

– Call for Papers –

Puzzling Europe

Literary, Political and Linguistic Perspectives on a Fragmented Continent

Interdisciplinary Conference at the
Department for European Languages and Cultures, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

27 to 28 October 2016

Europe is a puzzle, in more than one sense.

Currently, public discourse in Europe is dominated by crises: conflicts over migration politics and refugee quotas, financial meltdowns, member states' threats to exit the EU. This discourse of crisis seems to corroborate the complaints of sceptics who consider Europe a loosely stitched patchwork on the brink of disintegration. On the other hand, the story of Europe can be told as a transnational success story. From this perspective, the continent is best described as the site of a peaceful and pervasive quest for unifying ideas, common ideals, and shared cultural values.

Previous and ongoing crises have generated a new sense of 'Europeanness' marked by international co-operation, transcultural solidarity, and political alliances across traditional divides. The search for a 'New Narrative for Europe' has not only inspired the European Commission's cultural research project of the same name, it is also a key topic for authors, artists, and intellectuals who strive to revise, reinterpret and redefine Europeanness in response to contemporary challenges.

A puzzle consists of many parts. The task of successfully assembling it involves many hands and an appreciation of both shared political norms and diversity as a positive and enabling value. This conference proposes an innovative approach to the Europe of Crisis depicted in public discourse. We aim to address the implications of political, socio-economic and cultural fragmentation in present-day Europe through an interdisciplinary combination of perspectives from the humanities and social sciences. *Puzzling Europe* proposes collaborative ways of understanding and teaching Europe. The conference aims to provide a platform for exchanges on topical questions across political, linguistic and cultural divides. We invite scholars from Literature, Political Science, Sociology, Linguistics, Arts, Philosophy, History and related fields to rethink the European mosaic, discuss its ramifications, dilemmas, and challenges, and propose methods of understanding the continent's wealth of cultural relations, political frameworks, and global entanglements.

The new Department for European Languages and Cultures at Rijksuniversiteit Groningen is made up of three interrelated profiles: *Language and Society*, *Literature and Culture* and *Politics and Society*. Working on and across the fault-lines between these disciplines, we balance European knowledges as articulated in seven different languages. Our research and teaching methods pioneer new ways of coming to terms with the multi-faceted challenges of studying Europe.

We invite proposals of approximately 250 words for 20-minute presentations under one of the following headings (detailed panel descriptions below). Please indicate in the subject heading of your email which panel(s) you would like to join.

1. **Thresholds. Outside, Inside, In Between**
2. **Peripheries. Otherness within Europe**
3. **Multiple Identities. Regions, Nations, Europe(s)**
4. **Visions of Unity. Pragmatics and Paradoxes**
5. **Historical Perspectives. Negotiating Europe's Past**

Please email your proposals accompanied by a 50-word biographical note by 31 March 2016 to puzzlingeurope@rug.nl

News, announcements and the programme will be posted on the conference website:

<http://www.rug.nl/research/icog/research/conferences/puzzling-europe/>

Panels:

1) Thresholds. Outside, Inside, In Between

At present, questions of political and cultural integration and marginalization dominate the scholarly and public debate on European identity. As such, European identity is constructed in terms of in-groups and out-groups. However, the in-group/out-group dichotomy negates the intermediate state that constitutes many Europeans' daily reality. This applies to, for instance, immigrants with indeterminate residence permits, people holding a European and a non-European passport, and people speaking several languages at various intermediate levels.

In a more general sense, this also applies to the intermediate identities and orientations that challenge the present hegemonic models of European identity or citizenship. The current mass migration of refugees from Syria and North Africa posits an unprecedented political and cultural challenge to these models. One could also think of sexual minorities applying for refugee status due to persecution in their home countries (e.g. Russia, Iran, Uganda), for example. Moreover, there are cosmopolitan, academic and expat communities as well as nomadic cultures and communities (e.g. Sinti and Roma) that cross boundaries of all kinds. Another set of examples stems from countries contemplating exit or regions with secessionist aspirations (e.g. the United Kingdom, Greece, Catalonia, Scotland).

These multiple and overlapping identities and modes of citizenship require conceptual reflection. The questions they raise are cultural, social, and eminently political. They reflect back on social and political value change, democratic ideals and cosmopolitan norms in Europe as well as their popular discontents among European citizens, denizens, and newcomers. Departing from these observations, we can develop research questions that address the manifold practices and representations of the threshold experience in the cultural, political and linguistic sphere.

Organisers: Dr Konstantin Mierau (k.mierau@rug.nl), Dr Stefan Couperus (s.couperus@rug.nl), Prof. Lars Rensmann (l.p.rensmann@rug.nl)

2) Peripheries. Otherness within Europe

Does Europe have a centre? Does Europe constitute a centre? Does Europe need a centre? Who is and who is not European? Are some more European than others?

Whatever answers are offered to these questions, the existence of European peripheries is not in doubt, neither in geographical nor in metaphorical terms. The Eastern European cultures and languages, for instance, continue to be under-represented in current exchanges and teaching programmes.

This panel seeks to analyse the changing patterns of domination and hegemony in European culture and its cultural heritage. We will address overt and covert conceptualisations of otherness and consider how these influence the idea of the European nation state. Questions to be addressed may revolve around cultural stereotyping, stigmatisation, and other forms of exclusion within Europe. Presenters are invited to ponder the similarities, differences and 'other-relations' that pertain to European others and peripheries, understood culturally and politically, such as the 'Unknown East', the extreme North and South, and the aspiring new EU member states.

Organisers: Dr Vera Alexander (v.alexander@rug.nl), Dr Florian Lippert (fj.lippert@rug.nl), Prof. Pablo Valdivia Martin (pablo.valdivia.martin@googlemail.com)

3) Multiple Identities. Regions, Nations, Europe(s)

This panel aims to discuss the interplay of unity and diversity in present-day Europe by focussing on the relationship between the notion of 'European identity' and national or local identities.

Possible topics include (but are not limited to):

- The interaction between trans-European policies and local ones; the acknowledgement of diversity (or lack thereof) in the European public sphere; the perception of European identity within different social environments; the role of subcultures (pop music, sports, etc.) in constructing or obstructing a shared cross-national identity;
- Unity and diversity in European linguistic policies; the coexistence of multiple linguistic identities at the social and institutional levels; the status of minority languages in the European 'linguistic landscape', and their relationship to specific national contexts;
- The co-existence of national and European identities in contemporary literature; multilingualism as a literary practice; literary exchanges in Europe during globalization.

Organisers: Dr Bob de Jonge (R.de.Jonge@rug.nl), Dr Alberto Godioli (a.godioli@rug.nl)

4) Visions of Unity. Pragmatics and Paradoxes

The omnipresent quest for transnational unity and integration leads to ever new conflicts and controversies. Meanwhile, processes of disintegration render constantly changing socio-political and cultural constellations throughout Europe. Phenomena such as trans-border regionalism, new separatisms and modes of localist orientation force us to ask at which level(s) the much-quoted 'ever closer' unification can actually take place: If national borders are to become less and less important, will other kinds of 'units' come to comprise the European puzzle? How and to what extent *can* we conceive of trans- or supranational unity, anyway?

Hans Magnus Enzensberger's image of Europe as 'a union without unity', connected to the vision of 'a cluster of ever *decreasing* nation states', is an example of a consciously *paradoxical* description of the continent's contrary tendencies. A more 'conceptual' paradox is Jacques Derrida's characterization of European culture as 'the identity of the non-identical', which is based upon the characteristic tension between two poles: 'On the one hand, Europe's cultural identity must not dissolve (...) into a myriad of irrelevant provinces (...). On the other hand, it must oppose any authority (that would) exercise absolute control and uniformity.'

In this panel, we will discuss different forms and possible consequences of such paradoxes, as well as pragmatic suggestions about how they could be made productive or even solved – in order to renegotiate and revisit the notions and possibilities of unity within the European framework.

Organisers: Dr Florian Lippert (f.lippert@rug.nl), Dr Stefan Couperus (s.couperus@rug.nl)

5) Historical Perspectives. Negotiating Cultural Memory

This panel focuses on the material presence of the past in the formulation of present-day European identities. The social and cultural manifestation of memory has been the subject of a growing body of research in recent years as the historical dimension of European identity is increasingly debated (e.g. Müller 2002, Lebow et al 2006, Erll & Nünning 2010, Silberman & Vatan 2013).

Key themes are the role of archives, libraries and *lieux de mémoire* as loci of European memory (cf. Sierp 2014). Focussing on the relationships between these loci will allow us to discuss the transnational dimension of European identifications. Who are the main actors in the field of European memory construction (cf. Calligaro 2013)? Who organises the archive, who decides on the construction of *lieux de mémoires*, who chooses the representation of the European past in the development of the canon?

These questions can be approached from political, linguistic and cultural perspectives. Possible paper themes include: the relationship between historiography and the construction of a European identity, linguistic policy as applied to education, the function of minority languages in the preservation of regional cultural memory, archives and memorials as motifs in literature, cinema and the (performing) arts, and archival selection as a form of structural violence (i.e. the memory of violence/the violence of memory).

Organisers: Dr Alberto Godioli (a.godioli@rug.nl), Dr Konstantin Mierau (k.mierau@rug.nl)