I. A BLUEPRINT FOR A EUROPEAN SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY

The Council of Europe's founders hoped to establish, and then strengthen, peaceful coexistence among the various states and peoples of Europe. References to a community spirit did not betoken the establishment of a community in the true sense, but rather a union of differences; not forced unification, but free accession; not standardisation, but the combining of identities, forms of expression and various goals. These are all aspects that distinguish the European blueprint for union from a community devoid of any contract, united around beliefs or particular customs, or subject to common rules.

This blueprint targets a dual ideal. On the one hand, "the Community", the most balanced form of "Us", is also, for this very reason, the most stable, common form",[1] on the other, the community is "founded on the equality and solidarity of the peoples composing it".[2] Indeed the term "common", which comes from the Latin *communis*, means "belonging to [or] open to ... the public at large".[3]

Among Europeans and in the minds of its promoters, the idea of community signifies a desire for fraternity, freedom and responsibility, but also, to borrow the distinction made by Tönnies,"[4] for society, that is, an organised unit founded on a contract *(Gesellschaft)* as opposed to *(Gemeinschaft)*. The paradox of the European blueprint is that it brings together distinct societies, including states and communities such as nations, minorities and religions; it seeks to build a European society founded on economic relations, laws, regulations, institutions and electoral systems and, at the same time, to give it a sense of mutual trust and recognition that is unique to communities. Is the Council of Europe at the centre of this paradox? Is it a participant in this paradox? If so, would that thwart its goal of ensuring communication and unity among Europeans?

1. G. Gurvitch, *Vocabulaire actuel de la sociologie*, PUF, Paris, 1962, p. 140.
2. 1958 French Constitution, Article 1.
3. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, Oxford, 1998, p. 370.
4. F. Tönnies, *Community and Society*, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Some observers and analysts take the view that human society holds together thanks to various structures and forces covered by the term "social capital". Forging ties and instigating dialogue in the hope of reducing the risks of conflict cannot be achieved by decree, but must take place gradually. On what foundations? On the one hand, we have history and its painful memories, with traces of former conflicts and tensions between different identities, symbolic territories and heritages. On the other, we have cultural, spiritual and philosophical values and movements that unite Europeans, and creative interactions in centres of culture and innovation, the product of which spreads beyond political boundaries and often provides common references. Perhaps this apparently paradoxical combination is in fact a fabulous asset.

If it is possible to speak of social capital in connection with societies, perhaps a social capital could also be identified at the European level. Indeed, surely the work carried out by the Council of Europe and its partners effectively enhances this capital?

According to Putnam, social capital is founded on the networks, rules and trust that foster co-ordination and co-operation on the basis of a common good.[1] A high level of social capital increases the level of well-being and understanding among members of the community.

For his part, Bourdieu considers social capital as:

> all the existing or potential resources associated with the possession of a sustainable network of more or less institutionalised relationships characterised by mutual understanding and recognition; or, in other words, with the sense of belonging to a group. It is a set of agencies that not only possess common properties (able to be perceived by the observer, others and themselves), but are also united by valuable ongoing bonds.[2]

According to Coleman, social capital lies in the format of relationships between members, and implies obligations, expectations, information channels and social rules. Two relevant findings are worthy of note: communities that raise their social capital are more open to social innovation; and more frequent exchanges based chiefly on trust also give rise to greater innovation, which in turn increases the social capital.

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1. R. D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993, p. 34.
2. P. Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique, précédée de trois études d'ethnologie kabyle*, Editions Droz, Geneva, 1972, p. 47 (editor's translation).

Putnam sees participation in civic activities (voting, discussions, reading newspapers and taking part in meetings and associations) as seeming to play a positive role in increasing social capital. Brenhm and Rahn have demonstrated the importance of reciprocal relationships and trust in others building up such capital, while, according to Bélanger, Sullivan and Sévigny:

> It is initially at the local level that social networks with common goals can generate other social networks. Social capital arises in circumstances conducive to the forging of ties between individuals, giving them the power to develop and sustain social relations. The role played by the State and by institutions must assist in bringing about such circumstances, fostering them rather than attempting to create social capital directly.[1]

According to these authors, a society with a high social capital is less confrontational and more creative, affording its members a better quality of life. Does the Council of Europe's work create social capital at the European level? What are the components of that capital when the aim is to develop a common blueprint for Europe as a whole, but also for European cities, neighbourhoods and regions? The six main components would appear to be as follows:

– centres of interaction, socialisation and creative activity;
– networks linking those centres together;
– mediation;
– historical references;
– planning for the future in the blueprint itself and through its dissemination;
– a communication system.

All the activities undertaken by the Council may be analysed according to these parameters.

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1. J-P Bélanger, R. Sullivan, B. Sévigny, *Capital social, développement communautaire et santé publique*, Editions ASPQ, Montreal, 2000.