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# IDENTITY IN THE AGE OF UNCERTAINTY

## THE EMERGENCE OF EUROPEAN CHARACTER AT SEVILLE EXPO 92

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*ABSTRACT - This paper argues that there is a connection between the phenomenon of World Expositions and the construction of multiple identities. Seville '92, the first universal exposition after Osaka '70, was promoted as an exceptional opportunity for Spain to realize its longstanding ambition of a "bridge between America and Europe." Many nations emphasized the historical connections with other countries, whereas others remained cautiously bent to literal interpretations of their tradition, but all of them celebrated at the same time national identities in grandiose ways and a global culture with the fading away of national frontiers. Also, the exposition masterplan relied on an imagery that reinforced place identity: a huge program of urban development was meant to create legible images that evoked similar feelings on dissimilar audiences.*

*The year 1992 marked the significant emergence of the European Union. The EU pavilion at Expo '92 provided an image of itself as a one whole country, a super-nation rather than supra-nation with clear figures, cities, economic objectives in a low-profile but pervasive rationale based on the recognition of its own identity. Designed by Karsten Krebs, the only visible parts of the pavilion were its iconic 50-meter steel tower decorated with the member states flags and twelve 31-meter towers representing the twelve countries.*

*While historically expositions helped leveling class differences contributing in creating an identity with own self-image for a rising middle class, this story tells how the sense of world fairs is able to evolve and adapt quickly. From grand narrative of national progress, they can now legitimate supra-national values through history storytelling, tradition re-invention and symbolic re-construction of a new centrality in a global world.*

*At length, the emergence of the EU in 1992 was the peacekeeper of the exposition, which can be considered a starting point to understand the renewed interest of the 21st century towards the phenomenon.*

**Keywords** – European Community, information society, universal expositions, placemaking, postmodern.

Space rockets, lasers, holograms and computers, tons of concrete and glass, trains in the air, pavilions of the future, three-dimension movies, bio climatic areas, a united Europe and religious tolerance – that's what the future looked like in the Spanish summer of 1992, more than 25 years ago, where Expo 92 was taking place themed "The Age of Discoveries" celebrating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of the Americas. In short, an oasis of modernity with the historic town of Seville in the background, celebrating the past glories of the Spanish Empire. Meanwhile, during those same months, the tourist shops along Avenida de la Constitucion – the main paseo in Seville's historic center – were still selling Franco-era postcards featuring flamenco dancers stomping and posing among flowerpots in Andalusian patios in psychedelic enhanced colored dresses from the 60s and 70s. With the slogan "Spain is different," the postcards pictured an image of Spain as unique in respect to European countries whose old stereotypes of bullfighting and flamenco remained the bread and butter of Spanish identity and continued to define the interactions between the visitors and the visited. This asymmetry of culture and tradition on one hand and technological development on the other puts us in front of the clash of two opposing stereotypes at which one wonders what is cliché and what is essence, that of a fiery land of sun, bulls and Carmen or that of a modern, even futurist nation at the forefront of technology with a central position in a rising unified Europe?

The second element at the basis of this investigation in fact, is the geopolitical situation of individual European countries on the eve of the completion of the frontier-free "Common Market" at the end of 1992 and the entry into force in 1993 of the new Treaty on Political Union and Economic and Monetary Union agreed between the Twelve Countries in December 1991 at Maastricht. During the previous years in fact, Europe's shape had changed dramatically. With the death of dictator Francisco Franco in 1975 and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy that finally brought elections and the 1978 Constitution, Spain was officially transitioning to democracy and was eager to hold a place in democratic Europe. An important step in this process – that will also play a major role in the backing of the 1992 Expo – was the victory of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) in 1982 general election and the joining of the Community in 1986. Next, a series of civil unrest in Eastern Europe – Poland, Hungary and the Velvet Revolution that led to the birth of the Slovakia and Czech Republic – to the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 when East Germany was welcomed into the Community as part of a reunited Germany. In such context, an appointed European Commission and of the twelve Member States was created to highlight the presence of the European Community as such at the Seville World Fair sustaining what was called "a momentous step for the Europe of Twelve." <sup>1</sup> in the words of Mr Jean Dondelinger, Commissioner General for the European pavilion. Its representation at Expo 92 is relevant in this study because, nor a corporation nor a nation-state, the EU pavilion provided an image of itself as a one whole country. With its population figures, frontiers, capital city, and with clear economic and monetary

objectives, “this was a super-nation rather than supra-nation, providing an umbrella and a low-profile but pervasive rational for the centrality of other European states.”<sup>2</sup>

This paper in fact, argues about a connection between great events like Universal Expositions and identity-making with the aim of verifying under which conditions such events create one or plural identities, and for whom this or these identities hold true across time and space. There is an ironic contradiction in fact, between the identities Expos are trying to encompass and their physical projects. In theory, World Fairs are platforms for the discussion of global issues’ potential solutions, recent innovations and technologies, progress. By employing the broad scope of architecture and using buildings as a medium of communication, they explore not simply aesthetic notions but also political, humanitarian, technological and even religious ones. In truth, Expos do not engage with challenge and discipline of solving real problems and going beyond their triviality, short-term vision and no viable long-term strategies.

## Setting The Fair Ground: Placemaking

From an all-round perspective, the Seville exposition conveyed a threefold message. The first, with a municipal payoff in the urban planning of a new neighborhood in the city of Seville. The second to be set within a regional and national scale regarding the prestige of Andalusia and Spain within the new European scenario. The third with a global vision that, while celebrating the 500 anniversary of the Columbus endeavor, encompasses a future made of networks, technological supremacy and multinational faithfulness. Throughout these three positions, post modern architectures were symbolically and physically outlining the contours of Expo 92: both the masterplan and the pavilions were building their own universe of reference via images and the most explicit forms of futurology all performing technological dependence as the cipher for evolution from past to future.

The first candidate as Expo Commissioner General was world-wide known architect Ricardo Bofill, a Catalan whose candidacy was labeled incompatible with Andalusian pride. In November 1984, Andalusian law professor Manuel Olivencia Ruiz<sup>3</sup> was appointed Commissioner and launched in 1986 an international competition by invitation to define the general master plan of expo. From day one the site chosen to host the fair was the Cartuja Island, a 530-acre teardrop-shaped island northwest of the historic town, artificially created at the beginning of the twentieth century with the dual intention to enlarge the city’s port and to avoid the constant threat of flooding from Guadalquivir, the river that crosses Seville north to south.<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact, implementing infrastructure became fundamentally intertwined with the expo purposes: six bridges were built (Alamo, Barqueta, Cartuja footbridge, Cristo de la Expiration, Fifth Centenary and Las Delicias), the airport was added with a new terminal designed by Rafael Moneo; the old train tracks running on the banks of the Guadalquivir were dismissed and the Santa Justa station by Cruz and Ortiz built in the eastern part of the city.

From the master plan competition emerged two ex aequo winning projects: Emilio Ambasz from New York and Spanish architect Fernàndez Ordonez. Ambasz’s proposal was so sustainable and low-infrastructure that couldn’t possibly be linked to a universal exposition. Most pavilions would be placed on floating barges in three lagoons carved out of the artificial bed of the Guadalquivir and multiple entrances would connect the city and the fair via vaporetta. At the end of the expo the pavilions would “sail” away except few ones remodeled for the University of Seville.<sup>5</sup> Seville would gain a landscaped park complementing, rather than challenging, its historic urban center. Also, this solution resonated with the theme of the fair symbolizing and reviving water, the first communication means between Spain and America. The second winning project focused on a Cartesian grid of intersecting avenues with bridges, monorails and infrastructures that would be more appealing both to public opinion and political leaders. The final result was a strictly zoned master plan combining the two winning projects and assembled by architect Julio Cano Lasso: the island was divided in a northern section turned into park and cut off via a new to-be-built expressway, a southern portion with the St. Maria de las Cuevas Monastery<sup>6</sup> – where Columbus had spent month planning his trip to the Indies – hosting more permanent structures like the Triana tower, the Discovery and the Andalusia pavilions, and the central part with the new urbanization for the expo. The expo itself was divided in two main zones through a north-south axis (*Camino de los Descubrimiento*, Discovery Av.) that on its west side was cut by several avenues hosting international and theme pavilions and on its east side would feature a large pond (*Lago de Espana*) for the Spanish regional pavilions.

Undoubtedly, infrastructure has always been an instrument of political propaganda that is able to feed the public opinion for a while and divert from other significant issues happening concurrently. I do not see Universal Expositions as the greatest invention since the Roman Arch, from their very beginning in fact, they have been settled by political and economic powers leading nations and markets. They are examples of top-down developments. The specific visual images that world fairs provide, the use of rhetorical strategies, imposed circulation or key positions in the plan create legible images that resonates both on a “traditional” city dweller and on a global one, of different cultures, ethnicities and habits. In this sense they provide reassurance, at least in the immediacy, and help minimize the feelings of complexities and anxieties of the visual chaos of the modern city. They are a kind of safe heaven, a refuge like no other, where the global can meet the local in an encounter that is supposedly informing a new identity of place.

The second consideration I'd like to make is that by no means expositions were made to be profitable events. An analysis of the financial reports shows how cities have invariably struggled to raise from the burden of the expenses sustained.<sup>7</sup> They had difficulties in bringing to new life the clustered vacant areas; both when trying to establish businesses or technological parks and when trying to restore natural environment. If they are not-for-profit events then, we could speculate about their final purpose. I argue there is a philosophical theme in them, that has to do with the fact that they represent a very palatable container for the delivery of a content which is not yet known. Nowadays World Expos happen every 5 years. This time span is a distinctive trait but also quite insubstantial as it doesn't guarantee a legacy, it only imposes to say something before anyone knows what and how to say it.

## In Search For International Prestige

Passing on to the national level, the expo leadership's intentions were to reverse foreign misinterpretations of Spain and produce a more confident and uplifting perception of the nation for Spaniards themselves, to redefine their collective identity and self-esteem within the boundless frontiers of internationalism. The fair would provide a chance to transform Andalusia into a technologically advanced region, the "California of Europe,"<sup>8</sup> and recognize Spain as an infra-structurally mature country compared to European powers like France and Britain which were planning the Channel tunnel in those years. The first instances in favor of an international Spanish celebration date back to May 1976, during king Juan Carlos' official visit to Santo Domingo and only months after dictator Franco's death, hailing the bonds between Spain and Latin America.<sup>9</sup> Although the king never literally "announce a Universal Exposition," it would uplift the exposition foundation, advance liberal instances and cover the politically troubled affair of the enterprise. Only in December 1982, Seville was officially appointed to host the universal exposition of 1992.

Two main factors secured the Expo affair. The first one was the government support, patronized through the Office of the Commissioner General headed by Olivencia and individuals like diplomat and Seville born Prado y Colon.<sup>10</sup> The second factor was the victory of the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) in the national election of 1982. The party initially seized the exposition with high skepticism: not only it was related to the conservative agenda of the monarchy, but it was also reminiscent of Spain's past imperialism in fact, most Sevillanos remembered the Ibero-American exposition of 1929 as a financial disaster and a tool to sustain the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. When criticism begun to rise for a general delay on the schedule, the Socialists stated that the whole project was missing an idea martiz that would provide a rationale for the pageantry. At this point, a second office was created, the State Society for the Universal Exposition, under the leadership of the Socialist Party that would have dealt with the operative activities of the exposition, employing experts in the various fields to develop the sub-themes contents. While the Office of the Commissioner General was amply delimited in the following months – controlling the expo cultural program, ceremonies and the theme pavilions – the State Society saw its charges and authority broadly expanded to become a huge operative arm with thousands of employees and plenty of resources, with offices on the exposition's ground. Eventually the Socialists took over the expo and used it to enforce their political and territorial power,<sup>11</sup> in an unexpected dualism between the State and the Party control. Indeed, the disproportion of means between the two institutions poisoned their interactions, Expo was no longer the communal objective: on one side the architecture of pavilions and on the other their contents, which would remain deliberately disconnected.

## The Five-Hundred Years Excuse

On a global scale, the Expo's pursuit was to strengthen ties between Spain and Latin American countries, and ultimately Europe and the Americas, providing a fresh identity to a more cohesive and newly unified Europe. Historically, Seville was the city from where Columbus sailed off to the Indies, and with more ties than any other Spanish city with Latin America. Thanks to the navigability of the Guadalquivir, the port of Seville had become the center of Spanish trade with the Mediterranean since the 13th century and had retained its monopoly until 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, across the fair, not only the conflicts about values, religions and identity, but also the century-old legitimating process of the horrors and crimes committed by the Europeans against the Native Americans were carefully excluded and systematically abolished. Green canopies hanging all over the avenues, fountains, sprinklers, the biosphere and bioclimatic towers that saturated the air with vaporized water to soften the midsummer Spanish heat would provide an identity of dull uniformity. De facto, while the instances of original colonialism of the conquistadors were being forgot, a reality of multinational technological dependence was evidently perceptible. In fact, as Winona LaDuke argues in her works, within the expo boundaries Christopher Columbus had been lost and the age of discovery may be confused with the age of colonialism, pleading that "to celebrate Columbus is to congratulate the process and history of the invasion."<sup>12</sup> Major expression of this plain contradiction were national pavilions that celebrated both domestic histories and the global culture with the fathering away of national frontiers.

Many pavilions remained cautiously bend to literal interpretations of their tradition, like the Chilean pavilion with its iceberg fragment shipped from the Antarctic and returned once the expo closed, the Saudi pavilion with desert sand, the Norwegian with walls of the Nordic ice, New Zealand reproducing a gigantic portion of rocks framed in its walls, a newly reunited Germany with a four meter long section of the Berlin Wall, or the Australian Pavilion displaying a portion of the Great Barrier Reef.

Some nations decided to emphasize the historical connections with other countries. For instance, Israel self-identified as a melting-pot country where Jews, Christians and Muslims had hailed from forty different nations. Mexico, quite

literally affirmed its identity as a convergence of many diverse influences featuring a giant concrete “X” in its façade, also addressing the silent pronunciation of the letter x in its name; Morocco a melting-pot of many civilizations, Papua New Guinea emphasized its 850 different languages. Swiss’ exhibition provocatively affirmed “Switzerland does not exist,” Japan, with its pavilion designed by Tadao Ando, was the world’s largest wooden construction and it aimed at showing Japan’s encompassing tradition from origami to laser art.

Interestingly, the presence of South-American countries was very low and debated. Faced with the high costs of construction and distant location, along with a perception of continuity with European colonialism, one after the other they withdrew their presence. Being this unacceptable given the celebration theme, the expo leadership decided to create a huge super-pavilion to host most of the Latino countries. The spatial layout reinforced the narrative of Spain as the center of the western world. Spain held a central position on Avenida de Europa at the end of the Camino de los Descubrimiento, between the Spanish regions and the Latin American countries. Quite naively, the other non-European superpowers hold a position according to their political or economic prestige and, naturally, to the amount of money infused in the allotment and construction of their own pavilions. Japan, Russia, US, oil producer Venezuela and Saudi Arabia had large plots but suburban positions. While Mexico was opposite to Spain in the heart of the exposition, since its participation had turned fundamental to assure the presence of other South-American countries.

## Setting The Fair Cultural Context: Postmodernity

If this open field of styles, montages, colors and shapes may provide an image of blurred identities coming from nations, it is also capital at this point to set the Exposition in the post-modern world of 1992. Postmodernity was a new freespace contrasting the rigid orthodoxy of modernity, it was a new reading on History freed of any finality and on the contrary open to interferences, where different worldviews can coexist with no suffering and where progress was no longer an ascending line inevitably leading to better life quality. It is a world where the “truth” of the scientist is different from the “truth” of the artist or that of the priest, and still all of them hold true at once. As a consequence, the concept of “originality” slowly disappears and Postmodernity’s values oscillate and eventually shift to being mere “coordinates” along which we move freely. But by accepting potentially any position, Postmodernism ends up in potentially delegitimizing all of them. And in a general absence of reliable criteria – aesthetic, artistic, social – it becomes a world which ultimately refuses to orient identity.

Postmodernity interestingly coincides also with the rise of the Information Age, an essentially capitalist system dominated by information technology, based on what sociologist Manuel Castells calls “Space of Flow” in opposition to traditional capitalist “Space of Places.” This means that traditional “places” give way to “networks” and as the networks come to govern, capital flows globally. Hence, capitalism has ceased to be based on Nation-States but has become disorganized globally. This materializes in the form of a new kind of urban space that develops in different social and geographical contexts that is the city, or the megacity, where the concentration of power and wealth shifts towards those urban agglomerations that are smart enough to obtain certain opportunities.

The rise of the Information Age and network society takes full advantage of the features of world fairs, being expos organized since the beginning through a network system that concentrates power and prestige in one time and place, demanding though that the same power necessarily shifts to the next event passing the baton to another city. With the rise of a techno-corporate reality that is either very local or totally global via the network, the traditional capitalist class is turned into a faceless collective capitalist. It is clear how this is a perfect timing for the construction of a new identity that works two ways on a civic and international scenario that is in apparent competition with the traditional idea of the nation-state.

## The European Affair

Similarly, a rising Europe needed to create its own renewed identity, and more importantly to show itself as a tangible entity to the millions of citizens whose consensus and approval would turn essential in the following years. The Community – as the European Union was mainly called at the time – was eager to use this symbolic occasion as a huge communication operation, bearing the message of unity in diversity and at the same time serving as a landmark at the centre of the Community group. The efforts and money infused in the expo resulted in a combination of outcomes: a site and a pavilion unquestionably the most visible sign of participation, the future Center for Andalusian businesses or ACP pavilion and the European gastronomy pavilion, besides contributing to the six months cultural program.

The site, designed by Franco-German group of architects Hennin-Normier and Lippsmeier&Partners, coincided with one of the main arteries of the plan – Avenida de Europa – around which were symbolically and physically grouped all the twelve Member States, with Spain at one end, UK and a united Germany at the other, and in order France, Portugal, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Greece, Finland, Denmark and Luxemburg along the sides.

The architectural design of the pavilion itself was the work of German architect and Professor Karsten Krebs, who was selected in a Communitywide competition by a jury chaired by Mr Jean Dondelinger, Commissioner General for the Seville World Fair. Designed to highlight the Community identity, it was a single entity comprising twelve 31-meter towers symbolizing the twelve Member States and a semi-transparent conical tower 50 meters high decorated with a pattern based on colors featuring the flags of the Member States. These structures were linked together through tends

and sails evoking the interdependence of the Community countries. On the grounds, an extensive garden with pools and color interplay between soil and vegetation were included. The idea of the cone-shape towers was inspired by the towers of the monastery of La Cartuja few hundred meters apart, and with its powerful imagery the European presence clarified its self-determination to be the beacon and the backbone of the exposition.

The exhibition itself extended entirely underground, in a 9000 m<sup>2</sup> open space that worked as an encompassing yet invisible structure, metaphorically including the above twelve European countries stretched along the Avenida de Europa.

The exhibit inside the pavilion was entitled “From Renaissance Europe to the Renaissance of Europe” and placed the European Community in a historical context. It took the year 1492 as the taking off of Europe to enlist the striking developments of its civilizations represented by scientists, travelers, inventors, the birth of the printing press and the banking institutions. The exhibition didn’t go into detail but wanted to

“evoke the overall picture by broad brush strokes, relying largely on stage design techniques, lighting effects and music. The exhibition is rounded off by an audiovisual display devoted principally to the Community in the future: it will sketch out the broad lines of possible political and economic developments in Europe and will also show some of the major European scientific and technological achievements which will strongly influence tomorrow's Europe.”<sup>13</sup>

The narrative went on including - unlike the other exhibitions - the many endless conflicts that affected Europe throughout the centuries up to the devastation of World War II. The direct link between the origin of the European Community and the urgency to halt this murderous time projected a future of tolerance and harmony. In an environment with integrated fifteenth century harpsichords sounds into modern synthesizers, the public walked around wooden models, glass display tables and multiple screen videos. The careful staging of the single elements was possible thanks to music composers, art experts, historians, designers and engineers united to produce an original composition that defined the identity of Europe. Not only Europe was now and for the first time a tangible reality, but it was the result of cooperation and of a sharing faith in “systems of organization and government in which man is at the centre.”<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, the average visitor was reassured on the principal goals of the Community's foundation, that is “to reconcile age old foes in a peaceful economic endeavor - the ‘Common Market,’” and would thus look at “the Community as one of the major innovations of the twentieth century.”<sup>15</sup>

But Europe was in the limelight also for providing high-definition television its first successful exposure through the Retelevision Pavilion.<sup>16</sup> In fact, presenting European HDTV (high definition television) to the widest possible audience at the Seville Expo was one of the objective of an ambitious project put forward by the European Commission aimed at the construction of a unified HDTV based on European know-how. Vision 1250,<sup>17</sup> a European consortium and one of the first European Economic Interest Groupings (EEIGs), set up and managed both fixed and mobile HDTV facilities on show in all the pavilions on the Avenida de Europa, to be made available to TV and audio-visual professionals and broadcasters in the European Community. In the end, there were showings of films, video program entitled "Europe rediscovered or the return of Columbus," broadcasts covering events at the Fair and elsewhere, such as the Olympic Games in Barcelona (taking place concurrently), the Wimbledon and French Open tennis tournaments, making a total of 3,600 hours broadcast on this new “European Network” produced to the high-definition standard by the European Commission.

The Seville 1992 Expo was the first of its kind to receive worldwide television coverage. A pre-expo TV game show offered trips to visit the construction site, popular music concerts and another events were highly advertised, and ceremonies and VIP visits were systematically covered. This was the result of the dramatic change that television had brought in the previous decade: the key for success of the Los Angeles Olympic Games of 1984 was mainly based on the broadcast rights fees paid by NBC.<sup>18</sup> Despite Expos and Olympics share many characteristic – of size above all – expositions do not reach a comparable level of interest in the public opinion. A lack of competition, an higher demand for sector-based domains, the specialization of the market, diminish the possible economic profits of exhibitions.

Also, the European gastronomy pavilion, financed from the funds for promoting olive oil consumption, provided a showcase for the variety and wealth of European agricultural products and offered visitors a panoramic view of the gastronomic traditions of the different regions of Europe by means of information stands, displays and a restaurant. An International Gastronomy Congress took place, specializing in food and a world nutritionists conference on the "Mediterranean Diet."

Finally, the European Community also provided financial backing for the participation of 34 African countries as part of its “measures to assist developing countries.”<sup>19</sup> It also provided support for the organization of training sessions and seminars on the development of trade relations in the field of tourism and small businesses, contributing to the implementation of a program to promote tourism in the Pacific, and to support exports.

To conclude, we can say that Europe was revealing its identity at this international gathering as the result of ancient culture and modern technology. But it is interesting to see how the two were related: the majority of exhibits in fact, used simulation technologies to set the cultural background of a unified Europe. This had the vantage of not requiring a social context for the delivery of a content that had to be generic and suitable for all. While boosting participation, facilitating relations among visitors, increasing data absorption, and making culture more viable, extra technology

promoted also diversity and multiculturalism. It was, in truth, the beginning of the exponential growth of the public internet which, in the 90s, was gathering greater amounts of online information, knowledge, commerce, entertainment and social networking.

## Techno-Corporate Realities

The use of technology as identity-making was exceeding European means. Within the boundaries of Expo 92 in fact, the most explicit forms of futurology were assured by corporate pavilions. Fujitsu, Siemens and Rank Xerox were the largest multinationals on the site. Presented as “leaders in the field of technology,” their presence was considered as necessary as that of Latin America’s countries, and Olivencia’s office had firmly worked to secure their participation. This allowed corporations to enfranchise from their countries of origin (although it has been noted how Siemens pavilion was opposite to Germany, Rank Xerox in front of the United States and Fujitsu close to Japan),<sup>20</sup> and self-present as neutral and unbiased organizations committed to the benefit of humanity in general through the union of art, science and technique. The basic elements of all these pavilions were videos, cinematic devices, holograms, Imax and virtual reality. They often included cinemas, theaters, auditoriums and open-air areas where performances were staged to promote social encounter. Often, the pavilions’ exhibitions ended with films featuring and summing up the content of the display. “Although we cannot predict the future, we can invent it,”<sup>21</sup> was the slogan of the Siemens pavilion, whose exhibition “Evolutionary Network” was aimed at tracing technological development using the analogy of biological evolution in Nature. The same concepts resounded in the Fujitsu’s 3-D spherical cinema pavilion and in the hollow black and white parallelepiped of Rank Xerox, where you could do yourself a full color photocopy. This one, as the official supplier of the Expo computer systems, displayed an extensive account of the history of documentation. As a primary means of communication and preservation, the written world is intrinsic with human evolution in any social, cultural, scientific field of its existence. With a forward-looking view towards a bright future, the storage of past documents, messages, papers - in a word the storage of knowledge - was secured for future generations. The collaboration of the corporation extended throughout the fabric of Expo as many key services, infrastructure, buildings and cultural and technological presentations had been made possible by the support of those companies. Being technology “culturally neutral,” it works for the advancement of the human race devoid of any national, identitarian or cultural mark. Clearly, in this “deterritorialized” ground, the concept of nation-state becomes pleonastic, giving way to the alien circuits of over-national corporations.

While the discourse for the European Union does not overlap with that of the Corporations, it goes with the same state of mind, that of providing the right settings for life and costumes featured in a pluralist society dominated by information technology. I think using architecture as a metaphor to explain the idea of identity is functional to the aim of this paper.

The European pavilion, with its visible and homogeneous character, was in true form the paraphrase of a cooperation between the twelve member states and the Community Institutions that had successfully worked together around a building in the Avenida de Europa with “good will on all sides.”<sup>22</sup> It was signature building that turns context into a visual game, instead of an accommodation with history and society. Its contextual solutions – i.e. the twelve towers mimicking the towers of the Cartuja monastery – revealed as unreal and irrelevant as the identity they were trying to design. Postmodernism brought this kind of facile eclecticism to enormous success, providing buildings and institutions with instant images which are generally praised and accepted as the real thing but only good to convey temporary solution to long-standing problems. The building itself becomes an exhibition object. But there is something flat about it, lacking in body and confidence, that eventually evaporates. Likewise, that search for identity doesn’t bring any process of analysis and synthesis, on the contrary it is pure wish, invention, lifestyle simulation or popular market production.

The additional problem in Seville was that the European pavilion had been selected in the first place because it “could be left in place afterwards [...] thus serving as a permanent reminder of the Community.”<sup>23</sup> And a huge percentage of the pavilions was built to remain and be converted after the expo closed its gates. Today the area is called Cartuja 93, which is a thriving science and education park, it’s deserted on weekends and evenings, lending it a post-apocalyptic science fiction atmosphere. The reuse is still very limited, not just because the pavilions are in part private, in part public and partially owned by multinationals, but because it only channels services and businesses that are inhomogeneous, though much of the surface still remain in a state of abandon. The pavilion of Chile is abandoned, as well as the Finland pavilion, the Hungary one which was also declared a building of cultural interest but is in ruins due to legal procedures, the huge Spain pavilion; not to forget the abandoned Discovery Channel, many of the open-air theaters, the monorail stations across the area, other steel structures used for plant irrigation in the various Avenidas, as well as the structure for spraying nebulized water to cool the summer heat. The pavilions in use today are the Italy and France, which hosts multinational corporations, the Navigation Pavilion now houses a museum dedicated to oceanic exploration, the Andalusia building with its RTVA headquarters, the African one hosting the confederation of regional small business or the Plaza de America that now belongs to the School of Engineering of the University of Seville.

## Conclusion: What Identity?

World expos are truly extravagant events. They have been compared to anything from “Disneyland,” to “vanity fairs,” “tourist information show,” to “architecture freak show,” and also manifestations of colonial domination, class, race superiority, or gender discrimination.<sup>24</sup> They were born out of the illuministic view of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and were an animating force of the Industrial Age with a protestant work ethic, but interestingly they were able to adapt quickly to romantic, positivist, modern instances and finally informational ones, opening up to the third millennium. No wonder then, that we expect world exposition to help define an identity, to create an image, a place, a world. But they went from world of make-believe where fairgoers experienced firsthand the newest human achievements and feel infused with a new sense of identity, to being highly mediated form of experience, that follow rather than guide, the demands of a standardized consumer culture.

The problem in 1992 was that this “pop landscape” was raised to the cult status. It provided a stamp of approval to pseudo-architectures that are blatantly unreal, even offering as a model for future buildings. Truth is that these theatrical gestures are no more than cardboard cutouts, paper-thin pretensions that are inept in scale and detail. And the final effect is that of a joke being played on whatever purpose they pretended to fulfill. They conform to the rhetoric of the time, and adapt very comfortably across time and space. Not only they deny the essence of architecture, but also deceive the essence of identity. In fact, we assist at an absolute confluence of false and real identity. On the fair grounds, it was difficult to discern reality from representation, where holograms and video projections alternated with visits by dignitaries and celebrities, where monumental symbolic buildings did nothing to elevate the viewer’s sense of self and place, where being “off-set” was equal to being “on-set.” The visitor, engaged in the process of acquiring data and drawing analogies, could easily confuse knowledge with participation.

The identity built in essence, didn’t speak to the mind and soul, nor to the individual nor to society as a whole. It was trivial identity, which is a replacement – if not denial – of identity and makes that purpose incredibly difficult to hold true. Referring back to the identity of the European pavilion, with its towers and underground display, it was probably a simplistic approach to complicated process, which still today carries contested and controversial issues. While far from denying the existence of a European identity, that rushed attitude failed to acknowledge many factors and conditions. If we traced a summary of the lesson learnt during the summer of 1992, it could be synthesized in the notion of the encounter. Only after the 1492 enterprise, a completely European affair, the journey towards a truly integrated, collective and united Europe had begun. If that had been a perilous process, there was nothing to be worried about the future, thanks to mature Institutions and technologies surrounding us. This turns into an idea of identity that follows feelings. It is more important to show one rather than have one; it has to have a stamp on it rather than nourish minds and souls; it is more important it sends messages rather than fill needs of individual Europeans and Europe as a cohesive society; it is more important it exists in built or virtual form than to be deeply integrated through its culture into the rich and complex totality of its nation-states that make of Europe a phenomenal and miraculous reality of twenty-first century.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> EU Press Release, "Sevilla World Fair 1992: Mr Dondelinger On The Importance Of Community Presence And High Definition Television," October 20, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Penelope Harvey, *Hybrids of Modernity: Anthropology, the Nation State and the Universal Exhibition*. London: Routledge, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> In a way, Olivencia was Bofill's nemesis. He wasn't neither an original innovator nor an administrator of mega-scale events.

Although he remained Commissioner General of the Expo, this decision would never be fully accepted by the Socialist party. Born in Andalusia, he grew up in Ceuta, a Spanish enclave in northern Africa. He studied law at university and began to teach commercial law in Madrid in the 1950s. Moved to the University of Seville in 1960 he was also serving as an adviser to the Bank of Spain and as Spain's representative to the United Nations Commission on Commercial Law.

<sup>4</sup> As early as in 1794 begun a modernization of the port with the construction of the first artificial canal, the Corta de Merlina. In 1814 the creation of the Real Compañía de Navegación del Guadalquivir was aimed at improving the navigability of the river, undertaking engineering works. Its course underwent many amendments during the last century

<sup>5</sup> For details of Ambasz's proposal see: <http://emilioambaszandassociates.com/portfolio/Master-Plan-Universal-Exposition-1992>.

<sup>6</sup> Today the monastery hosts the Andalusian Contemporary Art Center (CA AC), created in 1990 as part of the huge development Seville was planning prior to Expo '92. Following the secularization process, the monastery was vacated in 1836 and acquired in 1839 by the English businessman Charles Pickman who established a modern ceramic factory. Named La Cartuja, the brand became renowned in Europe and Latin American countries until its definitive closure in the 1980s. For an extensive history of the monastery see: Sociedad Estatal para la Exposición Universal Sevilla 92. *La Cartuja de Sevilla: ribera, monasterio, fábrica, corta y recinto*. Sevilla. Editorial: Sociedad Estatal para la Exposición Universal de Sevilla 92, 1988.

<sup>7</sup> See: Brunella Angeli, "If You Have Seen One, You Have Seen Them All," PhD thesis, Politecnico di Milano, Milan, February 2016.

<sup>8</sup> R. Maddox, *The Best of All Possible Islands*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Juan Carlos was the first Spanish monarch in five-hundred years to make a state visit to the Americas. Continuing his official visit to the US, the king welcomed more liberal ideals than the conservatism and nationalism showed in Santo Domingo. As Richard Maddox observes, "For quite a while to come, these two tendencies were to define the cultural and ideological space of nationalist liberalism or liberal nationalism within which the Expo was conceived and developed." R. Maddox, *The Best of All Possible Islands*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> president of the Comisión Nacional del Quinto Centenario, friend to king Juan Carlos who promoted a mix of patriotic loyalty towards his hometown, historic values and personal interests in the real estate development of the Cartuja Island. See R. Maddox, *The Best of All Possible Islands*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Among the priorities of the Socialists, there was the interest in softening the tensions between the central government and the independent regions of Andalusia and Catalonia. In order to conciliate regional pride with a limited release of additional autonomy, the idea of great events seemed highly advised. Barcelona in fact, was contemporary submitting the proposal for what became the Summer Olympics of 1992.

<sup>12</sup> W. La Duke, "We are still here: The 500 Years Celebration", in *Race, Poverty & the Environment*, Vol.3, N.3, Special Issue Native Nations in 1992: 500 Years of Cultural Survival (Fall 1992), pp. 3, 20-21.

<sup>13</sup> "The European Community At Seville Expo '92," 14 April 1992, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-92-28\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-92-28_en.htm).

<sup>14</sup> "The Community At Expo '92 In Seville Message From Mr Jean Dondelinger, Commissioner General Of The Community To Expo '92," 14 April 1992, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-92-297\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-92-297_en.htm).

<sup>15</sup> "The European Community," 14 April 1992, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-92-28\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-92-28_en.htm).

<sup>16</sup> Retevisión was a public-sector company responsible for operating television infrastructures in Spain.

<sup>17</sup> The founding members of the EEIG were: BBC (UK), BHD TV (Federal Republic of Germany), British Satellite Broadcasting (UK), BTS (Federal Republic of Germany), France Télécom (France), Laser Creation (UK), Nokia (Federal Republic of Germany), Philips (Netherlands), OFRT (France), RAI (Italy), SFP (France), Thames Television (UK), Thomson (France), Unitel (Federal Republic of Germany).

<sup>18</sup> G. Linden, *The Expo Book*, Lulu, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> "The European Community," 14 April 1992, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-92-28\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-92-28_en.htm).

<sup>20</sup> Harvey, "Nation on display. Technology and culture in Expo '92", in Sharon MacDonald (ed.), *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture*.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted from a brochure of the Siemens pavilion at Expo.

<sup>22</sup> "Expo 92 Closes Its Doors," 12 October 1992, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-92-28\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-92-28_en.htm).

<sup>23</sup> "Expo '92 In Seville : First Prize Awarded To German Architect," 22 January 1990, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-90-54\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-90-54_en.htm).

<sup>24</sup> Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," *New Formations* 4 (Spring 1988): 73-102; Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); and Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).