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**EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE IN POSTSOCIALIST CITIES:  
IN SEARCH OF EUROPE**

MA thesis

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I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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## Abstract

“European Capital of Culture” (ECoC) is an initiative of the EU, established with a purpose to promote a Pan-European culture and stimulate urban development. In this thesis, the ECoC is considered as a platform for dialogue between cities and the EU, through which meanings of Europe is produced. In the context of the growing territorialization of European identity and reinforcement of the internal East-West divide, caused by the growth of national sovereignty and illiberal movements in some countries of the CEE, the importance of cross-national zones of European identity increases. This thesis argues that through the ECoC events postsocialist cities from the CEE construct postnational spaces of European identity and provide alternative to nation states images of Central and Eastern Europe. Through the lens of poststructuralist discourse theory, the analysis shows how eight postsocialist cities with the ECoC title construct Europe in their bid books, and how they contribute to the debates about meaning of Europe, upgrading their urban identities at the level of the EU.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

European Capital of Culture (ECoC) is one of the well-established initiatives of the EU in the framework of its cultural policy, which is presented in a form of annual cultural events in cities all around the EU. It was created with a purpose to stimulate cultural development of the European cities and promote Pan-European culture. The main difference of this initiative from other large-scale cultural events is in its European dimension. In order to become “European Capital of Culture”, candidate cities need to include this dimension in their programs and articulate its meaning in their application books for the ECoC title, called bid books. Since the EU does not provide detailed instructions how the European component should look like, cities tend to interpret this dimension independently based on their own perceptions of the idea of Europe and European cultural space. Taking into account these diverse interpretations and implementations of the European dimension by cities, the ECoC initiative might be considered a proper case to study spatial dynamics in the making of European identity.

While studies of the ECoC initiative mostly focus on its economic benefits for the cities (Herrero, et. al., 2006; Liu, 2014, et. al) and the influence on their urban regeneration (Hudec & Džupka, 2016; Richards & Wilson, 2004; Steiner, et. al. 2015, et. al.), some authors concern about the European dimension of this program (Sassatelli, 2002, 2008; Lähdesmäki, 2010, 2014; Immler, 2014; Fischer, 2013; Patel, 2013; Fage-Butler, 2018; et.al.). They agree that the ECoC initiative generates meanings of Europe in various spatial contexts and contributes to European identity formation. The ECoC relocates discussions about the idea of Europe from European elites in Brussels to local communities “at the margins” of the EU (Sassatelli, 2008: 227). At the same time, these local and bottom-up interpretations of Europeaness are meaningful, because they develop greater identification with the European project in public space than top-down articulations (Fage-Butler, 2018). Moreover, the ECoC initiative produces European discourses which are not restricted by national frameworks and identities (Sassatelli, 2013; Palonen, 2010). “Europeaness” in the ECoC becomes a spatial identity that acquires its meanings in particular places (Lähdesmäki, 2014). Thus, elaboration of the

European Dimension by ECoC cities is not just a formal requirement of the European Commission, but a resource of reimagining Europe through spatial narratives.

Even though the studies of the European Dimension in the ECoC program demonstrate the importance of local perspectives on Europe for the process of European identity building, only few authors examine more general spatial and regional dynamics of the EU in construction of the idea of Europe through the ECoC. Studies usually disclose European discourses in concrete ECoC cities without looking at how they vary across cities depending on their geographical position within the EU. Nevertheless, some of them indicated these dynamics. As it was pointed out by Nicole L. Immler and Hans Sakkers (2014), participation of peripheral regions of the EU in the ECoC shows that they tend to locate themselves culturally at the center of Europe regardless their actual geographic position. They reimagine Europe and its centrality according to their history and location in peripheral zones. Tuuli Lähdesmäki (2010, 2012) also outlines some spatial dynamics in her studies on the ECoC, she emphasises the role of the recent enlargements of the EU in redefinition of Europe and their implications on East-West divisions of the continent. According to her, the former East-West divisions of Europe reflect cultural practices in cities, located in postsocialist countries that witnessed transformation of their political systems (Lähdesmäki, 2010). Therefore, the ECoC initiative could be considered as a case to study spatial and regional dynamics in construction of the idea of Europe.

These spatial dynamics in construction of European identity became especially relevant after the Eastern enlargement and with the growth of national sovereignty and illiberal movements in some countries of the CEE, which led to emergence of internal Others of the EU and reinforcement of the East-West divide. In the context of the EU, this reemergence of internal boundaries increased the importance of spaces of European identity, dynamic and cross-national zones where ideas of Europe are generated and transformed, and where ideological discontents between Western and Eastern Europe can be blurred. Cities in the CEE can be considered as belonging to these postnational spaces, because they depend on national discourses only partially, hence, they can develop multiple identifications with European idea beyond national boundaries, creating diverse and, at the same time, territorially defined images of Europe. They can provide alternative

to nation state images of Central and Eastern Europe, contributing to the debates about meaning of Europe and upgrading them at the level of the EU.

Taking this into account, the ECoC initiative can be considered as a tool of dialogue between cities and the EU about European identity and the future of Europe. Therefore, this thesis aims to empirically demonstrate that through the ECoC events postsocialist cities construct postnational spaces of European identity and show its spatial dynamics after the Eastern enlargement. The main research question of this study is *how the idea of Europe is constructed by post-socialist cities from Central and Eastern European countries in the framework of the ECoC programme?*

In fact, many authors have already analyzed the spatial dynamics the EU on European identity (Delanty&Rumford, 2005; Diez, 2004; Krastev & Holms, 2018; Kuus, 2005; Mosio, 2013; et al.). But this literature often remained at the macro-level and considered particular nation states, but rarely explored concrete cities, whose urban identities translate into diverging constructions of Europe. At the same time, literature on urban identities in European cities (Gospodini, 2004; Murzyn-Kupisz & Gwosdz, 2011; Tölle, 2010; Young & Kaczmarek, 2008) too focuses on particular places and hardly addresses their influence on more general spatial transformations of the idea of Europe. This study seeks to connect this literature and demonstrate that urban identities are meaningful in construction of the idea of Europe

Since authors who noticed the spatial and regional dynamics in the ECoC do not explore how exactly postsocialist Central and Eastern European cities construct Europe discursively, and which meanings of Europe they produce through the ECOC initiative, this study will address this gap. The analysis will include eight ECoC bid books of cities in countries from the former Eastern bloc that joined the EU after 2004. Through the lens of poststructuralist discourse theory by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) and poststructuralist discourse analysis developed by Lene Hansen (2006), cities' articulations of Europe in ECoC bid books will be analyzed.

The structure of the thesis consists of five chapters. Following the introduction, the second chapter provides the background of the study, which includes more detailed description of the spatial transformation of Europe and its growing territorialization, the role of spaces of

Europeanization and urban identities in Europe. The third chapter includes the theoretical and methodological framework of the study. There the main principles of poststructuralist discourse theory and analysis are outlined, as well as justification for their application. The second part of the chapter explains selection of cases and methodology of the research. The main analysis is presented in the fourth chapter. It is based on poststructuralist discourse analysis, developed by Lene Hansen (2006), and demonstrates how Europe is constructed spatially, temporary and ethically through the lens of ECOC cities. Conclusions are presented in the fifth final chapter.

## 2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

### 2.1. Territorialization of European identity

In 2003 Juergen Habermas and Jacques Derrida wrote a joint declaration about the European identity in the twenty first century, which was a meaningful act of defining Europe. They reflected the path towards European integration after the Second World War, which led to the creation of the European Union. According to them, European identity is based on overcoming Europe's colonial, imperialistic and totalitarian past. European conflicts and wars throughout centuries construct contemporary Europe through a feeling of shame for its own past. This explains the core of the idea of Europe, which is based on the pursuit of a more social justice, protection of its integrity, devaluation of sovereignty and distancing from its own Self (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). These characteristics of Europe show that European identity can be contextualized as a political inspiration and process of becoming through distancing and overcoming the past (Heffernan, 2005; Wæver, 1996).

This aterritorial and post-national understanding of Europe as aspiration lied at the basis of the supranational idea of the EU, which promotes inclusiveness and coexistence of different nationalities. However, as it was noticed by Thomas Diez (2004), after the end of Cold War with development of the EU, expansion of NATO and emergence of terrorist threats, European idea became more territorial. The growing necessity to securitize Europe led to creation of new European Others, such as Islam and United States (Diez, 2004: 332). Moreover, due to the geographical expansion, EU became more conscious about its borders and limits of European East while approaching closer to more traditional Easts, such as Turkey and Russia (Kuus, 2005). The extraterritorial vision of Europe as an inspiration to follow for others became blurrier when questions of new membership and further enlargements arise. This shows that securitization of the EU from the external threats and limitation of EU borders undermine inclusiveness of European idea and creates more ideological divisions around its meanings (Diez, 2004; Kuus, 2005). European idea acquires features of a national identity, which is centralized and linked with a particular territory (Diez, 2004: 322).

Not only external geopolitical Others challenge the self-reflective and post-national character of the European idea, but internal disagreements about its definition among the EU Member States, which especially reinforced after the Eastern enlargement in 2004. The idea of Europe, based on overcoming its past, acquires different meanings in postsocialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Namely, their perception of national sovereignty is historically different from many Western European countries, because they regain it only after the Cold War. Unlike the countries from Western Europe, their path towards integration with the EU coincided with the liberation of their national sovereignty, which previously was suppressed by communist and totalitarian regimes. This means that after joining the EU, they might not share the same type of distancing from national sovereignty as some Western European countries, what can influence on the development of the EU as a supranational project.

This question of national sovereignty in Central and Eastern European countries became one of the reasons why some authors, who write about European identity after the Eastern enlargement, attribute collective actorness to Central and Eastern Europe. By means of this attribution, they outline causes of spatial differences in construction of Europe inside the EU. For instance, Delanty and Rumford (2005: 48) consider the role of national sovereignty in Central and Eastern Europe as a reason of rising new conflicts over belonging and post-national identity in Europe, because “national autonomy will be a top priority for many of the incoming countries, many of which have only recently experienced national autonomy” (Delanty & Rumford, 2005: 48).

Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holms also share a similar vision on ideological consequences of the enlargement, they agree that national sovereignty is one of the reasons of Central and Eastern Europe’s discontents with Western European countries (2018). Their membership in the EU make them play an “imitation game” to fulfill Western standards, what creates a feeling of loss of sovereignty for them. Therefore, they tend to invert this imitation, creating their own visions of Europe and replacing its centers from the West to the East, as it happened in Viktor Orban’s Hungary and Jarosław Kaczynski’s Poland (Krastev & Holms, 2018).

Reflecting on these East-West discontents, Maria Mälksoo (2019), shows more radical stance, and she constructs Central and Eastern Europe as a “normative threat” of Europe. Discussing the conflict between the “liberal EU mainstream” and particular populist governments in the CEE, she outlines that “their national sovereignty and values, seems to be particularly disturbing for the EU’s positive sense of self precisely for the normative challenge’s emergence from within the cohort of ‘new Europeans’” (Mälksoo, 2019: 366). According to her, their emphasis on national sovereignty, combined with the rise of illiberalism, authoritarian forms of government and populist movements in some CEE countries undermines the EU of a “normative power Europe” as it was defined by Ian Manners (2002) (Mälksoo, 2019: 378). These factors intensify divisions between the East and the West of Europe and fluster European “we” internally. The emergence of the Eastern Europe as a “normative threat” within European Self causes anxieties about the future of Europe and its general idea (Mälksoo, 2019: 378-379).

Therefore, the East-West discontents over the question of national sovereignty are one of the examples of spatial transformations of European identity and emergence of inner territorial Others in the EU. It leads to attribution of collective actorness to Central and Eastern European countries and their stigmatization as an internal threat. It shows that the post-national and temporal vision of European identity is undermined not only by external geopolitical threats, such as Islam and the US, but by internal discontents that divide Europe on the West and the East. In these conditions of the growth of territorial internal and external Others, importance of particular spaces and spatial dynamics in construction of Europe increases. The territorial reconstruction of Europe after the Cold War demonstrates that not only the European past, but “ontopology”, what means ‘stable and presentable determination of a locality, the topos of territory, native soil, city, body in general’ (Derrida, 1994: 82), plays an important role in European identity construction.

## 2.2. Spaces of European identity

The territorialization of European identity means that characteristics of particular spaces are represented in discourses about Europe. Anssi Paasi (2001) considers national communities as the most representative to observe how territory determines cultural and

political discourses, because national identity is almost always connected with territoriality. Indeed, national interpretations of Europe are important and they are often analyzed in the literature on European identity. For Ole Wæver (2002), for instance, discourses on Europe are produced through a layered framework, based on constellation of state and nation and their relational position towards Europe. This attention to national discourses on Europe is reasonable, because they reveal the strongest ideological struggle of the EU on its way to a common identity, which is a question of how to combine national ideologies with the European supranational idea. They are also important when it comes to policy-making in the EU, namely, nation states can “upload” or push some policies at the European level from a “bottom up” dimension (Börzel, 2002).

However, since the very identity of Europe is supranational and belongs to public space, considering articulations of Europe only from national perspective means limiting European community by national borders. This can lead to overgeneralization of public discourses, when citizens of one country are considered speaking in one voice, to replacement of public opinion by official position of national elites, or, how it was outlined in the previous subchapter, to attribution of collective actorness and stigmatization of particular countries. Besides, national discourses themselves does not correlate with Europe’s transboundary space-making, which involve cross-national political and economic actors at various scales. As Tim Richardson (2006) points out, European space is characterized by rapid increase of cross-border and trans-national zones at different levels. He distinguishes trans-European connectivity, transnational regions, infrastructure and urban networks as conditions for the emerging European space (Richardson, 2006: 213). In this context, knowledge-producing practices, generated in these zones on the territory of the EU, are resources for territorial redefinition of European space (Richardson, 2006: 206). This spatial and multiscale format of space-making in the EU destabilizes national spatiotemporal structures and fixed discourses on Europe (Moisio et al., 2013).

These cross-national zones are frequently considered as starting points in creation of a common European space. In spite of variations in defining them in the literature, there is a consensus that they contribute to creation of European space beyond national frameworks. Clark and Jones called them “spaces of Europeanisation”, which are created

from an “interplay across individual, organizational, community and territorial scales” (2008: 302). For Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford they are “dynamic zones” or “spatial entrepreneurs”, developed through interaction between global processes and “more static territorial arrangements to constitute new local, regional and transnational (European) spaces” (Delanty & Rumford, 2005: 135). They emerge from fragmentation of the EU Member States and have their own forms of autonomy and government. They also shape the process of supranational integration in the EU, involving various actors, such as governmental institutions, cities, policy makers, social groups, individuals and others (Delanty & Rumford, 2005: 123). Like the nation states, they can influence the policy-making in the EU, because these cross-border formal and informal networks of different actors facilitate communication and implementation of the EU policies (Börzel & Buzogány, 2010). Moreover, considering these spaces and networks in the context of the EU enlargement, they can be characterized as “fora for policy learning for both state and non-state actors from the new member states” (Börzel & Buzogány, 2010: 714).

Hence, spatial contexts play significant roles in the construction of European identity. As many authors highlight, European space contains a network of different dynamic zones, which have autonomous power and resources to produce knowledge. They are not territorially fixed units due to their dynamism, but at the same time they are not completely aterritorial. Geographical and historical context determine how European values are recreated in these spaces. Combining local, national, supranational and global influences, they produce new geographies of Europeaness that reflect spatial construction of Europe beyond physical borders of the EU and its Member States. If some countries in Central and Eastern Europe return Europe to its past through revitalizing national sovereignty, subnational and cross-national spaces of European identity in this region direct Europe toward its future, mitigating East-West divisions.

### 2.3. European urban identities

In the process of European space-making, cities can be considered as belonging to these dynamic zones of European identity, because their urban environments create conditions for mirroring Europe. As it was explained by Gerard Delanty and Paul Jones (2002: 462), cities construct their identity out of live and public spaces, which embrace almost all

aspects of social life and disclose its diversity and changeability. It indicates a citizen-centered character of cities' identities, and demonstrates how European principles of diversity and social inclusion can work in practice.

Another reason of cities' closeness with the idea of Europe is a crisis of national identities within the EU. Such trends as growth of supranationality and mass migration all around the Europe blur national identities and create more multicultural and multiethnic society. Under these circumstances, European cities become epicenters of these migration flows and cross-national dynamics, where the supranational and, at the same time, non-homogeneous culture emerges (Castells, 1993; Gospodini, 2004). Besides, these dynamics are fostered by the process of globalization. Local culture and universal trends merge in cities, creating "glocal spaces", where global processes are embedded in particular local conditions (Brenner, 1999). Clearly, these influences do not necessarily lead to the emergence of transnational, postmodern and globalized societies in European cities. They can also cause the growth of xenophobia, racism and separation of local culture from other higher-order identities, including national, regional and supranational (Castells, 1993). Therefore, cities, influenced by the growth of supranationality and migration flows in Europe, can become either open and multinational or closed and localized spaces. Nevertheless, in both cases European cities challenge or complement ideology of a nation state through continuous transformation of their urban society under external influences (Bhadha, 1994; Gospodini, 2004). They provide a space for Europe to be shaped and tested at local level, dealing with the growing social and cultural diversity of urban places and power struggles between various social groups.

Not only sites' response to current European and global trends and their citizen-centered character make them meaningful actors of European identity formation, but their urban identity or landscape, defined as "set of meanings, representations and values with which the urban settlement has been invested and which it conveys" (Murzyn-Kupisz & Gwosdz, 2011: 114). Urban landscape embrace memories of region, nation, ethnic and social groups, mix and localize them. This multilayer structure of city with overlapping identities from various historical periods often represent localized versions of European history. Urban landscape saves memories that remind Europe of its diversity, which is often diminished by states because of their focus on national identity.

In the context of the eastern enlargement, cities of former postsocialist countries deserve a special attention. The East-West divide that Europe has faced after accession of the Members from Central and Eastern Europe acquires new meanings in urban identities of this region. Contrary to nation states, whose national sovereignty often contribute to further divisions of Europe, European postsocialist cities might represent spaces where these East-West discrepancies would be blurred due to their multiscale and flexible urban identity. Urban identities in the CEE often do not coincide with national discourses, hence, they are more open for transformation and integration into European and global networks, embracing new economic and political realities based on their own local memories and conditions (Volcic, 2005; Young & Kaczmarek, 2008).

Considering the literature about identity formation in European postsocialist cities, Craig Young and Sylvia Kaczmarek (2008) notice that such studies frequently focus on the process of cities' distancing from their communist, socialist or Soviet and Russian past through abandonment of its symbols, returning to pre-socialist times or Westernizing their identities. However, many studies underestimate value of their socialist past, and they do not consider how it shapes current identity of cities (Young & Kaczmarek, 2008: 54). This observation is important, because omitting the "non-European" socialist past means removing an essential part of city's identity. Without taking into account the whole past as it is, urban identities of the present remain incomplete, and it is important to realize that "powerful narratives of place, fixed with hegemonic representations of the past, remain fundamental to the modernistic ideas of legitimacy and authority" (Graham, 2000: 75). These representations show how postsocialist urban identities are constantly transforming through remembering and forgetting different parts of their past. Hence, as it is observed in the literature, the CEE cities create a vision of their future through the ideological struggle between their historical memories and new European realities (Adler, 2005). This contested character of identity building in postsocialist urban spaces is an important source for identification of meanings of Europe.

### 3. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Poststructuralism engages in deconstruction and decentralization of identities. It multiplies meanings and rejects essentializing particular collective representations. Opposing to absolute certainty, it does not ultimately fix meanings, but shows their discursive variations in specific contexts. The poststructuralist approach discloses “layers of history” of particular identities (Williams, 2014: 16) and reflects changes in configurations of space, territoriality and place (Howarth, 2013: 17). It also reveals moral and ethical perspectives in relation to particular concepts (Howarth, 2013: 16). This decentralized and dynamic theoretical approach correlates with the contested nature of European identity, which, following to Ole Wæver (1996: 127), can be contextualized as “something impossible to fill, always incomplete due to the presence of the outside in the inside, but also as defined by this impossibility”. In the context of the increasing territorialization of European identity and the role of spaces, the poststructuralist approach provides a necessary theoretical basis to study how Europe is constructed by postsocialist cities. It helps reveal local representations of Europe through different temporal, spatial and ethical angles.

#### 3.1. Poststructuralist discourse theory and analysis

This study is based on poststructuralist discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) and poststructuralist discourse analysis developed by Lene Hansen (2006). Poststructuralist discourse theory was chosen to answer the research question, because it can help reveal meanings and discourses about Europe in particular local contexts. As Jacob Torfing (2005) outlines, the discourse theory provides a contextual, relational and historical view on formation of identities and meanings. Specific discursive contexts influence how these meanings and identities are interpreted and constructed (Torfing, 2005: 14). Thereby, based on poststructuralist approach, this study does not seek to ultimately fix meanings of Europe, but empirically demonstrate their variety from specific discursive contexts.

Some of the key principles of poststructuralist discourse theory was developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their book “Hegemony and Socialist Strategy” (1985). According to them, meanings and identities are produced through the process of *articulation*, defined as “any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 105). Articulation practices emerge in a system of differences, where elements attempt to determine and structure their totalities. Hence, the process of articulation leads to creation of the “structured totalities”, called *discourses*, which are constituted as “an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 105, 112). The idea that discourse organizes these differential positions does not mean that it ultimately fixes meanings and represents a homogenous dominant formation with a single center. Within discourse, meanings and identities are fixed only partially, because their relational and transformative character prevents them from any ultimate fixation. Since discourse is an open system of signification without any ultimate center, the partial fixation of meanings emerges in *nodal points*, through which discourse is organized (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Torfing, 2005). They are defined as “privileged signs, around which other signs are ordered” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 26). The partial fixation of meanings around certain nodal points within particular discourses, therefore, constitutes the process of articulation (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 113).

The process of articulation produces discourses through hegemonic struggles, which emerge when elements of articulatory practice have antagonistic relations and their frontiers are unstable. These elements have a floating character, what means that they are subjects of a constant redefinition (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 136). They can be called *empty signifiers*, since they do not have any concrete signified and their limits are antagonistic. They subvert the process of signification, because they represent “a pure being of a system” without attachment to a particular signified (Laclau, 1996: 39). The presence of empty signifiers in a system means that the object of signification is unachievable, and it is impossible to represent it adequately (Laclau, 1996: 40). It can be represented only by means of establishing of its limits and partial fixation of its meanings through hegemonic struggles and antagonism of articulatory elements (Laclau & Mouffe,

1985). These hegemonic practices of partial fixation of meanings are based on the logic of equivalence and difference. The interconnected chain of equivalences and differences demonstrate limits of any representation. Establishing relationship of equivalence and difference with an external means to identify limits of Self. In other words, not being something or being equivalent to something different shape presence of Self (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

Lene Hansen (2006) in her book “Security as practice: Discourse analysis and the Bosnian war” also argues that meanings and identities are constructed through the logic of equivalence and differences, and she calls it *the processes of linking and differentiation*. According to her, this processes can provide not only a theoretical basis, but methodological tools for analyzing “how discourses seek to construct stability, where they become unstable, how they can be deconstructed, and the processes through which they change” (Hansen, 2006: 40). Analyzing discourses through the processes of linking and differentiation means to pay attention how discursive elements are juxtaposed and linked and how they construct Self and its radical and less-radical Other (Hansen, 2006: 41). These processes can stabilize meanings and identities and, at the same time, disclose ruptures and instabilities in their discursive construction.

Lene Hansen (2006) goes beyond poststructuralist theoretical framework and develops methodological guidelines how to conduct poststructuralist discourse analysis. She argues that methodological void of poststructuralist discourse theory should be filled with particular communicating strategies and choices (Hansen, 2006). At the beginning of analysis, she recommends to identify *basic discourses*, which create main struggles around meaning and identities in texts. They connect and systemize multiple representations of Self and Other and distinguish key points of disagreement and constellation within debates on identity (Hansen, 2006: 46).

When basic discourses are identified through reading of texts, analysis should be focused on articulatory practices, namely, the processes of linking and differentiation of discursive elements. Lene Hansen (2006: 41) suggests looking at them from spatial, temporal and ethical perspectives, because such big concepts as space, time and responsibility play an important role in constitution of boundaries of any discourse. She

argues that “even abstract discourses constitute subjects by situating them within particular boundaries, by investing them with possibilities for change or repetition, and by constructing ethical relations” (Hansen, 2006: 41). According to her, spatial, temporal and ethical perspectives have equal theoretical status for construction of identities (Hansen, 2006: 42).

Considering all these three dimensions separately, *spatial identity* is constructed through creation of boundaries and, as Hansen (2006: 42) writes, through “delineation of space”. Spatial discourses are represented as territorially bounded. For example, in light of European identity building, ideological boundaries of Europe can be drawn through its differentiation with some geographical Others, such as “Russia”, “Middle East”, “Africa”, etc. Spatial perspective is also needed while defining centers of Europe and analyzing East-West dynamics in the process of European identity building. Besides, spatial construction of European identity largely depends on particular territorial spaces in which European discourse is located. This diversifies meanings of Europe and broadens European discourse with every new spatial contextualization.

Not only spatial identity helps stabilize discourses, but *temporal identity* that reflects processes of discursive transformation or continuity throughout a particular period of time (Hansen, 2006: 43). Usually temporary identities are constructed through linking and differentiation of a contemporary Self with its past. They represent how discourses establish relations between the present and the past and how they develop historically. In the context of Europe, its temporal identity is often considered to be constructed through differentiation with the past, which is considered as the significant Other for the contemporary European Self (Diez, 2004; Wæver, 1996). European identity is largely based on overcoming its past, associated with concepts of colonialism, nationalism, totalitarianism, genocide, fragmentation etc. At the same time, the past is not fully negated by the European Self, because it is constructed through linking with other more appropriate in the contemporary context historical themes, such as Enlightenment, Christendom or Revolution. Hence, the processes of linking and differentiation in construction of temporal European identity define which parts of the Europe’s past is considered as opposite or identical to the European present. This temporal perspective

demonstrates transformation of European discourse throughout the history and shapes contemporary meanings of Europe.

Ultimately, Lene Hansen (2006) recommends to take into account *ethical identity* while conducting a discourse analysis. This type of identity is interconnected with construction of responsibility, ethics and morality within discourse. Ethical identity is produced with a purpose to legitimize some particular representations of identity and to give them a moral force. It could be also connected with universal conceptions of morality and international responsibility. This ethical identity is particularly visible in European discourse, when Europe is represented as “normative power”, whose international role is to take responsibility for protection of fundamental principles of liberty, democracy, human rights and rule of law (Manners, 2002). In this case, ethical component plays a crucial role in construction of European identity, and it makes Europe different from Others, who oppose its fundamental principles.

To summarize above mentioned, the poststructuralist discourse theory by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) and poststructuralist discourse analysis by Lene Hansen (2006) complement each other. The former provides a theoretical basis for a poststructuralist research, while the latter develops methodological tools to conduct it. They both explain how particular meanings and identities are constructed in specific discursive contexts. As it was discussed before, meanings and identities emerge as a result of articulatory practices and hegemonic struggles between their discursive elements. Discourse analysis helps to stabilize them through partial fixation of their discursive limits. This can be done by looking at how discourses are articulated around nodal points through the processes of linking and differentiation, and how they construct Selves and Others of different degrees of radicalness spatially, temporally and ethically.

### 3.2 Case selection and methodology

In order to answer the research question *how the idea of Europe is constructed by post-socialist cities from Central and Eastern European countries in the framework of the ECoC programme*, eight ECoC bid books from post-socialist cities in Central and Eastern

Europe is analysed, including Pilsen-2015 (Czech Republic), Wroclaw-2016 (Poland), Plovdiv-2019 (Bulgaria), Rijeka-2020 (Croatia), Timisoara-2021 (Romania), Kaunas-2022 (Lithuania), Veszprém-2023 (Hungary), Tartu-2024 (Estonia). This study focuses on cities located in post-socialist countries, which became part of the European Union after the enlargement of the EU in 2004, 2007 and 2013. These eight cities were chosen, because they are the only post-socialist cities from the CEE region that received the title “European Capital of Culture” for the period between 2010 and 2019. It should be mentioned that they receive the title four or five years before the actual ECOC event starts, thus bid books are also written at this time.

Selection of the period from 2010 to 2019 can be explained by several reasons. Firstly, it is connected with history of the European dimension in the ECOC programme. During the first years of the ECoC initiative from 1985 and up to 1994, this dimension was not clearly articulated by cities. In this period ECoC cities tended to focus more on promotion of their cultural uniqueness rather than on connection with the European cultural space (Myerscough, 1994: 20, 24). From 1995 cities started highlighting some common European topics due to the growing pressure from the European authorities, but still it was not a central part of their ECoC programmes (Cox & Garcia, 2013: 180). As it was also outlined by the Palmer/Rae Associates (2004) in their report about the ECoC between 1995-2004, cities did not have any obligation from the side of the EU to prioritize European dimension, as well as they were lacking a clear vision how it can be implemented. Only in 2006 the European Parliament and the Council of the EU published the *Decision establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event*, where they emphasise the key role of the European dimension in the ECOC programme and outline its main characteristics in order to make it more explicit for future ECOC candidatures. According to the Article 4 of this Decision, the European dimension of the programme should:

- *Foster cooperation between cultural operators, artists and cities from the relevant Member States and other Member States in any cultural sector;*
- *Highlight the richness of cultural diversity in Europe;*
- *Bring the common aspects of European cultures to the fore* (European Parliament and Council of the EU, 2006).

The Decision was fully applicable to the ECoC candidate cities starting from 2007, what means that only from this year cities faced with the official demand to develop “Europeannes” of their programmes, and the European dimension became a central indicator for a final selection of ECoC hosts (Cox & Garcia, 2013). In order to be competitive, cities had to develop their “own European narrative depending on its geographical location and its history, its past and present populations, and that in some cases it might also extend beyond the borders of the current European Union” (European Commission, 2010: 6). Therefore, articulation of the European idea in the ECoC bid books became more visible after 2007. Since this study aims to discover meanings of Europe, it is important to choose texts with more explicit articulations of European idea, and for this reason, this study does not include cities which applied for the ECoC title before 2007.

Nevertheless, study includes ECoC cities from 2010, what can be explained by the availability of data. Since the European Capitals of Culture initiative has a temporary character, open access to materials of the event published before 2010 is limited. Because of this, bid books of cities that received the ECoC title from 2007 to 2009 were not included in the analysis, what is considered as one of the limitations of this study. For example, ECoC webpages and bid books of Košice (Slovakia) and Riga (Latvia), which hosted the event in 2013 and 2014 accordingly (meaning that they wrote their application books four or five years earlier), are not available publically anymore. This shows the temporal status of this initiative and importance to analyse the available data in order to perpetuate meanings that it produces. Finally, this study seeks to understand contemporary representations of European idea, therefore, the preference was given to the most recent available application books where the idea of Europe is articulated.

In regards to the selection of the ECoC bid books as texts for analysis, it was based on criteria for textual selection by Lene Hansen (2006). According to her, texts should have clear articulation of identities, a formal authority and to be widely read (Hansen, 2006: 76). It can be argued that the ECoC bid books meet these criteria. Due to the demand from the EU, they include their own explanations of the European dimension, what indicates that they clearly articulate their identity vis-à-vis Europe. As it is mentioned in the Article 4 of the Decision 2006 on ECoC, cities need to explain what do

richness of cultural diversity in Europe and common aspects of European cultures mean for them (European Parliament and Council of the EU, 2006). Bid books also have a formal authority. They are usually written by many representatives from various governmental and non-governmental organisations, academics and other activists in the field of culture and heritage, but their content always goes through approval of municipal governments and mayors of cities before submission. Ultimately, bid books are widely read, because they are published on websites of the ECoC events, which are promoted through news and advertisements to attract their visitors.

At the same time, it should be taken into account that ECoC bid books are mostly written for the EU, namely, for representatives of the European Commission and for the ECoC Selection Panel, which consists from appointed experts from different bodies and institutions of the EU. This means that articulations of Europe constructed in ECoC bid books are meant for the EU to a large extent, and their texts are mostly meant for “uploading” their local visions at European level. Besides, they have a clear accent on promotion and advertising themselves to be attractive for the Selection Panel. It means that they represent themselves from the most beneficial positions with a purpose to win, what indicates that interpretations of their local identities and meanings of Europe might not coincide with actual narratives of cities. Their bid books also can contain some clichés from previous winners of the ECoC title, which can illustrate specifics of representations, approved and liked by the EU.

Making some final remarks on case selection, it should be mentioned that not all parts of the bid books were included into analysis. Only those parts were chosen, where clear articulation of identities in relation to Europe was observed. It primarily relates to introductory parts and chapters about the European dimension, but not necessarily limited by them. Those chapters of the bid books that cover management financial planning of the ECoC event were excluded. The parts of the text where European themes are generated provide a valuable basis for a discourse analysis. They belong to literary nonfiction genre, where real events and places are described with literary elements, what facilitates articulation of identities.

As it was observed by Lene Hansen (2006), texts of literary nonfiction genre often represent construction of collective identities, where Self “encounters a set of objects and habits which are articulated as indicative of a place or a people” (Hansen, 2006: 63). This directly aligns with identities produced by cities in their ECoC bid books: they reflect landscapes, cultural artifacts, historical and political factors, which construct their Selves. It can be already noticed that in this thesis Self is not single, it represents European identity in various local contexts. Following Hansen’s terminology (2006: 69), this is a “multiple Self” study of one event and one moment. One event means that construction of identity is linked with a particular event, which is the accession of the CEE countries to the EU. One moment study indicates that Selves are situated “within the same temporal horizon” (Hansen, 2006: 71), which is the period after the accession. Therefore, this study aims to understand how European discourse is implemented in particular local conditions, and how struggles between the past and the present of postsocialist cities influence their Selves after the accession to the EU.

In order to understand this, the chosen ECoC bid books will be analyzed through the lens of poststructuralist discourse theory developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985). Poststructuralist discourse analysis by Lene Hansen (2006) will be used as method of the analysis. Since the research question asks how the idea of Europe is constructed by the cities, the basic discourse that need to be analyzed is *European discourse*. In this study the concept of *Europe* is presented as an empty signifier with unstable frontiers, which are constantly redefined. In order to partially fix meanings of Europe produced within postsocialist urban identities, articulatory practices and hegemonic struggles within nodal points of the European discourse will be analyzed. The analysis will be based on looking at how processes of linking and differentiation evolve around the cities’ European Selves and Others of different degrees. Finally, the European discourse will be considered from spatial, temporal and ethical perspectives. The discourse analysis will focus on how postsocialist cities construct their European Self spatially, temporally and ethically through a particular set of nodal points.

## 4. ANALYSIS

### 4.1. Spatial construction of European Self

*“Just as physical space exists only in so far as that there are particles that fill it with their kinetic energy, spaces of human life only exist in so far as there are human beings who fill them with their social, moral, and aesthetic energy”.*

*(Wroclaw 2016, 2011: 14)*

This subchapter analyses how postsocialist cities construct Europe spatially in their bid books. The analysis focuses on how their spatial characteristics connected with the notion of Europe. Three nodal points, which partially fix European discourse of cities, were identified during the analysis: the East-West division, disconnection and localization. The first nodal point “East-West division” shows that cities outline dereferences between Eastern and Western part of Europe, articulating their European Self in bid-books. They connect this nodal point with concepts of “inequality”, “aspiration” and “connection”. Cities demonstrate that they are not equal with the countries of the “traditional West” and they still have some feelings of aspiration towards them. At the same time, the “East-West” division is linked with a concept “connection”, which shows that cities consider themselves as connecting points or bridges between Western and Eastern European parts.

The second nodal point “disconnection” illustrates that cities become disconnected with their own Self and Europe, while looking for Europeanness inside themselves. The “disconnection” is linked with concepts of “methamorphosis” and “difference”. The former indicates disconnection and dissatisfaction with their urban spaces which do not correspond to their expectations and remind them about their past. It makes them constantly undergo methamorphosis to find their place in Europe. The latter shows cities’ detachment from “more democratic and more cultural” Europe and acceptance of their difference from it.

Finally, the third nodal point “localization” demonstrates that Europe can be localized in postsocialist cities. It shows particular characteristics of their urban spaces, which make them be European. Articulation of the concepts “meeting point” and “postnationalism” discloses these characteristics. The “meeting point” is connected with cultural diversity

of cities and migration flows, whereas “postnationalism” – with formation of subnational and cross-national zones of European identity around cities.

#### 4.1.1. East-West division of Europe

Spatial representation of European discourse in the ECoC bid books is frequently connected with articulation of the East-West division of Europe. Cities from Central and Eastern Europe tend to look at Europe from the lens of this division, which becomes an essential part of their European identity. It is also a nodal point in the European discourse of cities, because it partially fixes meanings of Europe and gives them particular characteristics. When the nodal point “East-West division” is connected with an empty signifier “Europe”, the homogeneous vision of Europe disappears. It separates European space on Eastern and Western parts, and links “Europe” with such concepts as “inequality”, “aspiration” and “connection”. Considering each of these concepts separately, cities articulate the first moment “inequality” linked with European idea, because they consider themselves belonging to the Eastern part of Europe that is unequal to the West. For example, Pilsen, a ECoC city from the Czech Republic, outlines these unequal East-West relations in its bid book:

“We cannot pretend that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are equal democracies compared to the traditional West. [...] Anybody who survived the 50’s and cheered with hope for “The Prague Spring” inevitably lost the rest of their illusions during the period of hard normalisation in the 70’s. So many cuts into live flesh have been borne by the generation of today’s seniors, so many maneuvers and “coat changing” has been experienced by today’s political representation, so many stigmas, paradoxes and uncertainties are encompassed in each Czech family ... and each differently and under a variety of circumstances” (Pilsen 2015, 2010: 14).

For Pilsen democracies of Central and Eastern Europe that experienced various “cuts” and “coat changing”, are unequal to those from the “traditional West” (Pilsen 2015, 2010: 14). In the quote “We” are the city of Pilsen and its people, who identify their Self with the Czech nation and Central and Eastern European countries. The Self is

constructed through its differentiation with Western democracies that have not experienced shortages and transformations, which are inherent to postsocialist societies of Europe on their way towards liberal democracy. Pilsen's Other is not Europe, but the West that does not share with them their harmful experiences. At the same time, the West is not a radical Other, because it is connected with the concept "inequality", which indicates existence of a common contextual ground with the Self. Pilsen's Self and Other are not totally separated from each other, they coexist within the same context, but unequally. Although in the current moment they both represent democracy in an unequal way, Self wants to become its Other at some point, establishing fair equality within the same discursive context.

This hope of the Central and European Self to become integrated with its Western Other shows that the inequality between them is combined with some degree of aspiration towards the West. Accordingly, the nodal point "East-West division" is also linked with the concept "aspiration", which intersects with the concept "inequality". This aspiration was articulated by Kaunas in Lithuania in the following way:

"Radio Luxembourg English service was extremely popular in the Eastern Bloc in the seventies. [...] It was the only radio station from the West that could be heard in occupied Lithuania. It was almost like a breath of fresh air, a passion – people would record entire programs and share them. The station brought The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and The Doors to the Lithuanian listeners, and its programming acted as an on-air English teacher and a voice of freedom through culture" (Kaunas 2022, 2017: 50).

Here the West is represented through a metaphor of "Radio Luxembourg English" and linked with "freedom", "fresh air" and "teacher". At the same time, it is differentiated from "Eastern Bloc" and "occupation". Kaunas' Self is identical to the people of Lithuania and other countries from the former Eastern bloc, who shared similar feelings of aspiration towards the West in the past. For people of Kaunas, the West was not only their non-radical Other, to whom they aspire and from whom they learn, but part of their Self, which was hidden and suppressed by their realities of oppression in the USSR. They consider their identity of seventies as an encounter with their Otherness, because their

desired liberated Self was facing the oppressive reality of the Soviet period, which prevented them from becoming the West. Even though this fragment represents identity of Kaunas and Lithuania of the past, it was included in the ECoC bid book to demonstrate that some degree of aspiration towards the West still exists in their society of the present. It was also made with a purpose to show that this period of time is not forgotten and considered as an essential part of their contemporary Self. It means that in spite of the fact that Lithuania became a free country as a result of the collapse of the USSR, its Self is still not fully integrated into the West, which still remains its Other, because these memories and aspirations continue existing within the society. Kaunas' bid book develops this idea linking the concept of the West with Europe itself:

“The tragedy of a divided Europe by the Iron Curtain transformed the way we, as Lithuanians, thought and still think of Europe and of ourselves. Our isolation behind the Iron Curtain meant for us that “Europe” was the West. So for a long time we associated Europe only with Western European countries” (Kaunas 2022, 2017: 15).

Being European for Kaunas is to be part of the West, which is their historical Other, because the memories of a divided Europe during the Cold War still exist. In the meantime, the European Self for Kaunas is projected towards the future and reflects the process of becoming and getting closer to Western European countries.

Gradually after the concepts of “inequality” and “aspiration”, the nodal point “East-West division” is linked with another concept “connection”. Spatial position of cities from Central and Eastern Europe between the West and the East is considered as an opportunity to reconnect two parts of Europe and overcome existing inequalities. Vezprem articulates this idea in their bid books:

“In Hungary, a “ferryboat” is a widely used metaphor – a vehicle that is constantly moving back and forth. In this case between East and West. Today everything is different: values are less a matter of physical space and more of the product of a post-modern fuzziness – something that belongs to web crawlers rather than to ferryboats. In a way it is a relief, as not being squeezed in between

two territories anymore frees our own 2023 Ferryboat to play a more relevant and positive role” (Veszprem 2023, n.d.: 16).

Veszprem indicates its position in-between the East and the West and construct its European Self as connecting the two sides of Europe. Pilsen shares similar vision on its place in Europe, articulating it as “a bridge between “old” and “new” Europe” (Pilsen 2015, 2010: 14). They attach metaphors “bridge” and “ferryboat” to their Self to demonstrate their connecting role in a renewed Europe of the future, when ideological frontiers between Eastern and Western parts of Europe disappear in “postmodern fuzziness”, as Veszprem’s bid book outlines (Veszprem 2023, n.d.: 16). At the same time, Pilsen’s bid book uses adjectives “old” in relation to the West and “new” – to the East, in order to challenge the idea that the East is less European than the West. The Czech city attempts to demonstrate that the East could play even a more significant role in the construction of European identity, because since it is “new”, it transforms the obsolete vision of Europe, where the West is its core and aspiration for others. In bid books of both cities the East is represented as fully European, but in a renewed Europe, provided that the two sides are connected.

With the concept “connection”, Pilsen and Veszprem’s Other is not only the West, as it was with previous concepts, but the East itself, because the cities’ Self is located in-between them. However, when the East and West connect, they are not Others for Pilsen and Veszprem anymore. If they merge, they become part of cities’ European Self. This understanding of the European Self as connecting and central is oriented towards future again. Cities use the future tense and such phrases as “open to an experiment” (Pilsen 2015, 2010: 14) to show that their European Self is still in the process of becoming. They have a potential to become a center of Europe, when their Others, the West and the East, merge and create conditions for existence of their European Self. Therefore, their Others are also non-radical, and they are even parts of their future European Self.

Among all three concepts, linked with the nodal point “East-West division”, “connection” is the most progressive and future-oriented. When concepts “inequality” and “aspiration” indicate that the two parts of Europe are still separated from each other, “connection” gives a space for a new and alternative interpretation of the East-West division as an

opportunity to connect and transform Europe, redefining its centers. To a certain degree, “connection” even undermines “inequality” and “aspiration”, because despite they represent current conditions, they are not so forward-looking and postmodern, and they are still linked with an obsolete vision of a divided Europe. Nevertheless, all of these moments are interconnected. For the postsocialist ECoC cities, European Self is more alien than naturally belonging to them, it reflects vision of their future and the process of becoming. Accordingly, to a certain extent, the European Self is also their Other, because they do not articulate their identity as being fully attached to Europe. This can be explained by the idea that their European Self is more Eastern, since the Western part of Europe is considered as an unequal Other, which is also their source of aspiration. However, even though they are not fully European in the present, in the future they locate themselves ideologically at the center of a renewed Europe with connected Eastern and Western parts. In this case Europe needs to be transformed and its old divisions should be blurred.

Thus, the nodal point “East-West division” partially fixes meanings of Europe as a heterogeneous space, separated on Eastern and Western parts. The East has inferior and unequal status in relation to the West, because the former is still only in the process of becoming fully European. At the same time, the East-West division provides an opportunity for Europe to transform and become connected. Connecting the East and the West means creating a postmodern and connected Europe of the future.

#### 4.1.2 Spatial disconnections

Apart from the “East-West division”, there is another nodal point “disconnection” within the European discourse of the ECoC postsocialist cities. The disconnection is linked with two different concepts: with metamorphosis and difference. The concept “metamorphosis” means that disconnection happens inside of cities’ Selves because of European influence. They are disconnected with their own Self, and reimagine a new European Self, to which they want to belong. This moment indicates inner transformation of cities and dissatisfaction with their own reality. Rijeka and Veszprem explicitly articulate this idea:

“Rijeka is a somewhat tired city that needs to re-imagine itself. In this way, Rijeka needs Europe. We have to reach beyond our own habitual memories and narratives, as a thriving port, a prospering industrial city, because that city simply does not exist any longer. It slid away at the end of the last century, together with 25,000 lost jobs, leaving abandoned halls, chimneys and power plants” (Rijeka 2020, 2016: 2).

“2023 [ECoC year] will mark the start of a new era for us. One where we go beyond our provincialism, beyond our defeatism, beyond our indifference. [...] We will demolish the separation of our city and the region and will dare to be what we are destined for: an exciting new destination and a contiguous European cultural space” (Veszprém 2023, n.d.: 9).

These cities articulate their Self as striving to go beyond itself. It shows that cities have inner struggles in identification of their place and ideology in Europe. Rijeka represents its Self as empty and abandoned. Its spatial identity is disconnected from city's past and future, and represents a precondition for a metamorphosis. Similarly, Veszprém articulates its Self as provincial, defeatist and indifferent to show its desire to create a new spatial identity, which would be more European and superior to the current one. This abandoned and provincial side of the Self is also the Other for both cities, because they attempt to re-imagine and change themselves with the help of Europe: Rijeka strives to overcome its ideational emptiness, while Veszprém wants to eliminate unsatisfactory parts of its Self. Their postsocialist spatial identities are driven by a constant metamorphosis, which causes not only a feeling of dissatisfaction with their urban space, but even hostility towards it. Wrocław raises this issue and mentions agoraphobia, a feeling of anxiety connected with a particular place, while discussing the transformation of Polish society into less open and more agonistic after the accession to the EU:

“These changes fill many people with anxiety that makes the public space of their own city and country seem hostile; they feel they are being chased away from that space and seek shelter in their privacy. This phenomenon may be described as public agoraphobia. It is particularly acute among the young. Many

of them, including those best educated, do not find a place for themselves in today's Polish society and emigrate to other countries" (Wrocław 2016, 2011: 11).

In the bid book of Wrocław, the nodal point "disconnection", linked with the concept "metamorphosis", shows a total rejection of the space where the Self is situated. This differs from the feeling of emptiness and dissatisfaction in relation to cities' spaces, as it was in the cases of Rijeka and Vezprém. Wrocław's Self is linked with an anxious and agonistic society, which became less open than it was during first years after joining the EU. The rejection of the public space by young Polish people demonstrates a clear disconnection between the space and values of many of its inhabitants. Even though the negation of the Self is higher in Wrocław than in Rijeka and Vezprém, all three cities construct their identities through othering various parts of their Self. Europe has changed the way they perceive the Self, therefore, they wish to transform themselves according to the current European realities. In particular, Vezprém reimagines its future as a "contiguous European cultural space" (Veszprém 2023, n.d.: 9), and Rijeka claims that it "needs Europe" (Rijeka 2020, 2016: 2) to show that they attempt to become closer to Europe through metamorphoses, even though they have to negate significant parts of their own Selves.

Apart from the metamorphosis, there is a concept of "difference" linked with the nodal point "disconnection". While "metamorphosis" indicates the disconnection of postsocialist cities with their empty, unsatisfactory and hostile Self, because of the European influence, "difference" shows disconnection of the cities with Europe itself. In the first case, cities' Self and Other are hardly distinguishable, because the Other is embedded in the Self, whereas, in the second case, Europe is presented as the Other of the cities' Self. In the first subchapter of the analysis, related to the East-West division, the Other for postsocialist cities was more the West rather than Europe, but this subchapter argues that Europe is also the Other for their Self. The articulation of Europe as the Other can be found in the bid books of Plovdiv in Bulgaria and Tartu in Estonia:

"We are proud that we are deeply rooted in European culture, of our connections to Europe over these millennia, but today we feel distant from the democratic,

dynamic and cultural Europe of the past 60 years and we are striving to find our place on Europe's cultural map" (Plovdiv 2019, n.d.: 5)

"There's hardly any need to explain European cultural diversity to most Tartuvians – we seem to get our share of it. But just a few kilometres away, the people from the Southern Estonian heartlands might not be taking it for granted. They're not necessarily averse to this diversity – there's just not enough first-hand experience, so mentioning Europe can all too easily conjure up images of suits, ties and tough restrictions" (Tartu 2024, 2019: 52).

Plovdiv differentiates the Self from Europe, which is "democratic, dynamic and cultural", and considers itself distant from it (Plovdiv 2019, n.d.: 5). Positioning Europe as the Other, Plovdiv articulates its Self as less democratic, less dynamic and less cultural. The city feels disconnected from Europe and continues searching for its place in the European cultural space. Meanwhile, Tartu also emphasizes that many people from Estonia are not attached to Europe, because they do not have a "first-hand experience" to understand the European idea better (Tartu 2024, 2019: 52). Although Tartu constructs its own Self as European, it articulates the difference that exists between Estonian people and Europe. Tartu also distinguishes two types of Europe: the first is linked with the idea of cultural diversity, and the second is connected with bureaucracy, represented by suits and ties in the quote, and restrictions. However, the second one is considered as the "superficial" Europe that "conjure up" in the mind of Estonian people, who feel distant from the "real" Europe, based on the value of cultural diversity (Tartu 2024, 2019: 52). Tartu puts an emphasis on disconnection of people with the first image of Europe.

Tartu and Plovdiv similarly outline the difference of their Selves from Europe indicating a feeling of distance or lack of the first-hand experience while interacting with Europe. Meanwhile, Veszprem goes beyond this and, discussing the place of Hungary in Europe, stresses on its own "flashing, neon-light anomaly of being the black sheep in the European herd" (Veszprém 2023, n.d.: 17). The Hungarian city links its country's Self with a metaphor "black sheep" to demonstrate its radical difference from Europe. In the Veszprem's case "difference" has a particularly strong connotation, because the city emphasizes the outstanding and even anomalous position of its country in Europe.

Therefore, for Veszprem Europe is more radical Other, than for Tartu and Plovdiv, who articulate their difference from Europe by referring to less antagonistic factors, such as the feelings of distance and the lack of understanding.

Thus, the nodal point “disconnection” discloses meanings attached to the European discourse of the ECoC postsocialist cities. It shows that their current membership in the EU, what makes them being part of Europe, causes the disconnection of cities with their own Self. They constantly undergo the process of metamorphosis, othering unsatisfactory parts of their Selves. In this case, Europe is presented as a source of this dissatisfaction and a catalyst of cities’ transformation. At the same time, the nodal point “disconnection” indicates that Europe is different from the cities. They articulate Europe as the Other by representing it as distant and detached from their Self. Linking Europe, their Other, with such notions as democracy, dynamism and cultural diversity, cities show that they are lacking of them. Europe as a more democratic and embracing cultural diversity Other, and Europe as a catalyst of transformation are the main European representations within the nodal point “disconnection”.

#### 4.1.3. Localization of Europe

The third spatial nodal point of the European discourse is localization. This nodal point shows that meanings of the empty signifier “Europe” are localized and contextualized. Localization of Europe means that European idea attaches to a particular place, space or even an individual, transforms under their influence and becomes a part of their Self. Kaunas in Lithuania mentions this localized and individualized character of the European idea in the ECoC bid book:

““I woke up one day and knew I was a European” wrote the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas in the late 70’s to his previous Kaunasian teacher. But what does it mean to be a European today? For us and for our young generation? Or what does it mean for a Lithuanian to hear the word “Europe”? – Certainly not the same as for someone from Sweden or Britain or Portugal – perhaps not even the same as for someone from Romania or Poland” (Kaunas 2022, 2017: 15).

Kaunas outlines this localization and personalization of the European discourse through intertextuality, referring to a quote of Emmanuel Levinas, a French philosopher of Lithuanian and Jewish origin, born in Kovno of the Russian Empire, which is present-day Kaunas in Lithuania. His sudden realization of himself as European shows that “Europeanness” of an individual is not given by origin or nationality, but encountered in a particular moment and context. For that reason, people from different countries and generations articulate Europe in their own distinct way. Considering this in the context of postsocialist cities, they also encounter with Europe differently, which leads to multiplication of its meanings on various localized interpretations. “Europeanness” could even be attached to a particular place via some elements of local facilities and infrastructure. For instance, looking like European for Tartu means to have “a wide range of places to stay, eat and drink in, 24-hour safety and medical help, advanced traffic and commercial infrastructure, good quality services, lots of fluent English speakers and [...] free Wi-Fi” (Tartu 2024, 2019: 57). Tartu links Europe with some visible and tangible elements of its urban environment, which make the city modern, cosmopolitan, developed and convenient for its citizens and visitors. Even though these characteristics might seem universal and appropriate for modern cities from any part of the world, Tartu connects them with the idea of being European, thereby aligning universalism with “Europeanness”.

The examples from Tartu and Kaunas demonstrate that the European idea is highly localized and contextualized. Kaunas in its ECoC bid book shows that “Europeanness” can be encountered in any place and context. Tartu confirms this idea, demonstrating tangible characteristics of its urban space, which make the city European. Accordingly, it may be assumed that nodal point “localization” cannot partially fix meanings of Europe, because it constantly multiplies them. It seems that this nodal point only shows diversity of the idea of Europe and its dependence on a particular spatial context. However, this is only one side of it. The ECoC books of postsocialist cities show that localization reflects not only diverse and contextual articulations of Europe, but also common ones, connected by particular discursive moments. These common concepts within European discourse, linked with the nodal point “localization”, are “meeting point” and “postnationalism”. They are indeed common, because they are articulated in all chosen ECoC bid books.

Taking into consideration that localization of Europe means searching for “Europeanness” inside one’s Self, the “meeting point” reflects this European side of the postsocialist cities. They characterize their urban spaces as meeting points to demonstrate their European identity. This can be illustrated by quotations from the ECoC bid books of Wrocław and Pilsen:

“Wrocław is a place of constant fusion of diverse cultural horizons. Many visitors stop here for longer or remain for good. New arrivals feel good in this city as everybody here is an arrival from elsewhere: the present Polish inhabitants arrived from other parts of Europe themselves. *Homo wratislaviensis* is a multicultural creature, open to otherness, tolerant and cosmopolitan, like his habitat” (Wrocław 2016, 2011: 21).

“Pilsen has always been a European crossroads. From time immemorial, people have been meeting in Pilsen on their way from Bohemia through Bavarian and Saxon cities to Europe, their lives and fates interconnecting and becoming part of city walls, streets and the surrounding countryside” (Pilsen 2015, 2010: 120).

Both cities indicate that their space is a meeting point of various European peoples and cultures. They highlight that their local places were created by these meetings on European crossroads. Their Selves are linked with ideas of multicultural diversity, exchange, openness, tolerance and cosmopolitanism. At the same time, they are differentiated from homogeneous and static national culture. The concept of the “meeting point” shows that local culture of the cities is not closed on itself, but embraces otherness in the form of different peoples, cultures and nationalities. This otherness lies at the very basis of cities’ own Self, their urban environment and citizens.

The concept “meeting point” also represents a fluid character of the cities’ identity. Fluidity of a local place creates preconditions for the meetings between people from various cultural backgrounds and contributes to formation of a multicultural society. It stimulates cultural exchange and movement of people from outside to inside and vice versa, what makes the local place more open to otherness and transformation. When

European Capitals of Culture from postsocialist countries articulate their Selves, they frequently use metaphors connected with water, demonstrating their fluidity. For example, Pilsen characterizes itself not only as a crossroads where people met traveling from Bohemia to Europe in the past, but as a fluid place, “where rivers from different corners of the Pilsen Region meet to create a new strong stream” (Pilsen 2015, 2010: 44). Meanwhile, Veszprém links the Self with a ferryboat that connects different European cultures and supports their communication in today’s world “where borders and culture are as fluid as the water on which it sails” (Veszprém 2023, n.d.: 38). cities

This fluid, open and multicultural side of cities’ identities belongs to the European discourse. As it was already mentioned before, meanings of Europe could be produced through their localization, since they are situated in a particular local context. In the ECoC bid books cities construct their Selves as multicultural meeting points to demonstrate their “Europeanness”. They indicate their belonging to Europe, highlighting that their location is a crossroads of nothing but European people, roads and culture (Pilsen 2015, 2010: 120; Plovdiv 2019, n.d.: 18; Wrocław 2016, 2011: 21, et al.). Therefore, articulating the concept of the “meeting point”, cities construct a localized model of Europe within their urban space. Due to this localization, Europe not only acquires characteristics of fluidity, openness and multiculturalism that belong to urban spaces, but becomes a part of cities’ Selves.

Apart from the “meeting point”, “postnationalism” is another common concept linked with the nodal point “localization”. This moment is connected with an idea that cities construct their European identities separately from nation states. They “localize” Europe focusing either on some specific characteristics of their urban space or on wider regional dynamics. Cities might disregard nation states with respect to “Europeanness” or even differentiate them from the European Self. This idea was also developed by Rijeka in its ECoC bid book:

“In 2020, Europe will designate the first Capital of Culture from Croatia, a country still synonymous with insecurity, hardship and war, for everything that frightens Europe. That is precisely why Europe needs Rijeka, a city known for remaining an oasis of normality in an abnormal context, primarily during the

1990s. This stubbornness is what gives Rijeka its European and cultural determinant, although it is barely known” (Rijeka 2020, 2016: 2).

Rijeka constructs its Self through differentiation with its own nation state. The city links Croatia with “insecurity, hardship and war”, and, at the same time, it characterizes itself as “an oasis of normality” (Rijeka 2020, 2016: 2). Rijeka also links its Self with stubbornness that makes it independent from national influences. Through this differentiation from the nation, the city demonstrates the European part of its Self. Importantly, other cities from the Balkans also tend to distance themselves from the conflictual character of their nations and the region. Plovdiv from Bulgaria even aims to change “the view of the Balkan region as being notorious for ethnic conflicts into one of it being a culturally diverse and shared region” (Plovdiv 2019, n.d.: 7). The city wants to share its Europeanness with the whole region and transform its hostile image. Hence, Europeanness of Rijeka and Plovdiv is connected with their postnational identity that can be projected to the whole Balkan region.

Similar links between the idea of Europe and postnationalism can be founded in bid books of other cities. Wrocław, considering itself in the role of European Capital, expresses regrets that culture of people of Poland “remains largely a national one” (Wrocław 2016, 2011: 7). The city explains this domination of national culture by “lower standard of living, historical separation, and insufficient language skills” (Wrocław 2016, 2011: 7), which create an obstacle for becoming more European. This shows that Wrocław constructs its European Self through reduction of the dominance of national culture. To be European for Wrocław means having high living standards, being connected with the rest of Europe and, importantly, developing postnational identity.

Veszprem from Hungary also articulates the idea of “postnationalism” in its ECoC bid book. The city constructs its European Self connecting it with the region around Balaton, the largest lake of Central Europe:

“Our programme spearheads our goal to introduce a new European cultural region. To establish and maintain a new cultural identity around Balaton. Where local, regional, national and European roles and features complement one

another. Where people and communities are supported and encouraged to define and own culture the way it relates to them (Veszprém 2023, n.d.: 23).

The city localizes Europe, using geographical boundaries in the form of Lake Balaton, rather than local or national ones. This shows the postnational character of European identity formation of the city, when historically and geographically shaped arenas become zones of Europeanization. Veszprem also emphasizes the role of community and people in creation of European identity, instead of particular cities, regions and nations. The city links Europeanness with the unity of local, national, regional and supranational cultural features. In other words, Veszprem constructs its European Self as belonging to this postnational culture, emerging around Balaton, which is created by people and through combination of identities at different levels.

Moreover, considering the place of Hungary in Europe, Veszprem outlines its “flashing, neon-light anomaly of being the black sheep in the European herd” (Veszprém 2023, n.d.: 17). The city recognizes differences between Hungary and the rest of Europe and urges to address them in order to increase the feeling of belonging to a common cultural area among European citizens. In this case, Veszprem represents a platform where national identity can be discussed in relation to Europe. This also shows a postnational character of the Veszprem’s identity, because the city is able to question the place of its own nation in Europe. Due to this ability to recognize the “anomaly” of Hungary and to question its current role in Europe, national identity is not a dominant part of the city’s Self. Furthermore, as it is in the case of the ECoC cities from the Balkan region, Veszprem attempts to prove that Hungary is “much more than how it is characterized in the current [European] rhetoric” (Veszprém 2023, n.d.: 17), which means that the city also wants to change the image of its country in Europe and make it less “anomalous”.

Like the “meeting point”, the “postnationalism” shows that Europe is not the Other, but a part of the cities’ Self. They find localized versions of Europe within their urban environment and surroundings. Articulating these moments, the cities demonstrate Europeanness of their identity that embraces cultural diversity and exceeds its urban and national space. Representing themselves as a meeting point of different people and cultures, they appreciate the contribution of various nationalities to their European

identity. Meanwhile, emphasizing their belonging to postnational spaces, they show their relative independence from nation states in construction of their Europeanness. Especially it can be observed in Central European countries, in Poland and Hungary, which are associated with authoritarianism and nationalism, and in Balkan countries, associated with wars and insecurity. Their cities want to demonstrate that they are resistant to national influences and they wish to reduce the dominant role of national culture in their identity. Moreover, they attempt to project Europeanness of their Selves on their countries or regions to change their “non-European” image.

#### 4.2 Temporal construction of European Self

*“The history of Europe is a history of various attempts to define Europe’s own identity. [...] Each attempt to understand the European identity determined new directions for the development of the continent and its culture. The dynamics of Europe’s understanding of its own identity attests to the vitality of the Old Continent” (Wroclaw 2016, 2011: 22).*

This subchapter analyses how postsocialist cities construct Europe through a temporal perspective. The analysis is focused on how cities articulate their Europeanness using references to the past. The ECoC bid books show that there are two historical periods, considered by cities as the most important in formation of their European Self, which are before and after the Second World War. The pre-war history is represented as a period of their full belonging to Europe, when European values were embedded in their identity. The post-war history is considered as a period of distancing from their Europeanness, because of the imposed totalitarian regimes during and after the World War II, and a period of regaining their place in Europe after the fall of communism.

Taking into consideration this temporal perspective, two nodal points within the European discourse were identified, which are “restoration” and “postsocialist transition”. The “restoration” relates to the pre-war period, and shows that now cities seek to restore their historically rooted Europeanness, interrupted by totalitarian regimes. Whereas the “postsocialist transition” is connected with the post-war period and indicates cities’ desire to overcome their communist past and find their own place in Europe.

The nodal point “restoration” is linked with the concept of “multiculturalism”, which means that cities wish to restore the peaceful coexistence of nations and cultures that made them European in the pre-war period. Meanwhile, the nodal point “postsocialist transition” is linked with the concept of “revival”, which shows how cities reestablish their European identity after decades of communism, and “fragile democracy”, which indicates their shortcomings because of the totalitarian experiences.

#### 4.2.1 Restoration of Europeanness

The nodal point “restoration” demonstrates how postsocialist cities reconsider their pre-war history and adjust its characteristics to the modern European context. They emphasize that Europeanness was an important and even natural part of their Self before the World War II. For instance, Kaunas from Lithuania, outlines that during this historical period “Europeanness was not something that had to be artificially constructed” (Kaunas 2022, 2017: 15). Timisoara in Romania also characterizes itself as a “quintessential European city” in the period from eighteenth century to the World War II (Timisoara 2021, 2015: 3).

This Europeanness, attached to their pre-war history, is linked with “multiculturalism”, because cities outline their multicultural character in order to highlight the European identity. In particular, it can be observed in the ECoC bid books of Pilsen and Timisoara:

“The traditional, efficient and inspiring co- existence of Czech, German and Jewish cultures, as well as Catholic, Protestant and Jewish belief systems, is part of the historical feel of the city and its inhabitants, albeit disturbed by two totalitarian regimes” (Pilsen 2015, 2010: 120) .

“Timișoara was an example of multi- and inter-cultural society for three hundred years, which made it possible for the city to be integrated into Europe in the 18th century and to represent the main link between the Catholics and the Orthodox, the Christians and the Muslims, the Habsburgs and the Ottomans” (Timisoara 2021, 2015: 17).

The two cities links multiculturalism with their historical Self. Pilsen characterizes the cultural and religious diversity of its past as traditional, efficient and inspiring, which

indicates the existence of multicultural values. Timisoara also defines its society as historically multicultural and integrated into Europe. These links between multiculturalism and Europe can be also founded in the bid book of Kaunas:

“We know we still have to undergo several steps in regard to our self-identification in order to be able to welcome people from all over Europe through our door, to feel “European” in ourselves, and not only as an identity on the map. We know we must return to the condition of an open-minded city, such as Kaunas was in 1938” (Kaunas 2022, 2017: 23).

The city constructs its Europeaness, linking it with the ability to be open to all people from Europe. This implies inclusion of people of different nationalities, religions and cultures that exists in Europe, which correlates with the idea of multiculturalism. However, the multiculturalism of Kaunas is focused on Europe, because the city does not mention other regions and continents when discussing its open-mindedness. Presumably, emphasizing Europe and its people, the city aims to highlight that multiculturalism is one of the characteristics that distinguishes European culture from others. Kaunas also shows that its contemporary identity is being constructed based on values that existed in the past. The city uses verbs and phrases such as “return” or “undergo several steps” (Kaunas 2022, 2017: 23) demonstrating the process of restoration of its former pre-war values.

Thus, the nodal point “restoration” linked with the concept “multiculturalism” discloses temporal dynamics in construction of cities’ European identity. It shows that Europeaness is historically rooted in cities’ Selves. Articulating contemporary European identity, they refer to values of their past, in particular to multiculturalism. Being European for them is to be open to different nationalities, religions and cultures. Due to inclusiveness of this nodal point, linked with “multiculturalism”, the Other is not clearly articulated here, because the idea of restoration of multicultural values implies acceptance of the Other. However, some differentiation of Europe from other regions and continents can be noticed, because of a European-centered articulation of multiculturalism. It is not universal multiculturalism, but existing inside of Europe. This characteristic of European identity also distinguishes it from other, more homogeneous cultures and identities.

#### 4.2.2 Postsocialist transformation

The period after World War II has transformed European identity of the cities that experienced totalitarian regimes. As it was defined by Rijeka that became part of socialist Yugoslavia in 1945, these regimes were “structures of power and fear” that transformed “spoken and unspoken narratives” of the city (Rijeka 2020, 2016: 41). The pre-war Europeanness of cities was interrupted by replacement of population and imposition of new communist ideology. However, along with weakening of totalitarian structures, they started rediscovering their European identities and looking for a new place in Europe. The nodal point “postsocialist transition” reflects this process of redefinition of European Self of cities during and after their totalitarian experiences. Cities articulate this nodal point within European discourse, linking it with concepts of “revival” and “fragile democracy”.

The concept “revival” represents the effort of postsocialist cities in reestablishing their European identity. It is especially visible in cities of Central Europe that experienced replacements of population after World War II. It led to the situation when they could not fully rely on historically rooted Europeanness, and needed to create it from the beginning with new inhabitants. In particular, Polish Wrocław, which was German Breslau before the postwar border changes, characterizes itself as a “laboratory of identity”, because of such replacement of population (Wrocław 2016, 2011: 9). In the ECoC bid book the city explains how its European identity was rebuilt:

“Wrocław, the city which experienced a complete replacement of its population after World War II, has laboriously rebuilt its identity out of the myth of Lwów, the pioneering efforts immediately after the war, and outstanding cultural achievements, best exemplified by Jerzy Grotowski’s era. In this way, Wrocław strove to regain a permanent place in Europe” (Wrocław 2016, 2011: 3).

Wrocław links its path to Europe with the revival of its identity after the war. Mentioning “the myth of Lwów” and reminding about the migration of Polish population from Lviv to depopulated Wrocław after the war, the city shows that its identity is connected with historical memories of its inhabitants.

Another Central European city Pilsen in Czech Republic also articulates the moment “revival” in its bid book. Discussing the postsocialist transformation into a European city, Pilsen uses a metaphor of a woman to describe itself:

“Just as other women and other cities of the Eastern Bloc have done, she must once more find her place in society, rediscover herself, emphasise her virtues and admit the shortcomings, tell her story and cleanse herself, revive her dreams and again step onto the path of transformation to being a self-confident woman of European culture” (Pilsen 2015, 2010: 3).

The process of becoming European for the city is linked with such verbs as rediscover, cleanse, revive, transform, what indicates that Pilsen wants to overcome its socialist past and reconstruct its identity. The city describes the years of a communist rule as those of “false ideals, emotional devastation, the collectivization of intimacy and the isolation of an inner world” (Pilsen 2015, 2010: 3). Meanwhile, Pilsen’s path towards Europe is defined as the process of returning to “health” and regaining “self-confidence” (Pilsen 2015, 2010: 3). Reconstruction of European Self of the city means to revive from the forcefully imposed communist structure of “false ideas” and to rediscover its own “true and healthy” identity.

Thus, the concept of “revival” shows that cities’ European Self is constructed through collective efforts of finding a place in Europe after communist experiences. They show that they are able to recreate their belonging to Europe, regardless political situation in their countries, even after their inclusion in a new state and a total replacement of population, as it was in the case of Wrocław. Pilsen connects Europeanness with the idea of being healthy and confident, Wrocław - with cultural freedom, but they still have the same vision on their transition to Europe along other postsocialist cities. They strive to overcome their historical Other in the form of communist and totalitarian regimes and revive the inner European Self out of collective memories of their inhabitants and the post-war cultural resistance to the imposed political structures.

If the concept of “revival” reveals the process of transition to a European city, another concept of “fragile democracy” indicates consequences of this transition. They are clearly articulated in Pilsen’s bid book:

“Is it not obvious that the mere existence of small nations such as the Czechs, following the recent unfortunate experience of two totalitarian regimes, has resulted after twenty years of fragile democracy in chaos within so many human souls. This chaos is accompanied by ethical decrepitude, loss or distortion of value systems, displacement of the role of culture, which for centuries formed the European continent, and which has always represented idea significant difference from other continents” (Pilsen 2015, 2010: 67).

The city links its own Self with a deteriorated culture and system of values. It places responsibility for this on totalitarian regimes, which hindered their Europeanness. Pilsen explains that memories and practices of these regimes are still integrated into the society, especially among the older and middle-aged population. Hence, the new democratic regime still remains “fragile”, because it has a pressure “from the ground up” that causes the “arrogance of power” and undermines development of civil society (Pilsen 2015, 2010: 113). Therefore, Pilsen considers the fragility of democracy and displacement of the role of culture as a loss of the European part of its Self, since democracy, culture and Europe go in parallel with each other for the city. Consequently, the city questions its own Europeanness and constructs Europe as a continent of culture.

Plovdiv also articulates the moment “fragile democracy” in its bid book, linking it with social alienation and lack of civic participation:

“All of our citizens have real potential, but there is also an alarming lack of unity and solidarity among people. People struggle to survive on their own, without regard to the community, and there is a lack of trust in cooperation. Alienation and remoteness prevent people participating in social processes and making them their own, as is the case in many other post-communist societies in Europe” (Plovdiv 2019, n.d.: 5).

The city demonstrates its connection with other post-communist societies in Europe and shares their common characteristic of the lack of unity. This alienation in the social sphere is interconnected with the feeling of distance from Europe, as it was also discussed in the chapter about the nodal point “disconnection” in the spatial construction of Europe. It

shows that the echoes of the communist past create obstacles for Plovdiv on its way of becoming fully European.

Therefore, the moment “fragile democracy” indicates that cities encounter in their Selves features of their unwanted past that undermine their Europeanness and the process of democracy building. Like the concept of “disconnection”, “fragile democracy” shows that Europe is still the Other for cities, because they are lacking European elements, including high role of culture and public trust. Responsibility for this is placed on their communist past, constructed as their radical Other, which is still not fully eliminated from their Self. This dissatisfaction in their own Selves is reflected in the nodal point “postsocialist transition”. Even though they want to eradicate socialist echoes from their Selves, they still encounter them in their public spaces, which impedes their transition to Europe.

#### 4.3 Ethical construction of Europe

*“Our dream is a Europe that will take responsibility not only for the welfare of its citizens. We want the new Europe not to be locked in its own selfishness but also to take responsibility for the fate of the world’s peoples to whom it owes its past and present prosperity” (Wroclaw 2016, 2011: 23).*

If previous subchapters cover discursive construction of Europe through space and time, in this subchapter the focus is made on how the European discourse is articulated ethically and through the concept of responsibility. The ethical approach represents which values and responsibilities are attached to the idea of Europe by cities. It also implies their ethical expectations and beliefs towards Europe. It should be taken into account that ethical identity has more imaginary character than spatial and temporal ones, because it relies on ethical ideas and beliefs, which do not necessarily have a material basis, meaning attachment to particular spaces or historical moments.

Though the analysis of ethical construction of Europe, two nodal points were identified, including “duality” and “citizens”. The nodal point “duality” represents dual character of Europe, because it embraces different contradictory and even opposite elements within its Self. This duality is linked with two moments that contradict each other. On the one

hand, Europe is articulated through the concept of “inspiration” in the bid books, which shows that cities are inspired by Europe, they want to learn from it and acquire European values. On the other hand, Europe is linked with the concept of “threat”, which discloses non-attractive and even threatening representations of European reality that cities want to avoid. It shows how European challenges, which were traditionally considered as the Europe’s Other, become part of its Self, creating this dual character of the European discourse.

The second ethical nodal point of European discourse is “citizens”. Unlike the first nodal point that demonstrates what Europe is responsible for, the nodal point “citizens” shows who is responsible for Europe. It represents an idea that European citizens more than any other actor are responsible for Europe, and they shape its discourse. This nodal point is linked with the concept of “personal choice”, because cities tend to emphasize that it is individuals who decide what Europe they want to have. These personal choices define the current European discourse. Another concept linked with “citizens” is “future generation”, which means that cities rely on the younger generation in respect to the future of European idea and the transfer the responsibility for it on them.

#### 4.3.1. Duality of Europe

The nodal point “duality” was created because of the clash between beliefs and reality that exists in European discourse. The concept “inspiration” intersects with the concept “threat” in articulation of the idea of responsibility in the European discourse. This duality of Europe confirms the floating character of Europe as a signifier that is able to acquire contradictory and even opposite meanings simultaneously.

Considering “inspiration”, cities articulate Europe as a source of learning and stimulus for their development. It can be founded in the ECoC bid book of Veszprem:

“If you ask us what we need to learn from Europe? – we can definitely answer: proactivity and engagement on all levels [...]. We need to learn how we can embrace diversity – of people, worldviews, ideas. We need the hands-on

experience of how we can benefit from exposure to otherness instead of slamming the door because of our insecurity” (Veszprém 2023, n.d.: 5).

The city links Europe with proactivity, engagement and diversity, while connecting its Self with otherness and insecurity in relation to Europe. The city shows that it needs to learn from Europe in order to become more open and accept its own differences.

Another Central European city Wrocław repeats this idea in its bid book. In its bid book it links European idea with plurality, diversity and negotiation:

“We want to see European unity and identity as a result of a negotiated and constantly renegotiated compromise rather than of an imposed dogma. We believe that the cultural unity of Europe stems from the recognition of plurality and diversity of cultures, perspectives and world views, and not from the hegemonic position of any one of them” (Wrocław 2016, 2011: 22).

Wrocław and Veszprem both expect from Europe flexibility and recognition of diversity. They construct Europe as embracing all differences within its Self and promoting coexistence of various cultures and world views. They are inspired by Europe, which is able to compromise with its inner diversity and at the same time remain culturally united. Therefore, the concept of “inspiration” shows that cities’ Selves are on their way of becoming European, because they learn from Europe how to become more proactive, engaged and united in diversity. With this moment, cities’ otherness becomes less visible, because of the inclusiveness of their image of Europe.

However, the “inspiration” reflects only one side of the ethical identity of Europe. Apart from imagining Europe, cities also address realities of Europe. Through the “threat” they show how the European discourse becomes dual, because of the coexistence of opposite elements inside of it. Tartu in its ECoC bid book outlines the emergence of European threats that challenge European values:

“So far, Estonia seemed to be on the safe side of democracy, openness and artistic freedom. However, the results of the latest parliament elections herald the rise of populism, xenophobia and attacks on the liberal European values also

in this country. Is Europe losing Estonia? Is Estonia losing Europe?”(Tartu 2024, 2019: 4).

The city indicates the emergence of threats in Europe, such as populism and xenophobia, which are considered as radical Others of Europe. These threats are contrasted with democratic, open and free Europe. Tartu shows that these threats question Europeanness of Estonia, because they undermine democratic and liberal values in the country, which are considered as a synonym of belonging to Europe.

However, if Tartu still considers those threats as the Other of Europe, many other cities from the Balkans and Central Europe attribute them to a new European Self. This can be noticed in the ECoC bid book of Rijeka:

“Europe, as a continent and as a project, is beginning to doubt its own core values of openness, diversity and tolerance. The old world’s ambition as a lighthouse of freedom has turned into a wall built of fear” (Rijeka 2020, 2016: 2).

The city equated the European values of diversity, openness, freedom, articulated through “inspiration”, with “old ambition”. These values are considered as belonging to Europe of the past, because they are challenged in Europe of the present. Rijeka demonstrates that the former Other of Europe has integrated into the current European Self. European ethical identity is not only constructed through “inspiration”, which shows that Europe’s responsibility is to inspire others and promote democratic values, but also with the “threat” that makes Europe responsible for the current challenges.

The concept of “threat” demonstrates that the European Self is in the process of transformation, because the “lighthouse of freedom” has been replaced on “a wall built of fear” (Rijeka 2020, 2016: 2) in the European discourse. Kaunas also shares the similar idea: its bid book says that “the old distinctions have resurfaced” and there is a rise of “walls, conflicts, confrontations, prejudices and fears” all around Europe (Kaunas 2022, 2017: 17).

Moreover, even the core European value of cultural diversity, which historically belonged to the European discourse, as the analysis of temporal identity of Europe shows, transformed into a source of a threat. Wrocław discusses this idea in the ECoC bid book:

“In consequence of the migration processes resulting from the elimination of borders in the enlarged European Union, a process of exchange is now taking place, as part of which the diverse cultural patterns clash with one another. These processes become a source of tensions and conflicts in Europe” (Wrocław 2016, 2011: 23).

The city connects cultural diversity of Europe with conflicts, tensions and clashes and, therefore, challenges the idea of Europe based on peaceful coexistence of various cultures. Europeanness of the postsocialist cities, which was based on their cultural diversity and articulated through “meeting point” and “multiculturalism”, changes its meanings with the concept of “threat”. Wrocław shows that now European discourse is linked with cultural diversity that represents not only the idea multiculturalism, but also conflicts, growth of racism and xenophobia. Being European for Wrocław means to experience these dual consequences of cultural diversity.

Timisoara’s bid book outlines other European characteristics, including the gap between rich and poor, religious conflicts, lack of civil participation, distrust in democracy (Timisoara 2021, 2015: 1), which are also articulated within the European discourse. These characteristics are part of European Self, yet they are also the Other of Europe, because they are represented as preconditions for self-criticism. This criticism of its own Self also belongs to the concept of “threat”.

Moreover, representations of Europe as a threat are connected with historical memories of cities, especially in Central European countries. Pilsen rises this idea that Europe is linked with fear, rooted in the history of Czech people. The city demonstrates that Europe is responsible not only for its present, but for its past that distances cities from Europe:

“Europe as a threat settled in the Czech country. People keep asking whether they will be able to compete. This relates closely to one of the crucial topics in the Czech history, i.e. the issue of the Czech elite which, since Bílá Hora was constantly chased out of the country or decimated, and thus society is genetically weakened” (Pilsen 2015, 2010: 15).

Through the analysis of how Europe transforms from the “inspiration” to the “threat”, the duality of European discourse can be noticed. In the ECoC bid books, cities articulate the

dual character of European Self, demonstrating that it is simultaneously linked with multiculturalism, openness, tolerance on the one side and with conflicts, fear, xenophobia on the other side. They emphasize that Europe is a place to learn and, at the same time, the place to criticize and to be afraid and show that it should take responsibility not only for cities' self-development, but for its inner European threats. This dual character of Europe confirms the idea that the Other is hardly presented in the European discourse. Even inner European threats, such as populism, radicalism, xenophobia and public distrust, which could be considered as the Other of Europe, gradually integrate into European Self.

#### 4.3.2. Citizens of Europe

While the previous subchapter analyses responsibilities of Europe, in this subchapter the focus is made on who is responsible for Europe. Analysis of the ECoC books shows that responsibility for Europe lies with citizens, rather than with other actors. Even the EU, the main European institution, is not considered by cities as the most responsible for Europe. For instance, Pilsen's bid book argues that the EU is distant from European people, and that "the "language of Brussels" is far removed from the reality in which people live" (Pilsen 2015, 2010: 242). It demonstrates that the EU is not fully responsible for how the idea of Europe is constructed in reality, since it does not have a common language with many European people.

Therefore, the second nodal point is "citizens", and it is linked with two concepts of "personal choice" and "future generation", because construction of Europe largely depends on individuals, and European future lies in hands of young generation. The Wroclaw bid book argues that "Europe is constituted by its citizens" (Wroclaw 2016, 2011: 23), and this idea is supported and articulated by other ECoC cities:

"We are talking about the responsibility of individuals for everything going on around them, for everything they are a part of. For the immediate surroundings in which they live, as well as their attitude towards what happens at the highest level of the government and the destiny of Europe as such" (Pilsen 2015, 2010: 67).

“For Plovdiv and for Europe we want to make our together not a simple combination of people forced to live in the same place, but together should turn into a conscious choice made by individuals who know why: sharing cultural diversity, while safeguarding fundamental rights and values that we have fought for in our city and in Europe” (Plovdiv 2019, n.d.: 10) .

Pilsen and Plovdiv connect Europe with personal choices of its citizens, emphasizing their responsibility for its destiny. These choices are articulated as conscious, meaning that they should be based on European values which were historically constructed. Special focus is made on sharing cultural diversity, which also can be noticed in spatial and temporal constructions of Europe.

Cities also highlight that this choice of becoming “European” is not taken for granted and it should be developed with an external help from countries or cities themselves. Wrocław relies on Polish government in overcoming “civilizational backwardness” of its citizens, expressed in their “low environmental awareness” and “material aspirations” (Wrocław 2016, 2011: 11). Whereas Veszprém believes that it needs to learn how to act like Europeans first, in order to give example to its citizens (Veszprém 2023, n.d.: 5). Wrocław and Veszprém construct Europe as an inspiration, as considered in the previous chapter, but, at the same time, this is also connected with the nodal point “citizens” and the concept “personal choice”, because they place responsibility for Europe on people and their awareness.

Importantly, among all groups of citizens, the focus is made on younger generation when it comes to the future of Europe. Therefore, the concept of the “future generation” is also linked with the nodal point “citizens”, because it reflects orientation of cities towards the future in their European discourse. It can be found in the bid book of Pilsen:

“...a new generation, skilled in languages, educated in the new democracy, with a wider outlook and hopefully with a perception of their coexistence within the European community, has been growing in the twenty years of this newfound freedom” (Pilsen 2015, 2010: 15).

The city’s bid book also says that young generation “familiar with Europe and the World will become bearers of the self-confidence” (Pilsen 2015, 2010: 15). Pilsen links new

generation with Europeanness and highlights their closeness to Europe, because they grew up in the era of democracy and freedom. The city also uses a trope “bearers of self-confidence”, linked with the future generation, with a purpose to show their responsibility for Europeanness of Pilsen and the Czech Republic. This is because being self-confident and being European are mutually constitutive for Pilsen, as it was previously demonstrated in the concept of “revival” within temporal identity of Europe.

Therefore, from the ethical perspective, Europeanness of cities’ Selves is represented by the future generation of citizens, because their personal choices are linked with the idea of democratic, free and multicultural Europe. Low awareness of European values among citizens is considered as the non-radical Other of cities’ European Self, because it needs to be overcome in order to be more European.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to empirically demonstrate that through the “European Capital of Culture” project postsocialist cities construct postnational spaces of European identity and show its spatial dynamics after the Eastern enlargement. In order to achieve this aim, constructions of Europe in the ECoC were analyzed through poststructuralist theoretical and methodological approach.

Discourse analysis of the ECoC bid books has demonstrated that the postsocialist cities represent spaces where European identity is generated. As it was discussed in the literature on European urban identities, cities’ migration flows, citizen-centered character and historical memories allow them to mirror Europe in their urban identities (Brenner, 1999; Castells, 1993; Delanty & Jones 2002; Murzyn-Kupisz & Gwosdz, 2011). Indeed, the analysis shows that due to migration flows, the postsocialist cities articulate their identities as meeting points of different peoples and cultures, which makes them closer to Europe. They also consider citizens as the main actors who take responsibility for Europe. Through their memories before the Second World War, the cities restore their European identity, based on multiculturalism of this historical period.

Importantly, the postsocialist cities do not limit their European identity by the urban landscape. They demonstrate postnational character of their Europeanness and ideological belonging to wider cross-national zones, including historically and geographically defined regions. It is particularly the case of postsocialist cities in Balkan and Central European countries. They show awareness that their nation states are the inner Other of Europe, because of the conflicts on the territories of their states or the growth of nationalism and authoritarianism in their governments. However, the cities avoid being associated with the otherness of their countries, therefore, they highlight the difference from them. These postnational articulations of the cities’ European Selves indicate that they construct spaces of European identity as the dynamic zones where meanings of Europe are created, and locate themselves inside them. This shows that identities of postsocialist cities are not necessarily aligned with identities of their nation states, which attests to the importance of their own independent contribution to the process of European identity building. They challenge the idea that Eastern Europe can be constructed as a “normative threat” (Mälksoo, 2019), and the CEE region as the Other of Europe (Diez,

2004), showing that they are Europe's Selves due to their belonging to spaces of Europeanization.

Their contribution to the European identity building includes not only their construction of spaces of Europeanization, but their ability to show spatial dynamics in construction of Europe after accession of their countries to the EU. They demonstrate that the East-West division is part of the European discourse, because they articulate the sense of inequality and aspiration towards the "old" Western Europe. The idea that Europe is the West is still embedded in identities of postsocialist cities, however, they seek to overcome this and become part of a renewed and connected Europe. This desire to overcome their "Easternness" and backwardness towards the West is reflected in their disconnection from their own urban spaces that remind them about their socialist past. Moreover, they also attempt to upgrade their own localized vision of Europe at the EU level. Emphasizing their full belonging to the connected Europe of the future, they deconstruct the idea that Europe represents the West, and connect it with spaces of their own identity, articulated as postnational meeting points of different peoples, most importantly, of the East with the West.

The ECoC postsocialist cities construct European discourse of the future without East-West divisions, echoes of communism and nationalism, which today create boundaries inside of Europe. They also see the duality of the present European discourse, when the core European principle of cultural diversity transforms into the source of conflicts and xenophobia. The idea that European identity is based on overcoming the past (Habermas & Derrida, 2003; Wæver, 1996) now also includes overcoming its present that makes Europe being a threat to itself. Nevertheless, Europe is still articulated as an inspiration and source of openness, freedom and cultural diversity. In any case, as the cities emphasise in their bid books, the responsibility for Europe lies with personal choices of European citizens, especially with young generation, who shape European discourse of the future.

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