

**Municipalism, Regionalism, Nationalism. Hybrid Identity Formations and the Making of Modern Europe**

**Veranstalter:** Centre for Research on the Cultural Forms of Modern European Politics at the University of Manchester

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This new Manchester-based Centre promotes interdisciplinary work on the history and politics of identity in modern Europe. It seeks to unite recent trends in political history, notably a focus on citizenship, liberal governmentality and mechanisms of political exclusion, and cultural history, with a focus on imagined communities, memory and the symbolic representation of belonging. Through a range of international research projects and publications, the Centre seeks to elucidate what, if anything, is specifically European about the layering or 'hybridity' of different strands of identity, such as the triad of local, regional and national. Taking its cue from the 'spatial turn' in the humanities, it will problematize the idea of Europe, paying equal attention to both the divisive and the consensual elements of European citizens' entangled identities as they unfolded over the past two centuries. This process is examined from a range of disciplinary viewpoints, including historical, literary and political studies.

On 10-12 March, the Centre hosted its inaugural conference, which focused on the spatial dimension of identities in modern Europe, from the onset of what is commonly regarded as the big modernization push around 1850 to the present. We analyzed how the municipal, regional and national were configured in terms of 'hard power' – modes of political decision-making, participation and entitlements – and 'soft power', such as subjective claims and perceptions of 'identity'. On the basis of particular geographical expertise, speakers were asked to comment on the following questions:

(1) How do we account for the different degrees of compatibility/hostility between the

local, the regional and the nation in poly-centric vis-à-vis more centralised European states?

(2) Does the historical *longue durée* matter in determining such relationships at any one time? Or were historical precedents merely rhetorical tropes invoked to lend legitimacy to models of centre-periphery relations that are driven by contemporary economics or power politics?

(3) How is the relationship between municipalism and nationalism affected by the relative strength or weakness of regionalism? Does localism thrive as an extension of regional autonomy, or is it a substitute for politically more potent regionalism that thrives in unitary nation-states?

(4) In methodological terms, how do we evaluate the relationship between cultural identity constructions (through language/dialect, culture, heritage etc.) and the relative significance of local, municipal, regional and national agencies, as written into political institutions and constitutions?

'Municipalism, Regionalism, Nationalism: Ideas and Ideologies'

The first session on 'Municipalism, Regionalism, Nationalism: Ideas and Ideologies' began with a paper by Julian Wright (University of Durham), who used the example of the French *Félibrige* to demonstrate how this nineteenth-century association of poets and writers imbued a folkloristic or aesthetic regionalism with political meaning. In doing so, he challenged the association of the central French state with modernization, and the concomitant categorization of regionalist movements as 'merely cultural' and backward-looking. He also demonstrated how elements within the *Félibrige* movement saw the regional as transcending the national, and forming the basis of PanLatinist identities.

By focusing particularly on the work of the nineteenth-century Lombard political economist Carlo Cattaneo, Marco Meriggi (Università Federico II, Naples) examined the problems of inventing a region and locating its place within a new nation. Meriggi emphasised the diversity of Italian traditions, pointing out that the historical importance of municipalism as the basis of allegiance in northern Italy was almost entirely lacking in the *Mez-*

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*zogiorno*. Meriggi demonstrated how Lombardy was historically a network of cities rather than a clearly defined region, where municipal loyalties were more often at loggerheads than in harmony. These could be reconciled with one another and with the idea of an Italian nation in the face of Austrian rule. The appeal to municipal, regional or national myths and traditions became distinctly more problematic after annexation by the House of Savoy in 1859: henceforth there would be no foreign power against which to unite, but only the newly created Italian state.

Carmen Popescu (University of Paris IV – Sorbonne) focused on the contribution of material culture. Comparing what she termed „identitarian“ architecture in different Balkan countries, she drew attention to the combination of regional, national and generic ‘Balkans’ symbolism, in which the different tiers of identity were often mutually reinforcing. However, „national building“ prevailed, in the context of a peripheral region which sought for emancipation and political recognition. This was one of the reasons why, according to Popescu, the Balkans witnessed a persistence of a historicist idiom, with a wide arsenal of allegorical tropes, into the beginning of the twentieth century, a time when Western European architecture moved away from historicism towards vernacular representations of belonging.

Finally, Yaron Matras (University of Manchester) examined the role of language in the formation of the transnational identity of European Roma. While the Council of Europe supported language revitalisation in the 1990s, Roma identity was often forged by the interaction with the different national, regional and even municipal cultures that provided the geographical and social context for their settlements. Thus, no unitary Roma culture exists; rather, communities seem keen to achieve equal status as citizens through a relatively high degree of assimilation.

‘Citizenship and the Tiers of Political Identities’

‘Citizenship and the Tiers of Political Identities’ was the theme of the second session of the conference. Andreas Fahrmeier (Universität Köln) challenged the assumption that citizenship is a privilege and duty conferred exclusively by the nation-state. Drawing on a

wide range of examples from the nineteenth century to the present, he argued that legal and social entitlements are often tied to documents issued by regions or municipalities, using quite different criteria from those employed by the state. He also explored a new trend by which large-scale corporations have been granted some collective representation in municipal government – a return to ancien régime practices of citizenship under the auspices of globalization.

Christopher Clark (University of Cambridge) presented a critique of Prussia’s image as the archetypal centralised, and centralising, state. Picking up the argument already presented by Julian Wright, Clark suggested a connection between literary representations of provincialism in Prussia by nineteenth-century writers such as Theodor Fontane to the persistence of political decentralisation.

Benoît Majerus (University of Luxembourg) discussed how the European Union has become Luxembourg’s *telos* in history. Shifting the focus of the discussion to the trans-national dimension, Majerus explored how Luxembourg’s identity is built on the notion of a synthesis between France and Germany– legitimated through their allegedly central role in defining the European project.

‘Borders, Minorities and Hybrid Identities’

Timothy Baycroft (University of Sheffield) opened the next section on ‘Borders, Minorities and Hybrid Identities’ with an ambitious model of hybrid identity formation in European border regions. Using Peter Sahlins’ model as a starting point, Baycroft argued for a conceptual distinction between multiple and hybrid identities, where only the latter involve a synthesis of the different spatial tiers into a new whole. His paper generated much debate on how useful the notion of hybridity was in relation to identity formation.

As Alon Confino (University of Virginia) pointed out, no identity is an island onto itself. Every identity is constructed through processes of comparison and transfer, and is therefore already a hybrid. The question remains why under certain historical circumstances identities are constructed as expressly hybrid, while under others hybridity is steadfastly denied.

Alexei Miller (Central European University,

Budapest) talked about the diverse conceptions of the Ukraine in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, emphasising how Polish and Russian conceptions of the Ukraine were mutually exclusive and how Ukrainian nationalist conceptions emerged between the two. Vera Tolz (University of Manchester) highlighted the ambiguous role of regional elites in shaping the way the political centre imagined the periphery. She used the example of Russian academic 'orientalists' between the 1860s and the 1920s to analyse a two-way process. While imperial scholars exported a Heimat idea into the peripheries to strengthen imperial domination, their own imagination was shaped by information provided and collated by local research assistants. These were recruited from among individuals who had originally arrived in European Russia with the intention of becoming servants of a centralised imperial state, but who ended up importing their own peripheral political agendas into the imperial centre.

'The Role of History in Negotiating Identities'

The fourth session examined 'The Role of History in Negotiating Identities'. Christopher Duggan (University of Reading) argued that the emergence of a historical narrative conducive to nation-state formation in Italy was hampered not so much by strong regionalisms, but rather by the lack of coherent regional or even municipal building-blocks for wider identities. In this situation, federalism was widely perceived as dangerous, as Italy already seemed excessively fragmented. Instead, a strong state was needed to cope with the traditional Italian vice of factionalism and to purge Italy of its historic decadence through the revival of military values to produce more virile and disciplined Italians.

Thies Schulze (Freie Universität of Berlin) analyzed the interrelationship between local patriotism and nationalism in Florence. Focusing on Dante festivals, he showed how the celebration of a seeming pinnacle of national identity could assume very different meanings in different municipal settings during the Risorgimento era.

Xosé Manoel Nunez Seixas (Universidade de Santiago de Compostela) pointed out how the 'local metaphor' was not accepted by many

historians in Spain due to a widespread belief that regionalism and Spanish nationalism were mutually exclusive. It was precisely the fact that sub-state nationalisms in Spain had regionalist forerunners which made Spanish historians suspicious of regionalism. However, Núñez also highlighted the findings of some new research that pointed out the extent to which region-building and nation-building were complementary in Spanish history, as well as the fact that Spanish patriotism often expressed itself through local and regional images, motives and celebrations, even during the Francoist period.

'Local metaphors? Locality, municipality and the nation'

The penultimate session on 'Local metaphors? Locality, municipality and the nation' was opened by Alon Confino, who considered the longevity of the Heimat idiom in German history. He used the GDR as a test case for the hypothesis elaborated in his earlier work, which suggested that in imperial Germany, the locality came to be used as a lens through which the abstract entity of the nation could be imagined. Using a series of official posters printed between 1945 and 1961 as evidence, Confino pointed out how SED propagandists consciously or unconsciously built on the imagery of Heimat established in the nineteenth century. He concluded that Heimat was not tied to a particular ideology, but that it could be appropriated by any regime to promote the national through a generic symbolism of the local that suppressed spatial particularity. The following three papers considered the potentially more problematic relationship between nationalism and the municipality.

John Foot (University College London) explored the place of Milanese identity politics in Italian nationhood. He emphasised the role played by the idea of Milan as the 'moral capital' of the peninsula, a vision of an industrious and honest city contrasted with a parasitic Rome, which was largely destroyed by the scandals of Tangentopoli.

Robin Okey (University of Warwick) analysed how Budapest and Zagreb transformed themselves from heavily German cities into motors of culturally specific nationalisms. He highlighted the role of language and literature for

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the successful notion of separate nationhoods of the Croats and the Hungarians respectively.

Ulrike von Hirschhausen (GWZO, Leipzig) provided an intriguing tableau of types of ethnic loyalties in Riga between 1880 and the end of the First World War. She concluded that 'industrial modernity under conditions of multi-ethnicity did not necessarily lead to the nation'. A variety of sub-national identities were just as likely, if not more likely to succeed. The political context was ultimately decisive for the precise interrelationship between municipality, region and nation.

Following dinner, the Swiss Ambassador to the United Kingdom, His Excellency Alexis P. Lautenberg, addressed the conference on the subject of how the relationship of municipalism, regionalism and nationalism would play out under conditions of Europeanisation. His optimistic assessment of the future of the Europe of the regions sparked a lively debate.

'Municipalism, Regionalism, Nationalism: Past, Present, Future'

The final substantive session of the conference discussed 'Municipalism, Regionalism, Nationalism: Past, Present, Future'. Michael Keating (European University Institute, Florence) argued that most contemporary claims to sovereignty are rooted in historical accounts. In this field, the nation-state narrative holds no monopoly claim to universal, liberal and democratic credentials. Regions and stateless nations, according to Keating, have based doctrines of limited sovereignty on narratives about plurinationality and accommodation, which effectively challenge the modernist teleology that informs much of social science writing today. They can also help recover political pluralism without losing democracy. Christopher Harvie (Universität Tübingen) analyzed why the 'Europe of the Regions', which had gained widespread currency in the 1990s, seems to have lost much of its attraction in recent years. A resurgence of economic protectionism, security concerns and economically driven geopolitics, especially in regard to the former Soviet territories, have, according to Harvie, undermined the potential of regionalist movements to foster sustainable development, civic ethics and ecological responsibility. Harvie also suggested a historical par-

allel between the current situation and the decline of regionalisms in the increasingly polarised international climate of the 1890s.

Finally, Richard Bellamy (University College London) explored the historical foundations of citizenship and offered a sceptical assessment of the prospects for EU citizenship. In his opinion the nation remains very much the focus and source of citizens identity in Europe for the foreseeable future, thereby weakening the capacity of the EU to employ democratic decision-making or take responsibility for social rights.

The final discussion of the conference focussed on three core arguments that emerged from the debates. First, the question was raised whether a hierarchy of spatial identities was still a valid proposition. Most delegates agreed that the fluidity of identities and the manner in which they were mutually constitutive renders such hierarchisation nonsensical, although several speakers pointed out that at various decisive historical junctures, the nation-state had been more successful than other spatial identities in subsuming both sub- and trans-national identities under its own auspices. This not only applies to moments of intense political mobilization that have characterised nation-building in Europe. In the *longue duree*, the nation-state's greater ability to incorporate rival spatial identities has been well established in studies of the stylisation of the locality as a national 'Heimat'. Speakers at the conference pointed to analogous developments in municipalities and regions, for example when the Franco regime appropriated a topology first developed to articulate separatist regionalisms, especially in the Basque Country, for the new iconography of the nation. We agreed that such transfers and projections merit closer investigation.

Second, the special role of trans-national configurations in shaping the triad of municipalism, regionalism and nationalism was highlighted. Delegates pointed to numerous examples where references to supra-national projects – notably Empire-building in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the discourse of Europeanisation thereafter – enabled sub-national units to legitimate their 'special status' within the nation more effectively. More research on the role of the trans-

national dimension on centre-periphery relations within Europe was called for.

Third, we discussed methodological problems in exploring 'characteristic' spatial identity formations in relation to the notion of hybridity. To date, the historiography of nationalism has tended to focus on moments of crisis and rupture. Supposing that different identities exist in a hierarchical relationship, historians have argued that nationalism can be most clearly grasped when actors are forced to prioritise one identity over another in situations of violent conflict or crisis. Thus, an underlying truth about the significance of national loyalties is revealed: war is the ultimate test case for nationalism. Some delegates at the conference argued that this model could usefully be adopted to shed light on the relative significance of multiple identities, too. Others suggested that hybrid spatial identities were better understood in conditions of 'normality' than during dramatic moments of change. The interrelationship of different tiers of spatial identity, these scholars suggested, was shaped by the *longue durée*. While it was constantly reconfigured in response to specific situations and to suit particular interest, this flexibility could best be grasped if studied, first and foremost, in periods of relative stasis, which, in spite of the historian's traditional obsession with change, was more characteristic of most people's day-to-day experience than dramatic change or rupture. Such an analysis could be further advanced by the use of visual evidence. The built environment, in particular, can be decoded as a way in which the different component parts of spatial identity, whilst still recognisable in their particular iconographies and materials, could be synthesised into a single, 'hybrid' image.

The Centre for Research on the Cultural Forms of Modern European Politics at Manchester plans to use the issues thus raised to develop a research agenda for years to come. We are hoping to build on the dialogue initiated by the conference to create an international network of scholars, who will work together in elucidating these problems through further trans-national research on modern Europe. Those interested in participating in future events of the Centre are warmly invited

to contact one of the organisers.[1]

Notes

[1] Contact details can be found at <http://www.arts.manchester.ac.uk/cultmep/>

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