

## University of Groningen

### Europeans in-Between

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## Introduction

The articles of this volume originate from a European Studies Intensive Programme held at the Georg-August-University Göttingen in June 2011. In European Studies, Europe is all too often discussed with regard to institutional matters, legitimacy and legitimacy problems, legal and governmental aspects. While these are indeed important issues and were taken into consideration in the conference programme, our main concern was with the question of how people interact in Europe. “Europe – Space for Transcultural Existence?” was the title under which the participants were asked to inquire into topics like migration and immigration, integration and citizenship. How do Europeans cope with their continent’s diversity? What can be learned from regions in other parts of the world? Is it correct that multiculturalism has failed, as several politicians have claimed in recent years? And if so, which kind of multiculturalism has failed?

This Intensive Programme asked for space rather than place. For one thing, this emphasis rested on the fact that those who live in Europe are increasingly mobile and the fostering of mobility has always been an essential part of EU-European politics. Secondly, as the University of Göttingen is set in a region in Lower Saxony that was once very close to the German-German border, the Intensive Programme was meant to trigger debates on how people live in bordering spaces and which functions borders fulfill. For that matter, we drew on the question that the French political scientist Etienne Balibar has raised, namely, whether European borders are indeed frontiers or whether they can be

democratized.<sup>1</sup> Raising such a question implies that Europe certainly is more than the European Union and “Europe” designates a space that is much larger than the area of its member states. Borders are thus to be constantly negotiated.<sup>2</sup>

Research projects and surveys frequently tackle the dimension of feelings of belongings and identity. Eurobarometer-polls for example inquire whether people feel bound to the nation, the region or Europe. For it might be the case that people, despite all mobility, at heart stay rooted in a particular place and have problems coping with an increasing diversity and exchange. So if the third element of the topic we have chosen, “Transcultural Existence”, sounds imprecise, it is because we wanted the participants to define the conditions of europeanization and globalization under which they live. Transculturality comes into play once we think about the various influences we are faced with each day. It stands against any binary logic of “us” as opposed to “them” and is based on a real understanding of others. Europe is, as Bo Stråth has pointed out, both “we” and “the other”.<sup>3</sup> But is transculturality, as Wolfgang Welsch has claimed, the only format under which there would be real interaction and interchange between people?<sup>4</sup> Or do the concepts of “Interculturality” or “Multiculturality” maybe entail this real interaction already?

The four texts by Balibar, Paasi, Stråth and Welsch that are referred to in this preface were given to the participants as starting point for their own research projects. The main theme of the conference was divided into four subthemes, which also structure the collection of articles in this volume:

- A. Internal and external European trans-border relations
- B. Representations of Europe in the arts and literature
- C. Feeling at home in many places: polygamy of place
- D. Mirroring Europe from the outside.

The European Studies Intensive Programme (IP) 2011 was carried out together with seven partner universities. These were Groningen, Deusto (Bilbao), Uppsala, Krakow, Olomouc, Udine and Strasbourg. The Göttingen-IP was the second one in a row of three that ran under the title “Europe between Europeanization and Globalization”. The first one took place in Groningen in 2010, the third one in Bilbao in 2012. In all three, students of all participating

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<sup>1</sup> As asked in the articles of: Etienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Anssi Paasi, “Europe as a Social Process and Discourse. Considerations of Place, Boundaries, and Identity,” *European Urban and Regional Studies* 8, no. 1 (2001): 7-28.

<sup>3</sup> Bo Stråth, “A European Identity. To the Historical Limits of a Concept,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 4 (2002): 387-401.

<sup>4</sup> Wolfgang Welsch, “Transculturality - the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today.” In *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, edited by Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash, 194-213. London: Sage, 1999.

universities were asked to come up with topics for their research papers and to submit abstracts. Like in any conference, groups were formed for around 100 students from more than 30 countries altogether. Students presented their papers in front of fellow students and faculty members. The best papers of these presentations were nominated for publication by the faculties. “Walking the Tightrope” is the publication of the best student papers of the Groningen IP.<sup>5</sup> In this volume, we collect the selected papers of the Göttingen-IP 2011. Both volumes not only show the interdisciplinary and multiple perspectives of the contributions. They also show the originality and great dedication of the students in conducting their research projects.

The editors would like to thank all participants of the Intensive Programme for their contributions and their input to what truly was a fruitful conference. The students, speakers and participating faculty members of the partner universities not only helped planning the 12-day-programme, but provided for fruitful input for discussions, of which the papers in this volume convey a good idea. The editors would like to thank Jannika Kühn, Ine Megens, Margriet van der Waal and Janny de Jong as well as the staff of the library of the University of Groningen for their help in setting up this publication. Very special thanks to those who were involved in planning and organizing the IP in Göttingen with a lot of inspiration and dedication: First and foremost, these are Marc Arwed Rutke, Daria Kulemetyeva, Nina Lutterjohann, Claire Greenfield, Karla Marysol Garcia Delgado and Ekaterina Ershova. A special thank you to Verena Grünefeld, the lector of this volume.

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Göttingen, July 2012

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<sup>5</sup> Janny de Jong, Ine Megens, Margriet van der Waal, *Walking the tightrope: Europe between Europeanisation and globalisation. Selected papers presented at European studies intensive programme 2010* (Groningen: University of Groningen Library), <http://irs.ub.rug.nl/ppn/333995155> (accessed 8 May 2012).