

Reflective Essay: Exploring Cultural Hybridity and Cultural Understanding at BeEUTOPIAn 2023 (October 12-13)

The BeEUTOPIAn 2023 conference, held on October 12-13 at CY Cergy Paris University, was not only an event I attended but an initiative I significantly shaped from its inception. From conceiving the idea to organizing the agenda and serving as the main speaker, I was deeply invested in the conference, which centered around the critical theme of cultural understanding and heritage in global academic collaboration.

In addition to my role in the conference, I was proud to be part of the EUSTT (Eutopia Student Think Tank). During my PhD studies, I served as a student representative and was responsible for much of the organizational work at EUSTT. Our primary goal was to share knowledge across various institutions within the European network, fostering cultural exchange and academic collaboration. This involvement was essential in promoting dialogue and understanding among students from different backgrounds, aligning closely with the themes of intercultural and transcultural engagement discussed at the conference.

In my view, cultural hybridity is not just a theory or a phenomenon to be studied; it is the normal life we live today, a reality I deeply believe in and strive to embody. This experience proved pivotal in both my academic and personal development, as I broadened my awareness of diverse cultural perspectives and gained invaluable insights into the dynamic nature of cultural identity.

A key objective was distinguishing between multiculturalism, interculturalism, and transculturalism. As the main speaker, I dedicated a portion of my seminar to delineating these approaches. I explained multiculturalism as the acknowledgment of distinct cultures existing side by side, often with limited interaction. Interculturalism involves active exchange yet maintains separation. I argued that transculturalism offers the most effective model, where cultures deeply intertwine.

Grounded in Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity, I aimed to illustrate cultures as evolving, shaped by contact and exchange. I emphasized that globalization leads to blending, creating hybrid forms that enhance richness. Relatable examples, such as McDonald's or Coca-Cola, demonstrated how cultures blend in daily life – norms, not exceptions. In this context, it's crucial to understand that globalization, as Welsch highlights, leads to cultures becoming deeply intertwined and interconnected, existing not as isolated entities but as mutually influencing forces. But beyond these obvious examples, transculturality manifests in countless other ways. Consider the popularity of sushi in Europe, the fusion cuisine that blends culinary traditions, or the widespread celebration of holidays like Halloween in countries far beyond its origins. These everyday occurrences underscore the constant interplay and blending of cultures that characterize our world.

A significant challenge was convincing some critical participants that transculturality is, indeed, a pervasive reality and not merely an abstract concept. Some questioned whether genuine cultural exchange could occur without the loss of unique cultural identities, while others questioned the potential for power imbalances to distort transcultural processes. Addressing these concerns required careful listening and persuasive articulation.

A crucial element was addressing the concern that cultural hybridity might dilute national customs. I emphasized that hybridity enhances traditions, like a mosaic. As I articulated in my January 2022 piece, "Patchwork Identity as the Foundation and the Future of the European

Union” this perspective aligns with transculturality, where cultures flow together. Here, it’s important to elaborate on Wolfgang Welsch's contribution to understanding this dynamic. Welsch argues that cultures are characterized by hybridization and intermingling. He posits that, due to globalization and migration, cultures have become so deeply interconnected that they can no longer be understood as separate entities. Instead, they're intertwined, mutually influencing each other and creating a complex web of transcultural relationships. This perspective directly counters the fear of cultural dilution by asserting that cultural contact leads to transformation and enrichment, rather than erasure.

Following the seminar, I facilitated an interactive workshop using Mentimeter to gather insights on perceptions of understanding, identity, and stereotypes. The workshop began with questions such as, “What does Identity mean to you?” and “What are some things that define a culture?”. This aimed to prompt reflection on cultural backgrounds and identity. Questions became more focused, addressing stereotypes, traditions, and cultural change.

One revealing segment explored stereotypes. Participants were asked, “Do you believe in cultural stereotypes?” and prompted to share examples. This fostered discussion on the harm of stereotypes and promoted nuanced understanding. I challenged participants to move beyond assumptions and consider diversity. For example, when a participant suggested a cultural stereotype about a particular nationality, I encouraged the group to consider counterexamples and recognize the danger of reducing individuals to cultural caricatures.

The interactive workshop allowed me to gain insight. I observed many participants shared concerns about losing cultural traditions, while others were excited about exchange. This reinforced the importance of balancing preservation and embracing change.

From a critical perspective, transculturality and hybridity have complexities. They can be influenced by power dynamics and injustices. It is essential to examine how globalization affects cultures, ensuring equitable exchange. Moreover, there is a need to safeguard the heritage of marginalized communities.

Building on insights gained, I am committed to furthering my engagement and promoting dialogue. I plan to continue incorporating interactive methods, like the Mentimeter workshop, to create inclusive spaces. Drawing from Welsch and Bhabha, “Patchwork Identity” equips individuals to navigate the social environment and is integral to a united, transcultural Europe. This “patchwork identity”, as Welsch describes, is shaped by multiple cultural patterns, equipping individuals with diverse tools to navigate the complexities of our interconnected world.

As part of the EUSTT team, I contributed to organizing events aimed at promoting dialogue, mutual understanding, and cultural appreciation across diverse student communities. Looking ahead, I intend to explore research methods to understand cultural hybridity and transculturality further, particularly focusing on how digital technologies shape identities. By engaging in these topics, I hope to contribute to a nuanced understanding of cultural dynamics that are increasingly relevant in our digital age.

In conclusion, my leadership in organizing and speaking at the BeEUTOPIAn 2023 conference was a transformative experience. By drawing on theoretical frameworks, engaging in dialogue, and employing interactive methods, I was able to foster a collaborative environment that fosters understanding and respect. This experience reinforced my belief in the power of education to promote an inclusive world. It also highlighted the importance of respectful dialogue in

fostering a transcultural worldview. As a community, we must embrace diversity and strive for open dialogue—recognizing that our hybridity makes us unique.

As Welsch suggests, recognizing the transcultural nature of society is essential for building a truly global community—one that is both diverse and interconnected. Promoting such understanding fosters shared responsibility and mutual respect, ultimately paving the way for a more inclusive and harmonious future.

BeEUTOPIAn Echoes¹

In halls of learning, shadows played, BeEUTOPIAn dreams, a heart unafraid.
October's chill, a Parisian grace, where hybrid souls found their embrace.

From EUSTT's fire, a spark took flight, knowledge shared, in dimming light.
A student's voice, both bold and meek, to bridge the gaps, the words to speak.

Theories danced, Bhabha's haunted space, Welsch's web, a fragile trace.
Transcultural threads, a fragile line, fear of fading, intertwined with mine.

McDonald's arches, sushi's gleam, a transformed world, a waking dream.
Yet voices rose, in hushed refrain, “Will culture die? Will nothing remain?”

I painted hope, a fragile art, traditions bloom, though worlds depart.
A patchwork soul, in pieces sown, each fragment loved, uniquely known.

Mentimeter's hum, a fragile plea, stereotypes shattered, truth set free.
“Identity”, a whispered fear, “Can I belong, when worlds collide near?”

In tear-stained faces, stories bloom, a shared humanity, dispelling gloom.
We mingled close, hearts open wide, a bridge of hope, where shadows hide.

Transcultural streams, a bittersweet flow, where boundaries fade, and spirits grow.
A yearning heart, a path to claim, to weave a world, in empathy's name.

So let the echoes softly fade, of EUTOPIAn dreams, bravely made.
For in that space, we touched and knew, a world of longing, me and you.

¹ The central theme of the poem, “BeEUTOPIAn Echoes”, conveys a message of optimism. Despite the challenges and anxieties associated with cultural exchange and globalization, the poem suggests that there is still hope for building a more understanding and interconnected world. The poem celebrates cultural hybridity and diversity. It acknowledges concerns about cultural erosion or homogenization but asserts that these challenges can be surmounted through empathy, open-mindedness, and authentic human connection. In essence, it is about confronting the intricacies and uncertainties of a complex and occasionally daunting world with the aspiration of collectively creating something meaningful.

The concept of Multiculturalism, Interculturalism and Transculturalism*

- **Multiculturalism**

(internal homogeneity, minimization of the foreign, external differentiation, no contact production and communication)

→ Insight into the conditions *within* the society

- **Interculturalism**

→ Insight into the relations *between* societies

- **Transculturalism**

Cultural hybridity, interconnections and transitions, transnational cultural overlap

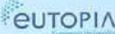


The "third space" is by no means only a place or condition between different cultures, but also a strategy of multiplying non-homogeneous stratifications within a respective culture. (Bachmann-Medick 1999, p. 521)







BEUTOWNIA
 Student Conference
 CV Cargo Paris University

Theme: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Research on Cultural Understanding and Cultural Heritage in Global Academic Collaboration.

„Beyond Culture“ Cultural Understanding and Cultural Heritage



Speaker: Misa GISC
 PhD Student in Humanities and Social Sciences – Literary Studies
 Department of German, Dutch and Scandinavian Studies
 Faculty of Arts, University in Ljubljana

Dec 10th 2022



Transcultural Daily Routine

- innovations are forced (discourse of power, economic dependency, inequality of distribution, migration processes, etc.)
- e.g., medicine is transcultural (Asian countries adopting Western medicine)
- pop culture, football → international influence
- theatre practices (classical - European)
- culture of consumerism



Michael Jackson, video: 'Black or White' (1991) - staging transcultural change through 'morphing'



Homi K. Bhabha: The Location of Culture

BORDER LIVES: THE ART OF THE PRESENT



- Homi K. Bhabha is considered one of the most discussed representatives of Postcolonialism in Cultural Studies worldwide.
- „How to claim Identity in the Modern World?“
- Contemporary Understanding of Cultures in the „in-between space“
 - new signs of identity
 - innovative sides of collaboration
 - idea of a hybrid* society
- Locating the question of culture in the realm of the beyond
- MOVENS
- Cross-Cultural Understanding based on Inclusion
- „[...] we find ourselves **in the moment of transit** where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the beyond; an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words au-delà – here and there, on all sides, [...] back and forth. (Bhabha 1994, p. 1)









Session 1:
Cultural Heritage and Cultural Understanding 101
Misa Glisic
Brian Schmitt

Session 2:
Cultural Understanding: the workshop
Misa Glisic

Session 3:
How to approach a research on Cultural Heritage and Cultural Understanding
Federica Mancini
Karolina Lovejoy

Session 4:
Debate and Brainstorming sessions
Rodrigo Camberos







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Student Conference

Session 1:
Cultural Heritage and Cultural Understanding 101
Misa Glisic

Presented by
Giulia Quadraccia
Head of Events



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List of References:

- Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- <https://eutopia-university.eu/english-version/partner-news/the-2023-chapter-of-beeutopian-conference-to-be-hosted-by-cyu-2>
- <https://www.eustt.org/2022/01/25/importance-of-hibr/>
- <https://www.eustt.org/eustt-representative-program/>
- Welsch, Wolfgang. 1999. *Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today*. Berlin: Unionsverlag.