SESSION III
HISTORY OF EU-COHESION POLICY

Featured by

Wendelin Strubelt & Detlef Briesen

Picking up a central element of our session, the view at the history of the background and of elements of Europe’s identity as formed by regional diversities on the one hand and the historical existent - proven and heavily discussed - bonds beyond all past and current problems to form a unity after all on the other hand - I came across a sentence by Thomas Mann written in January 1933 just shortly before the final seize of power by Adolf Hitler:

„Every Human Being, having intelligence and a sense of feeling and every proven politician knows that the people of Europe are not any more in the position to exist and to flourish separately by itself, rather they are depending on each other because they are in the same boat, they are sharing a common fate.”

“Jeder Mensch von Verstand und Gefühl, auch jeder bessere Politiker, weiß, daß die Völker Europas heute nicht mehr einzeln und abgeschlossen für sich leben und zu gedeihen vermögen, sondern daß sie aufeinander angewiesen sind und eine Schicksalsgemeinschaft bilden.“

THOMAS MANN

I do not want to reflect this intellectual statement in the context of the lives of Thomas Mann and Adolf Grimme - the one leaving Germany immediately after the seize of power by Adolf Hitler and the other one living in Germany after 1933 in a precarious situation and 1942 on account of undercover opposition imprisoned late - but it gives an impression of the intellectual enlightenment present in European minded circles after WW I and later confronted or living in “cohabitation” with the contrary nationalistic attitudes and policies. Which changed Europe not only for a while until 1945 but forced then the European oriented people and politicians after the disaster of WW II to start again thinking about how to create a new idea for a united Europe – more or less present, partly fulfilled and valid till today.

And however, it is strange that we now live in times of new challenges for the united Europe. Raised by nationalistic populism within Europe on the one hand and new international geopolitical formations on the other hand - transitions all over as challenges or chances? A constellation which has been raised again the validity of Gramsci's observation he has argued in 1930, namely, to live in "times of monsters":

The old world is dying, and the new one is fighting for its life – now it is the time of the monsters.

Die alte Welt stirbt, und die neue Welt kämpft um ihre Geburt: jetzt ist die Zeit der Monster.

ANTONIO GRAMSCI

A sentence which can be used to typify our times as well, a world having lost its old order, its old international balance and their impact for the spatial structure of Europe as a system of nation states having found after 1945 an internal balance spatially - regionally and nationally, considering the strategic position Europe's in a changing world.

And almost 100 years later Anton Jäger has characterized this problematic constellation in his book on "Hyperpolitics" - on the unsteadiness of the contemporary political sphere- in the following way:

"When societies enter choppier waters, atomisation amplifies their volatility – and the collective incapacity to respond to today's political and ecological crises."

Thus, under these circumstances it might be more than reasonable to look back to the historical developments of the “European Regional Policies” as facts and promises with the intentions to be prepared for the future of Europe´s nations or societies – inside and outside.

By the way, a quite old demand, because e.g. as early as August 1977 the German newspaper “Das Parlament” issued a number with the title:

”Mensch-Umwelt-Lebensqualität: Raumordnung Auftrag an Europa” (Mankind – Environment – Quality of Life : Spatial Order (Planning) a Mandate for Europe”

A challenge for a new ordering of the spatial environment (natürliche Umwelt) on account of the danger being destroyed by the uncontrolled of growth of their use by mankind which had to be designed and planned across the national borders on account of the given interdependencies – especially in densely populated Europe.

Detlef´s and mine work together started with a remark by Jürgen Reulecke about deficits in the field of spatial research and analysis namely a lack of reasoning about the historical developments and determinants of spatial constellations and their reflections over time and about the policies structuring spatial design based on scientific analyses or just on political decisions of power.

This resulted in the design of an issue (Nr. 10/11. 2007) of the “Informationen für Raumentwicklung (IzR) (Information about Spatial Development) – the scientific and practical journal of the research institute in Bonn I was working for.

Finally, we came to the result:

“The problem of the lack of historical considerations in the analyses of the present and the lacking reference to the present of historical analyses should be dealt with in a stronger dialogue between the involved disciplines. In Germany this dialogue was and is still additionally impaired through the political misuse of the term “space” in the National Socialist period which should actually be determined analytically. Nevertheless a complex research landscape has emerged in the post-war period, but which should mainly seek more strongly relationship between and among each other.”

This issue reflected this critic – not the least for a better understanding of national and societal conditions, reflecting the intermingling factors, looking back and forward. Here, it is impossible to resume all the many studies which appeared before and after our incentive.

Detlef Briesen and me, we have had the chance together with the help of the ARL to initiate a small conference 2014 in Bonn to reflect the history of “Raumforschung and Raumordnung” (Spatial analysis and spatial planning) in Germany after 1945. Most of the presentations were later published in the book: “Raumplanung nach 1945. Kontinuitäten und Neuanfänge in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland” which appeared 2015 in German.

Wendelin Strubelt, Detlef Briesen (Hg.)

RAUMPLANUNG NACH 1945

Kontinuitäten und Neuanfänge in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland

ARL AKADEMIE FÜR RAUMFORSCHUNG UND LANDESPLANUNG
LEIBNIZ-FORUM FÜR RAUMWISSENSCHAFTEN

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It gave an overview, naturally not a complete one, by historians and researchers and practitioners of spatial developments, theoretical and practical considerations. One result or better observation I do not want to suppress, namely the fact, that many considerations of spatial theoreticians and practitioners from before 1945, from the so called Weimar Republik and from the short (!) times of the NS-Regime, naturally cleaned from the fascist terminology, had survived but had to be adjusted to the new spatial structure and the rise of a new societal structure - under a consolidated democratic structure.

However, it is interesting to observe the continuation of older orientations of spatially planning, namely those mostly to be concerned with development of the rural areas in contrast to the urban areas. Thus, neglecting – more or less - the growing differences between urban areas following - not the least the growing impact of international developments and especially of new competitors - on national, regional and local affairs. Just to name the crisis on the Montan – industries in the Sixties.

From this attempt we widened our perspective from the German perspective into a European wide one. A perspective more than needed after WW II. And in some way implementing what Thomas Mann had outspoken in January 1933 -we “are depending on each other because we (they) are in the same boat.

And it is quite strange to realize that in our times within Europe, this constellation or conviction formed by the EU and being fundamental prerequisite for the future of Europe and under raising worldwide geopolitical challenge, is questioned by new nationalistic and populistic trends in the different member states of the EU. Trends which will challenge the grown up interdependencies and will endanger the cohesion of Europe as a spatial requirement – in German named “Die Gleichwertigkeit der Lebensverhältnisse” (The equivalence of the circumstances of life) as a common target not the least in times of worldwide transitions – better named transition than transformation.

Thus, we wanted to invite scholars from all over Europe, now West and East, to consider with us “A new Beginning? Spatial Spatial Planning and Research in Europe between 1945 and 1975”. Because of the Corona restrictions the book appeared 2022 before we all could meet in Berlin.

Detlef Briesen,
Wendelin Strubelt
(eds.)

A New Beginning?
Spatial Planning and Research in Europe between 1945 and 1975

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It is interesting the realize differences of European states on spatial planning caused by their centralistic structures or their federal ones. Not to overlook the importance of economic planning in contrast to the spatial prerequisites which was especially in the states of the Eastern block the case while in the Western countries land ownership “proved to be a variable that set clear limits to planning at the local level but also beyond.

Still:

“The similarities in thinking and the sameness of the problems facilitated cooperation at the European level, which was resumed shortly after the end of the war. The atmosphere between the scientific experts was much more conciliatory than one would assume today, despite the horrors of a war era of more than 30 years.”

Giving hope that scientific and practical experience can prove in future as well as a basis of cooperation between the European countries, even beyond their different political systemic structures. A process we are just now to propel into future by this congress.

And we are quite proud, if it is allowed to have such a self-perspective, that we have had the chance to continue our series of meetings on the condition and effects of spatial analysis and planning in Europe beyond 1990.

Again, with the support of the ARL, we could organize a meeting in Rome 2024 with the title: “The European Space between Consolidation and new Challenges. Spatial Planning and Research from 1975 to the Present. In October 2024”.

The topic of the meeting was caused by our understanding, that cohesion policy,

“Which is not limited to Europe, is therefore a comprehensive task that has not yet been appreciated in its (historical and present) overall context, and above all, in the context of European spatial planning”,

which we tried to tackle by inviting colleagues from different European countries and backgrounds, including two colleagues from Vietnam and India reflecting the fact, that cohesion as a spatial and social constellation or problem is not restricted to Europe but is rather a worldwide one.

Detlef Briesen,
Wendelin Strubelt
(eds.)

A Future for the European Patchwork

Cohesion through Spatial Planning since 1990

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In this context it is more than interesting – it may highlight a continuity of thinking -, that Cliff Hague sets at the top of his paper “Facing Polycrisis: Lessons from Fifty Years of Spatial Planning Practice and Research” which is presented as the first one in the just appeared book:

“A Future for the European Patchwork. Cohesion through Spatial Planning since 1990”

The sentence of Antonio Gramsci as well:

“The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters.”

Taking up the tone, that the reality of spatial planning is just not restricted to the very regional or local developments in the various and different national contexts but embedded in worldwide ones having direct or indirect impacts or deposits on spatial constellations and developments. And it is quite important that he is ending with the saying, that spatial planning is left

“with a serious dilemma. Polycentric development, balanced development and territorial cohesion remain ambiguous concepts, which lack a sound theoretical and analytical base.”

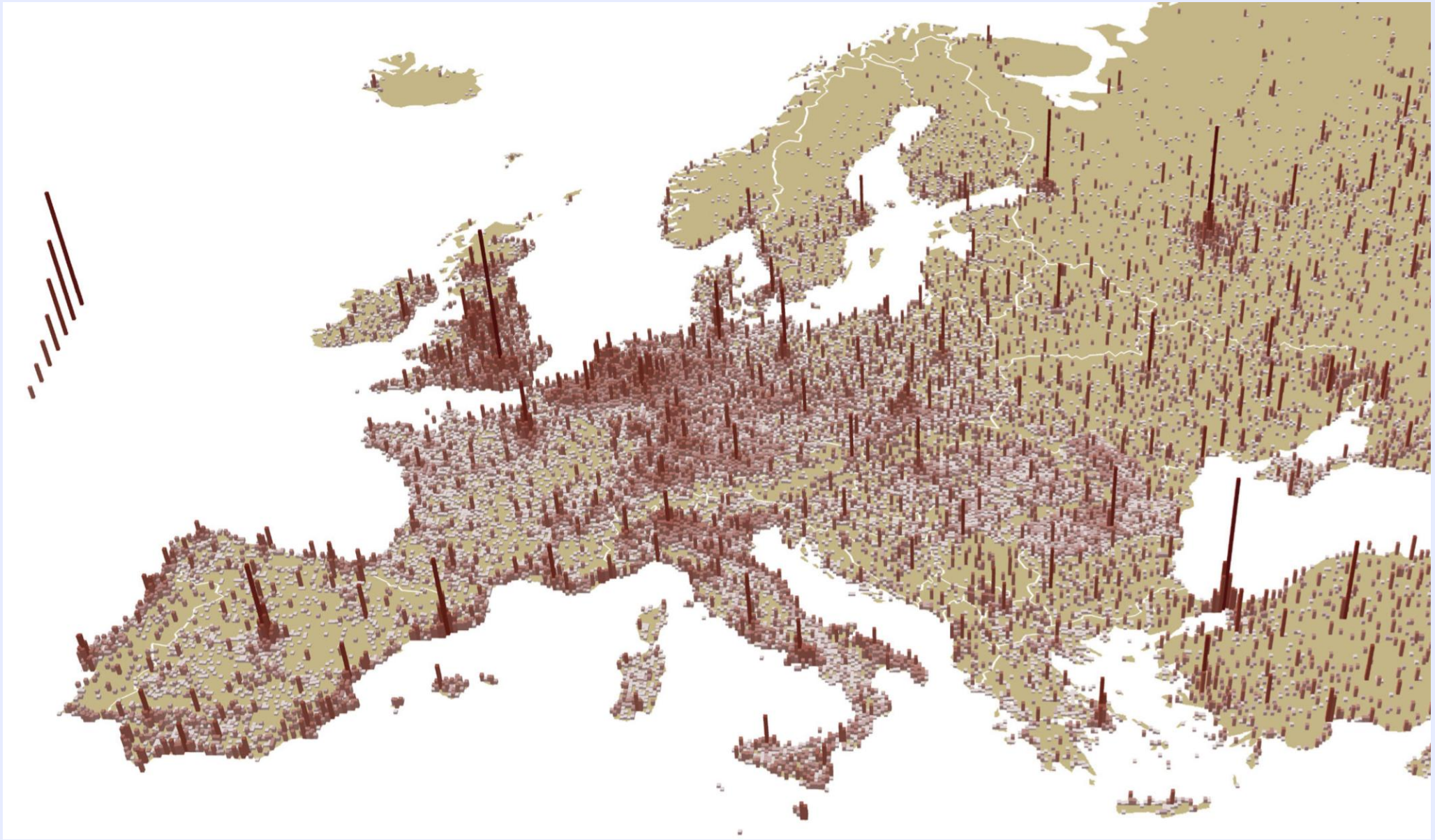
Especially in relation to the quite different regional and local constellations.

Our conference, the book documenting it, could not offer “final solutions”, but we could document the attempts to analyze cohesion in Europe and the attempts made by planning designs and actions to “compete” with the very problem mixtures present “vor Ort” – locally present.

Thus, it is an attempt, not the offer of a final solution but rather to offer some new thoughtful reflections about Europe.

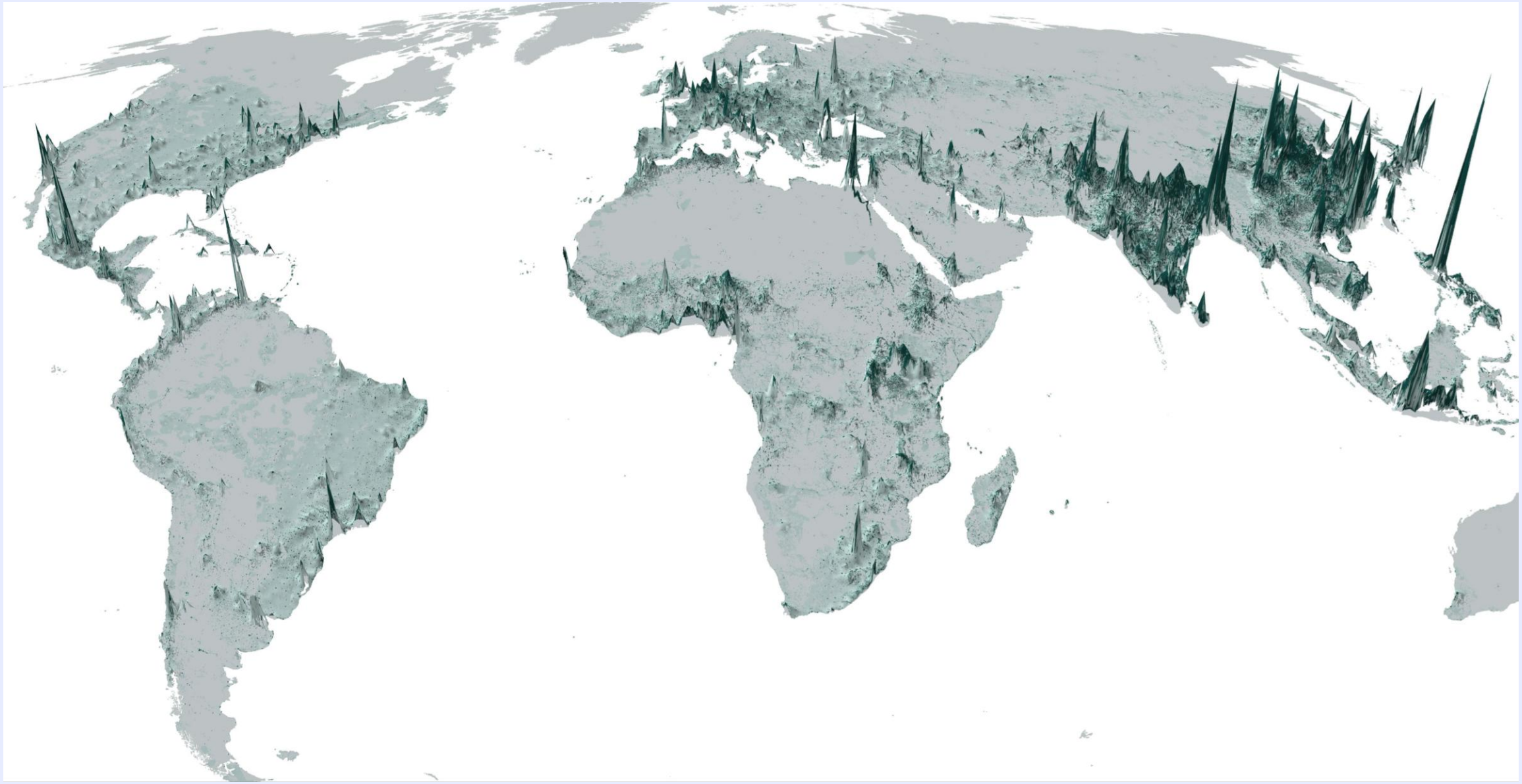
I want to supplement with some pictorial presentations of Europe, historical and present ones, impressions and factual constellations:

Cities in Europe



Source: BBSR, Die Unterschiede bestimmen die Vielfalt in Europa, 2019; page 10/11

Europe in the context of the World



Source: BBSR, Die Unterschiede bestimmen die Vielfalt in Europa, 2019;

The future of Europe and its spatial structure between tradition and the challenges of today! A queen not solely dominant anymore, but rather sqeezed between other dominant kings or queens on the global scene.

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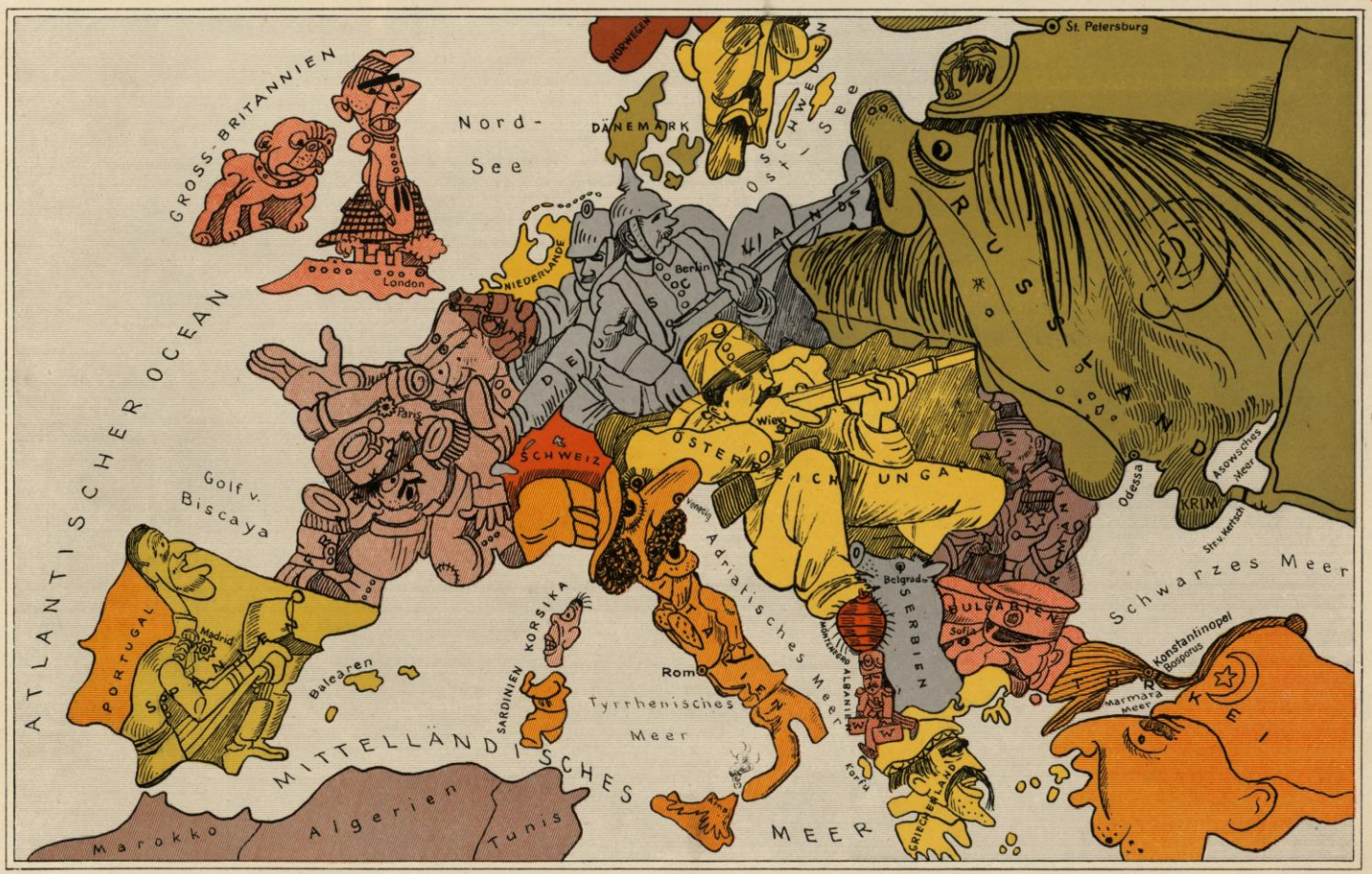
Europa prima pars terrae in forma virginis
Heinrich Bünting Hannover 1581

KARTE VON EUROPA IM JAHRE 1914

1914. 750. [1]

Gezeichnet von W. Trier



England verbirgt seine Flotte unter der Heimat Rock, die Dogge **Irland** im Rücken. König Oskar von **Schweden** sieht „gespannt" auf Russland. **Frankreich** zieht sich mutig zurück, während sich **Spanien** süssem Nichtstun hingibt· **Belgien** — hat ihm schon! **Deutschland** und **Oesterreich-Ungarn** teilen gute deutsche Hiebe nach allen Seiten aus. In der **Schweiz** herrscht guter „Wille" **Italien** ist treu bis zum Tod — dem Sieger. **Sicilien** vulkanischer Boden, sonst aber ganz ruhig. **Montenegro** — Lausebande, **Serbien** — Schweinebande! Der König von Durazzo — **Albanien** — verlässt sein Volk. **Griechenland** und die **Türkei** haben sich zum Fressen gern. Ferdinand von **Bulgarien** möchte auch etwas abhaben. Carolus von **Rumänien**? **Russland** will das Ganze verschlingen, es wird ihm aber nicht gelingen!

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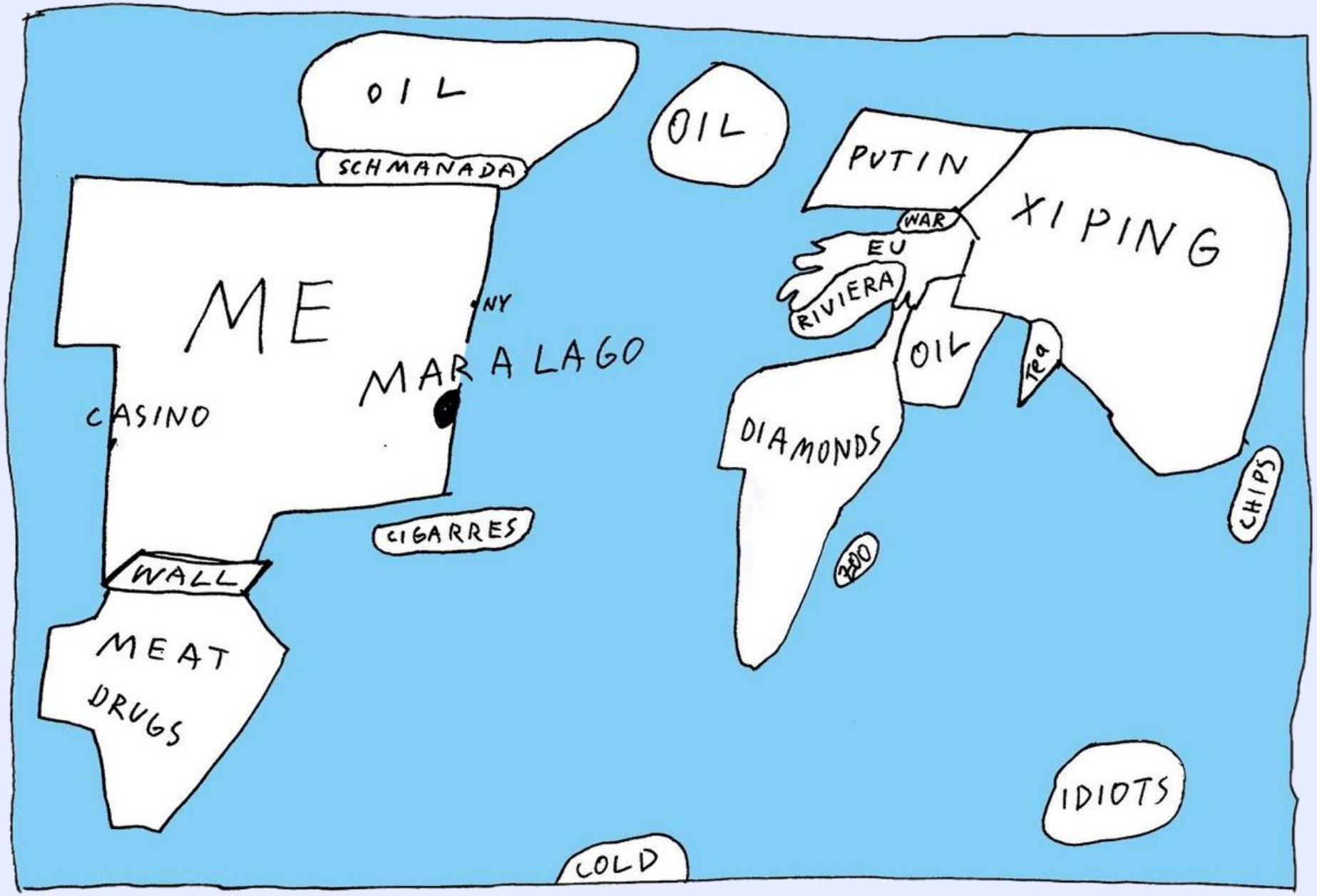
THE WORLD SEEN BY DONALD TRUMP

JULIAN FIEBACH / DER SPIEGEL 27.2.2026



And, at the end of my introduction and before our friendly colleagues will offer more details of our common endeavour I want to quote a sentence by Elfriede Jellinek - another Nobel Prize winner like Thomas Mann - :

A FINAL WORD?

„The world is a space in which exist other spaces, all sort of containers, and we should try to be aware of them, and especially of all those we did not want to keep.”

“Die Welt ist ein Raum, in dem sich andere Räume, alle Arten von Containern befinden, und man sollte alles im Blick zu behalten versuchen, auch denjenigen, die man gar nicht behalten wollte.“

ELFRIEDE JELLINEK

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