, the community needs to be involved, says Pierre Rosanvallon. This isn't necessarily about immediate realisation of economic equality, but rather what he calls realising a new relationship of equality, enabling groups to rekindle their discussion. A brotherhood relationship, as Hadama had called it. Perhaps a revolution of fraternity? (Excerpt from *The song of the kolibri*)

FW *Doesn't 'a revolution of fraternity' ring alarm bells?*

BM Yes, there are at least two dangerous sides to the notion of fraternity. It is gendered. And it easily

evolves into an excluding principle, into what I call the 'brown-shirt brotherhoods'. I like to oppose these with what I call the 'rainbow coalitions'. Unfortunately the first ones dominate headlines, whereas the latter are building our future, far away from media attention. The goal of my European travels has been to shed some light on these positive forces.

I met people who were advancing brotherhood, although they often preferred not to call it by that name. Such as Kazim Erdogan, a psychologist nicknamed 'the Sultan of Neukölln' who for years has been helping Turkish fathers connect with each other and with German society. He preferred to use the term 'good and honest communication'. I suddenly realised that the word 'communication' is derived from commune: communality. (Excerpt from *We are way ahead of the city*)

Maria tries to connect them by taking action. It costs her and her daughter and her daughter's girlfriend a lot of energy, and they have to survive on a few hundred euro a month from summer jobs. Yet they want nothing more than to collect books, give them away, and talk about them.

"It gives lonely people an identity and a sense of belonging," says daughter Weronika. Maria's library is a focus of resistance in this Warsaw district, building

togetherness regardless of colour and origin. Poland has been a much less friendly place since Law and Justice took over. The party deliberately creates conflicts, Maria says. "It polarises people against Europe, against foreigners." It's all about divide and conquer, and turning a blind eye when people do things in public that they'd never have dared before, like declaring that gay people should be sent to the gas chambers.

"The new government promises you a star in the sky. And if you don't get it they say sorry, we couldn't give it to you, someone stole the ladder." (Excerpt from *The dream is dead*)

FW Bas tells me he encounters examples of this instrumental polarisation time and again. Many of the revolutionaries of fraternity address this polarisation. Yet, lessons in political framing have taught us that deframing political messages doesn't work if you name the frame. On the contrary, people will remember the frame even better. To change the story, one needs to redirect attention. To do a great job in storytelling. As artists can do.

You are modern society's garbage, and are treated as such. Nobody wants you anymore. Let's build a rocket together and go to the moon. We'll make a nice game of it and film it." He called it Space Metropoliz. His idea is that there are more and more 'disposable lives', as

the philosopher Zygmunt Bauman described them. Migrants, Roma, the unemployed were all rejects. “So instead of awaiting their fate in the garbage dump, I proposed that we go to the moon together.
(Excerpt from *Hell is loneliness*)

FW Can the revolution of fraternity teach us more than reframing current politics?

BM It teaches us how to deal with limits, personal as much as shared ones. To act together one needs to know the limits of the partner. It teaches us modesty in the face of our personal ambitions. And that could be healthy in times when we are told everything is possible. We need to learn dealing with things not becoming true in order to make changes.

“We live in an era of transition from certainties to uncertainties,” says Italian Christian Iaione over lunch. “The great theories and ideas that believe in the market, and that the state sees as the organising principle, no longer hold as much sway as they used to.”

Iaione is investigating how the commons, which in the past centuries were highly valued, particularly by fishermen at sea and farmers in the countryside, can also be used in the big city. How should local government deal with these bottom-up forms of fraternity, and what makes such a project succeed or fail?

What Iaione does in Centocelle is to take students from an elite university to a poor neighbourhood to serve the needs of that community, not in pursuit of an ideology or to help people, but simply to work together.

“It’s not about participation or talking, it’s about doing things. We’re interested in creating work at the end of the trajectory, an economic reality, joint ventures that can offer a counterforce to the market and the government and increase the economic diversity of the city.”
(Excerpt from *Hell is loneliness*)

FW This ‘doing things’ also characterises Bas Mesters himself. What started as an idea when reading newspapers in early 2017 evolved into this series of essays in a Dutch weekly, but also grew into a series of public events in The Hague. And the series is not finished yet. Was he surprised at the width and depth of the revolution of fraternity?

BM Yes, I never thought this series would last so long. So many people are active in new established networks, as they want to feel ownership over their societies again. They want to live, act, work together. The stubbornness that drives many of these people is the same stubbornness that got me into journalism. The stubbornness to not accept the world as others tell it to be.

For Sztarbowski and Łysak, the theatre is a laboratory for the development of alternatives. Last year, they wrote the words Freedom, Equality, and Imagination on the front of the theatre. “To us, fraternity above all means imagination. Imagining together how things can be improved.”

And the key word in this respect is not strength or power, but care and compassion. “I think the new revolution is one for women in particular. The twenty-first century will be the era of sisterhood.”
(Excerpt from *The dream is dead*)

Bas Mesters is a journalist and Director of the Expertise Center for Journalism at the University of Amsterdam. He is also Programme Maker at EMMA – research and communication. This exchange was first published on the European Cultural Foundation website in December 2018.

Friso Wiersum is Project Coordinator Communications at the European Cultural Foundation.

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[Wat bindt Europa?](#)

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