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**Capitals and National Identity**

**European Variants**

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Capital Cities and National History

Capital cities make up a significant component of national identities, as locations of national power, as sites of representations of power, and as focal points of national cleavages, conflicts, and cohesion. Whether seen negatively or positively, capitals have an important function in the legitimation, and in the contestation of political power. By definition, capitals are political centres, and their making then one aspect of centre formation.  

Contemporary cities are usually made of layers of history, of building history, of economic history, of cultural and political history. In Europe they include legacies of Greco-Roman constructions, of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Baroque of the Counter-Reformation, the neo-Classicism of Absolutism, of 19th century Historicism and spatial expansionism, of Modernist transformations and, more occasionally, of post-Modernist after-thoughts. The history of European cities bear witness of economic trends and cycles, of trade routes opened and closed, of the movements of herring in the Baltic and the North Sea, of colonial plunder and slave trade, of manufactures, industrialization, and de-industrialization, of cycles of creativity and visitors’ attraction. Capital cities, in particular, are also made up of the vicissitudes of political history, of varying spatial extensions and organization of power, of different kinds and of different resources of power. They have travelled along different routes to and through national modernity, and they are currently differently located in the world of nation-states and of global flows. Even after the most vicious destructions, urban history tends to bounce back, as in Warsaw, Minsk, or Berlin. Identities grow from historical experiences.

Capitals have a function of representing political power. As representational forms, cities have five major dimensions:

1. A. layout, of streets, places, buildings, varying in form, size, inter-connections, and accessibility.

In the national history of European capitals, the demolition of pre-modern fortifications and the military abandonment of previous defence space provided important opportunities for a new urban layout. Linguistically it was indicated by the shift from bulwark to boulevard, and the Vienna turn from the defensive Glacis to the ostentatious Ringstrasse was the model example.

1 Capital city history may thus be linked to the different, more abstract-analytical conception of centre formation by Stefano Bartolini, Restructuring Europe, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005.
2 A set of buildings of political and of economic power, of culture, of popular well-being, of leisure, of consumption, varying in their relative size and frequency.

In European history, the most significant national buildings were usually the Parliament, the Opera or main Dramatic Theatre, the Palace of Justice/Supreme Court, and the National Museum.

3. Style, the architecture of buildings, the style of monuments.

Most public European nationalism built in the pre-modern repertoire of European architecture, neo-Gothic for the London and the Budapest parliaments, neo-Classicism in Athens and in the Vienna Parliament, neo-Baroque for the German and the Swedish parliaments, neo-Renaissance for the Czech National Theatre and National Museum, and for the Rijksmuseum of Amsterdam. In Paris, Haussmann imposed a disciplined French Classicism on the facades of the main boulevards, forming street-long horizontal lines, whereas in Central Europe a more irregular, and decorative, syncretism of the European repertoire, known as Historicism or Eclecticism, prevailed. The first architectural style breaking out of the old repertoire was known as Art Nouveau in Belgium and France, Secession in Central Europe, Jugendstil in northern Germany and Sweden, in Finland (sometimes at least) as National Romanticism, and in Catalonia as modernisme. Around 1900 it was the preferred style of much of the national bourgeoisie, from Barcelona to Brussels, and from Budapest and Prague to Riga and Helsinki.

Monuments were mostly figurative, although they did include a number of obelisks, usually provided with inscriptions, sometimes in Latin, more often in the national language. They were often allegorical, and the more important ones usually included an elaborate iconographic program.

4. Toponymy or Nomenclature, the naming of streets, places, and buildings

A system of urban naming is a product of early modernity, decreed in Paris in 1728. Before the French Revolution the usual pattern consisted of a few places of regal importance, and the rest left local landmarks. The French Revolution took nomenclature very seriously, turning Place Louis XV into Place de la Révolution, or Place du Trône into the Place du Trône Renversé, for example. The practice spread from the aftermath of the

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Napoleonic wars. In Stockholm, a (re-)naming program was launched in 1885, replacing a lot of local medieval designations with patriotic or illustrious names.\(^3\)

5. Monumentality, the object and the form of celebration or commemoration. Public monumentality expanded enormously in the nationalist 19th century. In Europe it was largely inspired by the Roman legacy, which also included the Egyptian obelisk, although the latter re-emerged in 19th century Europe from direct French and British imperial contacts with Egypt. The medieval Church sponsored monuments to Jesus, Maria, and patron saints, and staged iconic processions. Pests, or their end, gave rise to columns of thanksgiving, e.g., in Vienna and Prague. Princely homages, coronations, weddings, baptisms, or military victories often included temporary (mostly wooden) gates of honour. The princely equestrian statue was revived with the Renaissance.

The new national movement made its own use of the equestrian statue and the obelisk, it made permanent triumphal arches in stone, it moved the elaborate iconographic ensembles out of the palaces and the cathedrals, onto public places, while largely substituting secular, Greco-Roman or evolutionist allegories for Biblical ones. National flags, anthems, and days rose in the 19th century.

National capitals are modern social constructions. Medieval polities usually lacked a capital city, having itinerant emperors, kings, and princes, of variable mobility. Charlemagne, for example, had a preference for Aachen, and the area from Liège to Cologne, but was also very often in Worms in the southern Rhineland, and several times in Regensburg in southeastern Germany. When capitals did become the norm, from the Renaissance and onwards, they were not national, but princely *Haupt- und Residenzstädte* (capital and residence cities). The capital then represented his (occasionally her) power and glory, his/her identity. The prince had his power from God, not from the nation. An important tradition of medieval Europe was the urban representation of God and the Biblical narrative – in churches, sculptures, pictures -, continued into modernity and strongly reinforced by embattled Eastern Orthodoxy after 1453 and by the Western Christian schism of the 16\(^{th}\) century.

When nations rose, they had then to assert themselves against princes, with their aristocratic *pendants*, and against the worldly power of the Church. This was especially important in the Catholic realms, given the state independence and the wealth of the Catholic Church, and the splendour of its Counter-Reformation. The class character of nations have varied, but the rise of a nation, and thereby of a national capital, always involves a rise of

other social forces than the nobility and the clergy. In Europe this new social force was usually, above all, an haute-bourgeoisie, but significant was also the growth and collective identity of petite-bourgeoisies, of intellectual strata, of free farmers, and of autonomous working classes. The emergence of national capitals also entailed a social transformation, from cities dominated by courtiers, clergy, domestic servants, and soldiers, i.e., by servants of the King and God, to a society of economic and cultural relations. At the end of the 18th century, soldiers, civil servants, and their domestic servants comprised a good forty per cent of the population of Berlin.4

A national capital, then, is a seat of sovereign national power, and a city representing the nation. In constitutional monarchies the political change can be gradual, and what is a national or a royal institution of power may be open to debate. With respect to capital cities, their representative function is crucial. To what extent is there a representation of the nation, its power, its sovereignty, its victories, its peaceful achievements, its ancestry, its culture? The seating of a body of national representatives, in other words, a parliament building, is one significant indicator. Explicitly national or state institutions – theatres were often very important -, monuments and street and place names referring to the nation and/or the state and its exploits are others. A full analysis should also look into the socio-economic changes of the city, but the very possibility of a décalage of politics and economics has to be acknowledged. The latter, then, had better not be used as a criterion for the character of the former.

The main European road, to modernity5 as well as to a national capital, was the road of internal battle between the nation, on one hand, and the Prince and the Church, on the other. It was, of course, fought and travelled in variable ways, and we had better sort the latter into a few distinctive variants. However, the history of European capitals also includes two other routes, which should be singled out, although they shared the typical European experience of nation versus prince.

All along the East-Central Strip of Europe from Helsinki to Sofia, national capitals were established in a triangular conflict, pitting one ethnic nation against one or more other ethnies, and against a foreign prince. A third variant, on the Western periphery of the

4 A. Ságvári, ‘Stadien der Hauptstadtentwicklung und die Rolle der Hauptstädte als Nationalrepräsentanten’, in T., Schieder and G. Brunn (eds.), Hauptstädte in europäischen Nationalstaaten, Munich, Beck, 1993, p. 169. In larger Vienna of the 17th century, the court, state functionaries, the aristocracy, and their servants made up a third of the population, loc. cit.
5 See further G. Therborn, ‘Entangled Modernities’ European Journal of Social Theory vol. 6 (3)
continent, involved an emergent nation of old roots and a foreign prince or state, but without any stark cultural divide between them, as in the European colonies overseas.

All the three roads have their revolutionary, ruptural, and their gradualist or accommodational variants.

No capital is like clay in the hands of the ruler. It is always a natural locale, in Europe usually with a history of its own, more often than not with significant local powers, de facto or de iure. City-shaping is then usually protracted and costly, and therefore subject to political vicissitudes of power and of resources. This norm certainly holds for European national capitals.

Now, the different historical relationships between the prince and nation do not constitute the only major axis differentiation European capitals. Attention should also be paid to state-city relationships. They may be looked at and interpreted in different ways, but for my purposes a perspective developed by Stein Rokkan seems to be the most fruitful.\(^6\) As a kind of Western European counterpart to the above-mentioned multi-ethnic Eastern Strip, there is what Rokkan called the City Belt, of early and strong cities and weak states. It runs from central Italy to the Hansa cities of northern Germany, through Switzerland, the Rhineland, and the Low Countries.

Here, a particular conception of polycentrism and urban power vis-à-vis territorial states was reproduced in national modernity and largely maintained into current times. As an Italian politician put in 1864 in a parliamentary debate about the choice of a capital for the new Italian nation-state: “The very idea of a preponderant capital has always been resolutely rejected by everybody. … we do not want an Italian Paris, we do not want an Italian London.”\(^7\) Italy still has no one preponderant capital. Switzerland in the first half of the 19th century had six rotating capitals (Basel, Bern, Freiburg, Luzern, Solothurn, and Zürich) After the religious civil war of 1847 and in turning the oligarchic confederation into national in the aftermath of the 1848 February Revolution, the Swiss elected centrally Bern their capital (over Zürich and defeated Luzern). But again, urban polycentrism has remained a feature of Swiss geography.

The Netherlands has opted for a unique solution, un official capital (Amsterdam) which is not the seat of government and parliament, i.e., not the actual political capital; and an unofficial capital (The Hague) which is not the leading city of the country,

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\(^7\) Ferrari, quoted from G. Djament, 'Le débat sur Rome capitale. Géohistoire d’une choix de localisation’, L’Espace géographique 2005-4, p. 376n (my translation)
demographically, economically, and culturally. In 1815-1830 when the Netherlands and Belgium were one kingdom, the capital functions and the royal court alternated between The Hague and Brussels. After the Belgian secession, Brussels was brushed up as a national capital, with a national-cum-royal column higher than the classical Trajan column and with the biggest Palace of Justice in the world. But its important symbolic centre remained the Grande Place in the low city of the burghers, and there is no European capital which has paid as much lavish tribute to its mayors as Brussels, with its grand avenues and central places named after them.\(^8\) The 1949 West German choice of Bonn, a modest city even within the Rhineland, continued the City Belt tradition. Even in today’s Berlin Republic Hamburg and Bremen remain as city-states of the Federal Republic, in a polycephalous urban system which also includes Munich, Frankfurt, and Cologne as major players.

Finally, a time dimension to the two spatial ones above. This paper will concentrate on national capitals/national identities and European capital/European identity, which seem appropriate comparisons – and more than large enough a topic for this occasion. However, this writer is, of course, also aware, that capital city development does not end with an affirmation of the nation. Without subscribing to any determinist evolutionism, it seems that European national capital history may be analyzed in terms of three developmental moments. First, there was the national moment, the nation establishing its capital – with the three variants mentioned above – and the nation then defined as one by its leaders. Secondly, there was a popular moment, when the popular (non-elite) classes of the nation manifested themselves – with influence recognized and/or with power. This popular moment, which usually dates from the aftermath of World War I, paid homage to the Unknown Soldier, but also to peaceful labour and popular politics. The Belgian painter and sculptor Constantin Meunier turned to making sculptures of workers of different occupations in late 19th century, which later spread to Copenhagen, Stockholm and other places. But his grand Monument to Labour, on which he started working in 1886, had its erection in Brussels blocked till 1930. Even though Meunier’s art focuses on work and not on class conflict, there was for long a fear that the monument might become a rallying-point of the socialists.\(^9\)

Thirdly, there has come the global moment, when a national capital presented itself/aspired to become a world city, seeing itself, and being allowed to see itself primarily a city on a global arena – of capital, tourism, creativity -, and not as a capital worthy of the

\(^8\) Anspach, de Brouckère, Buls, Max et. al., influential mayors of the 19th and early 20th centuries.  
\(^9\) P. Derom, The Statues and Monuments of Brussels, Antwerp, Pandora Publishers, 2000, pp. 144ff. In the early 1950s the monument was dismantled and shipped to the outskirts of Brussels, inorder to make room for a bridge. Some years later, the famous Maison du Peuple by Victor Horta was also taken down.
grandeur of the nation. While this is an actual tendency, from an analytical point of view is certain caution may be in order, in the face of the hype of some consultants and a piece of academic fashion. In 1991 the London Advisory Planning Committee with some other bodies launched a “research project” on “London World City”, with a frank bluntness: “So world cities are about concentrations of capital and the generation of wealth. But they are also about command and control.”10 The British star architect Richard Rogers, in an influential publication of about the same time, put it differently, however: “London must learn to see itself not just as a British capital but as a European city.”11 The office of the London Mayor, Ken Livingstone, has added another perspective, the capital as the global agent of the nation: “The Case for London demonstrates that expenditure in London benefits the UK economy as a whole and helps the government achieve many of its national policy objectives … On a global level, London is a world city and acts as a gateway for the international economy into the rest of the UK.”12 The most global of European cities clearly does not see itself as unrelated to, independent of the national polity and economy. And imperial cities have always had some kind of global vision, albeit often less than planetary. Baron Haussmann, the builder of the Western European paradigm of national capital, saw his task as an: “.. immense enterprise which will make Paris a Capital worthy of France, .. almost said of the civilized World.”13

Three European Roads to a National Capital

National identities in Europe have developed in different ways, and have been moulded in different forms. The intention here is, of course, not to write their history. It is only to hint at the contours of the main variants. The ensuing national capitals indicate a topography of national identities.

1. Nations versus Princes

The mainstream of European nations asserted themselves against and/or above their princes. But even this mainstream had at least three different lanes. The fast lane was that of Revolution, which was not always the fastest in the long run, because of the counter-

revolutions it normally included. Paris was the paradigmatic case, the model, and the most successful. The experience of Madrid and Lisbon were much more convoluted.

The opposite pole to the revolutionary road was the gradual process of Nationalizing Monarchies. London was here the master copy, with less successful parallels in the Eastern empires, Vienna, St. Petersburg, and better small-state followers, in The Hague/Amsterdam, Copenhagen, and Stockholm.

Sometimes the foreignness, or rather the foreign base, of the prince was the issue. Brussels, Oslo, Dublin, and Reykjavik emerged as capitals of new independent states. In the Nordic cases this was a negotiated peaceful process, whereas Brussels and Dublin had to come out of lethal gun smoke.

In the cases of Italy and Germany, thirdly, the princes were too many and too small for the nation. Nation-building here was neither revolution nor reform, but “unification”. In both countries the process was enduringly complicated by strong pre-national institutions refusing to go away, the princely rights of the Hohenzollern and the Papacy, respectively. German Berlin and Italian Rome had to accommodate both.

a. The Bumpy Road of Revolutions and Counter-Revolutions

Paris was in ways many more than one the European model of a national capital. With the French Revolution Paris became the first national capital of Europe, the first capital of a self-conscious nation-state on the continent. It began in October 1789 when an angry Parisian crowd put an end to the royal residence of Versailles and brought the king back to Paris. The long story cannot be told here. Its vicissitudes may be summed up in a summary history of the Pantheon.

It was built as the votive church of Ste. Geneviève at the end of the ancien régime. But in 1791 the Constituent Assembly turned it into a national pantheon of commemoration: "To Great Men A Grateful Fatherland". This was neither a royal necropolis, of Saint Denis or the (Habsburg) Capucine Crypt, nor the private eclecticism of post-feudal but pre-national Westminster Abbey, but a selective homage by a nation to its greatest men. Mirabeau, Voltaire, Marat, and Rousseau were the first selected. (Marat was soon to be taken out, though.) The trajectory of the Pantheon reflects the rhythm of Revolution. It was re-consecrated under Napoleon I (continued under the Restoration), again a national necropolis under the July Monarchy, re-consecrated once more by Napoleon III, and finally desacralized by the Third Republic in 1885, in connection with the state burial of Victor Hugo.

The final, and paradigmatic consolidation of Parisian revolutionary nationalism was a protracted and complicated process. Its first debt was to the Tiers-Etat nationalism of the anti-Versailles revolution and to the iconoclasm of the Jacobins. Its second debt was to the military exploits of Napoleon and to the nationalism of his boisterous empire, summed up in the project of the Triumphal Arch to the Grande Armée (and not to the Emperor). The bourgeois July Monarchy completed the Triumphal Arch and built the Place de la Bastille with its July Column. The February Revolution of 1848 reaffirmed, however briefly for the moment, the Republican tradition. The Second Empire and its plenipotentiary Préfet de la Seine, Haussmann, provided a model layout of daring ambition and an unrivalled example of urban planning implementation. The Third Republic, finally, completed the transformation, with the monumental places de la République and de la Nation, with its pedagogical “statuemanie”, and with its continuing alliance of political power with the Ecole de Beaux Arts of monumental architecture.

There is an interesting paradox in the construction of Paris. It is the most monumental of Western European capitals, with its magnificent via triumfalís from the Rue de Rivoli to the recent Great Arch of La Défense, via the Place de la Concorde (ex-Revolution), the Champs-Élysées, the Triumphal Arch with Place Charles de Gaulle (ex-Etoile), and the Avenue de la Grande Armée, with lots of other grands boulevards, symbol-laden places, with street names crying out those of great men and great battles, and full of monumental buildings and of statues. But its key political institutions display little monumentality or grandeur. The President and the Prime Minister are located in rather ordinary 18th century aristocratic palaces – Elysée and Matignon, respectively –, on side streets without perspective, on different banks of the Seine. The National Assembly is somewhat better housed, in a palace on the Left Bank once built for a daughter of Louis XIV.

Paris fêtes la Grande Nation in terms of its revolutionary history, its military exploits, its haute culture, its distinguished personalities, but hardly with respect to its political institutions. And French politics to this day is very much like that, with personalities and protest movements trumping organizations and procedures.

b. Nationalizing Monarchies

When and how did London become a national capital? The answer is not as clearcut as in Paris, where the Revolution is the undeniable starting-point and the early Third Republic the last period of completion. But by the second third of the 19th century national London is clearly visible. In 1840 to 1860 the landmark Houses of Parliament were built, in 1830...
Trafalgar Square was opened, followed by a National Gallery and Nelson’s Column. By then there were already a Waterloo Place and a Waterloo Bridge. The wars against the French Revolution, and its revolutionary French nationalism, contributed to nationalizing London, the capital of the counter-revolution. A fire in 1834 in the medieval St Stephen chapel of the royal palace of Westminster, raised the issue of a special building representing Parliament.

Nothing similar of national commemoration occurred to the city after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. What happened after the Great Fire in 1666 (and the Civil War), and after Glorious Revolution? The main construction after the Great Fire was Christopher Wren’s new St Paul’s Cathedral, and Wren’s plan for the rebuilt city centred on the Cathedral. He was also active in building more than fifty other churches, but nothing really national. As a recent biographer of London put it, “the twin forces of tradition and commerce .. obstinately recreated London in its former image”, 15, thereby also referring to the peculiar English combination of feudal manners and capitalist practice.

10 Downing Street was in the 1730s offered by King George II as a personal gift to Sir Robert Walpole, who accepted it as the residence of the First Lord of the Treasury (de facto Prime Minister). Only Sir Robert’s personal stance made the building a national institution. Whitehall had no official function since the royal Whitehall Palace was destroyed by fire in 1698, and its southern part, leading to Westminster, was still King Street. There were no prominent non-royal monuments erected before the Napoleonic wars, whereafter an unended line began. That is, except for the Monument itself (1671-77), a column commemorating the Great Fire, with Latin inscriptions and a 1681 anti-Catholic addition. True, there were a couple of non-royals erected on peripheral locations, the 17th century architect Inigo Jones at Chiswick (from 1729) and an independent-minded 18th century Lord Mayor, Brass Crosby (of 1771) 16

The conclusion seems warranted, that the decisive period of a nationalization of royal and imperial London was the second third of the 19th century, also the time of Parliamentary Reform, Catholic emancipation, and the Chartist labour movement for universal (male) suffrage. Royal London, did not disappear, but it became part of a national – and a global –

configuration. Dispersion of power and increasing popular influence put limits to an imperial monumentality in London.\footnote{The final Kingsway–Aldwych complex in Holborn, opened up in the 1900s, fell short of the grand architectural schemes because of the caution of the London County Council. See further J. Schneer, \textit{London 1900}, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1999, pp. 19ff.}

The anti-Napoleonic wars, “the Patriotic War” in Russia, the “Liberation wars” in Prussia, ignited national flames also in much more conservative polities than the British, and in much more traditional capitals than London, such as Berlin and St. Petersburg.

The capital of Russia certainly remained more a capital of the Tsar than of the nation, in spite of its commemoration non-royal heroes of the war. However, from the (first) Patriotic War till the end at World War I nationalism was rising. The 1914 renaming of German-sounding Saint Petersburg into more Russian Petrograd highlighted that the Romanov empire and its cosmopolitan capital also were on the road to national forms.

Vienna had better not go too far in becoming a national capital of the very multi-national Habsburg empire. But the grandiose Ringstrasse project clearly made the city much more a capital than a residence city. While the imperial palace was also expanded and embellished in the urban change, its was now well matched, on the other side of the Ringstrasse, by a neoclassical Parliament and a neo-Gothic City Hall, flanked by palaces of justice and learning (university).

c. Nations Larger than Princes

The unification of Italy and Germany has been narrated many times, and so have the ensuing transformations of Rome and Berlin. Let us here only take note of a couple of points, the different processes of final unification in the two cases, with their ensuing different capitals, and, secondly their common trait of enduring powerful pre—national features.

The Italian project had succeeded in enlisting the nationalizing monarchy of Piemonte, so by the time of the nationalist military entry into Rome the main political obstacle to the nation was the worldly power of the Pope and the Church. The Hohenzollern King, on the other hand, was only reluctantly and partly pushed into the role of a national German sovereign. The German Reich was proclaimed in the Hall of Mirrors in the palace of the French ancient regime in Versailles. Elected representatives of the German nation and of Berlin were not invited to the ceremony. Only vigorous advice from Bismarck prevented Wilhelm I from making Potsdam (the Prussian residence city) the capital of the Reich.
Booming Berlin became a very successful economic and cultural capital of the new German nation. But little national symbolism was added, apart from a neo-baroque Reichstag, in the centre but somewhat off the main axis, and facing a royal square (Königplatz). The Victory Avenue laid out through the Tiergarten in 1892 was a completely dynastic showpiece, exhibiting 32 Hohenzollern rulers of Brandenburg-Prussia.

“We have to build Italy in Rome”, the Italian Premier Crispi declared in a programmatic speech.\(^\text{18}\) The King and the highest political institutions were installed in former Papal palaces, true, but the Pontifical renaissance street Via Pia was renamed 20 September (1871, when the Italian troops broke through the gates of the Papal city) and lined with new ministries and cultural institutions, a new Via Nazionale was built, and an impressive Palace of Justice. However, what most specifically characterized the nationalization of Rome was the enduring conflict with the Pope, in his Vatican recluse, and the royalist nationalism. Garibaldi on his monumental horse on the Gianicolo hill is made looking down at the Vatican, and 289 years after the Church burnt Giordano Bruno as a heretic, he was standing again on the Campo di Fiori. The enormous memorial to King Vittorio Emanuele, which has come to dominate the centre of modern Rome, included from the beginning an iconographic conception that made easily possible its broader national function after World War I, as Altar of the Fatherland, including an Unknown Soldier.\(^\text{19}\)

2. National Independence

Nations becoming independent have been exceptions in Western and Central Europe, dominated by old polities of pre-national origin. The four cases, of Oslo, Brussels, Dublin, and Reykjavik, have all been rather small nations. Their formation has varied considerably. Oslo, or Kristiania as it was then called, was never a Swedish city during the Swedish-Norwegian union 1814-1905. It had developed as a Danish city, and a Norwegian nation was emerging by the end of Napoleonic war. Though imposed by military might, the Swedish rule was not resisted but accepted. Kristiania developed in the course of the 19th century simultaneously as a royal city and as a national capital. Like the country, which developed vigorously economically and culturally as a nation. The main street laid out led from the royal palace on a commanding hill, with a royal statue in front of it, and the street was named after the King, Karl Johan. But it led by a new university, a centrally located new parliament, and a national theatre. The street is still called Karl Johan, and the statue is still in front of the


\(^{19}\) M. Pizzo, _Il Vittoriano_, Rome, Comunicare Organizzando, 2002
palace, although others have of course been added, both by the palace and along the street. But the city itself has changed its name, dropping royal Danish Kristiania and going back to medieval Norwegian Oslo twenty years after the peaceful secession from Sweden (in 1925).

Reykjavik, founded in 1786, grew slowly as a tiny provincial capital, reaching 7000 inhabitants in 1901 and a good 40,000 at the time of Icelandic independence in 1944.

Brussels, by contrast, was a substantial Habsburg centre, coveted by French kings and drawn into the French Revolution. During the Dutch reign 1815-1830, Brussels was one of the two seats of the court and government, and the one preferred by the corps diplomatique to rustic The Hague. The linguistic and religious insensitivity of the Dutch King provoked some discontent, but it was the inspiration of the French July Revolution of 1830 and the maladroitness of the monarch which led to Belgian independence. It was the Burgher Guard of Brussels which secured the city against a half-hearted Dutch attempt at military suppression, and the King elected, Leopold of Sachsen-Coburg, declared himself an adopted Belgian and swore his oath to “maintain national independence”. The “King of the Belgians” was part of the nation from the very beginning – like the King of Norway in 1905 –, and the development of Brussels as a modern national capital became a task of the King as well as of the nation.20 The Francophone liberal, secularist haute-bourgeoisie ran the city – protected by a narrow suffrage. Dutch-speakers were more numerous or, later in the century, as many as the Francophones, but language was not yet a significant political issue. From 1887 the city put the communal hall at the disposal of Flemish theatre troupes.21

Ireland was partly an Anglo—Scottish settler colony, and “the Irish question” had important religious and socio-economic as well as ethno-national aspects. Central Dublin bears eloquent witness of the struggles of the Irish nation. The main street is O´Connell Street, so named after (Free State) independence, paying homage to “The Liberator” of Irish Catholics (in 1829), and the first Catholic lord mayor of Dublin. He got a statue in 1882, but the city`s attempt to name the street O`Connell was stopped by the British powers. In the same street, the British had raised a Nelson Pillar in 1808, decades before Trafalgar Square. The IRA blew it up in 1966, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Uprising, which centred on the post office in the same street, today a memorial shrine. (Nelson is now replaced by a Monument to Light, a 120m tall steel Spire.) In 1957, the last British equestrian statue in Dublin was removed by persons unknown, while Queen Victoria had been dispatched to

20 See further G.-H. Dumont, Historie de Bruxelles, Brussels, Le Cri, 1997, chs. XIX and XX.
21 Dumont op. cit. pp. 330, 358f.
Australia, when the national Irish parliament took over Leinster House from the Royal Dublin Society (Her consort, Prince Albert, survived on the grounds, though).

Since 1979 O’Connell Street also houses a moving tribute to Jim Larkin, the labour leader in a big and bitter fight for trade union rights in 1913. It is probably the most prominent labour monument in any European capital today. Perpendicular to O’Connell runs Parnell St. At the crossing with the former stands a huge monument to Parnell, a Liberal Protestant landlord who fought for Irish Home Rule and land reform. When the monument was completed in 1911 Great Britain St became Parnell St.

Like in Prague or Zagreb national cultural institutions were important in Dublin for a national appropriation of the future capital. A tandem of National Museum and National Library was raised in 1877-90, but culturally more important in the Irish case was probably the Catholic University of Ireland of 1865, to become University College Dublin. The dominant academic centre in Dublin was, and is, Trinity College, of Protestant origin. Until 1970 Catholics risked excommunication for studying there, unless they had managed to get an individual dispensation from the Archbishop.22

3. Ethnic Transformations in the East

Virtually all nineteen current capitals of the East-Central Strip of Europe, from Sofia to Helsinki from Prague to Kiev, has had a complicated ethnic modern history. At least in the century leading up to World War I, many of them till the aftermath of World War II, in the case of Sarajevo up till now. Only three or four, Ljubljana, Warsaw, and Zagreb, and perhaps Tirana which had only 1500 inhabitants at the time of Albanian independence in 1912, had a 19th-20th century continuous ethno-cultural majority of the current nation. Helsinki was Swedish-speaking, Sofia was Muslim and Jewish more than Bulgarian, and Bucharest was largely Greek. Belgrade started out in the 19th century as more Muslim than Serb, Skopje was throughout the century more Muslim than Macedonian, while the Muslims lost their majority in Sarajevo (but not their plurality) to Catholic and Orthodox Christians in late 19th century.

Several cities, from Tallinn (Reval) and Riga to Prague and Buda (Ofen), were mainly German at least in the beginning of the 19th century. Pressburg/Poszony, today’s Bratislava, was mostly German and Hungarian. High culture in Ljubljana (Laibach) and Zagreb (Agram) was also German in the first half of the 19th century. Warsaw was ethnically

predominantly Polish, but was ruled in Russian and had a third of its population Jewish, in 1917-18 almost half. Minsk had a Jewish majority around 1900, and Yiddish was its most frequent language. Only nine per cent spoke Belarussian. Jews also made up nearly half the population of Chisinau and Vilnius. Lithuanians accounted for just 2 per cent of the population of Vilnius in 1897. Kiev had then two and half times more Russians than Ukrainians.

Well before independence, ethnic migration and constitutional changes had led to new city governments. Massive rural-to-urban industrial migration and democratic nationalism had changed the ethnic composition in ten of the future capitals between 1850 and World War I. Prague, for instance, got a Czech majority government in 1861 (which in 1892 took down the bilingual street names), Tallinn an Estonian in 1904. In 1873 Hungarian Pest and largely German Buda and Obuda became (mainly) Hungarian Budapest.

Historically German Riga had got a Latvian plurality and an emergent Latvian bourgeoisie, paying for Art Nouveau villas. But the oligarchic city government was still mainly German, with a merchant of British descent elected mayor in 1901. That was the year of the city’s seventh centenary, and Latvian nationalists debated whether Latvians should boycott the celebrations of the alien city. Imperial configurations and the urban-rural ethnic divide made other centres of nationalism than the later capitals. Belarusian nationalism, both early 20th and late 20th, century emerged (after the 1905 upheavals in the Russian empire) in Wilna (Vilnius), and early 20th century Ukrainian nationalism had its centre in Lviv, as it has now again. But in the beginning of the century the city was Lemberg in Austrian Galicia, then to become Polish Lwów.

Several capitals got their current national ethnic character only through the world wars and the ethnic cleansings during or immediately after them. Early modern Vilna was killed off in the Holocaust, and Warsaw was physically destroyed, with its Jewish population. Today, bi-cultural Riga is the only really non-monocultural capital of the area, and not a very happy one – of Latvians and Russians. (Helsinki still has a small Swedish-

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23 E. Wynot Jr, Warsaw between the Wars: Profile of the Capital City in a Developing Land, 1918-1939, New York, Columbia University Press, 1983, pp. 39, 106-7. Jewish, as well as Polish, ethnic politics was a significant part of Warsaw city politics between the wars, and the various Jewish parties held a fifth or more of Council seats, op. cit. pp. 118ff.


speaking minority culture of some significance.) Very recent immigration has added some
new ethno-cultural diversity, e.g. to Athens.

The bitter ethnic inter-conflicts which accompanied Eastern European
nationalism have been best chronicled with respect to Prague, which does not necessarily
mean that they were sharper there than elsewhere. Collecting funds for and building a
Czech National Theatre 1868-1881 was a major national event in Prague, celebrated with huge
street manifestations. Above the curtain there was the inscription: “The Nation To Itself”. In
1882 the old German-speaking university was divided into two, one Czech, one German. A
national theatre was a major step towards a national capital of still dependent cities in most of
the Strip, from Zagreb to Tallinn, including Warsaw in the years of opening after 1905.

The fate of Mozart in Prague in 1913 is a good illustration of rival symbolic
nationalism. The Prague “German Society for the Promotion of German Science, Art, and
Literature” wanted to put up a statue of Mozart in front of the (German) Estates Theatre,
where Don Giovanni had its first performance in 1787. However, this required the acquisition
of a small piece of municipal land outside the theatre. The now Czech-dominated City
Council rejected the petition, officially for traffic reasons.

Brussels and Capitals for Europe

Choosing and shaping a capital of Europe has been a complicated and
protracted affair. As a project peacefully pursued by a number of sovereign nation-states,
Europe had to have a negotiated capital. No natural one had emerged and was imposable,
although de Gaulle may have thought otherwise. Models did exist, from the 16th-17 century
United Provinces of the Netherlands, from Switzerland, and from the European settler states
coming out of the British empire. The United Provinces had selected a modest, powerless
place, which they denied city rights but which had some symbolic historical significance, the
late medieval seat of the Counts of Holland, The Hague. The Swiss cantons chose Bern in
1848 because of its relative accessibility in the mountainous country. Where there were two
major blocs of interest, the settler states decided to build a new capital in between,
Washington, Ottawa, Canberra. There were also mobile solutions. Before 1848 the Swiss had
rotating assembly sites. The shortlived kingdom of Netherlands and Belgium had two seats of
government and court, between which the King and the royal government moved, The Hague

27 Cf. on Riga and (in some part) Tallinn in Mühle and op. cit.
29 Wynot op. cit. p.35
and Brussels. The Union of South Africa had (and still has) two major capitals far apart, the government in Boer Pretoria and the parliament in Anglo Cape Town, with the Supreme Court in a third city, Bloemfontein, once capital of the Boer Oranje Free State.

The European project has groped its way, by many trials and errors, among these models. It clearly had to be somewhere in the City Belt interface between Germanic and Romance Europe, between France and Germany. Building a new city in the old, densely urbanized area was not much of a serious option, although there was a proposal of that sort floating around for a while. A French painter and a German journalist were canvassing together for a place between the former Maginot and Siegfried military lines, Bourg Blanc/Weissburg in Alsace.

The Council of Europe opted for Strasbourg, in now French, previous German Alsace/Elsass. But that council was an inter-state body, of which Britain was a founding member, although it came to develop a powerful suprastate Court of Human Rights. The location of an embryonic potential European Union was another matter. For seating the High Authority of Coal and Steel Union there were several candidates from the Belt. At the time of decision, in July 1952, France, supported by Italy, officially fielded Strasbourg, the Dutch The Hague, and the Belgians Liège. The Christian Democratic government of Belgium, which was in the midst of a profound crisis – around the reign of King Leopold because of his accommodation to Nazi Germany – pitting Catholic, Royalist Flanders against largely secular and anti-Royalist Wallonia, pushed Liège rather than Brussels, presumably as a gesture of national reconciliation. Wallonian Liège was the centre of the Belgian steel industry, facing difficult restructurations, and it was also the centre of the large and militant anti-Royalist opposition. To non-Belgians, smallish, old industrial Liège had no urban attraction.

There was also the idea of locating the new European institutions in a special federal district of Europe. Jean Monnet was hoping for this, without pushing any particular site. The French Europeanist Foreign Minister Schuman launched Saarbrücken. But the fate of Saarland was then unsettled, French, German, or European? (In the end, a referendum in 1955 voted overwhelmingly for Germany, which ended all discussions of Saarbrücken as a federal district of Europe:) After some exhausting days of inconclusive negotiations, a Luxemburg offer provided a provisional solution for the High Authority, with an (occasional) parliamentary assembly in Strasbourg, where there was a sufficiently large plenary hall in the new building of the Council of Europe. The Court of Justice, the second continuous institution
of the union, was quietly installed in Luxemburg in the wake of the High Authority. In the longer run, the tranquil little capital of the Grand-Duchy of Luxemburg, where the lights went out early, as Jean Monnet points out in his memoirs - was clearly too small for the European ambitions.  

The 1957 Treaty of Rome broadened the European project, from coal and steel only to the economy as a whole. The EEC had the same institutional structure as the previous ECSC, a Council of Ministers, a Commission (replacing the former High Authority), a (largely advisory) Parliamentary Assembly, and a Court of Justice. For purposes of localization the key institution was again the Commission. Ten applications were submitted in 1958, four French ones – Strasbourg, Paris, Nice, and the suburban department of Oise east of Paris -, four Italian – Milan, Turin, Monza, and Stresa -, Luxemburg, and Brussels. Well before 1990s “globalization”, Europeanization spawned urban foreign policy independent of national governments. Brussels had strong inter-governmental support – as a metropolitan city of a small country –, for housing all the permanent institutions, and won the second parliamentary round before Strasbourg and Milan. However, the French government, now under de Gaulle, was not prepared to go along. Brussels was accepted as a provisional seat for the Commission, while Luxemburg and Strasbourg kept their judicial and parliamentary functions, respectively – for the time being.  

Provisional solutions have tended to prove enduring during the whole European project, and the Union still has a complex capital structure. The inter-governmental Council was for long itinerant, like the medieval courts, but has now a fixed headquarters in Brussels. The Presidency is rotating, and the powerful summits are mobile. Brussels is the seat of what in the Middle Ages was the Chancery, the actual political centre-point of the European realm, where the bureaucracy is, and where the Parliament often meets, and would like to meet always. Strasbourg also sees the Parliament regularly, under powerful French governmental protection. Luxemburg corresponds to Wetzlar or Speyer of the Holy Roman Empire, the judiciary capital, and has also become endowed with investment banking, statistics, and recurrent parliamentary sessions. Distances are short, but a nomadic active Parliament is, of  

course, not very practical. The “cultural capital of Europe” has become a roving roadshow, politically rational, but not the way a focus of cultural orientation and identity is made.\textsuperscript{33}

Socially and economically, Brussels has changed with its European role. By 1998, about a tenth of all employment in Brussels Capital Region was due to European or international institutions – exclusive of employees of transnational corporations. Brussels has become the favourite European location of US corporations. In the 1990s Brussels overtook Paris as the biggest host of international organizations. Media interest in the EU has given Brussels the second largest press corps in the world, after Washington.\textsuperscript{34} Brussels Capital Region has become the second most prosperous region of the EU in terms of GDP per capita, after Inner London, but ahead of Luxemburg and Ile de France, 235% of the EU25 average in 2002, and 172% of the second Belgian region (Antwerpen).\textsuperscript{35}

Economically and well as politically important as it is, its European capital function has a quite modest place in Brussels´ geology of representation. European institutions have now expanded into a whole quartier, of new buildings for the Council, the Parliament, parliamentary administration, and a refurbished, asbestos-cleaned Commission building, provided with new public transport access. On the other hand, this, of old fashionable neighbourhood, is off-centre to the representative layout – sideways to rue de la Loi heading to the Cinquanténaire, the Arch to the fiftieth anniversary of Belgium, off Parc de Bruxelles with the Royal palace on one side and Parliament on the other, and beyond the immense Palais de Justice, the Mont des Arts, the grand avenues. The layout of Brussels is still above all national – or pre-national, as the Grande Place.

As a sizeable bon vivant national capital, Brussels has seen no need for new representative buildings apart from those of political or administrative function. Luxemburg was, of course, in a different situation, and has recently invested heavily in representative culture, with a concert hall by Christian de Portzamparc and an art museum by I.M. Pei. European Brussels has not produced any iconic architecture, at most some large-scale standard modernism. This in contrast to Richard Rogers’ Court of Justice in Luxemburg and the Strasbourg Parliament by Architecture Studio. Brussels monumentality is still mainly

\textsuperscript{34} C. Elmhorn, \textit{Brussels A Reflexive World City}, Stockholm, Almqist & Wiksell Internatyional, 2001, pp 41ff, 68ff
\textsuperscript{35} Eurostat, Regional statistics, online at epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int
Leopoldian, although new European buildings are featuring an E in some for or other. Some Europeanization of names has taken place. The Leopold Quarter is now referred to as the European Quarter – though including the Leopold station -, while the Rond-Point de la Loi was named after Robert Schuman already in 1963. Berlaymont, the Commission building, however, was the name of the convent torn down for the new construction, and Justus Lipsius, the name of the new Council headquarters, was a Flemish 16th century classical philologist and political theorist, who had a street there. – Monumental projects for the Schumann Roundabout have been plenty, but have stayed unrealized.36

Brussels may very well be taken as a metaphor of the European Union project. The latter is being in the shadow of still over-towering national legacies. While they may be contained within the EU, ethnic divisions have not abated and disappeared. On the contrary they have become more salient again. Belgium may well have fallen apart altogether, between the Flemish and the Francophones, but for the EU. Brussels itself is very much part of this conflict, ignited in the 1960s, as a mainly French-speaking city surrounded by Flemish-speaking suburbs with contested boundaries, and a contested prize among the two communities. Therefore, the Flemish Region and the Flemish-Speaking Community have chosen to have their headquarters, and the former also its parliament, in Brussels. Furthermore, ethnicity in Europe is no longer only the old divisions. About one of eight inhabitants of Brussels are “extra-communitarian”.

European Brussels has been built by political stealth and horse-trading, skilfully using and generously paying private capital interests. Most telling is the European Parliament building, which given the uncertainty of its location and the overt opposition of France and Luxemburg, could not officially start as such. Instead, it was launched, in 1987, as an “International Congress Centre”, financed by private investors given underhand guarantees. It met with vociferous local opposition, but it went through, to completion in 1995.37 Beneath the rhetoric, this, it may be argued, has been also a manner of constructing the EU.

Located within the historical weak states-strong cities belt of Europe, and on the cleavage line of one of the two main cultural divides of Western Europe, between the Germanic and the Latin – and not far from the second, between Catholicism and Protestantism – Brussels is an excellent site for a Western European Union capital in terms of balance and

36 Derom op. cit. pp. 264-5.
fairness. – If the EU were to divide, like the Roman Empire, Vienna would be the most logical equivalent of Constantinople.

However, identities are made of other stuff. As Cavour said in the 1860s debate about the Italian capital: “The question of capital is not decided ... by strategic reasons. ... The choice of capital is determined by great moral reasons. It is the sentiment of the people which decides questions pertinent to it.”38 Well, popular sentiment had nothing to do with the European choice of Brussels. Forty years after the Treaty of Rome Brussels remains a second tier European city. Peter Taylor ranks it seventh in Europe in terms of “world connectivity”, a league led by London and Paris. Brussels in Europe has the same rank as Washington D.C. in USA.39 Zaventem, Brussels airport, was only number 18 among European airports with respect to the number of passengers, just after Dublin and Stockholm-Arlanda.40

In 1912, a Walloon MP told the new King about the situation in Belgium: “There are Flemings and Walloons in Belgium, but, Your Majesty, there are no Belgians. ... A second sort of Belgians has been formed in the country, primarily in Brussels. But it is in fact of little interest. ... This population of the capital is not a people: it is an agglomeration of mixed-bloods [métis].”41 The Walloon politician turned out prescient. Brussels is the capital of a failed nation-state. It is a functional European capital, but its contribution to European identity is confined to its rally of bureaucratic elites and lobbyists. So far, the city of Brussels has made little effort to resemble the role of Washington: “When Americans make the pilgrimage to Washington they are trying to grasp the nation in its totality”, a contemporary American analyst has said.42 European Brussels rather seems to have, in a much lower key, the same distant ambivalence to European citizens that it has to both Flemings and Walloons, according to the Flemish writer Stefan Hertmans: “Brussels is nobody’s, and everybody’s”43.

38 Djament op. cit. p.372 (my translation from Italian).
40 Eurostat, Statistics in focus : Transport .On line at epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int