EUMEPLAT
European Media Platforms:
assessing positive and negative
externalities for European culture

Deliverable 5.6

White Book of Recommendations

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Summary

The tone of this document is slightly different from the original version, as it was outlined in the Description of the Action. The two planned documents – deliverables 5.6 and 5.7 – were possibly too similar to each other, and therefore we came out with an alternative solution: deliverable 5.7 will sort out the most operational recommendations (i.e., regulation proposals; direct requests to the European Commission; adjustments to the state of media markets); whilst the report 5.6 focuses on the critical areas on which those recommendations are premised. Practically speaking, D5.6 more largely draws on the notes from Work-packages 2, 4 and 5; and D5.7 on the notes from WP1 – including the media regulation report and the policy document drawn after the first year of the project – and from WP3 and WP5. In any case, ideally at least, the two texts should be read in parallel. For the sake of the reporting, we will use the original title – White Book of Recommendations – while putting forward this necessary premise.

The 5.6 report is organized as follows. The first section introduces four critical areas to be used to take together the results of the research tasks, based on both the EUMEPLAT deliverables and the recommendation notes provided by WP and task leaders, and namely: *agency*; *values*; *culture*; and *fears*. Merton's (1949) distinction between latent and manifest functions will be proposed as a general framework. In all cases, we will start from the emerged criticalities, and then discuss the best practices and the possible remedies. Each of the four dimensions will be treated as a whole, by reflecting of the indications coming from the different work-packages.

The deliverable has been drawn by Andrea Miconi, while also being based on a participatory approach. The notes provided by the task leaders and the WP leaders are listed out in deliverable 5.7 and annexed to the same document.

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Synopsis

The table below synthetizes the rationale of the deliverable. The table is to be intended as a reading guide to the structure, which is based on the following points: the synoptic reading of deliverables and WP notes; the identification of the major dimensions to be covered; the main findings based on our research tasks; and the possible, follow-up recommendations. The four dimensions – agency, culture, values, and fear – will be addressed in this perspective.

Table 1. Synopsis of deliverable D5.6

Dimension	**WPs**	**Topic**	**Finding**	**Recommendation**
Agency	WP2, WP4	Europeanization from below	Weakness of Europeanization from below	Plan in-depth analysis of the pan-European movements and valorize what has been done outside the institutional perimeter.
Agency	WP2, WP4	Horizontal Europeanization	Weakness of horizontal Europeanization: rare flows of information and exchanges of cultural forms among the contents.	Plan in-depth, monographic analyses of the best practices in the field (see D2.3 and D2.4).
Agency	WP2, WP4	Connection between agency and social media use	At the level of most influential posts, there is no evidence of social media favoring European agency	Plan in-depth, monographic analyses of the best practices in the field (see D2.3 and D2.4).
Culture	WP1, WP3	Hegemony of American media contents	Due to the rise of global platforms, US companies now control also the information, and not only the creative production.	Plan in-depth, monographic analyses of the best practices in the field (see D3.3 and D4.3). Improve the quota system for the VOD market (see D5.7)

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Culture	WP1, WP3	Persistent success of national media contents, in both legacy and social media.	The success of national contents relies of a form of banal nationalism, and it is not connected to hot nationalism or political de-Europeanization or de-democratization trends.	Support smaller media market (see D5.7); set up a study on the taste of the Europeans.
Culture	WP3	Representation of Europe in media contents	Europe is frequently thematized in terms of real story (i.e., documentaries, names of persons), as if we suffered from a lack of imagination.	Set up a study on the taste of the Europeans; explore the possibility of funding different genres (i.e., give less space to the documentaries).
Values	WP4, WP5	Post-materialist values	Transition to post-materialist values, and namely acceptance of super-national entities, is related to material well-being at both the micro- and the macro-social level, and therefore it may be reversible.	Revise the questionnaires used for assessing the values of the Europeans; launch a research program on the *material* priorities of the EU citizens.
Fears	WP1, WP5	Power takeover on the part of Big Tech	The platforms are not simply an infrastructure, but a new form of governmentality.	IF any alternative to global players is possible, it cannot be a likewise big platform, but a decentralized network of small platforms to be funded and promoted (see D5.7).
Fears	WP2, WP4, WP5	Polarization and radicalization of the debate	Polarization is not a deviation from the course of political debate, and it is not	Take into account the systemic nature of polarization; and therefore,

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			specific to a specific political faction.	consider the mapping of the debate through panels of representative samples (see D5.7).
Fears	WP5	Surveillance	In this case, Europe and the EU are perceived to be a menace, and not only a solution.	Open a debate with citizens and civil society organizations on the limits and scopes of surveillance; as an option, for instance, in the context of a European Citizen Assembly (see D5.7). Draw a line between the different players (i.e., pull into focus the relations between social media platforms and public institutions).

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Criticalities and breaking points

(1) Four key-dimensions

After the synoptic reading of all major deliverables and related notes, four principal dimensions seem to emerge, which can be used to analyze the contemporary European media landscape, in all its complexity: *agency*; *values*; *fears*; and *culture*. As to the latter, the clarification goes, culture is defined in a very restrictive way: the circulation of cultural products, or, in Wendy Griswold's words, the specific case of "shared significance embodied in a form" likely to be shared and commercialized (1986, 5). The table below schematizes – in a sort of reverse engineering, starting from the general category – the relation between the four dimensions and the results of our research.

Table 2. The four dimensions in relation to the WPs.

Dimension	**Work-Packages**	**Research Findings**	**Alternative scenarios**
Agency	WP2	The bottom-up discourse around Europe is rare. Negative relation between Europeanization and agency; or lack of Europeanization from below. Predominance of professional media in the online debate on European issues.	
Agency	WP4	Lack of references to Europe in online people's debate.	
Agency	WP4	Platformization allows for good practices in the representation of gender	
Agency	WP5		Strengthen algorithmic education. Reinforce people's agency. Call for a participatory productive ethics.
Culture	WP1	Impact and influence of American media.	

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Culture	WP1	Long-lasting relevance of national contents in legacy media.	
Culture	WP3	Relevance of national contents, as in the case of YouTube and TikTok influencers.	
Culture	WP3	American hegemony over VOD and video sharing platforms.	
Culture	WP1 and WP3	The massive production (or even co-production) of European contents is not enough.	
Culture	WP2	Lack of shared images of Europe.	
Values	WP1	Media pluralism and freedom of information.	
Values	WP4	Gender as a typically European value.	
Values	WP4	Acceptance of migration as a typically European value.	
Values	WP5	Trust in supernational solutions.	Trust in “supernational solutions”. Trust in a new digital “Enlightenment”. Expectations on supernational interventions on education, literacy [*Justice League of Literacy*], and AI management.
Fears	WP2	Disinformation and fake news.	
Fears	WP5	Surveillance.	
Fears	WP5	Power takeovers and media-politics complex.	
Fears	WP5	Intensification of conflict; harms on the environment, both biological and human.	
Fears	WP4 and WP5	Social fragmentation and polarization making less acceptable – or less accepted – gender and sexual diversities.	
Fears	WP2, WP4, and WP5		Media literacy and education.

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Fears	WP5	Algorithmic takeover.	

If we adopt the semantic map model (see Carpentier *et al* 2023) for framing these topics, we will obtain the following scheme.

Table 3. The four dimensions in the EUMEPLAT semantic map.

Dimension	**Related Work-Packages**	**Position in the Semantic Map**	**Approaches, based on the Semantic Map**
Agency	WP2 and WP4	Material; Relativist; Socio-spatial and Political-Spatial	Community, People, Interactions and Dialogue, Audiences, Public Spheres, New Social Movements, Citizenship
Culture	WP1 and WP3	Discourse-Material; Relativist; Socio-Spatial	Cultures, Media Industries and Capitalist Economies, Content
Values	WP2, WP4 and WP5	Discourse; Essentialist; Socio-Spatial	Spirit, Values, Democratic Models, Identities, Political Institutions, Representations
Fears	WP2 and WP5	Discourse	Values, Community, Representations

The overlapping between the two schemes is far from perfect, but all the axes are represented: the material/discourse; the essentialist/relativist; and the socio-spatial/political-spatial. As a result, seventeen approaches would be covered, out of the original nineteen listed out (Carpentier *et al* 2023, 108-119 in particular): except for Public Service Media and Law, which will be addressed in deliverable 5.7. The category of *fears* was not included in our original reflection, while shaping out in the course of the project: possibly because of the specific focus of Work-package 5; possibly due to Western imagery – and cultural industries as well - being increasingly populated by dystopian representations of the social order.

Social theory-wise, these variables can be framed by the opposition between manifest and latent functions, as laid out by Robert Merton. According to Merton, in short, manifest functions are “those objective consequences […] which are intended and recognized by participants in the system”; whereas the latent are not “intended”, and not always recognized by the people (1949, 105). Manifest functions are characterized, and actually driven, by people’s *purposes*; the manifest, are rather made visible by their *consequences*, without social

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actors necessarily being in control of them. The overall equilibrium of the structure, hence, is a measure of the balance between these two forces, what people are aware of, and what people are not aware of: so that the "persisting cultural forms have a net balance of functional consequences", acting as a twofold source of stability for both individuals and "society considered as a unit" (1949, 96, italics removed). This stability, Merton argues, can hardly be understood by means of the classical functionalist "institutional integration", while requiring observing "very different types of values and interest" (1949, 98). That any system has "*some* degree of integration" is a fact, in other words: conversely, not all societies reach the point after which "every culturally standardized activities or belief" is beneficial to both the individual and the structure (1949, 81, italics original). And how about the *European* society – is it reaching this point? Are, more practically speaking, which is *the part of the media* in that process?

In the other EUMEPLAT reports, we used alternative narratives: the coexistence of centralization and decentralization tendencies; the discursive/material assemblage; the vertical/horizontal and top-down/bottom-up Europeanization dyads; the dialectic between national and global; and the tension between unity and diversity, allegedly lying at the heart of the European identity (Morin 1990, 49; Delanty 2013, 323). In this case, it appears that the *latent* versus *manifest* dichotomy would better serve the purposes of framing the results of the research work-packages, based as they are on very different methodologies. Grounded on literature review, by the way, it appears that such idea is not original at all, as the model has been already applied to the understanding of contemporary Europe. For instance, Crespy and Verschueren provided a recognition on the debate around European integration, by using the category of "latent Euro-skepticism" (2009); and Scharkow and Vogelgesang worked at a similar exercise, with respect to both the latent pro- and anti-EU sentiment (2009). A more explicit reference to Merton's approach is made by Pichler, in his analysis of European cosmopolitanism (2008); and in Carbone's assessment of the implementation of EU policies, in the matter of the cooperation with other supernational organizations (2019). It is probably no accident that Merton's latent functions, intended as the sum of the unexpected externalities of a given process, have been mostly called to action in the case of migration, which is one of the most polarizing issues for European public opinions (see, among the others, Barbarito 2012; Chrzastowska 2021; Gabrowska & Engbersen 2016; Kwek Kian 2021; Zakiyyah 2021).

Here we cannot indulge in discussing the epistemological cogency of Merton's categories, which has been repeatedly questioned, if not contested, and the more so in the case of their problematic operationalization (i.e., Helm 1971, 52-57 in particular). Given the purposes of this paper, we will limit our analysis to one of the codified interpretations of those concepts, as stated: namely, that manifest functions have to do with the actions purposely carried out by social actors; and the latent, with the consequences of societal facts, beyond people's intentions and purposes. As we know, such aspect has been sometimes extremized into asserting that only social theorists can detect the latent factors at stake (Campbell 1982,

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32)[1]: in this case, and for the sake of simplicity, we will rely on Boudon's confutation of that critique (1977, 200-205 in particular). In the end, and for the goal of organizing the report, we can say that two of the selected variables insist on the manifest functions: *culture*, in our restricted sense of cultural consumption; and, by definition, *agency*. In the other way, fears and values can be considered as broader structures of meaning, which condition people's life beyond their willing adoption of them: if by *fears* we refer to the figures shaping collective imagery; and by *values*, to the underlying scheme of beliefs and principles shared by the social body - both explaining what Merton would call an only "apparently irrational behavior" (1949, 119). More precisely, we will consider the latent functions as the embodiment of collective structure, values, and meanings, which may limit, overdetermine or shape the individual action, ruled by its manifest intentions. This is not explicitly delineated by Merton, to be honest, while clearly emerging – in my opinion – in his taking distance from the psychological latent/manifest dyad, as it had been laid out by Freud. What is more, for explaining his approach, Merton relies on Mead's and Durkheim's reference to the latent variables as able to forge and protect the community, therefore being based on *social*, rather than individual reasons (1949, 115-116; and the same for Merton's use of Veblen's theory of consumption). In the sections below, we will discuss these four dimensions, trying to narrow down the scope to their media- and platforms-related implications, in all cases in relation to the process of Europeanization. As a general method, we will start with the most critical evidence, and conclude with the best practices, and with the possible solutions and remedies.

(2) The Agency of the Europeans[2]

(2.1)

As stated, the first dimension we have individuated is that of *agency*, which is a relevant sociological indicator of people's participation to a given process. In principle at least, the problem of agency has always been with us Europeans, and the same for its connections to the media field. As the Tindemans report read, back in the mid-1970s,

[1] We admit that Merton himself happens to allow for this interpretation, when reflecting on Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption, which is one of his favorite cases of latent structure. In fact, Merton states (1949, 124), "the Veblenian analysis has […] entered so fully into popular thought, that these latent functions are now widely recognized".

[2] A part of this section will be published in Thomass, Miconi & Moreno 2024, forthcoming.

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> no one wants to see a technocratic Europe. European Union must be experiences by the citizen in his [*sic*] daily life. It must make itself felt in education and culture, news and communications, it must be manifest in the youth of our countries […] (Tindemans 1976, 12).

From our observation point, we can state that this goal has not been accomplished, if not partially and locally. In fact, the EUMEPLAT findings indicate a number of clear criticalities: the modest interest towards EU-related issues in national media cultures (WP1); the scarcity of references to Europe in online people's debate (WP2 and WP4); the predominance of professional contents in the social media discussion on European issues (WP2); and in sum, the lack of a Europeanization from below (WP2 and WP4). As specified, we will work here on the aspects of agency which are related to media use and platformization process – whilst a reflection on Europeans' agency at large would be too big a question.

Both WP2 and WP4, which deal with what people actively produce online, indicate that the reference to European affairs is pretty rare, in social media discussion across Europe. This is the more relevant – apart from the limitations of the studies, laid out in the methodological deliverables – considering the different approaches we followed: with WP2 focused on the most impactful posts; and WP4 contents only collected through the use of thematic keywords. As observed in the WP2 final note, it is not simply that "there was not much discussion about Europe and European issues", but even more, that "references to Europe were not about European issues themselves but rather as a leveraging of European issues for use on internal national political and social struggles". In this respect, our findings confirm the evidence delineated by means of a literature review. Firstly, a national framing of EU-relates issues has been detected by comparative studies of European media, usually with no remarkable differences between the considered countries or outlets (Bee & Chrona 2020, 871-872; de Vreese 2003, 99-116; de Vreese, Peter & Semetko 2001, 116-118; Koopmans & Erbe 2003, 115-118; Machill, Beiler & Fischer 2007, 188-189; Peters *et al* 2005, 148). In a few cases, some exceptions stand out, with a few media outlets providing a properly European narrative: such would be the occasional circumstance of newspapers in Denmark (Sifft *et al* 2007, 139) or in Netherlands (de Vreese 2008, 136-140). It is also acknowledged, based on empirical data, that the attention towards European issues usually increases, in terms of media covering, when those issues directly intersect national interests or political themes (Barisione & Ceron 2017, 95; Peters & de Vreeese 2004, 5; Trenz 2004, 293). No all-embracing generalizations are allowed, but with this respect, we can doubt that the platformization process, per se, is working in favor of Europeanization – with an anomaly that will be discussed below, coming from the WP4 dataset.

A second insight to be highlighted, is the marginal role played by common users in the discourse about Europe. This is particularly clear in WP2, as the most impactful posts usually come from some kind of institutional actors – mostly political agents, on Facebook; and in

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prevalence media agents, on Twitter and YouTube. If anything, this speaks against the alleged democratic properties of the net: an illusion perpetrated by some divulgators and market stakeholders, despite the early evidence of power-law impacting online discussion, and attention clustering around a few selected nodes[3].

In both theoretical and political terms, it remains unclear how to combine this finding with the path of the Europeanization from below, as conceptualized by Donatella della Porta on the backdrop of the broader "globalization from below"[4] (della Porta, Andretta, Mosca & Reiter 2006). Della Porta and Caiani, in this sense, listed out the European-level activities of NGOs and grassroots organizations, also reflecting on whether, and how, these movements would need to put into focus the EU area (2007, 11-13). To a considerable extent, though, in Della Porta Europe is plainly used to set the stage for the international battles – as the Florence and Genoa global forums, her predilect case studies, have basically done - without being addressed in its specificities. This is somehow confirmed by the steady overlapping between the European and the global context: "the construction of another Europe and another world is now urgent"; comparable protests spread in both Middle East and Europe; the "ATTAC is present in many European countries, North Africa, Latin America and Canada"; so that the goal, in the end, is to build "another Europe for another world" (della Porta, Andretta, Mosca & Reiter 2006, respectively 7, 11, 33, and 77). In the article about Europeanization, it is similarly affirmed that the described "trends *are not only European*, *quite to the contrary*, the construction of Europe-wide networks and a European discourse has proceeded together with a wider trend towards a globalization from below" (Della Porta & Caiani 2007, 16, italics added). In short, Della Porta is more interested in the spread of global antagonism, and legitimately so, than she is in the European declinations of the related instances; and additionally social media, as it is correct in her perspective, play a merely instrumental role for people's self-organization. From our side, we can measure a different tendence: that these grassroots experiences are not able of reaching the mainstream, at least in the considered countries, and not even by the use of many-to-many communication platforms.

A strong interpretation of the nexus between agency and social media in Europe has been put forward by Conti and Memoli, in their elaboration on people's trust which deserves some attention, as it is the closest to the one that we realized with our WP1 data. The major difference is that, resulting from factor analysis, we obtained two macro-variables: use of legacy media (taking together press, radio, and TV), and use of online media (including both

[3] For a bibliographical overview, see Miconi 2013.

[4] Europeanization from below was also the topic of one of the seminars we had during the Kick-off Meeting (which, unfortunately, was held on-line, due to Covid-related restrictions), organized by Nico Carpentier with the participation of Donatella della Porta and Charlotte Galpin.

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the open web and the social media). Conti and Memoli, on their part, work on three clusters as they separate internet users and social media users (2016, 37-41), probably due to the different datasets taken into exam: the 2011-2015 editions of EuroBarometer in Conti and Memoli, compared to the 2019 report in our case. The common finding, in both works, is that strong users of legacy media are more easily engaged in European discussion, they are keener to trust the EU and generally in favor of it, in comparison to strong web users. As an additional distinction, justified by the above-cited statistical difference, Conti and Memoli found that social media users, on average, trust the EU even less than the "general internet users". Somehow, this would allow the authors to state an inverse relationship between Europeanness and people's agency, or "mobilization": in the end, *the more active* the users are – the more they share, like and post on social media – and *the less they trust* the European Union (2016, 93).

Our findings would lead us to disagree with Conti and Memoli's take, as people's presence in social media is not to be mistaken with their *agency* – if by agency we mean, as we should, a goal-oriented and willing activity carried out by the actors, or what Merton named a manifest function. Similarly, agency cannot not be reduced to the *materially* active use of digital platforms – as in the end, this concrete contribution to the communication flow is requested by the affordances, and standard agreements, of those platforms. That the same English word applies to both audiences' practices and political participation – *engagement* – is probably not helping, in this respect. Therefore, the issue is not whether social media usage *equals* agency; rather, is to what degree, and upon which circumstances, it can be considered as a *partial indicator* of agency, or engagement in a stronger sense[5].

A proposal for future research, is to scale down to observation from the general field of media, or platforms, to more granular processes. We already alluded to this aspect in some reports, for instance for what concerns the overlooked importance of football, and UEFA Champions League in particular, in providing people with a common European narrative. Here we will shortly touch upon another example, which is the scarcity of images representing Europe in social media discussion, and – possibly more relevant within the logic of social media themselves – the absence of pro-EU *memes*. It is hardly necessary to justify the importance of memes in contemporary online debate, where they serve as "playful appropriation" of serious arguments (Mortensen & Neumayer 2021, 2373), while also providing users with an affective bond to their community (Holowka 2018, 159). As it has been noted, memes can offer a "reference point for discursive interaction" about Europe as well (Reyes Enverga III 2019, 337): as a matter of fact, though, such contents are only diffused within very selected

[5] To be clear, this consideration has nothing to do with the general critique to social media as being incapable of generating engagement or political awareness – the so-called *slacktivism*. As Vaccari and Valeriani noted (2021, 64-65), both online and offline participation can be weak or strong; and both of them can be taken for seriously or downgraded to some meaningless rituals.

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environments – i.e., European Meme Society; Eclectic European Memes; Your Friendly European Meme's Dealer – without circulating in the social media ecosystem at large. As our colleague and EUMEPLAT scientific advisor Zizi Papacharissi wrote, memes "are shared from person to person" to support collective "structures of feeling", and therefore they are a privileged vehicle for the consolidation of what she calls "affective publics" (2015, 116). Among the other things, the weakness of the European visual and meme culture will require ad-hoc investigations, in the near future.

For our current purposes, it makes sense to discuss an additional point, that has been raised by Vaia Doudaki during the WP5 meeting hosted by Bilkent University, in September 2023: yes, let us say that the Europeans do not talk about Europe in social media – does this mean that they do not talk about Europe *at all*? Well, let me radicalize Doudaki's argument. As relevant as they might be for our research interests, the media – either legacy or social – are only a small piece of a bigger picture, and the idea that *any* or *most* human activity would take place online is, indeed, questionable. It is probably due to some accepted concepts, that we take for given the hegemonic role of mediated relations: for instance, the "new operating system" notion, which relies on a plain overlapping between online and offline social networks (Rainie & Wellman 2012, 126); or Couldry's *mediatization*, intended as the "transformation of many disparate social and cultural processes into forms or formats suitable for media re-presentation" (2008, 377). *Many* processes, though, is not the same as *all* processes: and what we possibly found, is that there is no elective affinity between social media platforms and European narrative, as simple as that. Tanya Lokot, for instance, detected the traces of a bottom-up impulse towards Europeanization, animated by a proper "European imagery", in the street protests in Ukraine (2021, 441-445); this confirming that the urban space, as Paolo Gerbaudo put it, is still the main incubator of social conflict (2012, 28). Hence, a follow-up question arises, as to why the citizens use social media for discussing any possible topic – national politics, local chronicle, global crises, economy, sport, gossip, and the more – and they *do not* choose them, in the case of European affairs.

This would leave us with two research options to be hunted for. Firstly, it appears that the traces of Europeanization from below must be hunted in different domains – for instance, those of sports or live events, rather than hypermediated communication. Qualitative investigations might help understanding the reason of this enmity between Europeanness and social media, and whether the material settings of the platforms play a part in it. It is particularly the case of the semi-public nature of the online spaces, bearing with it two problems connected to each other – the "right to be forgotten" (Mayer-Schönberger 2009, 208) and what Danah Boyd refers to as the affordances of *visibility* and *persistence* (2014, 11-14) – and possibly able to inhibit people's participation to some discussion threads, also due to the risk of being exposed to hate speech treatments.

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A second, and possibly more ambitious task would consist of the purely theoretical reflection on the above-mentioned *enmity* between digital platforms and Europeanness. As a matter of fact, the alike spatial orientation of the two patterns – the perimeter of the European region, and the enclosure of digital commons on the part of the platforms – is resulting in a clash between different forms of sovereignty. We recall here Carl Schmitt's lesson (1950), according to which the delimitation of a physical space – the *nomos* - is one with the imposition of an authority over it, and with the takeover of that space. This is too ambitious a topic for this document, but theoretical efforts will be required, for coming to terms with the conflict between alternative forms of power, ultimately legitimated by their spatial patterns, either drawn on the physical or on the online space.

In terms of indications, we would remark on the importance of any initiative aiming at favoring the consolidation of people's agency. The operational tools grounded on these findings are listed out in deliverable 5.7, in the section focusing on civil society, which range from the support to participative ethics, to the investment on more tailored media literacy campaigns, to the recognition of the role of common users in news reporting and content production. As observed by the EUMEPLAT scientific consultant Tiziana Terranova, the main principle by which our observations are inspired is the need of valorizing what has been done outside the perimeter of the institutional actions.

(2.2)

As is often the case, grounded on our findings the positive indications – either in terms of actual externalities of platformization, or proposed alternatives – are less common and solid than the criticalities discussed so far. In this section, we will address two relevant insights about social media use and agency, respectively coming from the aggregated analysis of WP4 national reports, and from the WP2 Italian dataset; and in the next one, a short series of proposals raised in the context of the WP5 scenario planning tasks and the WP2 and WP4 research tasks.

As the WP4 leader observed in the note for this deliverable,

> while being accompanied by numerous bad practices, such as fake news, hate speech, and so on, the work in Deliverable 4.5 Catalogue of Best Practices shows that platformization also provides the opportunity to communicate, spread and promote good practices to fight stereotypes and discrimination on social media and in online environments in general. While exhibiting quite some heterogeneity, the cross-country study of 10 European countries shows that there indeed exist some commonalities in the types of best practices that are communicated in social media across Europe.

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The relevant aspect, following the same document, is that social media allows “buzz in support of women's rights and LBGTQ+ as well as to promote empathy and education on gender issues”, which “may include sharing personal stories to encourage greater understanding and awareness of gender equality”. While analogous representations are reported to be less frequent in the case of migration, which will be addressed below and in deliverable 5.7, let us focus on this specific impact of platformization on European public discourse. That gender-related activism pops out as the most relevant positive externality of European platformization, so, is a good argument; which nonetheless has a downside. In fact, the attention towards sexual differences has increased in recent years: and especially among youth and young adults, which are usually over-represented in the sampling of social media posting actors. Even in Jean Twenge’s devastating diagnosis of teen-agers’ well-being, for instance, openness to sexual and gender diversities stands out as the *sole* improvement in people’s life (2017, 232-235). In other words, it is not clear whether we can rubricate the online attention to gender as a consequence of platformization, as a generational sensibility, or as a properly European feature: more than likely, in any case, social media are accompanying a broader social fact rather than shaping it (and once again, this would suggest that the media are maybe not as important as us media scholars suppose them to be). As we will discuss in section 3, all this directly calls to action the dimension of *values*; and the more so in the matter of gender equality, which is held and defended as a typically European principle.

The second evidence rather emerged from a local analysis, the IULM elaboration on the Italian WP2 data. The necessary premise is that the period under observation was characterized by the polemics around the introduction of the so-called Green Pass, the Italian version of the EU Covid-19 certificate. As a matter of fact, Italian measures were particularly restrictive, with non-vaccinated citizens banned from job, public transportation, and any public venue; and the news media coverage has been largely, if not totally in favor of the government (see Miconi, Pezzano & Risi 2023). This occurrence triggered an intense discussion, and lead people to search for alternative sources of information about the Covid policies put in place abroad. It follows, as first noted by Sara Cannizzaro, a frequent reference to other European countries as best practices, or at least better examples, coupled with the critique to the State handling of the pandemic. This supernational flow of information is what we refer to as *horizontal* Europeanization: a bilateral or multilateral exchange among countries, in place of the vertical relation between the EU and one’s own country. This distinction between vertical and horizontal Europeanization has been proposed by Koopmans and Erbe (2007, 102-103), and what is more relevant, research has universally detected a lack of horizontal Europeanization, with media attention only focusing on the European affairs somehow impacting local interests (Peters *et al* 2005; Sifft *et al* 2007; Machill, Beiler & Fischer 2007; Koopmans & Statham 2010). In the Italian case we observed this anomalous opening to the internal affairs of other European countries, which is the more relevant, when one recalls that we have worked on the most impactful YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook posts, in terms of

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generated traffic and number of reactions. The only prior case we are aware of is that of Bee and Chrona's study on the Twitter debate in Italy and Greece, which – though limited to a *bilateral*, rather multilateral scheme – in its turn measured a systematic flow between the two countries, united by a common aversion to the austerity measures (2020, 881-882). The two findings indicate that a perceived state of crisis may favor some solidarity among European citizens, as we will also debate in the third section. On the other hand, it has been remarked that political participation in Europe, also in reaction to crises, is mostly channeled by official agents (Cardoso, Accornero, Lapa & Azevedo 2018, 407-409); so that this embryonic form of horizontalization is still in search of a representation of itself. Here an investment in online communication can be worth – starting with a detailed mapping of what happens online - as wide-scale surveys show that social media foster the participation of *previously disinterred* citizens, and therefore may provide a tool to reach them out (Vaccari & Valeriani 2021, 156-160). It remains a fact, as stated below, that these discussions are not inspired by a European interest per se, whilst being triggered by a relevant and *material* problem, as it is felt by the people.

(2.3)

In respect to the last consideration of the previous section, a call for strengthening people's agency is presented in both the WP5 and the WP2 notes. Here we will collect these indications in four logical groups.

The first type of indications requires the EU to favor people's participation, by investing on the cooperation with NGOs and grassroots organizations, and it mostly comes from WP2. This semi-institutional option would possibly result in a network of associations dealing with European themes, after the model of EDMO- European Digital Media Observatory, which counts on the collaboration between the central institution and the local branches[6].

A second series of ideas, coming from both WP2 and WP4 and being made explicit in the task 5.1 and 5.3 notes, clusters around the need for *education* for critical thinking, and for active and critical citizenship. The risk implied in planning literacy campaigns is evident, though, and the problem is how to do that without endorsing a *judgmental* view of people's behavior and ideas. We also recall that a major shortcoming of public communication in Europe

[6] We recall here that the partner leading the EUMEPLAT WP2, ISCTE-IUL Lisbon, is also a member of the network responsible for the implementation of the EDMO policies in Spain and Portugal (*Iberian Digital Media Research and Fact-Checking Hub-IBERIFIER*).

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is precisely its perceived institutional and top-down inspiration, which is rarely coupled with a bottom-up participation of any sort. Two amendments to the media literacy discourse therefore come to our mind. Firstly, in-depth research is necessary, in order to know something more about the demand side; or at the very least, about people's availability and susceptibility. Secondly and relatedly, it might be necessary to should drift away, as much as possible, from an idea of literacy based on classical lessons, or in any case on a vertical transfer of knowledge – for this is how a university class work, but not *how society works*. While looking for a possible narrative, I came across the indication suggested in the task 5.1 note: education as a strategy to prevent the diffusion of dystopian representations of European future. An option is to explore whether the methodology partially used for the WP5 tasks, that of forecasting and back casting, can be applied to this stage as well: coming to terms with people's fears (more on this in section 4), and provide them with the knowledge which is necessary to face those fears, and to critically deconstruct the above-cited dystopian perspective (or endorse them in a more aware way). In both cases, the background research and the hypothesized sessions, the adoption of qualitative methods will be necessary; and in both cases, it goes without saying, a similar intervention can only be planned at a small scale.

A variant of this thematic, thirdly, is laid out in the 5.2 note, calling for algorithmic literacy. In this case, the very *technical* competence in question might help to involve citizens, or social groups, without implying the judgmental approach we have mentioned before. Attention should be placed, in this sense, on the way the whole package of AI- and algorithms-related themes is addressed in the academy. In the general public speaking, the algorithm is still presented in a sort of mystic fashion, so to speak, as an initiatory knowledge; and in the field of professinal master education, AI is offered as tool for reaching marketing purposes - that is to say, to extract as much data as possible from people's digital life and turn them into profit sources. Both things are totally legitimate, needless to say, but on the other hand we observe a lack of initiatives for helping citizens' awareness or, so to speak, for *unboxing* AI[7].

Finally, we can group together the proposals of valorizing people's agency and "cross-fertilizing" the existing practices (to quote the formula used in the 5.4 note). The difference with the interventions of the first type, and it is a big difference, is that here major organizations are not supposed to take the lead – neither the European Union and nor the academy, we may add. As our EUMEPLAT scientific consultant Tiziana Terranova observed during the meeting in Rome, it would be about studying what has been done outside the official perimeter of the institutions, and taking advantage of the energies of informal and independent social actors of different kinds. The same approach is called for in the 5.4 note, in terms of a "participative

[7] We are referring to the Unboxing AI program promoted by the Italian Fondazione Feltrinelli, to which the Principal Investigator of the EUMEPLAT project, Andrea Miconi, has participated a few years ago (see Wahal 2022).

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productive ethics", with the goal of taking together "the already existing but fragmented initiatives in a variety of societal domains". To be practical, we will shorty touch on the first example provided in that document, the actions against cyber-bullying. In fact promoting a synergy among different projects is particularly important, in this case, as *insulation* is the main problem at stake in cyber-bullying, which is built on two levels: the imbalance of power between the many and the individual, the bullies and the victim (Boyd 2014, 131); and the action of the media in reinforcing the spiral of silence and letting people believe they are more isolated than they actually are (Noelle Neumann 1980, 111 and 169). Along this line, the academy would be expected to intervene only *in a second moment*, along with the involved stakeholders, and act for the valorization of citizens' actions, rather than for their education.

About this last issue, some skepticism may be introduced into this whole discourse. Exactly as media literacy always comes out as a sort of *cosmetic* solution in response to any dilemma, strengthening people's agency, in its turn, is easier said than done. Indeed, being engaged in education for students, or in literacy programs at basic levels[8], can provide a solid background knowledge for that: but there is little doubt that speaking to society at large and to the citizens, well, is something else entirely. It is also the be considered the argument made by Barbara Thomass during the Ankara WP5 session: that insisting on literacy, and therefore on people's duty to be competent and skilled, cannot come at the price of removing the responsibility of institutions and regulators.

[8] In this sense, the EUMEPLAT Coordinator, IULM University, has also worked to some EU-funded projects on media literacy: the Tempus project eMEDia and the Erasmus+ project PAgES (the latter as the coordinator), which implemented a cross-media journalism master program respectively in Tunisian and Libyan universities; the Creative Europe project *TEHC- Teaching European History through Cinema*; and it is currently a partner of the Cooperation Partnership in HE project *CLIP- Critical visual media literacy and empowerment*. To what degree this expertise can be used for a wider campaign, well, it is still to be understood.

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(3) The culture of the Europeans[9]

(3.1)

As anticipated, we are using a very restricted definition of culture, which is close to *cultural consumption* or *media repertoires*. The title of the section obviously quotes that of Donald Sassoon's 2006 monumental book, which showed how rare the circulation of cultural contents has actually been, over the two-century course of industrialization. In particular, it is Work-package 1 and Work-package 3 to provide a confirmation of Sassoon's findings, according to which, in a nutshell, each country either consumes *national* or *American* contents, with no space left for a pan-European culture, or, how the statistical definition goes for non-national European works.

As stated in the introductory section, we will focus on the following evidence: Impact and influence of American media; Long-lasting relevance of national contents in legacy media; Relevance of national contents, as in the case of YouTube and TikTok influencers; American hegemony over VOD and video sharing platforms; Lack of shared images of Europe (which is connected to the fact that, as observed in the WP1 deliverables, the quantitative increase in the production of European works is not enough). For the sake of brevity, we will group together the similar arguments, resulting in this list of topics: Influence of the American media (points 1 and 4); Influence of the national media (points 2 and 3); Shortcomings of the European cultural production (points 4 and 5).

(3.2)

Data coming from WP1 and WP3 unambiguously reveals the importance of American media contents and infrastructures in the European area. Here we will focus on the possible explanations of the American hegemony over Europe, which ultimately rely on two possible options: respectively, the cultural imperialism and the culturalist thesis.

In respect of the first case, Jeremy Tunstall's work has provided a useful basis for studying the internationalization of communication flows. His classical position can be epitomized in the formula *the media are American*, that is the title of his 1977 book. In Tunstall's reading, the American hegemony over the world did not take shape overnight, while being

[9] A part of this section will be published in Miconi 2024, forthcoming.

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conquered step by step: with the dawn of the movie industry in the 1920s-1930s (ibidem, 49); with the diffusion of American music in Europe, after the end of World War II (ibidem, 91); with the importation of US contents in British Tv, from 1955 onwards (ibidem, 101); and with the launch of telecommunication satellites in the 1960s (ibidem, 39) – to the point that the very definition of the media formats has been, first of all, an American affair (ibidem, 75-76). Despite the collected evidence, Tunstall is well-aware that the cultural imperialism thesis does not stand up to the historical facts, as it only explains the rise of global powers, without accounting for the case of regional hegemonies (ibidem, 62). It is pretty surprising, in any case, that three decades later Tunstall would reverse his interpretation, suggesting a transition from the Anglo-American cartel to a sort of Euro-American complex.

The contact point between the two alternative statements is the idea of American supremacy peaking in the 1950s, presented in both studies: with the undisputed dominance of the US media from 1943 to 1953 (Tunstall 1977, 137), challenged at the end of the decade by the European takeover of the news agencies market (Tunstall 2008, 99-100). The vanishing of American power, Tunstall opines, would be caused by both the consolidation of alternative global conglomerates – especially those based in China and India (ibidem, 139-231) – and by the fusion of American and European media in a single integrated industry (ibidem, 14).

According to Tunstall, the weakening of American power is made evident by some adaptations and changes of the media systems, and in particular by Public Service Media surviving to deregulation almost everywhere and giving rise to public-private hybrid Tv markets (2008, 259); or, as we have already observed, by the failure of the convergence tendencies individuated by Hallin and Mancini as the main feature of the new century (Miconi & Papathanassopoulos 2023). Among the factors at stake, going back to Tunstall, we can also mention the concurrence of Latin American countries in the production of “cheap” Tv series (2008, 11); the role of the European Big Five in the audiovisual industry (ibidem, 262); the upheaval of American cable and satellite Tv services (ibidem, 274); and the co-productions between European companies and Hollywood (ibidem, 282) – and here Tunstall probably underestimates the dominant role played by the American partners in the joint movie releases. At the end of his half-serious comparison between the different segments of media industry, Tunstall presents a balanced proportion, as “the United States beats Europe 10 to 6, or 5 to 3” (ibidem, 281). More importantly, his conclusion is that Unites States is still leading the entertainment sector, with Europe being stronger in the field of news and information (ibidem, 247). This would result from a bizarre inversion of the historical cycle: firstly, the French-British information duopoly over a whole century, between 1830 and 1930; then the US hegemony, which lasted “fifty years”, approximately from 1930 to 1980; and European countries eventually regaining their leadership (Tunstall 2011, 263).

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Tunstall's discourse is in line with a typical post-1990s vulgate, claiming the crisis of the American empire: something close to what Huntington had previously labelled the *declinism*, or the rhetoric of the US downfall (1988-89, 76 and 95). Such hypothesis has been contested and somehow overcome in the debate among historians, making space for less radical interpretations (see Cox 2011; Nye 2015). In any case, Tunstall is certainly right in questioning the American hegemony, in face of the evidence of new global players taking the center of the stage, either they come from China, India, or the Persian Gulf. His diagnosis of European media, in other way, is probably optimistic; and in any case, the platformization process would bear with it a new, and unprecedented hegemony of American players.

That online platforms are mostly owned by American capitals, with a few exceptions, is simply a state of fact, as it is the relative downgrading of European companies (Mansell 2012, 136). Not surprisingly, this new media regime has been labeled as *platform imperialism*, with market monopoly and architecture design cooperating in reinforcing the hegemony of American services over the world, and especially over the Global South (Kwet 2019, 6-8). In short, it would be about American imperialism being "renewed with platforms", as an additional tool along with those based on "politics, economy, and military, as well as culture" (Yong Jin 2015, 69). For what concerns the video-on-demand sector, that we will deal with in this chapter, similar explanations have been put forward about the "Netflix imperialism": a branch of the American empire, taking advantage of both the usability of the interface and the vertical integration, made possible by the realization of the so-called originals (Davis 2023, 1145-1146). By collecting first-hand information and interviews with local professionals, Park, Kim and Lee assessed the disruptive effect of Netflix on the Korean market: with the increasing dependence of the industry on the investments of the US-based platform (2023, 79), predictably, but also with the changes to the "conventional grammar" of Tv dramas, reorganized around the schedule and the timing imposed by the advertising slots (ibidem, 81). The commercial VODs actually play a twofold part in favor of the American system: exporting its products at an unprecedented level of scale, and granularity of diffusion; while also giving new impulse to the internal circulation of its contents and to the actual recognizability of its own culture (Yong Jin 2017, 3887).

Here we argue that the shortcoming of the cultural imperialism theory is not in overestimating the impact of the American media, while in the conceptual frame adopted for explaining such undeniable impact. There are three reasons, in synthesis, that would lead us to privilege an alternative model. The first aspect, exemplified by the Korean case we shortly alluded to, is the fact that American hegemony does not only impact peripheral areas, while also investing other core regions of global capitalism: which, as delineated by Immanuel Wallerstein (1980, 39), is a typical feature of the world-system pattern. Secondly, the insistence on the American empire risks to overlook the power of other regional hegemonic forces, which can be analyzed in their turn in terms of platform colonialism - which is the case of Chinese companies (Davis & Xiao 2021, 104-105 in particular).

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A third and more complex argument has to do with the combination between the American origins of the platforms, and their global ramifications. It is hardly necessary to recall that digital platforms "were not born in the void", while being rooted in US capitals and laws (Bannermann 2022, 8). Still, if we consider the actual role of the platforms, as it is legitimized and exercised, doubts can be casted about them being an extension of the Nation-State they originated from - which would justify the *imperialist* thesis[10]. That we bear witness to something different than the classical imperialist hegemony, is also proved by the fact that many platforms favor the spread of national contents, as we saw in the first chapter – and still, they keep exercising a global power of *infrastructural* nature (see Van Dijck, Poell & de Waal 2018, 12-16). Benjamin Bratton possibly made the biggest and more ambitious step in this direction, in conceptualizing the rise of a mega-machine, likely to take control of the Earth ecosystem. For what is of our interest, Bratton sees in these platforms – or the layers of the "stack" to come – a new form of governmentality, which cannot be reduced to their material control of the market, nor to the formal authority of the State, while resulting from the encounter and the amalgamation between the two (2015, 341). In this respect, the two authorities would become continuous and eventually indistinguishable from each other (ibidem, 120), affirming an unprecedented combination of legal and infrastructural powers (ibidem, 21).

While the media imperialism thesis is not totally convincing, we should recognize that the culturalist interpretation of the US hegemony falls short in its turn. North American products, the elucidation goes, would better fit the complexity of the global landscape as they are ideated and created since the beginning for a variegated audience, due to the multi-ethnic composition of the US society. This argument has been leveraged by both Donald Sassoon (2006, 821; 2019, 214) and Joseph Nye, the main theorist of soft power (2004, 41), and it seems to be largely accepted (i.e., Hoskins, McFayden & Finn 2004, 44; Martel 2010, 188-189). As it has been objected, though, this would not explain why other multi-ethnic countries are not capable of exporting their culture (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 214-2145); nor it untangles, reciprocally, why not all US entertainment forms are equally popular abroad, and some of their undertones are almost impossible to adapt to the taste of other audiences.

Either way, it appears that the platformization process has not damaged the US movie and Tv shows business; rather, it has taken it to a whole new level. An analysis on the ten major VOD providers available in the US – Netflix, Prime, Google Tv, HBO, Disney+, Fandango, iTunes, Hulu, Vudu, IMBD – also indicates that the streaming infrastructure has

[10] In this sense, we rely on the distinction between *imperialism* and *empire*, as defined by Negri and Hardt: with the first intended as the supernational expansion of the State, and the second as a genuinely global form of sovereignty (2001, 221-234 in particular).

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been reinforcing the diffusion and success of American and English-American movies at the national box office (Demont-Heinrich 2022, 12-14), thus confirming the deep connection between the strength of a country in the global competition and the numbers of its internal market. As to Europe, the wide-scale adoption of US video platforms is engendering a cascade of cultural and economic repercussions. By quoting what Thomas Guback observed back in the 1970s, "the American presence" in the movie field has not only a direct impact "on the way specific films are made", with its consequences also involving the "industry's structure and viability" at large, and its ability "to be the be judge of its own interests" (Guback 1974, 5) – which is, in the end, a definition of how *hegemony* works. As discussed by Thomas Elsaesser in terms of film theory, the very definition of European culture used to be affected by the haunting comparison with the American industry, with little space left for the blooming of cross-European forms. As Europe is eventually becoming a continent of immigrants and fractures like the Northern-American society has traditionally been, Elsaesser argues, European cinema can no longer proclaim itself as *European*, in the same way it used to: the more Europe is comparable to the United States, in other words, and less the US itself will serve as a constitutive other. This would engender a deficit of legitimization, and therefore the urgent need of new creative energies for the definition of an alternative canon: a "philosophical turn", nothing less, able of using the European "performative self-contradiction" as a cultural and political response the new state of "servitude" (Elsaesser 2019, 297), after the decline of any "heroic narrative of self-identity" (ibidem, 10). If we go beyond the specific focus on films as "thought experiments", in fact, Elsaesser is cogitating about the "new marginality" of Europe (ibidem, 9), which in his view has been partially caused by the unification itself (ibidem, 168).

The accomplished unification of our continent requires a common identity, as Giacomo Tagiuri put it, and in its turn "identity needs contents" (2014, 157): novels, movies, Tv-series, songs, you name it - and such European cultural contents are yet to come, despite the almost universal availability of new devices. In the end, we go as far as to state that the platformization process is going against Europeanization, inasmuch as it takes together the *infrastructural* power of the platforms themselves, and the affordance for social production, which, on the other hand, favors the rise and spread of *national* contents: in such a way by-passing the symbolic opposition that provided, as is often the case of constitutive others, a possible legitimacy of European culture.

(3.3)

As anticipated, evidence coming from WP1 and WP3 is the long-lasting centrality of national contents, which would confirm Donald Sassoon's and Jérôme Bourdon's (2011) diagnoses on European audiences being either interested in local or American contents, which little space left to properly cross-European phenomena. How to interpret such tendency, is the

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core argument of this section, based on the juxtaposition between hard and soft hypotheses – respectively, the cyber-balkanization and the banal nationalism.

According to a common interpretation in the internet studies, the fragmentation of the web into national clusters – with the alleged effects on society at large - goes by the name of *balkanization*: and the convention has it that we refer with this label to two different processes. On the one hand, it is about the "governmental fragmentation" of "the global public Internet being divided into so-called "Balkanized" or digitally bordered national internets", as Drake, Cerf and Kleinwächter (2015, 6) recounted a few years ago, in their report for the World Economic Forum. In the other way, the same category also indicates the consequences of users' behavior, which preferably stay in touch with like-minded others – or with those speaking the same language, at the very least - thus cocooning in self-referential shells and augmenting the insularity of the web ecosystem (see, among the others, Romm-Livermore 2012, 322; Boyd 2014, 154-156). And it is a fact that the same two facets – the rise of social media as walled gardens; and the role of the governments in regulating the net – have been evoked by World Wide Web inventor Tim Berners-Lee, in his denunciation of the end of the cyberspace as we knew it.

> The Web as we know it, however is being threatened in different ways. Some of its most successful inhabitants have begun to chip away at its principles. Large social-networking sites are walling off information posted by their users from the rest of the Web. Wireless Internet providers are being tempted to slow traffic to sites with which they have not made deals. Governments – totalitarian and democratic alike – are monitoring people's online habits, endangering important human rights (Berners-Lee 2010, 80).

Berners-Lee explicitly takes together non-homogeneous things: authoritarian countries paving the way to the State control of the Web; platforms walling users off from hypertextual navigation (and users willingly accepting that); or algorithms clustering the audiences for commercial purposes. The importance of this last aspect has surged as a popular argument after Eli Pariser's (2011) seminal work on the Page Rank filtering operations: triggering the discussion among scholars as to whether the clusterization of the web is prevalently due to the technical set-up of the algorithms, or to what people do when on-line (Sunstein 2017, 92-94).

Here we will take a different stand: that the local and the global dimensions – as well as the national and the European – have been going hand in hand over the whole story of digital networks. As a consequence, doubts can be casted on the rebranding of balkanization as a contemporary phenomenon, tied to – if not caused by - the spread of sovereigntist ideas in commercial social media. In terms of long durée continuities, this also means

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> that nationalism is never simply opposed to cosmopolitanism, as many advocates of the idea of Europe have assumed. Nationalism and universalism not only emerged in Europe in the same historical epoch, but they belong together. Since the eighteenth century, ideas of Europe have repeatedly not only tied that idea to the culture of a particular nation-state, but also conceived of Europe in nationalism terms, even when the models have been federalist (Weller 2021, 275).

It makes sense to remark that Billig's view of banal nationalism is premised in a similar postulation: that "historically the rise of nationalism entailed the creation of internationalism", as one nation can only be imagined "amongst other nations", and against the backdrop of what can be defined the "universalization of particularism" (1995, 83). Interestingly enough, this is a point stressed, albeit in different perspectives, by both Gerard Delanty (2013, 322) and Immanuel Wallerstein (2006, 31-34): that Europe is made of a combination between localism and cosmopolitanism, and that the super-national ideas have been reinforced in parallel with the rise of the State as a typical European form. It is not our intention to address such broad topic as the relation between universalism and nationalism – rather, to observe the very same tension through the prism of media systems. As we know, the urge "to move away from the nation-centered stance" has been largely accepted in television and communication studies, probably on the footprints of Ulrich Beck, and his celebrated attack to "methodological nationalism" (Oren 2012, 373). As Hepp and Couldry noticed, if "the methodological base of international media research is comparative", its focus has not to be "national-territorial", while the entire plurality of economic and cultural flows has to be used as the unit of comparison (Hepp & Couldry 2009, 32-33). The utility of Billig' reading, in this perspective, is to interpret the relevance of *national* media culture as an *international* phenomenon, in a way that cannot be neglected. This is somehow the same complication we have already seen in Elsaesser, whit his idea of European cinema as being rooted in the tradition of national authorship – so as to be perceived, in the end, as a series of "seemingly discrete national film cultures" (Bergfelder 2005, 315).

The more relevant implication of this argument, as stated, is that the current definition of balkanization entails the strong conception of nationalism as anti-European, anti-immigration or protectionist ideology: what would be sanctioned by the semantic reference to the tragic history of the Balkans. In the United States, Barack Obama himself called to action against the "balkanization of news media", intended as a driver of populism, a main "damage" to democracy, and ultimately a poisoned fruit of Donald Trump's regency (Visoka & Richmond 2022, 88). The spread of nationalist and ultra-nationalist instances online has been largely analyzed (see, for a recent example, Fuchs 2022): that social media has a specific affordance for right-wing propaganda, though, is still to be proved. Similarly, that the national internet phenomenon, also played out by our research data, belongs to the same family of the nationalist attacks to the EU, is far from clear. We basically agree with Mihelj and Jiménez Martínez, when they utter that

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> future research should resist the temptation of restricting nationalism to its most exclusive, aggressive variants and instead examine how digital media contribute to the reproduction and spreading of different varieties of nationalism, including those that are more open to diversity or more compatible with liberal democratic values (Mihelj & Jiménez Martínez 2021, 342).

As a matter of fact, and more concretely speaking, the national embedding of social media culture is also in place in those countries where the populist sentiment is relatively under control, or where people are largely *in favor* of the European Union. According to the last EuroBarometer polls, for instance, in winter 2022-2023 75% of the Swedish and 60% of the Portuguese "tend to trust" European Union, both standing above the general average of 48% of the population in the EU27 (European Commission 2023, T36). When it goes down to the sharing of contents in social media, this notwithstanding, we saw how relevant the national discourse might be in these countries as well, also regardless of how widely spoken is the English language. We may append that the national contents are of paramount importance in any single country, whether their population "tends to trust" local institutions, as in Germany, Sweden, Czech Republic and Belgium (respectively 70%, 75%, 63% and 62% of the citizens, over a 56% EU average); or is in line with the European average in that matter, as in Portugal (56%); or does not trust its own public bodies, as in Spain (47%), Italy (42%), and Greece (37%) (European Commission 2023, T31). This encourages the hypothesis that the on-line *political* nationalism in a proper sense – despite exercising an impressive grip over academic debate – might be overestimated, when compared to a purely cultural factor, as it is the dependence of national audiences on contents, frames and memes coming from their daily environment.

Europe being a continent of many countries of *comparable* size and relevance, Tzvetan Todorov wrote, an integration and a synthesis would unlikely emerge – in the past as in the present, based on the *long durée* of geo-cultural patterns (Todorov & Bracher 2008, 7). Conversely, the argument has been made that centers on the idea that national sentiments thrive on-line as *reactive* forms of identity: this is Manuel Castells' interpretation of the space of places, again, intended as the primary resistance of subaltern classes to the spread of global flows (Castells 1996, 1997, 1999). Here we advance that the importance of the local in social media has to do with the *cultural* needs of the audiences: something closer to Benedict Anderson's idea of imagined community (1983), who not accidentally considered the media of the time – novels and newspapers – as the main drivers of collective identification. In other terms, we are back to what, after Michael Billig, is commonly defined *banal* nationalism:

> Why do "we", in established, democratic nations, not forget "our" national identity? The short answer is that "we" are constantly reminded that "we" live in national: our identity is continually being flagged (1995, 92).

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Billig's work is explicitly based on Anderson's (and Gellner's) idea: "nation-states are not founded upon objective criteria, such as the possession of a discrete language", but they have to be "imagined" by means of the "banal flagging of nationhood" itself (Billig 1995, 10). We argue here that Billig's theory is not necessarily in opposition with the orthodox interpretations of nationalism: rather, it adds to the discourse all the unnoticed signs by which people's belonging is identified. What is notable, is that the revolutionary impact of Billig's concept has been commonly assumed in general theory, while at the empirical level it emerges how nationalism evolves through an interplay between its *hot* and *banal* forms (Koch & Paasi 2016, 4-5), which are easily merged into the same practices, as exemplified by the rituals of the American people during the Independence Day (see Paasi 2016, 22). As to Europe, the same combination of hot and banal nationalism has been detected in several investigations: on the symbology of English female sport (Bowes & Bairner 2019); on the bi-lingual road signs in Wales (Jones & Merriman 2009); on the visual representation of Italy and Italian people (Antonsich 2016); on the Serbian popular music (Atanasovski 2015, 85-86), or on the Opening Ceremony of the London Olympic Games (Closs Stephens 2016); and, at the pan-European level, in the case of the BoycottGermany campaign (Lekakis 2017).

In both Anderson and Billig, nationalization measures spill over into how people live their daily experience: or better, they are legitimized, if not brought to existence, by that daily life experience. As to the scholarship about the concept of banal nationalism, that we can not address as a whole, we will shortly debate the major objections related to our specific case-study, the role the media in the process. According to the first critique, such thesis would imply the passivity of the citizens in receiving, and being shaped by, the top-down stream of information contents (Reicher & Hopkins 2001, 3-4); while the second one apprises the over-emphasizing of the actual homogeneity of national media cultures (Rosie & others 2006, 334-336). We will not deal with these counter-arguments per se – if anything, because the author himself eventually provided his point-to-point reply to the critiques (Billig 2009). What we need to do, is to simply clarify our positions in that matter, for what affects the operational choices inspiring the research. As to the first aspect, we are purposedly offering a perspective centered on people's *choice*, for the reasons described in the agency section: which social media channels are the most followed; or which movies are more appreciated in video-on-demand platforms. Not that we agree on Billig considering the media audiences as passive, properly speaking: while we do think, as already explained in respect to Smits' work on illustrated journalism, that ordinary consumption is a real blind-spot in many reflections on media systems, whether national or super-national. The second objection is directly related to this last aspect, as it questions the very existence of a consistent national media culture. In this sense, the banal nationalism model would assume "that a national media addresses and constitutes a coherent national public", Michael Skey opines (2009, 335), "and though this process disparate individuals are, to paraphrase Anderson, able to imagine themselves as belonging to the same community". In this case, we think that Skey is simply right: there is no such thing as a national media culture to be taken for granted – rather, it is constantly shaped and reshaped through a negotiation process; it inevitably results from the compromise between

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local and foreign contents; and in the end, it only exists in the context of a plurality of tendencies and forces, some of which can work against its consolidation and stability. Here we can limit ourselves to state, as a general remark, that the same can be told about *any form of nationalism*, regardless of its theoretical framing. In fact, homogenous entities only exist in theory, with the modern world being ruled by Max Weber's polytheism of values: so that the very idea of the nation does not exist as a "coherent" ensemble, and its foundational narratives - including, but not limited to, *media* narratives - are always counter-balanced or contrasted by alternative stories.

(3.4)

For what concerns the weakness of European contents, we will adopt a qualitative perspective, which has to do with how Europe is *represented* rather than with the quantitative frequency of the related keywords.

That the measurement of references to Europe will not do it far enough has been pointed out by many scholars. In the case of the most institutional symbols, such as the twelve-star flag or the common currency, we also object that their repetition may even backfire, as it risks consolidating the image of the EU as a purely bureaucratic and *abstract* entity, far away from the dailyness of people's experience. In this direction, interesting insights are offered by a comparative assessment of the representation of European issues in Bulgarian and British media. Slavtcheva-Petkova performed a two-step study, with a content analysis of seven Tv programs – three in Bulgaria and four in the UK, between November 2009 and February 2010 – followed by in-person interviews with 174 children living in both countries (2014, 49). References to Europe are three times more frequent in Bulgarian Tv than in the British; and as to the EU flag, it is visualized in 12.7% of the 355 analyzed Bulgarian programs, and barely in 0.5% of the 202 UK programs (ibidem, 53). It remains a fact, nonetheless, that Bulgarian children, despite being more able to recognize the UE flag (ibidem, 56), are less likely to identify themselves as Europeans, and even less aware of the very existence of the Union (ivi). A similar argument is made by Foret, according to whom the visibility of the EU flag in the media would not have any reverberation on the audiences, without it also being used in the day-to-day experience and transactions (2009, 316). Picking up on this point, and in discussing the news coverage of the EU, we cannot help but remark a step back in the understanding of how the media work: as if Europeanization could be fostered by the media "frequently tak[ing] up with issues relating to the EU", quoting Cram's reference to the so-called banal Europeanism (2001, 24o), "often expressing neither opposition or support, but simply reporting relevant information", and regardless of their narrative tone. For European values to be "internalized", we may object, it takes more than the simple repetition of a given set of keywords: something than can be only understood by monitoring the "quality" and knowing "not only what the media focus on but also what is missing" (Huertas Bailén 2015, 42).

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This necessary shift from the *presence* of Europe in the media narrative to its *rhetorical construction*, we have to admit, is still to be interpreted, and it will require ad hoc investigations. For the time being, the closest concept we can think of is that of "marked Europeanness", suggested by both Marco Cucco (2015) and Milly Buonanno (2015), in application of Matte Hjort's original dyad of marked and unmarked *transnationalism*. To Hjort, who is speaking about the global movie industry, a distinction must be drawn between marked and unmarked "cinematic transnationalism": as in the first case, the international dimension is limited to the existence of cooperation agreements and distribution campaigns. Conversely, "a film might be said to count as an instance of marked transnationality", if and when their authors "intentionally direct the attention of viewers towards various transnational properties that encourage thinking about transnationality" (2010, 13-14). In actuality, none of these authors put forward a suitable analytical model for addressing the media representation of Europe: so that "marked Europeanness", in the end, is characterized by the "unmistakable evidence of European presence" in the creative process (Buonanno 2015, 210-211).

All in all, and as recalled in a previous section of this report, the main indication of our dataset is that the American productions get the majority share in all markets – and in a more impressive fashion on Google Play, iTunes, Disney+, and Apple Tv - with no macroscopic differences with respect to theatrical movies screening. In WP3, we also observed how "non-national European movies" are hardly popular, with the partial exception of Czech Republic. Here we will narrow down the discourse to the success of national movies, based on the double bind between national and European cinema, highlighted by Thomas Elsaesser. We can state that Elsaesser's idea – European cinema as a series of national forms – echoes the tension between universalism and nationalism, as laid out by Delanty and Wallerstein in more general terms.

Table 4. National productions and co-productions in the weekly top ten watched movies in VODs

Country	Platform	Total national successes	Comedies
Belgium	iTunes	23	10
Belgium	Netflix	3	3
Bulgaria	HBO Max	3	3
Czech Republic	Netflix	32	9
Germany	Netflix	18	13
Germany	iTunes	12	8
Germany	Amazon Prime	12	11
Greece	Ertflix	4	0

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Italy	Netflix	23	13
Italy	iTunes	30	16
Portugal	HBO Max	1	1
Spain	Netflix	25	19
Sweden	Netflix	2	0
Türkiye	AppleTV	1	1

(Source: Elaboration on FlixPatrol data)

In the above table we listed out the rankings in which national successes are indeed present - which is not always the case, exactly because VOD platforms are hegemonized by American productions. The main indication, at a first glance, is the centrality of the comedy as a typically national genre: as it accounts for 13 of the 26 top-watched titles in Belgium; three out of three in Bulgaria; 32 out of 42 in Germany; 29 out of 53 in Italy; and 19 out of 25 in Spain. The only local movie appreciated in Portugal is a comedy, *Ladrões de Tuta e Meia*, and so is the sole national success in Türkiye, *Recep*. The Sweden case is different, as the two national titles are both dramas, and they are both released by Netflix; while in Czech Republic comedies account for a smaller – albeit not irrelevant - number of successes, and precisely 9 out of 32. In Greece, finally, national movies only get some notoriety in the Public Service Media platform, Ertflix, and in this case no comedies are included in the top-watched list.

The success of the comedy as a specifically national format can be explained, following Steve Neale, with its flexibility as a narrative format. The comedy, Neale and Krutnik (1990, 198) opine, can easily be adapted to historical changes, so that their themes will be the closer to the material phenomenology of people's life (whether we consider it as a *genre* or as a *mode*: an aspect of Neale's reflection that we can not take into account here). The comedy as the drama situation "in which the physics and conditions of everyday life" are represented, in other words, and "transposed into a new register" (Bukatman 2012, 2). "It is clear", Edgar Morin wrote in his celebrated praise of mass culture,

> that the spectator tends to incorporate himself and incorporate into himself characters on the screen according to physical or moral resemblances he finds there (Morin 1956, 184).

Indeed, this movement only explains half of the emotional loop that binds the spectator to the imagery of the movies (the "polymorphous projection-identification"); as well as we know that the magic of cinema, for Morin, springs off the possibility of identifying oneself with the otherness ("kids in Paris and Rome play cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers"; "little girls play mommy"; "little children, murderers"; "good women play the whore and mild civil servants

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the gangster"). Still, if we stick to our empirical evidence, we bear witness to a sort of *division of labor* among the symbolic forms: the national cinema is the marker of *closeness*, as it embraces the identification and the recognizable characteristics of what daily happens; the American cinema, on its part, is the realm of narrative digression, imagination, and suspense. On the margins of his comparative analysis of European Tv markets, Jérôme Bourdon puts forward a similar view, with American movies being defined a "special resource" for holiday moments, and national cinema as the provider of ordinary contents and daily life narrative (2011, 109).

A more granular observation is possible in the case of Amazon Prime in Italy, as we could gather data about the daily, rather than the weekly top-watched movies. Out of 247 positions occupied by national productions or co-productions, 233 titles are either labeled as *comic* or *comedies*, thus confirming the previous research pitches. "Jokes and many other ingredients of comedy rely heavily on short circuits between signifier and signified", Franco Moretti observed: it follows that "they are weakened by translation", and more likely to be appreciated by local audiences (Moretti 2001, 94). It is also interesting that among the thirteen non-comedy hits we would find – along with one single film presented as drama – six times a documentary, about swimmer and Olympic champion Federica Pellegrini; and seven times a title presented as a *suspense* movie, which nonetheless is the biography of the Italian scientist and former congresswoman Ilaria Capua. In a similar vein, among the Italian top-watched positions on iTunes four documentaries stand out; while in Netflix *Yara* recurs three times, which tells the story of a thirteen-year-old girl horrendously raped and murdered in 2010, in the North of the country. We may add that two positions in the top-watched Spanish ranking are taken by documentaries as well, while the Czech list includes two "social issues dramas" available on Netflix, and the Belgian one comprehends ten biographies, all released by iTunes.

Some additional information is provided by the lexical occurrences in the titles of the audiovisual works. We will dig into this research question by narrowing down the analysis to a smaller corpus: the most-watched movies and Tv-series in Italy, in both Netflix and Amazon Prime, in the same period (from November 1, 2021, to February 28, 2022). Which inferences are made possible by the titles and their recurrences is questionable, for sure – besides their general, twofold function of accompanying or replacing the consumption of a given work (see Genette 1987). In the specific instance of the movie industry, the function of the titles in a regime of over-abundance has been repeatedly remarked upon, as well as their importance as morphological devices (see, for instance, Altman 1999, 79; Re 2006 and 2013; Brunetta 2004, 44-46), but very rarely investigated at the empirical level (see Miconi 2014). As Franco Moretti explains in his work on an archive of 7,000 English novels, the titles gain a particular importance in the age of over-production, as they "develop special "signals" to place books into the market niche" (2013, 204). In short, we will consider the markers contained in the titles as basic indicators of the contents, and locations in particular.

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Practically speaking, we have firstly isolated the toponyms and the proper names included in the titles, and referred to Italy, Europe, United Stated, or the rest of the world.

Table 5. Geographical and local names in the most viewed Netflix movies and Tv shows in Italy (November 1, 2021- February 28, 2022)

Category/Region	**IT**	**EU28**	**USA**	**Rest of the World**
Toponyms	0	105	50	96
Proper names of persons	204	21	0	11
Other proper names (i.e., Juventus; Plaza Hotel; New Amsterdam Hospital)	58	3	26	1

(Source: Elaboration on FlixPatrol data)

Table 6. Geographical and local names in the most viewed Prime movies and Tv shows in Italy (November 1, 2021- February 28, 2022)

Category/Region	**IT**	**EU28**	**USA**	**Rest of the World**
Toponyms	47	54	17	68
Proper names of persons	180	21	0	0
Other proper names (i.e., Juventus; Plaza Hotel; New Amsterdam Hospital)	58	0	0	1

(Source: Elaboration on FlixPatrol data)

Let us focus on the most striking difference among the clusters. When audiovisual works refer to the United States or to the rest of the world, it is all about *places*: respectively, 67 titles out of 93; and 164 out of 177. All proper names have to do with regions, cities, or regions: *spaces*, which, as in Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of "chronotope", are the "formally constitutive category of literature" (1937, 84), or what we can call the "elementary unit of imagination", in the creation of both novels and movies (Keunen 2010, 35). Each place generates its own mythology; calls for a particular action; unfolds a whole catalogue of stories, events, adventures, encounters. The mentions of proper names related to Europe, on the very contrary, often indicate *real people*: 384 times, compared to 47 toponyms, for Italy; and 42 times in the case of non-national European markers. If we go in the details of the Italian case, in particular, we see that references are made to the popular movie director and actor Carlo Verdone (89); to the most famous couple of influencers, known as the Ferragnez, after the

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crasis of their two names (81); to a swimmer and former Olympic champion (10); and to the already cited Yara Gambirasio (17), atrociously killed in winter 2010.

Table 7. Geographical and local names in the top Prime and Netflix movies and Tv shows in Italy (November 1, 2021- February 28, 2022; at least ten weeks in the top 10)

IT	EU28	USA	Rest of the World
Vita da Carlo (89) *The Ferragnez* (81) *All or Nothing: Juventus* (58) Come un gatto in tangenziale - ritorno a Coccia di Morto (38) *Yara* (17) *Federica Pellegrini – Underwater* (10)	Hotel Transylvania: Transformania (54) Emily in Paris (28) *The Electrical Life of Louis Wain* (21) The Girl from Oslo (12) *Munich: The Edge of War* (11)	New Amsterdam (26) Ozark (11)	Narcos: Mexico (27) Natale sul Nilo (17)

(Source: Elaboration on FlixPatrol data)

Analogous examples can be found in the datasets related to the other nine countries: where the names stand out of Louis Whain, Anna Frank, Carlo Verdone, Angèle, The Ferragnez, Neymar Junior, Georgina Rodriguez, Federica Pellegrini, or the Juventus football team. These names do not have anything in common, besides the simple fact that, in all cases, they introduce to the stories of *real* persons, no matter how romanticized they are. A comparison with the American market will make it clearer the narrative implications of these basic recurrencies. In Italy, the titles including proper names of persons (or sport teams) occupy 255 positions in the statistics of the top-watched movies and Tv-shows; in the United States – sticking to the same period and to the same source – only *twenty* positions.

Table 8. Proper name of persons in the tiles of the most-watched movies in the USA (November 1, 2021- February 28, 2022)

Category/Platform	Netflix	Number of weeks
Movies	*Alyleen Wournos: American Boogeywoman*	1 (Week 4)
Tv-shows	*Yara*	2 (Weeks 44, 46)
	King Arthur	2 (Weeks 44, 45)
	Mariah Carey's Merriest Christmas	1 (Week 47)

(Source: FlixPatrol)

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Table 9. Proper name of persons in the tiles of the most-watched Tv-shows in the USA (November 1, 2021- February 28, 2022)

Category/Platform	**Amazon Prime**	**Number of weeks**
Movies	*The Electric Life of Louis Wain*	1 (Week 45)
	House of Gucci	1 (Week 8)
	King Richard	4 (Weeks 1-4)
Tv-shows	*RuPaul's Drag Race*	8 (Weeks 1-8)

(Source: Elaboration on FlixPatrol data)

When working on the "five major axes of differentiation: cultural, institutional, economic, spatial, and political", Thomas Elsaesser individuates in the "reference points" a major deviation between European and American cinema. European movies "carry linguistic boundaries", the idea goes, whilst Hollywood productions are "less particular", and devoted to universal poetics (2005, 492). It would be of advantage, at this stage, to conjecture a similar division of labor in the field of video sharing platforms. On the one hand, we have YouTube and TikTok channels, where the dominant genre is the vlog: and no matter how specialized this format may be (tutorials, playthroughs, unboxing, ASMR, decluttering, and so on), it will basically come with the features of the *blog*. At the formal level, it is about the close-up shoot; at the rhetorical level, it is the informality of style and language; at the content level, the tale of everyday life; and at the pragmatical level, the allusion to an intimate relationship with the audiences. Along the spectrum of local versus global, Instagram places itself at the very opposite end, as the platform where celebrities and stars come to play, setting a different tone: that of the on-stage rather back-stage performance, highlighting the distance with common web users and followers. Not accidentally, amongst the most-popular positions in Instagram we find several celebrities in the very classical sense, which obtained their reputation outside the web - unlike in YouTube and TikTok, where success is regularly beneficial to *native* influencers. And in Instagram, for the very same reason, there is more space for international channels, whereas TikTok and YouTube rankings are topped by national profiles, blinking an eye to the proximity and the warmth of people's daily experience.

To some extent, several evidence – the relevance of comedies; the frequent reuse of real histories; the success of local vloggers telling common stories - prompt the suspect that European countries might suffer from a *lack of imagination*; which once again, may come as a result of their *long durée* history. Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of Modern Age*:

> It is not only that there was a new founder figure, one who might seem to correspond better to this tendency to shift the beginning of the age to earlier periods; it is also that there was a different type of initiating gesture, one stamped by *not so much the pathos of beginning anew*

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and opposition to what is past *as concern for what already exists*, humility before what has already been said (Blumenberg 1966, 471; italics ours).

European culture can never start over, according to Blumenberg, as the richness of its history is also its curse, the inertia that makes it stick to "what already exists" – and this is true in the media production as well.

(4) The values of the Europeans[11]

(4.1)

The relevance of the values in the discourse around Europe is undoubtable. In the preamble of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, published in late 2000, it is stated that Europe is destined to "a peaceful future based on common values", and at least six of them are explicitly listed out: human dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, and later on, security and justice. "The European Union is a community of values", we can likewise read in Ursula von der Leyen's preface to the recently released *Atlas of European Values* (Halman, Reeskens, Sieben, & van Zundert 2022, 5). In the latter presentation, and to some extent *self-presentation* of the EU, values are then clustered into six groups: *Identity*, in respect to the tension between national pride and European belonging; *Welfare*, and related happiness and satisfaction with life; *Migration*, in terms of both welcoming and citizenship rights; *Sustainability* and environmental "consciousness"; *Solidarity*, also including tolerance and "limits to tolerance"; and finally, *Democracy*. Needless to say, in the EUMEPLAT research we could not deal with all these features, and if anything, we filtered the dimension of values through the lenses of social media debate: and for this very reason, it makes sense – before discussing our findings - to observe how such dimension is built at a more general level of scope.

For this purpose, we will rely on the most complete assessment we could find about the European Social Survey, on whose data the official definitions of European values are currently premised. The considered dimensions are the following (Davidov, Schmitt & Schwarz 2008):

- Achievement: Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards;

[11] A part of this section will be published in Thomass, Miconi & Moreno 2024, forthcoming.

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- Hedonism: Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself;
- Stimulation: Novelty, and challenge in life;
- Self-direction: Independent thought and action-choosing, creating, exploring;
- Universalism: Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature;
- Benevolence: Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact;
- Tradition: Respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide the self;
- Conformity: Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms;
- Security: Safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships, and of self.

The table below shows how these dimensions are operationalized and translated into a scale and into the related sets of research questions (for the *male* version of the questionnaire, to be precise, which is the only one included in the appendix to the article).

Table 10. Operationalization of values in the European Social Survey

Dimension	**Code**	**Questionnaire Items (male version)**
Self-Direction	SD	1. Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to him. He likes to do things in his own original way. 11. It is important to him to make his own decisions about what he does. He likes to be free to plan and not depend on others.
Universalism	UN	3. He thinks it is important that every person in the world be treated equally. He believes everyone should have equal opportunities in life. 8. It is important to him to listen to people who are different from him. Even when he disagrees with them, he still wants to understand them. 19. He strongly believes that people should care for nature. Looking after the environment is important to him.
Benevolence	BE	12. It's very important to him to help the people around him. He wants to care for their well-being. 18. It is important to him to be loyal to his friends. He wants to devote himself to people close to him.
Tradition	TR	9. It is important to him to be humble and modest. He tries not to draw attention to himself.

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		20. Tradition is important to him. He tries to follow the customs handed down by his religion or his family.
Conformity	CO	7. He believes that people should do what they're told. He thinks people should follow rules at all times, even when no-one is watching. 16. It is important to him always to behave properly. He wants to avoid doing anything people would say is wrong
Security	SEC	5. It is important to him to live in secure surroundings. 14. It is important to him that the government insures his safety against all threats. He wants the state to be strong so it can defend its citizens.
Power	PO	2. It is important to him to be rich. He wants to have a lot of money and expensive things. 17. It is important to him to get respect from others. He wants people to do what he says.
Achievements	AC	4. It is important to him to show his abilities. He wants people to admire what he does. 13. Being very successful is important to him. He hopes people will recognize his achievements.
Hedonism	HE	10. Having a good time is important to him. He likes to "spoil" himself. 21. He seeks every chance he can to have fun. It is important to him to do things that give him pleasure.
Stimulation	ST	6. He likes surprises and is always looking for new things to do. He thinks it is important to do lots of different things in life. 15. He looks for adventures and likes to take risks. He wants to have an exciting life.

Source: Davidov, Schmitt & Schwarz 2008.

If we jump to the aspect that we will discuss in greater detail in the next section, based on Ronald Inglehart's work (1971; 1977), it is a fact that only one dimension, out of the nine itemized here, relies on materialist values – that is to say, *security*. All the others are inspired by post-materialist motivations, either they deal with hedonism and individual self-realization, or with open-mindedness, solidarity, and universalism: as the two levels were actually taken together in Inglehart's category, allowing it to explain the most disparate things – from cultural tourism to volunteering – and probably causing its wide adoption and notable success. We will be back to this problem later on in this text, while wondering if the nexus between Europeanness and post-materialism is still solid, and analytically valid, as it used to be.

In our semantic map, the category of European values is positioned in the discursive-essentialist quadrant, with only European *spirit* being higher on the scale of substantialism

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(Carpentier *et al* 2023, 107-109). And yet, the two things are quite close to each other, as it is widely held that values are consubstantial to European identity – so that, Italian philosopher Massimo Cacciari wrote, "fundamental for a European method to take shape" would be the "manifestation […] of some essence" (1997, 21). Values, as a typical aspect of the European mentality: in the first place, this is certainly a biased assumption – as if the others, the 90% of the world population, *were not capable* of cultivating and respecting values in their turn. Edward Said himself, albeit mostly working on the Western representation of Eastern history, made room for a similar suspect, while observing the propension of the Europeans to only attribute to themselves morality, virtue, and a solid core of shared values (i.e., Said 1979, 49, 85, and 227). This line of reasoning, as diffused as it may be, echoes Wallerstein's distinction between the "European universalism", as the biased assumption about the universal nature of European principles, and the "universal universalism", which "refuses essentialist characterizations of social reality, historicizes both the universal and the particular, reunifies the so-called scientific and humanistic into a single epistemology", and go beyond the limits of Western way of thinking (Wallerstein 2006, 79). Jürgen Habermas made a similar point, while tracing the appropriation of the universalistic values, inherited from the Enlightenment, and their labeling as European, "our", or "Western values", in the identity-building process made necessary by the confrontation with the external others (2008, 73); while Gerard Delanty reached the same conclusions by following the opposite path, and remarking upon the "cosmopolitan embodiment of European identity" (2003, 81). The goal of this section, consequently, is to analyze such dimension in a less judgmental and more secular way, by reflecting on which structure of values emerged from the European social media discourse and from the Delphi+ workshops, and which part it can play – if any - in reinforcing a common identity across the continent[12]. This is also the reason, practically speaking, for which this section is titled *The values of the Europeans*, in place of the more common formula, *European values*: to make distance with the essentialist and self-referential understandings of the topic, and address what the EU citizens believe, without vesting them with a specific sensitiveness to values. As Cacciari would say, Europe per se cannot be the answer; rather, we should see

> Europe as *problem*. Europe as something intrinsically worth questioning: such an approach is by now what historian, sociologists, political analysts and geographers have been tasked with" (Cacciari 2016, 53).

As anticipated, the theme of values popped out of different tasks of the EUMEPLAT project, and in relation to a variety of societal facts: in WP1, about media pluralism and freedom of information and freedom of speech; in WP4, inevitably, in the analysis of gender balance

[12] To be clear, this option is nothing new for the EUMEPLAT project and rather respects its theoretical embedding, as since the drawing of the semantic map we coded the values-related approach to Europeanness as an essentialist interpretation, without endorsing it.

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and acceptance of migration as allegedly typical European values; and in WP5, finally and in a more oblique way, in the guise of the trust in supernational solutions. In this paper we will not refer to the issue of media pluralism and freedom, which is addressed in deliverable D5.7; we will shortly touch on the WP4 findings, which are included in D5.7 as well and have been widely described and analyzed in a series of deliverables and publications; while we will mostly work on the last aspect, which is not considered in other reports and, as we will try to show, brings with its serious repercussions in terms of Europeanization.

(4.2)

For what concerns the two critical themes taken into exam in WP4, gender and migration, the EUMEPLAT findings would basically confirm the evidence coming from previous research and from literature review, with the dimension of values being evoked in both cases. The tables below synthetize the relevance of the value implications of such topics in the Facebook and Twitter posts in the ten countries – Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Türkiye – between September and November, 2021[13]. In the tables the red is flagged to indicate when the dimension is missing: for instance, in the Spanish social media debate, based on our sampling, the implications in term of *culture* are not present.

Table 11. Dimensions associated to the gender topic in social media debate in ten countries.

Table 3. Overview of Social media representations used in analyses.

	People	Law	Culture	Values	New Social Movements	Public Sphere	Identity
ES	1	1	0	1	1	1	0
DE	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
BE	1	1	0	1	0	1	1
BG	1	1	0	1	0	0	1
IT	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
PT	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
CZ	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
GR	1	1	1	1	1	0	0
TR	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
SE	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Between	10	10	7	10	8	6	8

Source: EUMEPLAT elaboration.

[13] For the methodology, see the EUMEPLAT deliverable D4.1- Methodological Guidelines; for the results, the deliverables 4.2- Representation of immigration in ten countries; 4.3-Representation of gender in ten countries; and D4.4- Aggregated data analysis report.

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Table 12. Dimensions associated to the migration topic in social media debate in ten countries.

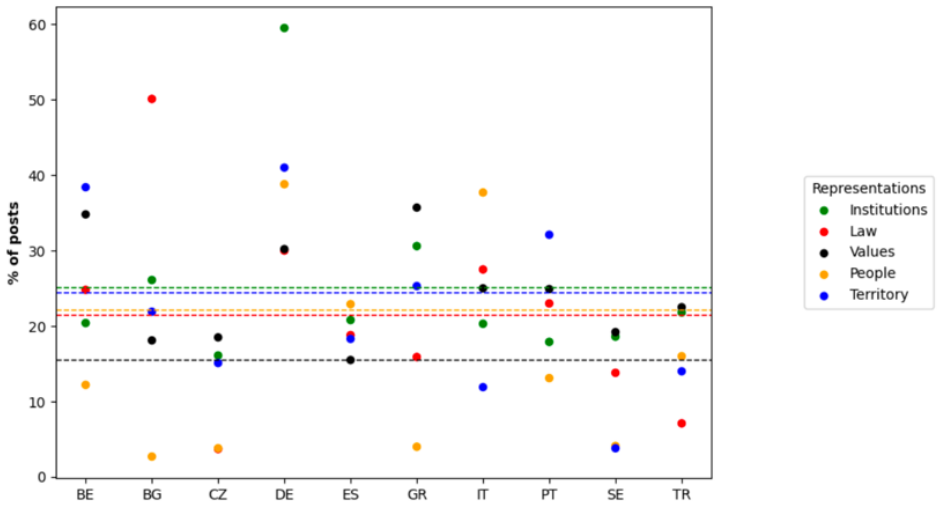
Table 3. Overview of Social media representations used in analyses.

	Institutions	Territory	Values	People	Law	Interaction & dialogue	Culture
ES	1	1	1	1	1	0	0
DE	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
BE	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
BG	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
IT	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
PT	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
CZ	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
GR	1	1	1	1	1	0	0
TR	1	1	1	1	1	0	0
SE	1	1	1	1	1	0	0
Between	10	10	10	10	10	0	6

Source: EUMEPLAT elaboration.

All in all, these findings cannot come as surprise: in the end, both gender equality and openness to immigration are widely held as distinctively European principles (for instance see, respectively, Peto & Manners 2006; and Favell 2023). At a closer look, though, things reveal to be more complicated, as in both cases – the social media discourse around migration and gender – the posts related to value are the farthest from the distribution average, statistically speaking (see the charts below).

Chart 1. Distribution of the topics in the ten countries: Migration



Source: EUMEPLAT elaboration.

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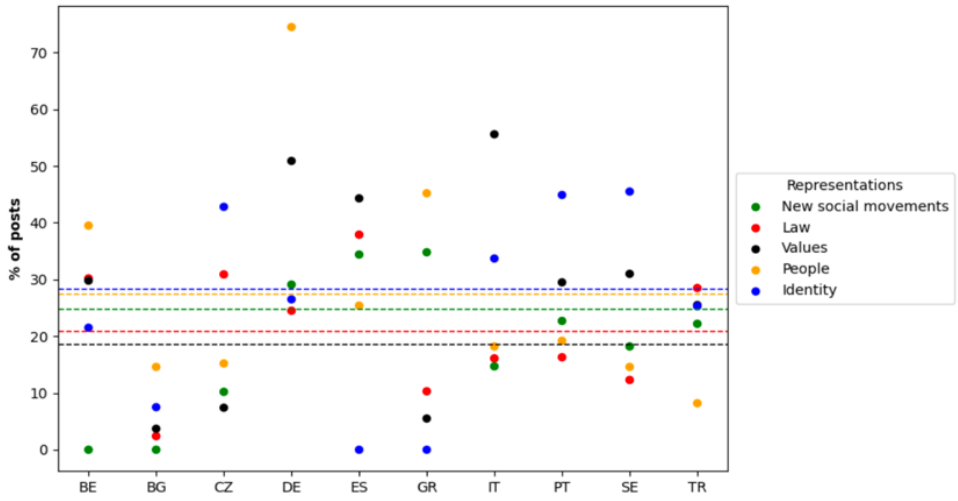
Chart 2. Distribution of the topics in the ten countries: Gender



Source: EUMEPLAT elaboration.

As the vertical axis indicates the frequency of the value connotation of gender- and migration-related posts in each country, it is clear that everywhere people talk about such implications of their discourse: but at *a very different rate*, while the references to other dimensions are more evenly distributed and vary within a narrower range. We would go as far as to state that the insistence on values does not pay a good service to our understanding of European identity, whatever its definition. On the very opposite, it is necessary to *unpack* such category and come to terms with the divergent, variable, or even conflictual interpretations of the values themselves, or with what Max Weber defined the "polytheism" intrinsic to modern societies (or the "war of gods", in a more literary fashion). An interesting attempt, in this perspective, is Kankaraš and Moors's work on the meaning attributed to *solidarity* in 33 European countries, which shows a sort of common understanding of *family* and *social* solidarity, respectively accounting for the community and the country level: whilst "the largest differences between countries are observed" in the case of global solidarity, and its indicators related to humankind, immigrants, and Europe as such (2009, 571-572). In the end, the values of the Europeans - even in our case, and from the limited observation point of social media debate - may end up not being the *European* values.

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(4.3)

It is in WP5, that the trust in supernational solution emerges as a recurring line of thought[14]: either in terms of education programs at the international level; of the role played by the EU in literacy campaigns; or more ambitiously, of a European AI industry; of a common, "safe digital space"; a "new digital Enlightenment" (which, by definition, would be an universal phenomenon); or a European "Justice League of Literacy" for tackling the impact and opaqueness of algorithmic recommendation systems.

That super-national solutions may win the hearts and minds of European citizens, in its turn, is not totally surprising. The same internationalist vocation has actually inspired Ronald Inglehart's theory, starting with a 1971 article about "post-bourgeois" and "postindustrial" values, before his celebrated "post-materialist" formula was even invented (1971, 996). Still, if we make use of Inglehart's concepts - perhaps beyond the author's intentions - there is also bad news: that the postmodernist and post-national transition is not necessarily *irreversible*. The main factor at stake, here, is indeed the statistical correlation between people's acceptance of a post-materialist identity, and the support to the European Union as a supernational entity (Inglehart 1977, 334).

If we embrace Inglehart's reasoning, we can expect that the less the people will trust in post-materialist values, and the more they will drift away from super-national identities and forms of belonging. This might be confirmed, or at least hinted by plain evidence from WP2 and WP4, already discussed in section 2 of this deliverable: which is the possible people's withdrawal from the public discussion around European themes. As we know, there is agreement, in literature, on EU-related topics being mostly discussed within the Member States when they directly impact national interests, in particular in the cases of public debt and bailout debates, and economic crises in general. An additional (and complementary) hypothesis is that people's sense of belonging to the European Union has been weakened by the recent crises - and in particular by the financial downturn (Delanty 2013, 365-366) - which have impacted both the societal structure and the moral economy of the area (for an overview, see Castells, Caraça, & Cardoso, eds., 2012; and Castells *et al*, eds., 2018). The interplay between the material and the ideological dimension is the more relevant, exactly when one

[14] The need of super-national solutions is also evident in the results of WP1 and WP3, and in respect to a variety of problems: the regulation of the platforms; the support to PSM and to smaller media markets; the quota system for non-national European movies; the funding of independent journalism; the protection of national languages; and the more. There topics are not considered in this deliverable, as they are addressed in D5.7 - Short Book of Recommendations.

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recalls Ronald Inglehart's work on the set of values of the Europeans. Already back in 1971, by means of a comparative survey in six European countries, Inglehart identified the shift of priorities, according to the new generations, from the more basic needs to what he first defined as post-bourgeois (1971), and lately post-materialist values (1977). For our interests, it makes sense to highlight that the adoption of post-materialist values, in Inglehart, is a driver of the identification with Europe as a supernational community or form of government.

> But these same value choices also show significant relationships with other political preferences which have no obvious similarity in terms of face content. For example, they serve as good predictors of attitudes toward supranational European integration (Inglehart 1971, 996).

Such is the silent revolution in European culture that Inglehart was talking about: the adhesion to post-materialist values is a predictor of the adoption of a trans-national stance – and the other way around, we may add. In this direction, Oshir, Shefer and Shenhav compared the opinions of the people declaring a set of post-materialist values, with those of a control group of citizens with different priorities, based on the European Values Surveys and the World Values Survey, between 1994 and 2010, for a total of 295,484 interviewed in 99 countries. As a result, post-materialist values – and specifically, support to democracy and anti-authoritarian positions – are correlated with the individual variables indicating economic prosperity (2016, 121; in this specific case, the non-European countries are used as an external control group)[15]. In its turn, the change in the structure of values over time can tell something relevant about the destiny and viability of post-national projects. This trend has been observed by Arts and Halman, which measured a decrease in the popularity of post-materialist values already back in the 1990s; while its occasional increase seems due to the reduction of the interviewed stating *only* to trust in materialist values, and rather choosing the mixed option, both materialist and post-materialist (2004, 47-49). It is also interesting, and it will deserve further investigation, that at the time post-materialist values were more diffused in post-Communist and post-Socialist countries, apart from Croatia and Slovenia, than they were in Central and Western Europe (ibidem, 42).

The two findings converge towards a common indication: the idea, codified by Inglehart and Wezel, that post-materialist values more easily spread among the wealthy portion of the population of a given society. This socio-economic implication has been framed by Inglehart and Welzel (2005) in terms of two juxtapositions: *traditional* versus *secular-rational* values; and

[15] The authors aim at proving the thesis of the European socialization, or the hypothesis that the spread of democratic values increases as the country "accumulates more years of membership of the EU" (Oshri, Sheafer & Shenhav 2016, 118), and therefore they only make use of some dimensions of Inglehart's broader category of post-materialism.

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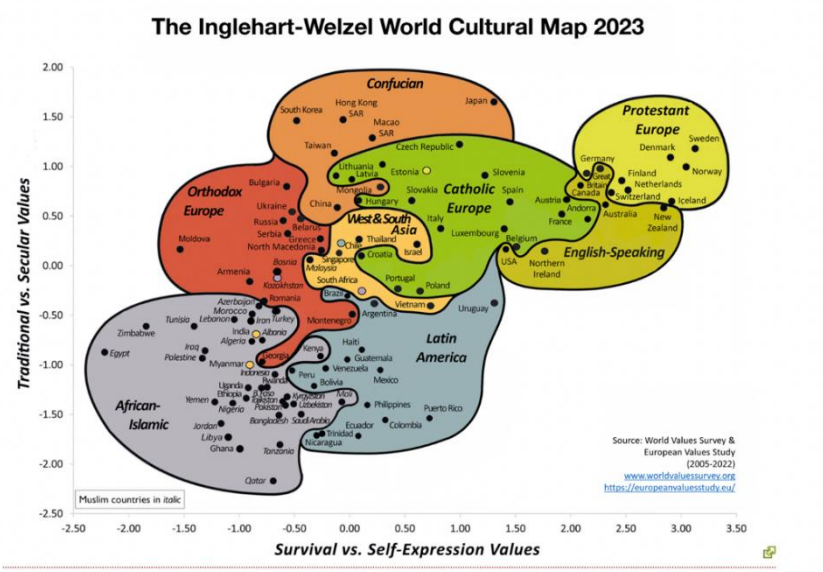
survival versus *self-expression* values. These categories, which in substance adapt and rename the original nuances of post-materialism, are currently used for the drawing of the so-called *world cultural map*: the distribution of values and priorities across the globe, which – as showcased by the latest available version, in chart 3 – clearly confirms the above-cited hypothesis.

Chart 3. World cultural map based on Inglehart and Welzel's indicator of values.



Source: The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map – World Values Survey 7, 2023 (www.worldvaluessurvey.org).

In general terms, Europe is still the land of post-materialist values, albeit not without serious internal stratifications: if we put things into the historical perspective, though, we might reach different results. A research path to be explored, in fact, is whether the very material needs imposed by the recent traumas – unemployment, eviction and poverty, caused by the economic crisis; or healthcare and human freedom, in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic – is changing back the set of priorities as perceived by the people, therefore impacting on their willingness to embrace a typical post-materialist idea as the supranational unification. We will not indulge here in reviewing the literature on the crisis of the Europeanization process, which has been widely addressed and discussed in the EUMEPLAT deliverables. In the other way, we would focus on the balance between the material and discursive dimensions of this process – the "discourse-material knot", in Nico Carpentier's terms (2017). If economic wellbeing and stability are a predictor of the success of post-materialist values – at both the macro and the

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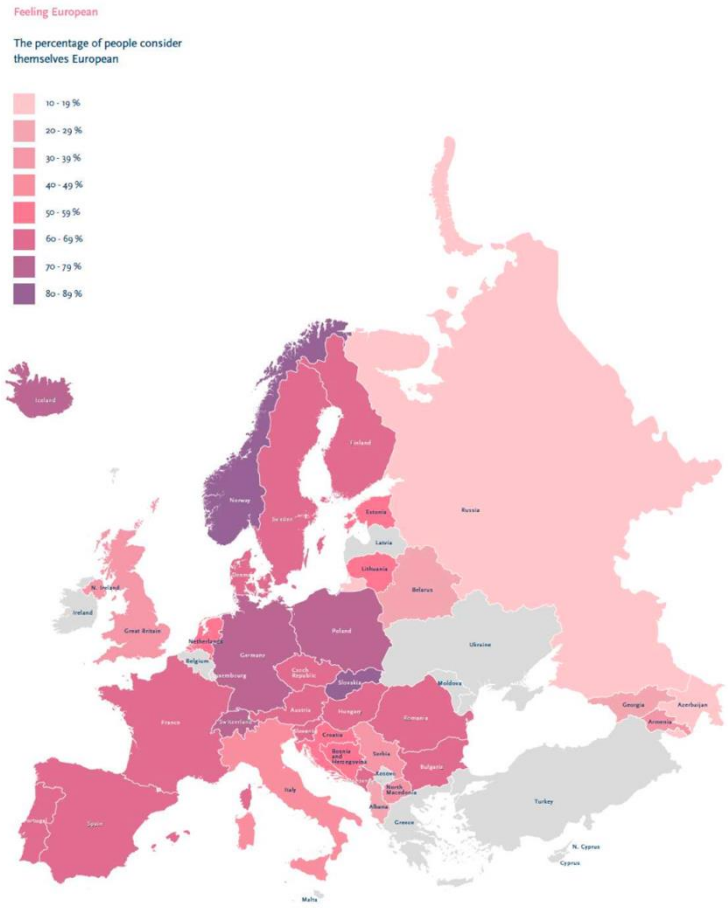
individual level, as seen[16] – we may wonder whether the financial recession is eroding, along with the quality of life of the Europeans, their willingness to share post-materialist values, and in particular the acceptance of the EU as a wider community. As shortly recalled, in Inglehart it all begun with this very association; and the current data seems to confirm the correlation between the economic development – in this case, in terms of macro-indicators related to the nations – and people's likeness to call themselves European (chart 4).

Chart 4. Percentage of people feeling European.



Source: Halman, Reeskens, Sieben, & van Zundert 2022.

[16] The above-cited studies indicate that the nexus between the floridity of material conditions and the acceptance of a super-national identity does apply to both the *individual* and the *country* level. This would be in line with Carpentier's very definition of the knot, which affects any layer of the societal system, from the level of the structure to that of daily life, not differently from Foucault's micro-physics (Carpentier 2017, 4).

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In short, we are facing a sort of triangular relation between three factors: the process of Europeanization and its legitimacy; the material state of the economy and people's conditions of life; and the set of values as shared by the Europeans. Here the bad news is that, in Jürgen Habermas' ruthless synthesis,

> to date, European unification has been a project pursued by the elites above the heads of populations. This went well as long as everyone benefited from it. The switchover to a project that is not merely tolerated, but is also supported, by the national populations must clear the high hurdle of founding cross-border solidarity among the citizens of Europe (2013, 66).

Europeanization could and did work, Habermas points out, "as long as everybody benefited from it" - that is to say, before the impact of the economic downturn on large stratums of any society. Thomas Piketty's work (2013), beyond a crucial theoretical drawback that cannot be discussed here[17], is precious in describing the new wave of wealth polarization, under the pressure of contemporary capitalism, starting in the 1970s and peaking after the 2008 general crisis; and there is not much to add to it. If wealth and super-national identities grow together – with post-materialist values providing the link between the two - it is possible, in the end, that the process has reached its breaking point.

A final aspect is to be considered, which deals with a major question in contemporary political studies: whether or not, or to what extent, is this process also impacting the level of people's trust in democratic procedures. Somehow, it is the issue that we already observed in Oshir, Shefer and Shenay's research, where the two dimensions – the popularity of the EU, and that of democracy – happen to overlap with each other. As a general evaluation of the state of democracy is out of the scope of our research, we will limit ourselves to a couple of counterintuitive remarks. Firstly, pro-democratic attitudes are not always related to the balance and accountability of institutional powers: for instance, and from the specific perspective of values, Inglehart and Welzel (2005b) measured their wide circulation, especially among the young generations, in authoritarian countries. Secondly, it is to be proved that the decreasing trust in the institutional idea of Europe is caused by the likewise descending popularity of democratic procedures: as in the widely discussed theses of de-democratization or democratic recession. As Gerard Delanty put it, cosmopolitanism and universalism would be equally diffused interpedently from the rise of the EU – and in actuality, they *were* diffused before it

[17] We refer to the fact that Piketty, as bizarre as this may be, does not propose any definition of capital and in short, equals it with patrimony – "nous utiliserons les mots "capital" et "patrimoine" de façon interchangeable, comme des synonymes parfait" (2013, 84). This is certainly legitimate: as the two words *are not* perfect synonyms, though, this definition would require a more solid theoretical ground. Despite its importance, that we do not aim at diminishing, *Le capital au XXI^e siècle* is not, in the end, a book about capital.

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(2003, 84-85). Delanty's work comes in handy, here, inasmuch as it helps understanding the misalignment between the value patterns which, at a first glance, would appear to be consistent and linear. In one way, people's dissatisfaction may not be directly addressed to the EU, while resulting from a more vague anti-establishment feeling (21013, 360); in the other way, the European integration is not per se democratic or perceived as such, and some critiques to the EU institutions may well be rooted in very European principles of transparency and division of powers (2013, 329; same position in Weller 2021, 249). We reckon that the topic of democratic stability should be brought into this discussion[18]; simply, we could not handle the argument on the EUMEPLAT project.

Such ambivalent role has been detected, in particular, in the course of the WP5 qualitative tasks, where Europe alternatively appeared as the problem and as the solution to that problem – as Nico Carpentier put it in the notes for this deliverable, it alternatively vested the role of the *hero* and that of the *villain*. The last section of the report will put into focus this specific aspect.

(5) The Fears of the Europeans

(5.1)

As sketched in the first section of this report, the emerging fears can be listed out as in the following table. The related counter-measures, based on the same results, are presented in greater detail in deliverable 5.7, in the fourth cluster, related to the opening up to civil society.

Table 13. The fears of the Europeans based on the EUMEPLAT findings.

Topic	**Related WP**
Disinformation and fake news.	WP2
Surveillance.	WP5
Power takeovers and rise of media-politics complex.	WP1 and WP5

[18] We refer to the fact that in a number of Western countries, and in Europe too, an increasing number of people declares not to be interested in the quality of democracy (see, for instance, Beaufort 2020). As observed by Yascha Mounk (2018, 122), this is probably due to the new generations only knowing the democratic systems, as too young for having lived under an illiberal regime.

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Destructive technologies: intensification of conflict; harms on the environment, both biological and human.	WP5
Polarization; polarization and social fragmentation and making less accepted gender and sexual diversities.	WP2, WP4 and WP5
Algorithmic takeover.	WP5

In all cases the fears about what might happen, the clarification goes, is not meant to forecast the future: contrarily, they tell something crucial about the persistence of material and discursive structures, and about the way the Europeans imagine the times to come. The way the people think and act in the present moment, in fact, is also inspired by the future perspective, as they perceive it: and the comprehension of what the citizens fear or expect is key to the implementation of strategies and policy for limiting the deviations and the risks engendered by the omnipresence of digital means, surveillance, and information overload. In theoretical terms, we would refer here to Roberto Esposito's use of the autoimmune disease as a metaphor for understanding societal facts. By definition, this is in origin the case of the immune system overreacting to external threats, and therefore ending up generating the same disease that it was expected to contrast (Esposito 2002)[19]. For what is of our interest, following Esposito, the way the social body frames the possible menaces to its well-being can lead to a consequent rearrangement of structure: and through these lenses, it is possible to analyze the emergence of new forms of power as well. In this respect, we would prefer Esposito's approach over Derrida's (2003), as in the latter case the trope of the autoimmune disease is only used for the specific theme of international terrorism – which is relevant in absolute terms, as it is of secondary importance for our tasks[20]. To a considerable extent, the back-casting method implemented in the WP5 Delphi+ sessions may provide an answer, as it deals with the analysis of how to prevent a given situation to escalate or degenerate: a form of "participatory-oriented broadcasting", as it has been defined, "where the procedural understandings of scenario development provide the focus" and assess the "main concern with outcomes" (Soria-Lara & Banister 2016, 3).

[19] We cannot help but notice, in this respect, that Esposito's more recent works would take an unexpected and somehow contradictory path. We will discuss this aspect later on in the text.

[20] Even though we do not have enough space for addressing this issue, Derrida's reference to anti-terrorism measures is actually a good example of latent functions: unexpected outcomes of the policy implementation, which go well beyond the people's understanding of it. Benjamin Bratton's position is similar, which will be considered in the next section, as only the *City* layer of the Stack – out of the six codified in the book – would be affected by autoimmune disease (2015, 325): as the governmentality of the urban setting, like in Derrida, has been invented for preventing the attack of external enemies (i.e., military superpowers) and the possible catastrophe, at the risk of causing harm to itself (i.e., nuking its own territory in the course of the nuclear race).

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In respect to the contents summarized in table 13, we will organize the discourse around three major priorities: the *power centralization*, taking together the cases of media complexes, algorithmic takeover, and destructive technologies; *polarization* and societal fragmentation; and *surveillance*. The issue of misinformation and disinformation will not be addressed, as it is treated in deliverable D5.7- Short book of recommendations; and similarly, we will not touch on the gender-related themes, as they have been widely investigated in the EUMEPLAT reports and initiatives (in particular, the international conference *Gendered Cultures in Platform Economies: Entertainment, Expertise and Online Selfhood*, hosted by ISCTE-IUL on November 20-21, 2023; and the forthcoming special issue of the journal *Media and Communication*). Needless to recall, we are focusing on the criticalities that are more directly related to our overarching research question – the nexus between media platformization and cultural Europeanization – rather than on more general issues (i.e., human rights, economic cycles, or political contingency).

(5.2)

The problem of power take-over comes as a consequence of both WP1 and WP5 findings. In the first case, in terms of media concentration and market exploitation on the part of US-based companies, which is extensively debated in deliverable 5.7. Here we will rather make use of some arguments raised in the context of WP5, which have to do with the rise of a global technological assemblage[21] – a new version of Eisenhower's military-industrial complex, we may say – and with the replacement of humans with artificial actors. In the Delphi+ session, even dystopian scenarios were depicted, from a Master AI apparatus to the robots patrolling the streets and suppressing citizens' protests. Here we will take these different aspects under the same umbrella, by tackling the major issue of the power takeover. And in fact, there is little doubt that in the last thirty years we have witnessed the rise of new conglomerates and the financial subsumption of the system: something close to the centralization of power constantly evoked by the Frankfurt School, or "the unification of intellectual functions" under the same immanent technological rationality (Adorno & Horkheimer 1944, 36)[22].

[21] In the WP5 sessions, the issue of power take-over has been also solicitated in relation to the intensification of armed and grey-zone conflict; an aspect that we will not cover in this report, as it has been elaborated on in an upcoming article (Carpentier & Miconi 2024, forthcoming).

[22] For some reason, the concepts of the Frankfurt School have been very popular until the 1980s, while being almost wiped off in the following decades. This is noteworthy, as such theory has been used for analyzing a cultural

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Benjamin Bratton is perhaps to be credited with the most ambitious, albeit inevitably imperfect attempt of building a general theory about the mega-machine to come, or the so-called Stack. Even though Bratton does not directly refer to the European case – besides a mere reference to the EU constituency (2016, 309) – he is well-aware of the implications of platform infrastructures in terms of sovereignty. Both the platforms and the States, Bratton argues, define a specific "geo-scape" of their own (ibidem, 246), in such a way that the future will be ruled by a mixed assemblage of the two, shaping a new form of technological and institutional power; a half-material and half-digital grid taking together the legal legitimacy of the State, and the universal scope of the global communication (ibidem, 220-221 and 341 in particular). The hypothesis of an algorithmic take-over is also considered by Bratton and pushed to its limits, as the citizenship to the new system will no longer be a prerogative of the mankind: not "derived from the essential dignity of the particular human" (ibidem, 252) connected, while being a function of the access point to the grid, granted to both humans and non-humans (either bots, internet of things, automated devices, artificial intelligence, or neural networks). On a more general stance, we would disagree with Bratton on a number of aspects, and particularly in respect of this application of the post-human notion: we do recognize, though, that *The Stack* is a precious book, inasmuch as it highlights the need of a theoretical leap forward, in our understanding of what platforms are.

Based on the idea of a new, emerging new complex, we put forward that the major platforms can hardly be understood under the frame of infrastructures, or markets – rather, they play the role of technological *singularities* able to change the role of the system[23]. In this direction, a Braudelian framework has been applied by Peck and Phillips, which analyzed "the emergent spatialities of platform capitalism". In short, those "variegated and conjunctural form", encompassing material spaces, "(de)regulatory settlements" and even the cloud, can be interpreted as a form of world-economy in Braudelian terms, which require capitalism "to be situated": "the coexisting fragments of an emergent globality, each with their own power centers and patterns of concentrated control" (Peck & Phillips 2021, 76). In particular, the authors refer to a specific stage of economic development, that Braudel notoriously defined the "anti-market", as the peak of the concentration tendency proper to capitalism: "when the great predators roam and the law of the jungle operates", in his inimitable language (Braudel 1979, 230). The *de facto* monopoly of digital platforms over global market, along this line, is to be intended as the completion of a longer historical process, grounded on a twofold spatial

ecosystem to which *it could hardly apply*, while being removed in face of the impressive power concentration which has taken place in the last thirty years.

[23] I addressed these shortcomings of the platform society and platform economy theories in Miconi 2022.

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logic: the geographical expansion of the world trades, and the centralization required for taming the super-national territories.

In other words, the adoption of a spatial perspective helps understanding both the continuity between digital economy and the previous accumulation cycles, and the specific challenge raised by the mega-platforms: or, to apply Harold Innis' forgotten lesson, the particular "dominance" taken on by the media which puts an emphasis on the dimension of *space*, more than time (Innis 1950, 76). The connection between space and sovereignty also recalls a strong notion in political philosophy: that the act of drawing a line on the ground also implies the imposition of a power over it. This is in fact Carl Schmitt's definition of *nomos*, by which "I do not mean here a set of international rules and conventions, but the fundamental principle of distribution" of the authority (Schmitt 1943, 310). By forcing "order and orientation" over the chaos of human things, the setting of a spatial perimeter acts as a form *individuation* and lays the foundation of the legality regime to come (Schmitt 1950, 67): and according to Schmitt, as we know, the very European spatial form, the one specific to the continent, is the State (1950, 125-136). As we have already touched upon more pragmatical issues in the previous deliverables, let us finally indulge in this purely theoretical aspect, if not in a haunting dilemma. If any spatial configuration is *itself* a form of sovereignty, a question arises as to whether the spatial forms we are considering – media systems, anti-markets, platforms, and mega-platforms – are compatible with the already existing institutions of different kinds.

We know that current research, in Europe and elsewhere, is hegemonized by the big data approach – whose importance we recognize, as we came out ourselves with machine learning investigations, in both WP2 and WP4. Given the present state of knowledge, and in force of some unfulfilled promises of the computational methodologies, we suggest that more investments are necessary, in the other way, on the theoretical reflection on the new technological landscape.

(5.3)

As it was inevitable, the topic of polarization deserved a peculiar space in different tasks of the EUMEPLAT project: in particular in WP2, in force of the big data analysis of the disinformation campaigns centering on the Brexit dilemma; in WP4, as a backdrop against which to discuss the organization of on-line debate in the ten countries; and in WP5, where it stands out as one of the perceived threats to European societies, in the years to come. Here we will not describe in detail the topic - which is addressed in deliverables 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5 – while recalling the fact that polarization also implies the construction of an enemy and its *othering*, and it is also of fundamental importance for the future of Europe, well beyond the restricted domain of online communication. We will rather take the argument to the next level,

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arguing that the commonly used measures are hardly effective, on the one hand; and in the other, that a broader understanding of polarization as a societal fact is key to tackling the problem.

It is barely necessary to emphasize the risks brought about by polarization processes, as they create the conditions for disinformation campaigns, hate speech and fake news to spread and being accepted. In one of the scenarios analyzed in the context of WP5, this problem took the shape of a sort of "algorithmic tribalism", accelerating the fragmentation trends due to filter bubbles and recommendation systems (see deliverable D5.2- Assessing externalities: Algorithms and choices). If the dimension and urgency of the problem are well-known, we have reason to believe that the countermeasures fall short for two reasons. Firstly, there is evidence that fact-checking and debunking *do not work*, while in some cases even backfiring and triggering an additional level of radicalization (see deliverables D2.5- Anti-European fake news and what to do, and D5.7). Secondly, the implicit or explicit definition of polarization as a degenerate case, rather than as a constitutive part of the debate, is preventing us from reaching a complete understanding of the phenomenon.

In the first case, the solution we propose is the early-warning approach, which aims at timely detecting the polarization tendencies, after which the circulation of unreliable information becomes impossible to stop. The method results from the work of Fabiana Zollo[24], responsible of the Ca' Foscari team in the EUMEPLAT project, and Walter Quattrociocchi, member of our Scientific Board, and it is grounded on empirical evidence: that the majority of topics is subject to misinformation within one day after its publication (see D2.5). For this to be realized, we also argue that a more systematic, and statistically-backed mapping of social media discussion – with tailored tools, specific to the affordances of each platform – is necessary, while the current datasets are built on non-representative samplings of the population (see D5.7 for the details about this recommendation). At this condition, polarization can be productively used as a flagging device, for taking under control the evolution of social media discussion. As stated in deliverable D5.3-Assessing externalities: Toxic debate and pluralistic values (authored by Mehmet Ali Üzelgün and Cláudia Álvares for ISCTE; Ioanna Archontaki and Iliana Giannouli for NKUA; Klára Odstrčilová for CU; Barbara Thomass for HBI; and Desislava Dankova for NBU):

> As a result, a rapid increase in polarization around a particular topic might serve as a "warning sign" that the topic has generated a fragmented information environment in which a debate unfolds. In this context, the intentional circulation of false information, misinformation and fake news are considered to contribute to the toxicity of public debates.

[24] See, along with deliverable D2.5, Quattrociocchi, Zollo *et al* 2019; Zollo *et al* 2021; Zollo *et al* 2022.

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As anticipated, the second observation relies on a more theoretical option: the need to reframe polarization, which is less a pathology of political debate than one of its possible manifestations. This is the more relevant, when one considers that in the academy the problems under observation – radicalization, hate speech, political uncivility, and disinformation – are mostly associated to the right-wing political actors and social media accounts: a very limited interpretation, which clearly results from a strong political bias in favor of the left-wing discourse. This is made evident by the impressive number of studies on Donald Trump's use of the fake news[25], which is not remotely paralleled by a similar attention toward the opposite side of the spectrum. What is more, that disinformation would be a prerogative of conservative parties, almost everywhere in the world, has been sustained in explicit fashion by a series of scholars[26]. For this purpose, we will refer here to a digital method research that we realized on a sample of 4.3 million tweets, released in Italy between June and December, 2021, and related to the so-called Green Pass, the Italian version of the Covid certificate (Pilati & Miconi 2023). The findings are particularly relevant to our case, as in the Twitter debate constant reference was made, by common users, to what the other European countries were doing for tackling the pandemic: a sort of bilateral or multilateral flow of information, which makes a relevant exception to the overall lack of horizontal Europeanization trends, that we have widely documented in our reports (see section 2.2 of this deliverable). For what concerns the topology of the Twittersphere, additionally, a notable symmetry emerges, with right-wing and left-wing accounts clearly separated (respectively on the right and the left side of chart 5), in a clear visualization of the polarization phenomenon. In fact, the two halves of Italian society are weakly connected by a few common references to the news media Twitter pages (at the center of the diagram); and in terms of content spreading and retweet metrics, they follow the very same pattern, with the discussion usually peaking, on both sides, after the intervention of an institutional actor, either politician or journalist (ibidem, 563).

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[25] Based literature review, believe it or not, this would be the bibliography about Trump and post-truth, updated to mid-2022: Ball 2017; Baron 2018; Bleakley 2018; Block 2018; Bufacchi 2021; Carlson 2018; Chugrov 2018; Corner 2017; Crilley 2018; D'Ancona 2017; Dittmar 2019; Dressel 2021; Fischer 2022; Fish 2019; Forstenzer 2018; Fuller 2018, 2020; Ganz 2018; Glasser 2016; Gore 2017; Harsin 2017; Hodson 2021; Irwin 2020; Ismail, Pagulayan, Francia & Pang 2018; Iyengar & Massey 2019; Jordan 2016; Journell 2017; Juhasz 2018; Kalpokas 2019; Kellner 2018; Kinght & Tsoukas 2019; Kite 2020; Kluknavská & Eisele 2021; Kulic 2020; Lakoff 2017; Levinson 2017; Lockie 2017; Lynch & Hunter 2020; Mair 2017; McComiskey 2017; Mejia, Beckermann & Sullivan 2018; Mercer 2020; Montgomery 2017; Neville-Shepard 2019; Nicholls 2016; Oliver 2020; Ott 2017; Papazoglou 2016; Peters 2017; Peters *et al* 2018; Rabin-Havy & Media Matters 2017; Renner & Spencer 2018; Reyes 2020; Ringrose 2018; Rose 2017; Sharp 2020; Sheffield 2020; Sismondo 2017; Speed & Mannion 2017; Suiter 2016; Waisbord 2018; Wight 2018; Wilber 2017; Wimberly 2021..

[26] See, for instance, Benkler, Faris & Roberts 2018, 105-140 in particular; Bratton 2021, 154-155; Ekman 2019, 554-555; Filkenstein 2020, 3-6; Frimer & Skitka 2020, 846-848; Klein 2020, 195-196; Suhay *et al* 2014, 659; Vaccari & Valeriani 2021, 43; and for the Italian case, Bentivegna & Rega 2022; Colombo 2022, 11-12; OCIS 2022.

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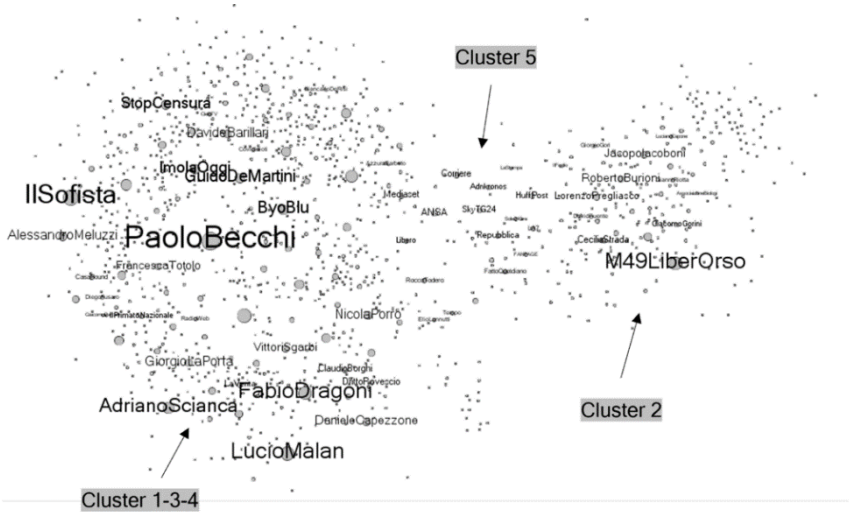
Chart 5. Polarization of the Italian debate on Twitter during the Green Pass controversy



Source: Pilati & Miconi 2023.

These results drastically contradict Benkler, Faris and Robert's findings about the 2016 US presidential campaign, which picture the "asymmetric polarization" of the debate, with right-wing users being way more insulated and self-referential (2018, 46-48 in particular). As *Network Propaganda* is the most cited book in this matter, and it has contributed to the canonization of the argument, it makes sense to keep it under better observation. As the authors state, the map does not reflect "the contents of the sites", while tracing "the attention patterns of the audience". The nodes are thereby colored, based on the partisanship of the readers accessing or linking them: practically speaking, two shades of blue for the center-left; two shades of red for the center-right; and green for the center (ibidem, 48-49).

Chart 6. Architecture of polarization during the 2016 US presidential campaign: The open web

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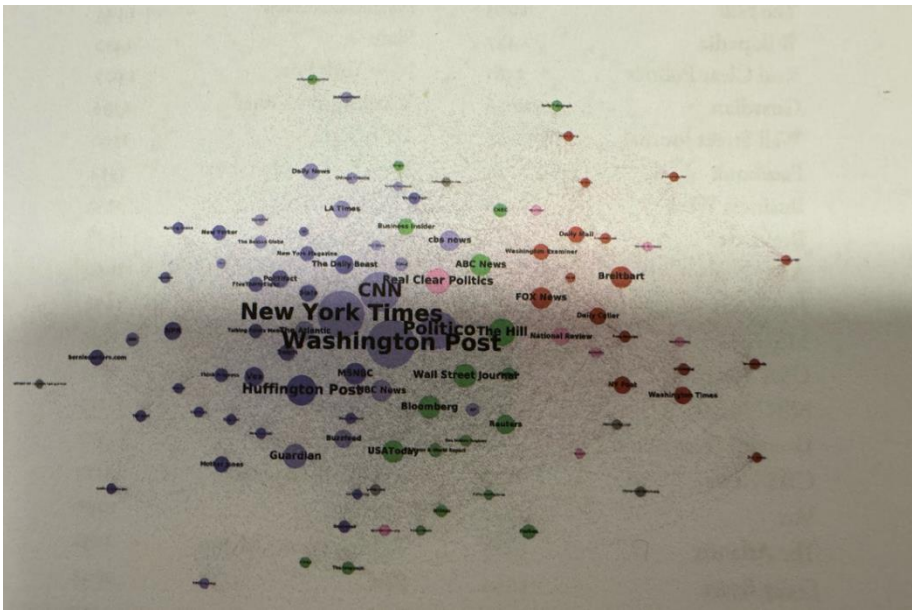
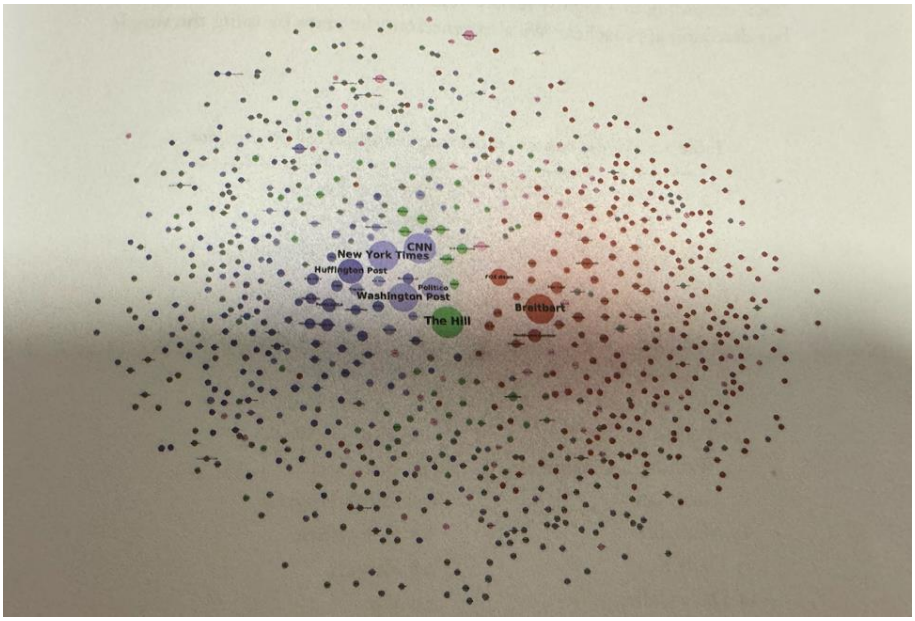


Source: Benkler, Faris & Roberts 2018.

Chart 7. Architecture of polarization during the 2016 US presidential campaign: Twitter accounts



Source: Benkler, Faris & Roberts 2018.

What Benkler, Faris and Roberts conclude, is that the bubbles only exist on the conservative side of the political spectrum: while the right-wing users cluster around a few selected and self-referential nodes, the left-wing do not only expose themselves to the contents

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of like-minded others, but also refer to neutral and official sources, which take the center of the diagram – hence the asymmetry of polarization already alluded to. The problem with this study, and it is a big problem, is that among those alleged neutral sources the authors include a number of news outlets that explicitly endorsed Hillary Clinton: *The New York Times*[27], *The Washington Post*[28], and even the *Wall Street Journal*[29], which is not used to take political position whatsoever. Needless to specify, endorsing a candidate is fairly legitimate, but it is the very opposite of neutrality; and considering that the above-cited accounts are among the most cited and linked overall (ibidem, 50), this incongruency makes Benkler's results not conclusive.

For our interests, the implications of the above discourse go beyond the spotting of some biases in academic discourse, which is in any case a relevant finding: they show that polarization, far from resulting from the ideological distortions of a specific faction, is somehow consubstantial to political debate itself. In the historical perspective, we might even add that in a few cases – the feminist movement, or the ethnic minorities struggles – the cocooning of people into homogenous circles has played a fundamental service to their empowerment and self-awareness. In any case, we have the impression that the mapping of polarization tendencies has probably to (re)start from here.

(5.4)

That surveillance is a main threat to both people's life and social justice is a simple state of fact, which requires no bibliographical justification. The topic has been addressed in legal terms in WP1 (see deliverable D1.4- European media legislation: Overview) and dissected in particular in WP5 (see deliverable D5.1- Assessing externalities: Surveillance and resistance), but it is one of those ideas somehow haunting any discussion on digital media[30].

In the previous section, we singled out the trust in super-national solutions as a prominent European value, and we traced its evolution – or involution - from Inglehart's post-

[27] *Hillary Clinton for President*, "The New York Times", September 26, 2016.

[28] *Hillary Clinton for President* "The Washington Post", October 13, 2016.

[29] D. Rabinowitz, *Hillary-Hatred Derangement Syndrome*, "Wall Street Journal", September 29, 2016.

[30] At the theoretical level, a distinction should be made between two forms of surveillance: the one put in place by State institutions, or the political *control*; and the economic one, which, in Marxist terms, is a strategy to increase workers' *exploitation* by maximizing the relative surplus-value. In this section we will basically discuss the first case, even though, in terms of *fears*, it is exactly the merging of the two forms to be prioritized – as already laid out while discussing about the Stack, as a combination of legal, infrastructural and market powers.

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materialism, back in the 1970s, to the present times. The results of WP5 show, in this sense, that European-level interventions are commonly called and advocated for, and for the most disparate goals: in terms of regulation, critical pedagogy, algorithmic literacy, AI industry, international cooperation against the intensification of conflict, “Enlightenment 2.0”, data protection infrastructure, and the more. Europe and European Union, therefore, may still be seen as a solution to urgencies of various kinds. What is specific to surveillance, as anticipated, is that this time Europe is perceived as both the problem and the solution to the problem; or, both the *hero* and the *villain*, so to speak. This possible ambivalence of Europe in the eyes of its citizens is, in actuality, the last argument of this report, as it leads to an uncharted territory: how to imagine the future of the Europeans in an age of traumas. Not accidentally, as it has been noted, in the last decades a series of dystopian tales have been released, which put the future of the Europeans in narrative form – in sharp discontinuity with the tradition of utopian and dystopian representation, which across history were *never* set in Europe (Westlake 2020, 28-30). This new literary wave, possibly exemplified by Brian Aldiss’ Eutopia (*Super-State: A Novel of a Future Europe*, 2002), is somehow telling, for those who put any validity in the meaning of the weak signals: something horrifying is about to happen, which we do not have the ability to detect and even to name, for the time being.

For what concerns the contradictory role of Europe, and as analyzed in D5.1, at the heart of the problem lies the fact that the EU has been capable of putting forward advanced regulatory measures – in particular the GDPR and the Media Freedom Act – while also setting up surveillance strategies of its own. Such strategies have impacted a series of levels, starting with the borders control made necessary by the intensification of migration flow, and with the introduction of the Schengen Information System (SIS), the Eurodac database, and the Visa Information System (VIS), back in 2003 (Broaders 2007, 72). As is often the case, such measures would be successively turned against the EU own citizens: with the monitoring of the economic transactions and the financial credits, also engendering the rise of anti-EU and anti-austerity movements in Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, Spain, and Italy; and finally in the field of public health policy, in particular with the handling of the Sars-Cov-2 epidemic (see deliverable D5.1).

Quite surprisingly, just a few years after *The Stack*, Benjamin Bratton came out with a pamphlet on the epidemic crisis, calling for a more advanced and strict surveillance system at the international level – or even for a biopolitical regime, but, needless to add, “in a positive way” (2022, 1, italics removed). This form “of positive biopolitics at a planetary scale” (ibidem, 30, italics removed; and 37) would shape a sort of “biopolitical stack”, turning a potentially destructive technology into the most advanced form of government ever existed (ibidem, 144-145). Hence the need of reframing social control and making it acceptable, or even desirable:

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> it would appear that the term "surveillance" has ascended to the status of an almost sacred negative concept not only for libertarian-anarchist idealists but also for Western political culture in general, across the political spectrum, including the complacent center (ibidem, 57).

Many aspects of Bratton's reasoning are honestly hard to accept: for instance, the idea that control, according to Michel Foucault, also means "enforcement", "protection", and "structure making" (ibidem, 146); or his defense of facial recognition as a tool likely to help and empower common people (ibidem, 95). This being said, the mere existence of a public argument *in favor* of surveillance can be used as an indicator of a bigger problem: as observed in the EUMEPLAT WP5, during the Covid-19 crisis, and possibly for the very first time, data surveillance was actually asked for by many people in Europe, as a measure for limiting the impact of the disease. Roberto Esposito, to whom we owe a fundamental essay on the symbiotic relation between *immunity* and *community* (2002), took a similar stance: what the pandemic proved, in the end, is that institutions are needed more than ever, and that the surveillance they exercise has nothing to do with any authoritarian control over people's life (2021)[31]. A new and inescapable governmentality – which, as Esposito explains, is something bigger and broader than the State itself (2022, 96) – would therefore take shape, in reply to a pressing historical problem: not only protecting the individual from the society, but even more, defending "society from the individual" (2022, 101). If taken serious, Bratton's and Esposito's positions contain the germs of a paradigm shift: in the end, all the biopolitical devices we are aware of – CCTV, facial recognition, contacts tracking, sanitary passport – may be a form of necessary surveillance.

We detected a discontinuity between the first and second part of the scientific production, in both Bratton and Esposito. To some extent, such discontinuity insists on the same ambivalence of Europe that we were describing: being both responsible for the implementation of surveillance strategies; and expected to put a limit to their excesses and related derogations to the rule-of-law. At the purely theoretical level, this would be in line with Bratton's analysis of the Stack, which requires an incredible amount of "energy flows", "energy storage systems", "facility management, "fine grain metering, and supply chain", and the more – and at the same time, once realized, would transfer human activities to a different level of the real, therefore making possible unprecedented carbon savings and positive environmental effects (2016, 95). "According to this model", Bratton opines, "we cannot afford *not* to accelerate the construction of The Stack", as "this is the conundrum into which we are thrown:

[31] We reckon that is hardly new, per se: CCTV cameras, as observed by Nico Carpentier, have been introduced as allegedly destined to limit street crime and therefore improve people's safety and perceived safety. As we will see below, though, in both Esposito and Bratton a sort of *positive* surveillance will be evoked.

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Can The Stack be built fast enough to save us from the costs of building The Stack?" (2016, 96, italics original).

In this perspective surveillance - like the Stack, with which it has many aspects in common, as betrayed in Bratton's more recent book – is simultaneously undesirable and inevitable; it is control and protection at the same time. And the fact that Europe is playing a contradictory role in people's imagery – especially, or exclusively in this specific respect - would remind us of Bernard Stiegler's great metaphor of the *pharmakon*: which, in its very etymological sense, is both the lethal poison and the antidote to it; the disease and the cure (2014, 49-50). How to take surveillance under control, without turning into a surveillance society, is definitely one of the main challenges in the years to come.

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