

*Thematic focus for the 2nd generation of doctoral researchers of the Saarbrücken Graduate School for European Research*

## Experiencing Europe: relational spaces of everyday Europeanisation between distance and proximity

Thematic foundation: Europe as an experience

Europe is a polymorphic formation: a shared idea as well as a political union of states in the form of the European Union (EU). At the same time, Europe is also a concrete space – one in which approximately 750 million people co-exist, all of who come from countries with various governmental structures and diverse societies. “Europe” has an effect on everyday life, but it is often perceived by citizens as an abstract construct with little connection to their own lives. From the individual’s perspective, much of what constitutes Europe takes place far away from where their lives play out. Where can Europe be experienced as a lived practice? How and where can everyday Europeanization become tangible?

Europe takes place in locations that were specifically built for this purpose as well as in transitory non-locations (*non-lieux*, Augé 2010): people experience Europe in spontaneous encounters at transit hubs, such as petrol and train stations, as well as at places that were intentionally created to bring people together, such as assembly halls, theatre stages and exhibition rooms. The shared, intertwined European history is linked to places such as former battlefields that can be visited. What characterizes situations in which we can have European experiences? On the one hand, Europe is staged institutionally. On the other, Europe is forged as a relational space that produces connections between distant points, be it through mobility or media.

As an idea of a collective, Europe – whose very name stems from a myth in which the dimension of distance is inscribed – is generally associated with a distance to be overcome, as regards identity and knowledge. Relational spaces also have a historical dimension in the sense of a cultural European memory, which is linked to memorial sites (*lieux de mémoire*, Nora 1984), although dissonant connections from different times also overlap. As a repository for accumulated life knowledge (Ette 2004) and a medium to transfer experience, art plays a decisive role.

Thematic and methodological axes: experience as a situated practice

The Graduate School’s research programme examines this ambivalence and, in light of the fact that Europe must continually be made tangible and that awareness of its existence must be raised, it asks the questions of where and how this happens in everyday locations. The focus is, on the one hand, on the experience of Europe and, on the other hand, on how Europe is expressed. The starting point of our investigations is the relational space where relationships and connections, ideas and confrontations accumulate. This can happen in reality or it can be dealt with in literature.

Thematically, "Experiencing Europe" can be addressed in various areas: (1) Movement and **mobility** (e.g. Interrail, train connections, alliances between educational institutions), (2) spaces where community is **staged** or negotiated (e.g. museums, theatres, events, literature), (3) practices of **Doing Europe** (such as in plenary sessions of EU institutions).

Three doctoral research projects from different disciplines (preferably: geography, anthropology, empirical cultural studies, literature or theatre studies) will work together in the CEUS Graduate School: understanding Europe as a transdisciplinary research field. What they all have in common is their focus on "Experiencing Europe" as a *situated* practice and a spatial process. Methodologically, the doctoral research projects are connected to each other via a mutual qualitative approach, which gathers together and interprets processes and practices across linguistic, text-based and empirical methods.

#### *Bibliography*

Augé, Marc: *Nicht-Orte*. Munich: Ch. Beck 2010.

Ette, Ottmar: *ÜberLebenswissen. Die Aufgabe der Philologie*. Berlin: Kadmos 2004.

Nora, Pierre (Ed.): *Les Lieux de mémoire* (volume 1 La République). Paris: Gallimard 1984.