

Waiting for Floating Pages

“Rewrite the book... Remove the pages.... Saving face, secured in faith.”

This is how Michael STIPE describes the discovery of new horizons. New pages are written; old ones are rewritten and removed. Removed pages, thrown into a river, remain afloat for a little while and then disappear forever...

...or are picked up by someone who has been waiting for them with patience.



The River Book

Central Europe knows both of these. This book favours the second approach. It might not hypnotise, it might not carry away, but it might keep afloat.

When looking at this book from a distance, searching for a keyword, one might be curious to learn what connects the chosen topics. An old question comes to mind – is colourfulness a weakness or strength? How about making it a strength this time...

The red thread, *der rote Faden*, of this book might be the notion of *responsibility* (the reader is free to have a broader view, of course). Responsibility can seem to be a relatively abstract and a rather philosophical topic at first glance, but in this book it is tied to two areas that are widely discussed in today's Central Europe – culture (arts) and economy.

Before entering into the discussion on these two areas of responsibility, we have decided to introduce a chapter on *identity*. Again a much-debated issue in Central Europe that creates a pre-taste for the other two. Identity can be perceived as a stronghold – a castle – from which one departs when looking for ways of behaving responsibly.

What determines us is one of the basic questions that open this book. It also suggests a way of viewing responsibility, which is more than just *political*. It appears clearly already at the beginning of this book that Central Europe is not just a political unit. It is not based solely on the political legacy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, of the Socialist Bloc or on the EU accession process – there seem to be more areas where we are connected. How can responsibility bind us together in the chosen areas? Is not the whole idea just a *chimera* – we are thrown together to discuss but leave for home with old burdens heavier than before?

The anthology aims at preventing historical, cultural and relational amnesia. It tries to re-collect the torn-out and forgotten pages of the thinking done in the region of Central Europe. It tries to suggest that *responsibility* and *appreciation* need not be a *black hole* and a *white dwarf*.

A Pentatonic Landscape

This book is the outcome of a co-operation between students from five Central European movements (CESR) that are linked to the European branch of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF, established in 1895), ‘an ecumenical forum for student encounter and open dialogue, action and celebration, changing the present and dreaming the future.’ This subregional co-operation started in *Praha* in 2001, and finds its shape in the organisation of seminars, leadership and language trainings, and the planning and executing of common projects.

We started to gather, edit and put together articles and essays in 2002. The first book in the series was called *A Pentatonic Landscape. Central Europe, Ecology, Ecumenism (Ecumenical Anthology I of the WSCF Central European Subregion)*, and it was published in Budapest.

The core element of all our seminars (Pannonhalma and Vilémov in 2002; Spišská Kapitula, and Białowieża in 2003) and trainings (Zvolen in 2003) is *dialogue*. Dialogue on ecumenical issues, on history, and on the role students of various Christian denominations can play in Central Europe. Many of the issues discussed are, essentially, about identity.

It will not be a surprise to anyone that this discussion has gained shape in the Central European Subregion, as well as in so many other circles, groups and debates around the globe. Identity is a multifaceted phenomenon that touches upon the individual and upon groups in society

and these societies as a whole. This discussion has many forms and aspects, but to focus on the 'hot issues' in the CESR, the main questions it brought to the front are: 'who are we', but also 'who are they?' As Austria is a part of the subregional network, the discussion is not solely about 'West' and 'Centre', but also about Central Europe and its borders.

Responsible Identity

In the first chapter of this anthology (*Quest for Identity*), the reader is led into the aspects of identity and identity formation, which is depicted by using the image of a *daisy*: our identity is like a flower that has several petals. Our emotions shape our images about others and ourselves and there are three voices, as different levels of awareness of human beings that whisper in our ears how we should behave in certain circumstances, or in what way we expect others to behave. Understanding the presence of these voices is essential in intercultural dialogue. It is not only a matter of what we think about ourselves, but also the opinion of the 'others': 'who do they think we are?' is significant. Let us make a little detour to illustrate this.

In September 2002 a small scale research was done in Amsterdam among Dutch young adults on their image of Central Europe. A small impression from the reactions: '*schöne, blaue Donau*; somewhere in the middle of Europe; centre of science, power, art, and culture', but also 'poverty; grey blocks of flats; concentration camps; not for tourists', and 'people that have resisted'. Others classified it by mentioning what it does not have: no bikes, no black-and-white-stained cows and no windmills. Who has ever visited the countryside of, let us say, Hungary, knows that the latter arguments will not do.

This last remark is not to prove 'how similar' Western Europe is to Central Europe. However, why not ask this question? We are confronted with some triggering insights on the question where the centre of Europe and its borders are. This concept has changed many times during history, and the case of *Berlin* serves in our book as a focal point to follow the changes. As a city which was part of many different realms of power and influence, its image and role in literature and thinking cannot be ignored.

To further our quest for identity, we cast a glimpse on movement building and growth in the beginning of the XXth century. As a case study, we can get to know the coming of age of the Magyar Student Christian Movement, and the ins and outs of its work in Hungary.

The roots of the Magyar movement were ecumenical from its very

beginning, for that time one among few unique cases in Europe. Magyar students were active not only on the local, but also on the regional and international level. Their involvement in WSCF was reinforcing and constructive to both sides of the line. The data show that co-operation between student movements in Central Europe has been vivid since the beginning of the previous century (*Turnov* and *Sonntagsberg* in 1921), bringing together students from various denominations.

In recent years, it has become clearer that *minority rights* are not a question that can be simplified. One of the issues at stake is the legitimacy of the rules that are applied to the situation of these minorities. While living in areas that encompass several national borders, the question is what set of rules, eg. what country or state, has governance over their situation. By using the analytical model of the *Cosmology Triangle* in which the main term is *social contract*, we are offered the possibility to understand the process that has led to the present situation. By shifting focus from a 'national social contract' to a 'global social contract', the latter is proposed as a feasible strategy for minorities in advocating their cause.

It is clear that identity is not fixed, but changes over time, depending on circumstances, emotions, and geographical and political borders. It necessarily is a quest that does not have a set outcome.

Ethical Stances in Art

The middle chapter (*Ethical Stances in Art*) is the most lengthy in the book: it deals with the responsibility of the artist and the recipient in the process of creation and reception. Together with the first chapter, it is based on the CESR Summer Conference in *Białowieża* (Poland) in July 2003 on *Central European Culture – Wanted (Dead or Alive)*.

First, we are confronted with the question: what kind of creative process leads to a new artefact? In the most general sense, the Logos inspires the artist (*Digito Dei*). She or he has to find the appropriate language to be in communication with the Logos and to turn this dialogue for the creation of an artwork, using imagination and aiming most of all for *catharsis*.

The responsible creation of art is illustrated in a specific dimension, the relationship between images and texts, in the role of symbols in art. The Bible is taken as a Great Text, an archetype, source and culmination of texts in our cultural circle.

The importance of a life-view in an artwork is continued in several articles throughout the chapter. Some maintain that an artwork should have

a constitutive total-view, which is the Providence in the novel, picture or composition. A work of art reveals the attitudes of an artist and it tells us many things about her or his position and inner life. Artists are, therefore, highly responsible; their artwork flows out of their whole life. The chapter closes with the role of world-view in creating cohesive art.

The death and evaporation of the author, who has to be sacrificed, is a somewhat parallel idea that pops up again and again in the line of thoughts of the book. As Roland BARTHES put it: “the author had to be sacrificed so that the reader, spectator or listener might be born.” Since the immortal spirit of an artistic product survives the whole, authors are challenged to die away from themselves and from the world.

An artist has to have some kind of political responsibility as well, because she or he is an engineer of the human soul. Art under dictatorship is again a new topic coming back in various articles. The analysis of the postmodern music scene, especially in Central Europe and in Slovakia, is a powerful example for that in our book. Music is the glory of the creation of art, and it also serves as a framework for our chapter.

Economy and Social Responsibility

Economy is one of the high-priority issues in public discourse in Central Europe. The rates of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth, direct foreign investment or the fluctuations of Central European stock exchanges can be found in newspapers on a daily basis. Burning topics, such as unemployment, tax and health care reforms, create a lot of distress in discussions on TV and largely contribute to the atmosphere in society.

In Christian circles, there is a constant debate on how the Churches as units and Christians as individuals should act, if they are to remain faithful to their identity on one side, and to perceive the *signs of the times* on the other. Our CESR Winter Conference in *Spišská Kapitula* (Slovakia) in February 2003 dealt with the *Perspectives of Corporate Social Responsibility in Central Europe*. This book also tries to offer some views in the chapter *Responsibility and Economy*, which might be of help for those, who try to hold the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. The notion with which the authors are primarily concerned is that of *corporate social responsibility* (CSR).

CSR is for most Central European countries a relatively new issue but has been drawing increasing attention in the recent years. The Church, who slowly but surely learns to appreciate the gift of entrepreneurship,

calls for a just distribution of resources in society. The Church, however, offers general guidelines and principles rather than concrete economic tools for an implementation of a more just distribution of resources. Nevertheless, in the economic sphere new approaches are formulated and applied and some of them aim precisely at what the Church is calling for.

Ethical moneymaking sounds to some as a paradox. In reality, however, ethics has become an important issue in business circles, since *ethical behaviour* is closely linked with such crucial business phenomena as credibility, good reputation, long-term efficiency or the satisfaction of customers and employees.

Corporate social responsibility concerns the responsible behaviour of those who have material and financial power and thus are assigned a higher burden of social responsibility. Company managers, high-ranking officials or people on other levels of leadership are presented with decision-making processes, in which ethical questions play a role. Individual value systems, personal priorities and beliefs permeate the decisions made in professional life.

But corporate social responsibility does not end with the personal level. The company is perceived as an organism with a distinct behaviour in the market. She has her reputation, relations and aims and these again are subject to alternations depending on the choices the company makes.

Socially responsible behaviour of those who have economic power is a challenging ethical issue in societies that are *in transition* from a centrally planned economic system to an open-market system. Maybe the Austrian experience on CSR can be of considerable interest for other Central European countries.

The chapter on corporate social responsibility examines also the features typical of societies in transition and tries to examine the factors affecting their “mood”. The notion of *pessimism* and *satisfaction* are examined as well to facilitate a deeper insight into the subjective feelings pervading the contemporary Central European societies.

Spiritual Archeology

To publish an anthology, one needs a bigger team of committed contributors. Many thanks first of all to the authors; then to the art editor, SZALAY Miklós; to our copy editor, Kate WILSON; and to the translators: *Eva-Maria REINER*, *Dorota ROMAŃCZUK*, *BARTALOS Tamás*, *CHIKÁNY Gergely* and *Juraj MAČURA*. We would also like to thank the main organisers of

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Finally, we thank the *artist, Zuzana ŠICKOVÁ-MEŠKOVÁ*, who provided the illustrations for the book. The technology of the pictures is monotype on plastic, using fabric or cloth. The artist is obviously fascinated by track and trail. Since her personal life and creativity are interconnected, her way to create art is based on gestures. Every illustration, she explains, represents different values in the church of our soul. These illustrations are, therefore, tracks of the visible world transformed to small archetypes.

She uses lines in the first place as main expressive means; for her, lines represent movement and change. She is inspired by Asian, especially Japanese calligraphy where she also recognizes a sense of movement. The world of illustrations is like the soil, which we should put away if we want to see what is beneath it; in that way, all of us are called to be archaeologists. Therefore, the series of illustrations in this book are findings of *spiritual archaeology*. They are waiting for someone to pick them up, one who has been waiting for them with patience.

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