

Welcome to 'Europe'! The Branding of 'Europe' in the International Section of Expo 58

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Abstract

Beyond the polished self-images of states and empires in the early Cold War, Expo 58 in Brussels also exhibited the post-war vogue of internationalism and three varieties of (Western) 'Europe' as a brand. The Council of Europe, the OEEC, and the ECSC each presented distinct visions of 'Europe' and competed for visitors' attention and recognition on the political stage. Still, as this article shows, they all subscribed to a Cold War conception of liberalism: in different varieties, they branded 'Europe' as 'liberal', hence providing vivid insights into the specific challenges of branding 'Europe' and of liberal place branding in general.

Keywords: European integration, nation branding, Expo, exhibition, Cold War history

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In April 1958, with much fanfare, the first post-war Expo opened its doors a little outside the city centre of Brussels. Organised by the Belgian government, it exhibited polished self-images of proud states, crumbling empires, and competing ideologies in the early Cold War. Furthermore, in the so-called City of International Cooperation (*Cité de la Coopération Internationale*), Expo 58 provided a political stage for three newly founded Western European organisations – the Council of Europe, the Organisation for European Economic Co-Operation (OEEC), and the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) – to present themselves as representatives of ‘Europe’.

Attentive visitors entering the international section therefore may have been confused, for they may have noticed that there were two pavilions and three organisations, all claiming to represent ‘Europe’. To their right, visitors saw the pavilion shared by the OEEC and the Council of Europe – a rounded structure made of glass and labelled ‘EUROPA’ in large capital letters.¹⁾ To their left, they saw the angular glass construction of the ECSC with a big sign reading ‘European Community’ next to the entrance. And whilst the Council of Europe decorated its pavilion with its 12-star flag, the ECSC used the occasion to present its own emblem: two stripes of black and blue as references to coal and steel, and six stars as symbols of its six member states. Attentive visitors thus maybe even sensed the tensions behind the futuristic glass façades: Paul Lévy, the Director of the Council of Europe’s Directorate of Information, was not exactly amused when he found out about the ECSC hoisting its own flag.²⁾ And when Albert Wehrer, member of the ECSC High Authority and its General Commissioner for Expo 58, learnt about the Council of Europe and the OEEC’s plan to label their pavilion as ‘EUROPA’, he wrote an indignant letter to Dunstan Curtis at the Council of Europe: “You will understand that this worries us enormously as our pavilion is just opposite of yours.” He feared a “general confusion in the spirit of the public if one of the pavilions, by taking the label ‘EUROPA’, claims a notion which others could claim for the same reasons”.³⁾

This sense of rivalry between newly founded European organisations is only one of many themes surfacing in the international section of Expo 58.⁴⁾ In fact, the European pavilions at Expo 58 exhibited much more than what was instantly visible to visitors at the time: First and foremost, as a bustling site for “politics by other means”,⁵⁾ Expo 58 allowed the OEEC, the Council of Europe, and the ECSC to appear on the world stage, physically juxtaposing their

1) ‘Compte rendu: Groupe de Travail du Secrétariat Général pour l’Exposition de Bruxelles’, 10 October 1957, CACOE, EXPO/SG (57) PV 10.

2) Letter from Paul Lévy to Robert Bichet, 20 June 1958, CACOE, Box 3129, Vol. 1.

3) Letter from Albert Wehrer to Dunstan Curtis, 3 March 1958, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-896, 82 (translation my own).

4) The three European organisations also cooperated on a number of occasions. Their officials corresponded amicably, they invited each other to events, and the two exhibitions made respectful references to each other. Together with the OEEC, they even organised a photographic competition inviting visitors under 18 to send in ‘pictures illustrating the idea of a united Europe’, cf. Dossier “Photographic Competition”, 1958, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-949.

5) Caroline A. Jones, *The Global Work of Art: World’s Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 37.

competing cultural and geopolitical conceptions of ‘Europe’. Furthermore, the three European exhibitions were part of the progressive self-image that Belgium, as the Expo’s host country, wanted to project of itself. The European pavilions in the international section were therefore placed in the field of tension between “national renewal and transnational beginnings”⁶⁾ that characterised the political reconfiguration of Western Europe after World War II. And not least, as this article argues, the three European exhibitions represented three specific instances of branding ‘Europe’ as liberal – and of branding liberalism in the process.

The three European exhibitions at Expo 58 therefore presented three varieties of ‘Europe’ as a liberal brand. And they provide historically specific answers to some of the overarching questions raised by this Special Issue: *How do liberal principles and ideals such as self-determination, reason, and rationality translate to messages, rhetoric and aesthetics? What does it entail to brand oneself as liberal?* Guided by these questions, this article is divided into three parts: it starts out by situating the European exhibitions within Expo 58 as a symbolic world order from a Belgian point of view. Part 2 introduces the ‘world’s fair’ as a highly normed framework of place branding that the OEEC, the Council of Europe, and into which the ECSC fit themselves. Plus, it takes a look inside the European pavilions and the three varieties of ‘Europe’ on display. Part 3 then returns to the questions above, reflecting on the specific challenges of early European organisations as they attempted to brand themselves as liberal in the context of the early Cold War.

In terms of academic literature, this article contributes to several neighbouring fields: it draws on Exposition Studies as an interdisciplinary field that has emerged at the intersection of history, architecture, cultural studies, and international relations since the so-called ‘spatial turn’.⁷⁾ It enriches the more recent historiography contesting teleological understandings and “progressive narratives of European integration”.⁸⁾ And more specifically, it is situated within the literature concerned with image politics in the name of ‘Europe’ and processes of “cultural Europeanisation”.⁹⁾ Consequently – as all of the contributions to this Special Issue – this

6) Mats Andrén and Ettore Costa, ‘Introduction: Transnationalism in the 1950s Europe, Ideas, Debates and Politics’, *History of European Ideas* 46, no. 1 (2020): 2.

7) J. G. Wallis de Vries, ed., *Thing Theory & Urban Objects at EXPO ’58*, vol. 3, Seminararch (Eindhoven: Technische Universiteit Eindhoven, 2012).

8) Mark Gilbert, ‘Narrating the Process: Questioning the Progressive Story of European Integration’, *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 46, no. 3 (June 2008): 642; for examples see; Kiran Klaus Patel, *Project Europe: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Martin Conway and Kiran Klaus Patel, eds, *Europeanization in the Twentieth Century: Historical Approaches* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Dieter Gosewinkel, ed., *Anti-Liberal Europe: A Neglected Story of Europeanization* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015); Bo Stråth, *Europe’s Utopias of Peace: 1815, 1919, 1951. Europe’s Legacy in the Modern World* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016); Bo Stråth, ‘Europe as a Discourse’, in *Europe and the Other and Europe as the Other*, ed. Bo Stråth (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2010), 13–44.

9) Anastasia Remes, ‘Europe at the Expo: The Pavilions of the European Community in Universal Expositions’ (European University Institute, 2022) cf. the abstract available from <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/74842>; Jacob Krumrey, *The Symbolic Politics of European Integration: Staging Europe* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); for examples see; Oriane Calligaro and Kiran Klaus Patel, ‘From Competition to Cooperation in Promoting European Culture: The Council of Europe and the European Union since 1950’, *JEIH Journal of European Integration History* 23, no. 1 (2017): 129–50; Gabriele Clemens, ed., *Werben für*

article contributes to the growing historiography on branding practices *avant la lettre*.¹⁰⁾

Since the 1980s, the ‘world’s fair’ has raised considerable academic interest, and standard references like Paul Greenhalgh’s *Ephemeral Vistas* (1988) or Alexander Geppert’s *Fleeting Cities* (2010) have paid tribute to ‘world’s fairs’ as rich manifestations of political interests, e.g., the promotion of trade and technological progress, the celebration of “imperial achievement”,¹¹⁾ the legitimization of colonialism, and the cultivation of the nation-state.¹²⁾ Other works have focussed specifically on one of these aspects, one particular timeframe, region, or trajectory.¹³⁾ As an endemic structure to the organisation of ‘world’s fairs’ – and to “national imaging practices”¹⁴⁾ in general – the nation-state has inevitably translated into a dominant research category.¹⁵⁾ And yet, it is exactly the spatial structure of the ‘world’s fair’ that quite literally situates the traditionally “highly nationalized debate [on cultural diplomacy and place branding] ... in the international arena where it belongs”.¹⁶⁾

As for the representation of ‘Europe’ in 1958, this article revises existing research: it builds on Stuart W. Leslie and Joris Mercelis’s work on Expo 58 as a “nucleus for the new Europe” and on Anastasia Remes’s recent article on the pavilion of the ECSC.¹⁷⁾ Yet, both of

Europa. Die mediale Konstruktion europäischer Identität durch Europafilme (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2016).

10) Historical usages of ‘nation branding’ are a relatively recent historiographical trend, cf. Louis Clerc, Nikolas Glover, and Paul Jordan, eds, *Histories of Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding in the Nordic and Baltic Countries* (Leiden; Boston: Brill Nijhoff, 2015); Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, ‘Nation Branding’, in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. Frank Costigliola and Michael Hogan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 232–44; Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, ‘Nation Branding: A Useful Category for International History’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 30, no. 4 (2019): 755–79; Carolin Viktorin et al., eds, *Nation Branding in Modern History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018); Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, *Vom Staat zur Marke. Die Geschichte des Nation Branding* (Ditzingen: Reclam, 2025).

11) Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World’s Fairs, 1851–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 52.

12) Alexander Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); see also: Paul Greenhalgh, *Fair World: A History of World Fairs and Expositions, from London to Shanghai 1851–2010* (Winterbourne: Papadakis, 2011); James Burkhart Gilbert, ‘World’s Fairs as Historical Events’, in *Fair Representations: World’s Fairs and the Modern World*, ed. Robert W. Rydell and James Burkhart Gilbert (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994), 13–27; Robert W. Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

13) For example Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916*; John Knight, ‘Discovering the World in Seville: The 1992 Universal Exhibition’, *Anthropology Today* 8, no. 5 (1992): 20–26; Wolfram Kaiser, ‘Vive La France! Vive La République? The Cultural Construction of French Identity at the World Exhibitions in Paris 1855–1900’, *National Identities* 1 (1999): 227–44; Patricia A. Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000); Matthew G. Stanard, *Selling the Congo: A History of European Pro-Empire Propaganda and the Making of Belgian Imperialism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011); Nicolas Bancel, ‘La Construction de l’altérité: du “sauvage” dans les zoos humains’, *Didactica Historica*, 41–47, 6, no. 1 (2020).

14) Louis Clerc, ‘Variables for a History of Small States’ Imaging Practices – The Case of Finland’s “International Communication” in the 1970s–1980s’, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 12, nos 2–3 (5 August 2016): 110.

15) Numerous articles and entire books have been dedicated to national pavilions at different points in time and the political objectives pursued by individual governments. See for example Kaiser, ‘Vive La France! Vive La République? The Cultural Construction of French Identity at the World Exhibitions in Paris 1855–1900’.

16) Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, ‘Introduction. On the Division of Knowledge and the Community of Thought: Culture and International History’, in *Culture and International History*, ed. Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht and Frank Schumacher (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 11.

17) Stuart W. Leslie and Joris Mercelis, ‘Expo ’58: Nucleus for a New Europe’, in *The World’s Fair in the Cold War: Science,*

these works put an exclusive focus on the ECSC as the predecessor of today's EU, and widely ignore the presence of the Council of Europe and the OEEC. This article thus sets out to tell a more complex story: it presents Expo 58 as a curious manifestation of the convoluted institutional landscape that had emerged in Western Europe by 1958. As three out of many more European organisations at the time, the OEEC, the Council of Europe, and the ECSC coexisted, cooperated, and competed on the fairgrounds, as they did in the international arena *per se*. As a “fleeting city”,¹⁸⁾ Expo 58 therefore captured a particular moment in the history of Western European ‘integration’ in which the future of ‘Europe’ as a political project was – to quote Bo Stråth – “as open as ours”.¹⁹⁾

Locating the European Exhibitions: The Place for Internationalism

The story of the European exhibitions at Expo 58 began with invitations from the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in 1954, and the architectural layout of Expo 58 was a suggestive allegory of the world order from a Belgian point of view. As a sort of parallel world, Expo 58 suspended reality for the duration of a visit. But as a city within a city, it was also placed within the political agenda of the Belgian government: the vast exhibition grounds were divided into a Belgian, a foreign, and an international section, with the Belgian exhibitions occupying over half of the site.²⁰⁾ The foreign section was an exclusive gathering of states with which the Belgian government maintained diplomatic relations. And the international section – the City of International Cooperation – was not least supposed to be a statement about Belgium's progressive political vision.²¹⁾ Expo 58 thus manifested Belgium's claim for leadership in the post-war world order and its positioning of Brussels in the “race for the capital of Europe”.²²⁾ As in many previous fairs, the Belgian government further used Expo 58 as an occasion to “legitimize itself as a colonial power”.²³⁾ And on their way to the international section, visitors likely passed the section of the Belgian Congo and Rwanda-Urundi, including what the organisers euphemistically termed a *village indigène*. In other words, they placed colonialism at the centre of the fairgrounds as an allegorical world order

Technology, and the Culture of Progress, ed. Arthur P. Molella and Scott Gabriel Knowles (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019), 11-26; Anastasia Remes, ‘Exhibiting European Integration at Expo 58: The European Coal and Steel Community Pavilion’, in *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities: International Exhibitions as Cultural Platforms, 1851-1958*, ed. Joep Leerssen and Eric Storm (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 375-403.

18) Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*.

19) Stråth, *Europe's Utopias of Peace: 1815, 1919, 1951. Europe's Legacy in the Modern World*, 2.

20) A similar formulation can be found in Gilbert, ‘World's Fairs as Historical Events’, 13: ‘As cities within cities and cultures within civilizations, they [world fairs] both reflect and idealize the historical moments when they appear.’

21) Host countries often used the chance to tailor exhibitions according to sectors and inventions with which they knew they could outdo other countries. Cf. Joep Leerssen and Eric Storm, ‘Introduction’, in *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities: International Exhibitions as Cultural Platforms, 1851-1958*, ed. Joep Leerssen and Eric Storm (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 6.

22) Krumrey, *The Symbolic Politics of European Integration: Staging Europe*, 156.

23) Remes, ‘Exhibiting European Integration at Expo 58: The European Coal and Steel Community Pavilion’, 380.

r.²⁴⁾ And while being marketed as a new beginning after the war, Expo 58 also continued the tradition of industrial fairs and colonial exhibitions going back to the mid-19th century.

The Expo's official motto was "for a more humane world" – and apparently this did not pose a contradiction to the dehumanising exhibition in the section of the Belgian Congo.²⁵⁾ In fact, the 'world' that needed to be "re-humanised"²⁶⁾ in the eyes of the Expo's organisers was largely confined to Western Europe and the US. And the motto primarily hinted at the aim to restore public faith in scientific and technological innovation after the unprecedented destruction of two world wars.²⁷⁾ Everarts de Velp, Secretary-General of the Belgian *Commissariat Général du Gouvernement*, for instance, circumscribed "a certain anxiety",²⁸⁾ stirred by a sense of lacking control over scientific and technological innovation after the war, especially with a view to nuclear energy.²⁹⁾ Literally overshadowing the fair, the Atomium was therefore a fitting symbol for this Cold War atmosphere: it corresponded with the US American Atoms for Peace campaign (1953) and the foundation of Euratom (1957). At the same time, it was an accessible fun-fair attraction: taking the fastest lift in Europe at the time, visitors could physically enter the ideal of a peaceful future powered by nuclear energy.³⁰⁾

Within the Expo's symbolic post-war world order, the international section was assigned a surprising location. Internationalism, and representatively the organisations invited to participate in Expo 58, were central to the liberal reinvention of 'Europe' after World War I.³¹⁾ And yet, on the exhibition grounds, the Belgian organisers assigned internationalism a

24) The tradition of 'human showcases' had been cultivated, normalised, and continuously reaffirmed by France and Britain, but also by Belgium and the Netherlands. Since 1897, the Expos previously held in Belgium (Liège, Antwerp, and Brussels) all had a section dedicated to the Congo, i.e. to Belgium as a colonial empire. Cf. for example Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 320 ff. or Greenhalgh, *Fair World: A History of World Fairs and Expositions, from London to Shanghai 1851-2010*, 123-51.

25) Cf. for example Strâth, *Europe's Utopias of Peace: 1815, 1919, 1951. Europe's Legacy in the Modern World*; Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*; Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Matthew G. Stanard, "'Bilan Du Monde Pour Un Monde plus Déshumanisé': The 1958 Brussels World's Fair and Belgian Perceptions of the Congo", *European History Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (April 2005): 267-98.

26) 'Première Réunion des Commissaires Généraux Étrangers' (Brochure), 1956, CACOE, Box 3059, 23 (translation my own). Similarly, Commissioner-General Baron Moens de Fernig summarised the objectives of the Expo in 1954: 'not only to bear testimony to our time, but also...to alert everyone of what needs to be defended and safeguarded: the dignity and the development of the human being.' Cf. 'Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles 1958, Message du Commissaire General du Gouvernement' (Brochure), 30 June 1954, HAEU, CECA_SEGE-1158, 59-108, 96 (translation my own).

27) Its official theme was 'Bilan du monde, pour un monde plus humain' which could be translated to 'Taking stock of the world, for a more humane world.'

28) In the same speech, he went on to say that 'despite all this, or maybe because of all of this, we cannot defend ourselves against a very real fear.' Cf. 'Première Réunion des Commissaires Généraux Étrangers' (Brochure), 1956, CACOE, Box 3059 (translation my own).

29) 'Première Réunion des Commissaires Généraux Étrangers' (Brochure), 1956, CACOE, Box 3059, 23 (translation my own). Similarly, Commissioner-General Baron Moens de Fernig summarised the objectives of the Expo in 1954: 'not only to bear testimony to our time, but also...to alert everyone of what needs to be defended and safeguarded: the dignity and the development of the human being.' Cf. 'Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles 1958, Message du Commissaire General du Gouvernement' (Brochure), 30 June 1954, HAEU, CECA_SEGE-1158, 59-108, 96 (translation my own).

30) And when they did, they walked towards big letters saying 'Atome = Espoir', cf. 'La forme de l'Atomium', *Atomium*, n.d., https://atomium.be/the_shape_of_the_atomium?lang=fr; Leslie and Mercelis, 'Expo '58: Nucleus for a New Europe'.

peripheral position – underlining that “the rise of political internationalism in 1950s Europe took place together with a reassurance of the importance of the nation state.”³²⁾ In fact, as Mats Andrén and Ettore Costa once put it, governments and leaders “took to European cooperation in order to strengthen their own states”³³⁾ – and Expo 58 was a manifestation of that: in the eyes of functionaries inside the ECSC, for example, the international section should, of course, “constitute the heart of the whole exposition”.³⁴⁾ But as they were placed “in a bit of a dead end”,³⁵⁾ the organisations gathered in the international section soon complained about their unfortunate location and the number of visitors falling short of their expectations. Members of the ECSC High Authority even expressed concerns that the international section might be perceived as merely the “back room of the Congo”.³⁶⁾

As a supposed enshrinement of international cooperation, the form of the international section was similarly curious. It consisted of five pavilions: an introductory Palace of Worldwide Cooperation (*Palais de la Coopération Mondiale*); the pavilions of the UN and the Benelux; the ECSC pavilion; and the joint pavilion by the OEEC and the Council of Europe. For one thing, the international section thus did not present a full picture of European or international cooperation. Most notably, it did not include military alliances like the WEU or NATO.³⁷⁾ Furthermore, in terms of Western European political ‘integration’, the section was a delayed reflection of the institutional architecture as it was in 1955, when planning for the Expo began: the Council of Europe and the OEEC on one side, and the relatively newly founded, supranational ECSC on the other. Consequently, the international section did not account for the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Community (Euratom), both modelled after the ECSC and founded in 1957.

31) Paul Betts, *Ruin and Renewal: Civilising Europe After World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2020).

32) Andrén and Costa, ‘Introduction: Transnationalism in the 1950s Europe, Ideas, Debates and Politics’, 3; see also Alan S. Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*, 2nd ed., originally published in 1992 (London: Routledge, 2000).

33) Andrén and Costa, ‘Introduction: Transnationalism in the 1950s Europe, Ideas, Debates and Politics’, 3.

34) ‘Palais de la Coopération Mondiale’, 1956, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-895, 180–190, 180 (translation my own).

35) Fosty, Jean, ‘Le Quartier de l’Europe à l’Exposition de Bruxelles’, N.E.M., no. 101, 25 April 1958, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-959 (translation my own).

36) ‘Compte-rendu de la réunion avec M. Everarts de Velp’, 29 December 1955, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-895, 130 (translation my own).

37) Kiran Klaus Patel has outlined how only between 1945 and 1948, over 100 international organisations were newly founded worldwide. By 1960, the number had increased to more than 1,200 organisations, cf. Patel, *Project Europe: A History*, 15.

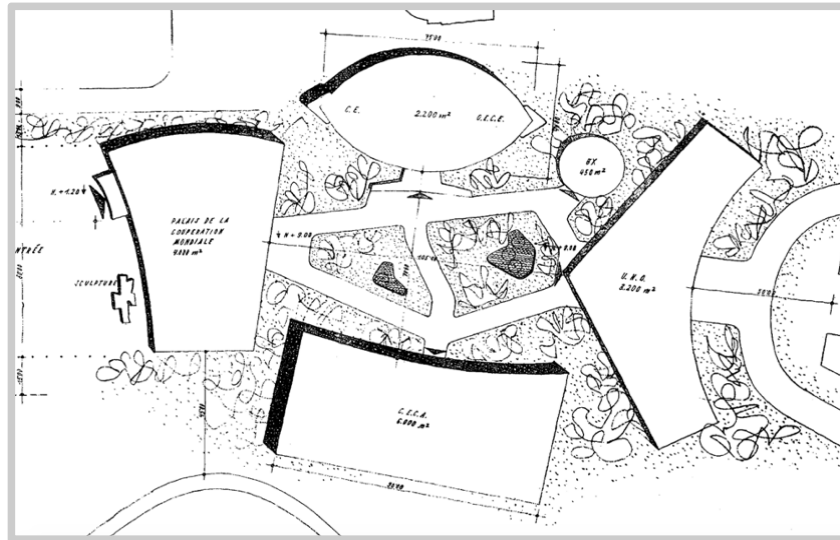


Figure 1. Map of the *Cité de la Coopération Internationale*, 3 April 1957. CACOE, EXP/Cult (57) 28.

Fitting in, Standing out: Three Varieties of ‘Europe’ at Expo 58

Expo 58 was not just an allegory of the post-war world order from a Belgian point of view. It was also a complex performative setting in which the branding of ‘Europe’ literally took place. Like any other ‘world’s fair’, Expo 58 presented what Michel Foucault has termed a *heterotopia*: “a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites ... are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted”.³⁸⁾ In other words, the peculiar spatial arrangement of the ‘world’s fair’ gathered carefully curated representations of real places, i.e., place brands. These places traditionally included nation-states and empires – even if, for Expo 58, the Belgian government extended the invitation to international and supranational organisations and multinational companies like IBM, Philips, or Coca-Cola. Expo 58 juxtaposed these carefully curated self-presentations, situating ‘Europe’ next to national but also commercial brands to be consumed by visitors. Still, the Expo was not the “universal museum”³⁹⁾ that its Belgian organisers liked to call it. In fact, the notion of ‘universality’ – implying the whole world was present and equally represented – concealed what Caroline Jones has termed “first world protagonism”,⁴⁰⁾ i.e., the imperial hegemony over what was framed as a ‘universal’ exhibition or ‘world’s fair’.

Regulated by the 1928 Paris Convention of the International Exhibitions Bureau (*Bureau International des Expositions*), participants adhered to rather strict existing norms. They crafted their brands within ritualised categories, the “world fair mould”,⁴¹⁾ to use Joep

38) Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias (1967)’, trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 24.

39) ‘Exposition Universelle et Internationale Bruxelles 1958’ (Brochure), [1955?], CACOE, Box 3062 (translation and emphasis my own).

40) Jones, *The Global Work of Art: World’s Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience*, 36.

41) Leerssen and Storm, ‘Introduction’, 17.

Leerssen and Eric Storm's expression. To put it differently, every pavilion needed to *fit in* – into the existing norms of the 'world's fair'. At the same time, in the eyes of the people in charge, every pavilion was supposed to *stand out*. Every organising team, every special committee aimed to cater to the taste, the expectations, and the previous knowledge of the public – a Western European, mostly Belgian public in this case.⁴²⁾ Shaped by what could be described as an internalised foreign gaze, participants of 'world's fairs' – traditionally nation-states and empires – therefore produced a specific, somewhat overdetermined version of their national identity.⁴³⁾

As I will elaborate below, the three European organisations present in the international section fit themselves into this "world fair mould",⁴⁴⁾ helping themselves to a traditionally national toolbox of place branding: they built modern pavilions that were supposed to be "representative of Europe in 1958 and thereafter",⁴⁵⁾ they hoisted flags, orchestrated 'European national days', and they invited visitors to an immersive experience of 'Europe' in their pavilions. At the same time, as they represented distinct brands of 'Europe', the OEEC, the Council of Europe, and the ECSC wanted to stand out from each other and sell their respective *raison d'être*. Plus, amidst the architectural nationalism of the 'world's fair', they aimed to make the case for international – or supranational – politics. As an internal ECSC report stated, "The new Europe will find itself in competition with the biggest political complexes in the world. It is absolutely necessary that she asserts herself with dignity in this comparison."⁴⁶⁾

42) On the Soviet case cf. Susan E. Reid, *The Soviet Pavilion at Brussels '58: Convergence, Conversion, Critical Assimilation, or Transculturation?*, Cold War International History Project Working Paper Series (Washington D. C., December 2010); on the Spanish 'Westernization of Fascism' at the Expo 58, see María González Pendás, 'Politics of the Void: Franquista Spain at the Expo 58', in *Architecture of Great Expositions 1937-1959: Messages of Peace, Images of War*, ed. Rika Devos, Alexander Ortenberg, and Vladimir Papernj (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 167.

43) A similar idea and formulation can be found in Homi K. Bhabha, 'Introduction: Narrating the Nation', in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), 2: Regarding the 'production' of the nation through language, Bhabha writes: "To encounter the nation as it is written displays a temporality of culture and social consciousness more in tune with the partial, overdetermined process by which textual meaning is produced through the articulation of difference in language."; Leerssen describes cultural nationalism as 'often ... an internalized exoticism', cf. Joep Leerssen, 'Trademarking the Nation: World Fairs, Spectacles, and the Banalization of Nationalism', in *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities: International Exhibitions as Cultural Platforms, 1851-1958*, ed. Joep Leerssen and Eric Storm (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 47.

44) Leerssen and Storm, 'Introduction', 17.

45) 'Architect's Suggestions for the Interior Planning of the Council of Europe Pavilion', 10 September 1956, CACOE, EXPO/BRUX/GRT/CM (56) 5.

46) 'Exposé pour la Commission Politique de l'Assemblée', 21 September 1956, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-898, 11–14, 14 (translation my own).

The Solution to the Problems of Our Time: *Internationalism in the Palais de la Coopération Mondiale*

Visitors entered the international section through an introductory pavilion, the so-called Palace of International Cooperation.⁴⁷⁾ Built and funded by the Belgian *Commissariat Général du Gouvernement* but cooperatively devised by the organisations in the international section, the introductory pavilion should “prepare the visitor for the comprehension of the individual pavilions”.⁴⁸⁾ Or as a joint report, circulated in 1956, reasoned, “The exposition will receive millions of visitors, for the most part Europeans. It seems that we should keep in mind that many of them are not a priori enthusiastic about international cooperation, notably due to the complex forms it has taken. Hence, it will be necessary to show them that the problems they are familiar with, require such cooperation to be solved.”⁴⁹⁾

The organisations involved in the conception of the Palace of International Cooperation agreed that the exhibition should impart the urgency of international cooperation.⁵⁰⁾ Thus, on their way through the exhibition visitors passed by what the representatives of the organisations in the international section considered the most pressing problems of their time: population growth and impending overpopulation, diseases, nutrition, labour, education, and technological progress. Visualised in dioramas and panels, these added up to a rather alarming scenario which organisers hoped would help make the case for international cooperation as the solution. And beyond graphs, maps, and dioramas, the conception of the Palace of International Cooperation indicated who the organisations in the international section imagined as their target audience: well-educated and responsible grown-ups, willing to be convinced by good arguments.⁵¹⁾

“Nothing but Dull Panels”? The Exhibition of the OEEC

Like the Council of Europe and the ECSC, the OEEC had accepted the invitation by the Belgian government to be present on the international stage. At the same time, OEEC decisionmakers decided to maintain cost discipline and share a pavilion with the Council of Europe. To fit into the “ultra-modern design”⁵²⁾ of the Expo, they jointly commissioned a

47) *Palais de la Coopération Mondiale* could also be translated to ‘Palace of Worldwide Cooperation’.

48) ‘Note concernant le pavillon de la C.E.C.A. à l’exposition de Bruxelles’, 3 May 1956, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-898, 4 (translation my own).

49) ‘Projet de Palais de la Coopération Mondiale’, 21 February 1956, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-895, 177-190, 177 (translation my own).

50) ‘Palais de la Coopération Mondiale’, [1956], HAEU, CECA_DOAC-895, 158-166.

51) See for example Ute Frevert, *Eurovisionen : Ansichten guter Europäer im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch-Verlag, 2003).

52) ‘Cultural Aspects of the Participation of the Council of Europe in the 1958 Brussels Universal Exhibition (Thirteenth Session)’, 3 April 1957, CACOE, EXP/Cult (57) 28.

“vast glass shell having the form of an ellipsoid”⁵³⁾ – a “glass egg”⁵⁴⁾ as they called it internally. Yet, in terms of their exhibitions, the two organisations were careful to be perceived as “entirely independent”.⁵⁵⁾ In the OEEC’s half, visitors walked through an exhibition that was quite similar to the one in the Palace of International Cooperation and mostly consisted of graphs, numbers, and illustrations on cardboard panels. If read carefully, these panels revealed the OEEC’s central messages: above all, it used the occasion to celebrate its own 10-year-anniversary and consequently, the 10-year-anniversary of the Marshall Plan. Or, as one of the panels put it, “the story of 10 years’ cooperation, of which every European can be proud”.⁵⁶⁾

The officials in charge intended to tell the story of European ‘integration’ – a term coined by Marshall Plan officials – as a transatlantic success story based on economic growth and productivity. They picked up the central message of the Marshall Plan campaign, i.e., that ‘cooperation means prosperity’, and that prosperity, in turn, enables and undergirds democracy. To make this upward trend physically palpable, the exhibition guided visitors from the ground floor – and illustrations of unemployment, protectionism, and social distress – up to the first floor, i.e., to the foundation of the OEEC and the positive impact of economic cooperation. As visitors walked up the stairs, they read, “How did we get out of this? ... New hope came from the US ... trade went up, you could get work, and you could earn more.”⁵⁷⁾ All in all, in the script for the exhibition, OEEC decisionmakers decided to focus on the “role played by the United States in the revivification of Europe”,⁵⁸⁾ as well as on the OEEC’s indispensability for “full employment, better living standards, more goods, cheaper goods, easier travel [and] more opportunities for your children”.⁵⁹⁾ And as the exhibition underlined the OEEC’s political focus on international trade and productivity, it represented one variety of ‘Europe’ as a brand – namely the promise of prosperity, happiness, and ultimately political stability through economic growth and liberalised, borderless markets.⁶⁰⁾

53) ‘The Council of Europe’s Participation in the 1958 Brussels Universal and International Exhibition’, 7 August 1957, CACOE, Box 3059.

54) ‘General Report by the Secretariat on the Council of Europe’s Participation in the 1958 Brussels Exhibition’, 10 September 1956, CACOE, EXPO/BRUX/GRT/CM (56) 6.

55) ‘Conseil: Exposition Mondiale de Bruxelles’, 25 January 1956, HAEU, OEEC-196 (translation my own); the OEEC even hosted another exhibition by the *European Conference of Ministers of Transport* (ECMT) to further reduce the costs. Cf. Conseil: Exposition Mondiale de Bruxelles, 25 January 1956, HAEU, OEEC-196.

56) ‘Brussels Exhibition 1958, O.E.E.C. Exhibit’, 9 October 1957, CACOE, Box 3060.

57) Ibid.

58) ‘Pavillon de l’O.E.C.E. à l’exposition de Bruxelles de 1958: Themes d’information et de propagande’, 26 May 1956, CACOE, Box 3059 (translation my own).

59) ‘Brussels Exhibition 1958, O.E.E.C. Exhibit’, 9 October 1957, CACOE, Box 3060.

60) Daniel Stinsky, ‘Western European Vs. All-European Cooperation? The OEEC, the European Recovery Program, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), 1947-1952’, in *The OECD and the International Political Economy Since 1948*, ed. Matthieu Leimgruber and Matthias Schmelzer (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 65–88.



Figure 2. Panels inside the OEEC exhibition, 1958. Courtesy of: AGR-ARA, National Archives of Belgium, F 1760, 510_2366_000_09037_000_0_0013.

All in all, compared to the ECSC and the Council of Europe, the OEEC kept its efforts relatively low, and this also affected the number of visitors: “not more than 4 or 5 people within the hour that I have been there”, complained Pierre Huet, the director of the OEEC’s European Nuclear Energy Agency after a visit – “nothing but dull panels”.⁶¹⁾ Given the OEEC’s experience with successful exhibitions like the Train of Europe, this notable plainness suggests that it was not simply an expression of restrained budgets, but also of priorities. It suggests that – unlike for the Council of Europe and the ECSC with their competing political ambitions – the stakes were comparably low for the OEEC as a primarily economic organisation.⁶²⁾ At the same time, in 1958, the OEEC had more member states than any other European organisation, and following Kiran Patel, it was “the principal challenger for the title of the Most Important Western European Organisation”⁶³⁾ well into the 1960s. Hence, compared to the ECSC and the Council of Europe, the OEEC possibly did not have as much to prove – and calculated accordingly.

A Democratic Utopia: ‘EUROPA’ according to the Council of Europe

Contrary to the OEEC, the Council of Europe, in the other half of the pavilion, did claim to be *the* European organisation. It represented 15 member states, almost as many as the

61) Letter from Pierre Huet to Cittadini Cesi, 14 May 1958, HAEU, OEEC-196 (translation my own).

62) Initially, it had even been discussed whether it should only be ‘of a temporary character’, cf. internal OEEC documents, cited in Stinsky, ‘Western European Vs. All-European Cooperation?’, 72.

63) Patel, *Project Europe: A History*, 36.

OEEC. And its self-image and rhetoric were still marked by federalist ambition – even though, by 1958, many had been disappointed about its actual lack of political clout. The so-called ‘information’ officials and ‘cultural experts’ behind the Council of Europe’s exhibition insisted they were representing ‘Europe’, both politically and culturally. Like any other state or organisation, they were aiming “for an original approach, standing out from the tradition of universal expositions”.⁶⁴⁾ And they settled for a rather pedagogical concept that primarily addressed “members of younger generations, school-children, members of youth organisations and students, as well as ... better-educated people”.⁶⁵⁾ At its centre was a reproduction of the Assembly Hall in Strasbourg – and therefore the Council of Europe’s self-image as a democratic institution. Envisioned as “an active European centre in the framework of the Universal Exhibition”,⁶⁶⁾ the replica of the Strasbourg Assembly Hall basically invited visitors to play and experience European politics.⁶⁷⁾ Individual visitors and groups could put themselves in the position of representatives in the Assembly Hall, i.e., sit down in their seats and listen to curated snippets of historic speeches over headphones.⁶⁸⁾ The Council of Europe urged associations and youth organisations to “hold their congresses ... there”⁶⁹⁾ and it organised so-called “mock-assemblies”.⁷⁰⁾ It hence expressed the then trending belief in culture as a tool for social transformation.⁷¹⁾ And most importantly, the parliament-like setting speaks to the “interconnection of the languages of Europe and of democracy” that Martin Conway has characterised as “one of the more surprising features of the post-war era”.⁷²⁾

64) ‘Bilan d’une expérience: Le Conseil de l’Europe à l’exposition’, 1959, CACOE, Box 3062 (translation my own).

65) ‘Report on the Building and Management of the Council of Europe Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels Exhibition and the Results Achieved’, 18 November 1959, CACOE, CM (59) 123, Box 3061.

66) ‘The Council of Europe’s Participation in the 1958 Brussels Universal and International Exhibition’, 7 August 1957, CACOE, Box 3059.

67) As an internal document put it in 1957: “One must never forget that what we offer to the public is a toy of which we expect some didactic results.” Cf. ‘Enregistrement mis à la disposition des visiteurs dans l’hémicycle de Bruxelles’, [1957?], CACOE, Box 3060 (translation my own).

68) The recording visitors heard over headphones began with: ‘Imagine that you are in the debating hall of the Consultative Assembly in Strasbourg. Since 1949, every year, hundreds of European parliamentarians have gathered here to plan the peaceful unification of the countries they represent’ – followed by snippets and explanations of speeches by ‘big stars’ like Herriot, Spaak, Mollet, Dehousse, Churchill, Adenauer, or Eden, and long applause. Cf. ‘Recorded Extracts for Brussels, English Version’, [1957?], CACOE, Box 3059.

69) ‘The Council of Europe’s Participation in the 1958 Brussels Universal and International Exhibition’, 7 August 1957, CACOE, Box 3059.

70) Letter from Paul Lévy to John D. Blumgart, May 1957, CACOE, Box 3060.

71) Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 1997).

72) Martin Conway, *Western Europe’s Democratic Age: 1945–1968* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 143.



Figure 3. The pavilion shared by the OEEC and the Council of Europe, seen from across the international section, 1958. Courtesy of: AGR-ARA, National Archives of Belgium, F 1760, 510_2366_000_09034_000_0_0016.



Figure 4. Interior of the reproduction of the Assembly Hall in the pavilion of the Council of Europe, 1958. Courtesy of: AGR-ARA, National Archives of Belgium, F 1760, 510_2366_000_09037_000_0_0029.

The Assembly Hall replica was embedded in an exhibition, curated by Belgian history professor Émile Lousse to sketch “the spiritual and political evolution of the European community”.⁷³⁾ It traced “The History of Liberty” back to antiquity and situated the Council of Europe in a long and pristine tradition of democracy and humanist ideals. With “diagrams, statistics, written texts and reproductions of original documents”,⁷⁴⁾ the organisers intended to impart the relevance and effectiveness of the Council of Europe, particularly in matters of

73) ‘General Report by the Secretariat on the Council of Europe’s Participation in the 1958 Brussels Exhibition’, 10 September 1956, CACOE, EXPO/BRUX/GRT/CM (56) 6.

74) ‘L’Europe et la liberté du monde à l’Exposition Universelle de Bruxelles 1958, Exposé du Prof. Lousse’, CACOE, Box 3059 (translation my own).

human rights, freedom of movement, social security, and cultural policy.⁷⁵⁾ And spell-like slogans like “You are no longer a foreigner in Europe. You are a European”⁷⁶⁾ or “From now on, you will be a conscious European – the Council of Europe is a big family”⁷⁷⁾ pointed to the long-term goals behind the Council of Europe’s cultural and ‘information’ policy: Although the term ‘European identity’ entered the discourse not until the 1970s, historical terms like a “European [civic] spirit”⁷⁸⁾ or a “European conscience”⁷⁹⁾ spoke to collective identification and unity as political aims.⁸⁰⁾ At the same time, these terms implied the exclusivity of the Council of Europe’s cultural vision of ‘Europe’: based on the idea of ‘Europe’ as an *a priori* “historical and cultural entity”,⁸¹⁾ its Committee of Cultural Experts not only aimed to foster a “greater sense of community”.⁸²⁾ They also claimed “a leading moral position”⁸³⁾ in the world and emphasised the difference between the “European civilisation” and the “outside world”.⁸⁴⁾

The Council of Europe’s participation in Expo 58 was a prominent example of a deep-seated ambiguity that was characteristic for the post-war branding of ‘Europe’: on the one hand, the Council of Europe branded itself – i.e., ‘Europe’ – as a departure from nationalism. On the other hand, the Council of Europe appropriated attributes and tools traditionally used by nation-states – and this culminated on 3rd September 1958 (the fifth anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights entering into force), when it celebrated the “national holiday of the Council of Europe”.⁸⁵⁾ The festivities took several days and were imbued with genuine reverence that owed much to Paul Lévy, the Council of Europe’s Director of Information and his biography. The festivities included prayers at a local synagogue and the laying of a wreath in Breendonk – the concentration camp where Lévy himself had been incarcerated. Lévy had even written a European hymn that was never sun

75) For example, visitors were supposed ‘to follow the course of an idea, starting from the moment when it is conceived in the Consultative Assembly or the Committee of Ministers, accompanying it through the various organs of the Council, until the culmination when it becomes a ratified convention or agreement which enters into force and affects the day-to-day life of individuals’, cf. ‘Cultural Aspects of the Participation of the Council of Europe in the 1958 Brussels Universal Exhibition (Thirteenth Session)’, 3 April 1957, CACOE, EXP/Cult (57) 28.

76) ‘Script de l’exposition après la revision faite les 7 et 8 janvier avec les architectes et le Professeur Lousse à Bruxelles’, 22 February 1957, CACOE, Box 3060 (translation my own).

77) Ibid.

78) ‘Handbook on European Civics. Methods of European Civics, Draft Prepared by Professor Brugmans’, 15 April 1953, CACOE, EXP/Cult (53) 9.

79) ‘Meeting of Art Specialists, Report to the Committee of Cultural Experts’, 10 September 1953, CACOE, EXP/Cult (53) 21.

80) Cf. Clemens, ‘Werben für Europa: Europäische Identität – Europäische Öffentlichkeitsarbeit – Europafilme – Forschungs-stand’, in Bo Stråth, ‘Europe as a Discourse’, in ‘Europe’ and the Other and ‘Europe’ as the Other, ed. Bo Stråth (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2010), 13-44.

81) ‘Memorandum: Exposition de Bruxelles’, 9 May 1956, CACOE, Box 3059 (translation my own).

82) Directorate of Information of the Council of Europe, *European Culture and the Council of Europe*, 2nd edn (Strasbourg: G. Thone, 1956), 35.

83) Ibid., 52.

84) ‘European Co-operation in the Cultural Field (Draft Recommendations)’, 31 August 1960, CACOE, AS/Cult (12) 22.

85) ‘Compte rendu de la réunion qui a eu lieu le lundi 13 janvier 1958 sous la présidence du Commissaire Général Adjoint’, 16 January 1958, CACOE, EXPO/SG (58) PV2 (translation my own).

g.⁸⁶⁾ Furthermore, the Council of Europe asked its member states to hoist its 12-star-flag to mark the occasion: it orchestrated a salute to the flag; a church service was held in the pavilion of the Vatican; and a youth choir symbolised harmonious polyphony and a better tomorrow – ideals that were repeated and affirmed in numerous speeches.⁸⁷⁾



Figure 5. The flag of the Council of Europe hoisted in front of the Atomium on “Europe Day” (3 September 1958). In: “Pavoiser Europe” (Brochure on the European Flag), [1959?]. Available from https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/wave_the_european_flag-en-0fab63df-d5c3-41a5. Public domain.

In the first ten years of its existence, the Council of Europe had faced numerous setbacks, and compared to the OEEC, the political stakes at Expo 58 were high. As one variety of ‘Europe’ as a brand, the Council of Europe represented the search for a European cultural identity, navigating a fine line between rupture and historical continuity. What is more, the exhibition projected the Council of Europe identification with democracy – even if that had little to do with its actual politics. Hence, as the Council of Europe tried to offer an immersive experience of European politics at the time, the image it projected was ironically accurate: they were driven by idealism and a sense of urgency, but they were also genuinely complicated and difficult to get across. To borrow from Stråth again, the Council of Europe embodied the “long-term dreams about a federal Europe”⁸⁸⁾ rather than concrete solutions to “short-term operational questions”.⁸⁹⁾ And in its political messaging, its often-frustrating present situation led the Council of Europe to turn towards the future instead. Consequently, like many other states and institutions at the Expo, it performatively exhibited what it aimed to be rather than what it currently was – a utopia rather than a real place.

86) Handwritten score for a “Hymne de l’Europe”, 16 May 1958, CACOE, Box 3062.

87) Illustrated Brochure reporting on the Council of Europe Days, 1958, CACOE, Box 3062.

88) Stråth, *Europe’s Utopias of Peace: 1815, 1919, 1951. Europe’s Legacy in the Modern World*, 353.

89) Ibid.

A European Spirit “Disguised by Coal and Steel”: The Pavilion of the ECSC

The ‘democratic utopia’ exhibited by the Council of Europe was contrasted by the more technical pavilion of the ECSC just opposite. In the international arena, as well as at Expo 58, the ECSC pavilion represented the so-called ‘Europe of the Six’ – and so did six struts of steel that looked like they were holding the giant glass construction together.⁹⁰⁾ Above all, the officials in charge wanted to make visitors *understand* the economic and social benefits of the ECSC. Still, they also wanted visitors to *feel* something. A vast lobby was supposed “to get ... visitors into the mood”,⁹¹⁾ and in big letters, visitors could read what the ECSC considered its central message: “Building Europe means taking the path to peace and prosperity.”⁹²⁾ Furthermore, in early 1957, Albert Wehrer – a high-ranking ECSC official – instructed his team to “maintain the closest contact possible with the decorators for them to take in the ‘European’ spirit that must prevail in our pavilion”.⁹³⁾ Yet, as he admitted, “this spirit is difficult to capture, even for the ‘convinced’ ones, for whom it is often disguised by coal and steel.”⁹⁴⁾



Figure 6. The ECSC pavilion from outside, 1958. Courtesy of: AGR-ARA, National Archives of Belgium, F 1760, 510_2366_000_09034_000_0_0004.

The ECSC’s pavilion was considerably better equipped than the one by the Council of Europe and the OEEC: not only was it better staffed; it was also more than twice as big, and

90) ‘Note concernant le pavillon de la C.E.C.A. à l’Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles 1958’, 3 May 1956, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-898, 2–10, 6.

91) ‘Note à M. Rabier: Exposition Universelle de Bruxelles’, 30 April 1957, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-959, 33 (translation my own).

92) Cf. French original: “Faire l’Europe, c’est prendre le chemin du bien-être et de la paix.”

93) ‘Le Pavillon de la Communauté à l’Exposition’, 31 December 1956, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-896, 45–55, 55 (translation my own).

94) Ibid.

the expenses of the ECSC were almost ten times as high as the spending of the Council of Europe.⁹⁵⁾ Like many other pavilions, it had a built-in cinema in which it showed, inter alia, pro-European films that it had itself commissioned. Guided visits for political delegations were often followed by aperitifs. And while the Council of Europe struggled to typewrite its exhibition texts in English, French, and Flemish, the ECSC had commissioned Siemens to develop multilingual audioguides – which were technological sensations in and of themselves.⁹⁶⁾ As visitors listened to these so-called ‘invisible guides’, they passed by machines, household appliances, and an entire model house made of steel.⁹⁷⁾ They walked past a gallery of “great Europeans” and a “section dedicated to the institutions and the social aspect of the Community”.⁹⁸⁾ Yet, the centrepiece of the ECSC pavilion – its “clou”⁹⁹⁾ – was an accessible model coal mine underground.¹⁰⁰⁾

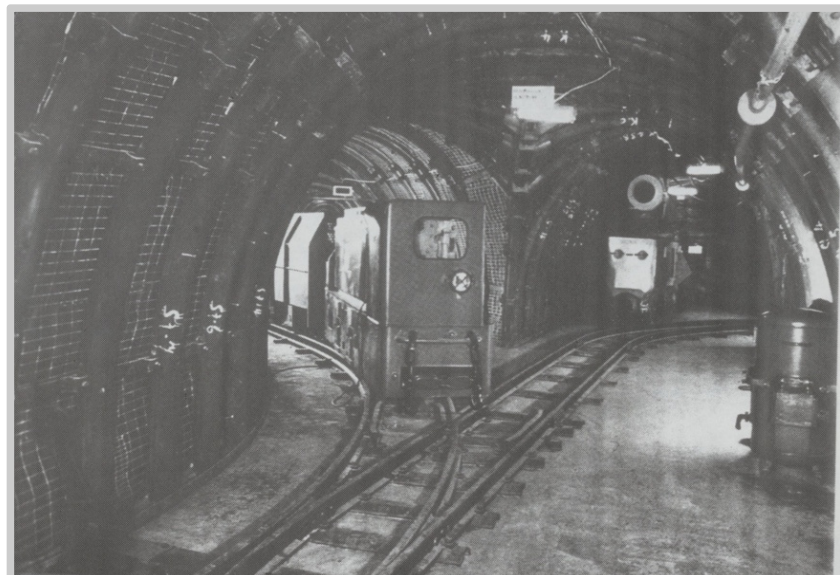


Figure 7. Inside the ECSC's model coal mine, 1958. Courtesy of: AGR-ARA, National Archives of Belgium, F 1760, 510_2366_000_09034_000_0_0021.

95) In 1957, Lévy complained that ‘fifteen governments are infinitely more frugal than a single one’, cf. Letter from Paul Lévy to M. Moies, 5 December 1957, CACOE, Box 3060 (translation my own).

96) The *guides invisibles* “spoke” 5 languages: the 4 official languages of the ECSC (French, German, Dutch, and Italian) and English, cf. HAEU, CECA_DOAC-896.

97) For the model steel house, the organisers were likely inspired by model steel house exhibited at US world’s fairs in the 1930s, e.g., in Chicago in 1933. Cf. for example Laura Burd Schiavo, ‘Modern Design Goes Public. A Photo Essay’, in *Designing Tomorrow. America’s World’s Fairs of the 1930s*, ed. Robert W. Rydell and Laura Burd Schiavo (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 119.

98) ‘Note sur la préparation de la Journée Européenne du 9 Mai 1958’, 15 October 1957, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-1078, 11-16, 12 (translation my own).

99) Fosty, Jean, ‘Le Quartier de l’Europe à l’Exposition de Bruxelles’, N.E.M., no. 101, 25 April 1958, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-959 (translation my own).

100) Despite the enormous costs, Jacques-René Rabier considered it ‘a ‘serious trump card’ to attract the wider public. Cf. ‘Le pavillon de la Communauté Européenne du Charbon et l’Acier à l’Exposition de Bruxelles’, 20 June 1956, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-959, 251–252, 251 (translation my own).

Similar to the Council of Europe, the ECSC celebrated the “Day of the European Community”.¹⁰¹⁾ And even though the ECSC’s funds allowed it to think bigger, Jacques-René Rabier, Director of the ECSC’s Information Service, considered the preparations a great challenge: “For a supranational institution, this task is much more difficult. The European Community does not have an opera nor a ballet company, nor an artistic tradition.”¹⁰²⁾ Rabier and his colleagues opted for a less solemn agenda than the Council of Europe: they invited over 2,000 guests – officials, eminent figures, representatives from the coal and steel industries, and partly the wider public – to commemorate the 1950 Schuman Declaration on 9 May. And to mark the occasion, they organised traditional fanfares performed by miners’ brass bands, an official reception, speeches, a *soirée de gala*, and a quiz show that was also broadcasted (‘eurovised’) via Eurovision.

Like the Council of Europe, the ECSC exhibited what it aimed to be rather than what it currently was. It still focussed on coal and steel, and Leslie and Mercelis were right to describe it as “a public face for an otherwise low-key and strongly technocratic organization”.¹⁰³⁾ Plus, considering that the ECSC had only six member states at this point, it could hardly claim to represent ‘Europe’ – even after the 1957 Treaties of Rome. Still, its exhibition underlined the ECSC’s ambition to become *the* European organisation and it linked ‘Europe’ with democracy, too: boldly, it presented its Common Assembly as ‘The European Parliament’. Like the Council of Europe, it situated itself within a grand tradition of pro-European thinking, trying “to make them [the visitors] feel that the greatest minds have sought the unity of the European peoples”.¹⁰⁴⁾ Plus, it cleverly branded itself as ‘The European Community’ – subtly trying to normalise “the EC’s European monopoly”.¹⁰⁵⁾

101) ‘Note sur la préparation de la Journée Européenne du 9 Mai 1958’, 10 October 1957, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-1078, 11-16, 11 (translation and emphasis my own).

102) Ibid., 12 (translation my own).

103) Leslie and Mercelis, ‘Expo ’58: Nucleus for a New Europe’, 14.

104) ‘Le Pavillon de la Communauté à l’Exposition’, 31 December 1956, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-896, 48 (translation my own).

105) Krumrey, *The Symbolic Politics of European Integration: Staging Europe*, 4.

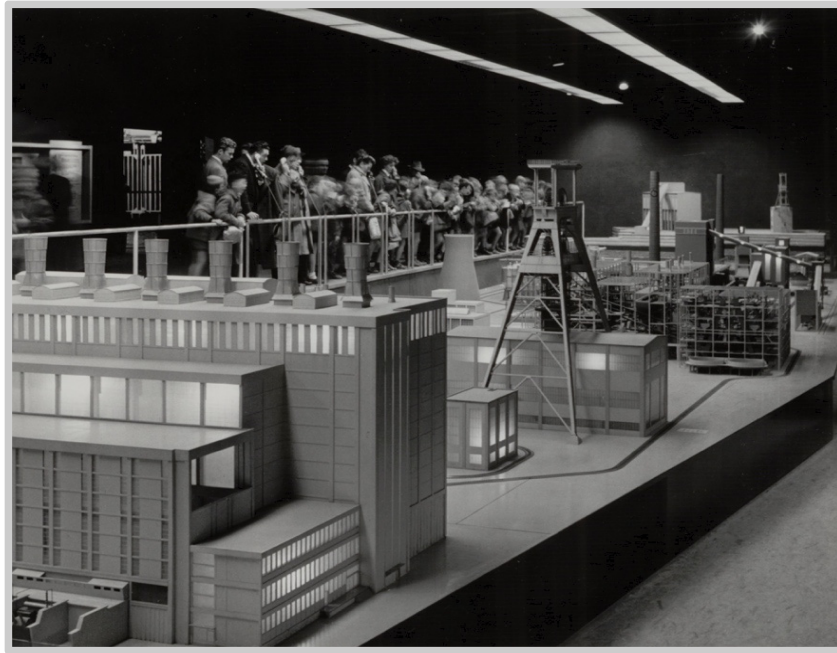


Figure 8. Visitors in the ECSC pavilion looking at a model steel mill, 1958. Courtesy of: AGR-ARA, National Archives of Belgium, F 1760, 510_2366_000_09034_000_0_0050.

It is impossible to say what visitors made of the ECSC exhibition.¹⁰⁶⁾ But compared to the exhibitions of the OEEC and the Council of Europe, it was better equipped, more frequented, and, above all, more confident. Especially OEEC officials probably looked across the international section with envy, as visitors flocked towards the ECSC pavilion. And whilst the Council of Europe and the OEEC both compared themselves to the ECSC, the ECSC compared its pavilions to the ones of the US and the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁷⁾ Compared to the other pavilions in the international section, the ECSC arguably tried harder to fit itself into the consumerist logic of the Expo: trying out an audioguide for the first time, watching films, and visiting a model coal mine may not have been specifically European – but it was probably more accessible and entertaining than participating in a mock assembly or carefully reading “dull panels”.¹⁰⁸⁾ As an internal note put it a few weeks after the opening: “It will come as no surprise to anyone that at the end of the day, Expo visitors show a special interest in places where they can rest or relax.”¹⁰⁹⁾

106) Thanks to Gherardo Bonini at the HAEU in Florence who tried his best to help me find the guestbooks of the ECSC pavilion – unfortunately unsuccessfully.

107) ‘Exposé pour la Commission Politique de l'Assemblée’, 21 September 1956, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-898, 11–14.

108) Letter from Pierre Huet to Cittadini Cesi, 14 May 1958, HAEU, OEEC-196 (translation my own).

109) ‘Note d'information: La C.E.C.A. à l'exposition de Bruxelles’, 9 June 1958, HAEU, OEEC-196 (translation my own).

Branding ‘Europe’ as Liberal: A Balancing Act

As laid out above, the European exhibitions fit themselves into the architectural nationalism and the thematic framework of Expo 58 as thought up by the Belgian government. At the same time, the OEEC, the Council of Europe, and the ECSC tried to stand out from each other and from the countless other pavilions and attractions on the fairgrounds. In their messages and foci, the three European exhibitions reflected what Kiran Patel has termed the “post-war division of labour”¹¹⁰ between Western European organisations. Plus, they exhibited different brands of Cold War liberalism: the tables and graphs about growth and prosperity in the OEEC exhibition; the interlinking of ‘Europe’ and democracy in the exhibition of the Council of Europe; and the ECSC with a combination of the two and a notable emphasis on the coal and steel industries. Hence, as they all tried to brand ‘Europe’ as liberal, the European exhibitions at Expo 58 allow to return the questions raised above: *how do liberal principles and ideals such as self-determination, reason, and rationality translate to messages, rhetoric and aesthetics? What does it entail to brand oneself as liberal?*

First of all, despite their different foci, the three European exhibitions at Expo 58 all grappled with the general dilemma inherent in branding something as liberal – namely the contradiction between self-determination and persuasion. And in the specific context of the early Cold War, (Western) European organisations wanted to persuade, educate, and entertain whilst distancing themselves from notions of manipulative ‘propaganda’, associated with war, the Third Reich, and the Soviet Union.¹¹¹ Up until the immediate post-war years, ‘propaganda’ had been a relatively neutral term. Yet, by 1958, decisionmakers inside European organisations mostly used ‘propaganda’ to denounce the illiberal practices of illiberal regimes – and therefore to signal their own ‘liberal-ness’: a Council of Europe official, for example, considered the Soviet pavilion “nothing but a huge propaganda machine”.¹¹² Similarly, the ECSC vigilantly commented that the Soviet pavilion pursued “a goal of *real* propaganda in favour of a political idea”,¹¹³ concerned about the ECSC’s competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, which did not have to worry about its liberal reputation. With a view to its own pavilion, the ECSC insisted that “this is not propaganda. This is showing that the unity of Europe is necessary ... and already in progress.”¹¹⁴

110) Patel, *Project Europe: A History*, 149.

111) Betts, *Ruin and Renewal: Civilising Europe After World War II*.

112) ‘Comité Spécial pour l’Exposition de Bruxelles, Compte rendu’, 30 October 1957, CACOE, EXPO/CM/AS (57) PV2 (translation my own).

113) ‘Exposé de la Haute Autorité sur la participation de la Communauté à l’Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles de 1958’, 24 September 1956, HAEU, CEAB03-922, 76–85, 83 (translation and emphasis my own).

114) ‘Note sur la préparation de la Journée Européenne du 9 Mai 1958’, 15 October 1957, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-1078, 11-16, 12 (translation my own).

The three organisations in the international section were thus all searching for a way to convincingly brand themselves without this being perceived as ‘propaganda’. As Émile Lousse put it when he sketched out the exhibition of the Council of Europe: “the character of the exhibition should neither be too technical, nor pure propaganda”.¹¹⁵⁾ Or, as a participant of an internal ECSC discussion concluded: “indirect propaganda is more effective than direct propaganda. *C’est à l’œuvre qu’on reconnaît l’artisan.*”¹¹⁶⁾ One recurring strategy in dealing with the dilemma inherent in branding ‘Europe’ as liberal was depoliticization, especially in the pavilions of the OEEC and the ECSC: the officials behind the scenes liked to frame their own branding activities as mere ‘information’, dressing their political messages in rationality and ‘truth’. And this corresponded with their positioning of liberalism as a ‘non-ideology’—especially vis-à-vis Soviet communism. Another way of depoliticising liberalism in its specific Cold War variety was a turn towards economic themes – much in line with the Cold War communication strategy of the US government, and – again – particularly notable in the pavilions of the ECSC and the OEEC: both focused on economic, and therefore allegedly apolitical themes. Plus, with their mere ‘stating of facts’, the ECSC and the OEEC overtly appealed to rationality, effectively depoliticising their quests for a common market and ever more productivity.¹¹⁷⁾

In the political rhetoric of early European organisations, the branding of ‘Europe’ as liberal generally translated to a strictly contained emotionality and an emphasis on facts, reason, rationality, and therefore self-evidence.¹¹⁸⁾ Framed as “a lesson that Europeans learnt from their violent and ultimately self-destructive pasts”,¹¹⁹⁾ the OEEC, the Council of Europe, and the ECSC all presented themselves as the latest evolutionary stage in an allegedly universal – temporality of progress. For example, the Council of Europe’s exhibition intended to “take the visitor to the logical conclusion: Europe must unite, triumphantly overcoming the obstacles of past centuries.”¹²⁰⁾ Resonating with conceptions of history as a “movement of Reason”,¹²¹⁾ they tended to trust that their message would simply “impose its evidence”.¹²²⁾

115) ‘L’Europe et la liberté du monde à l’Exposition Universelle de Bruxelles 1958, Exposé du Prof. Lousse’, 1958, CACOE, Box 3059 (translation my own).

116) ‘Exposé de la Haute Autorité sur la participation de la Communauté à l’Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles de 1958’, 24 September 1956, HAEU, CEAB03-922, 76–85, 83 (translation my own).

117) David W. Ellwood, *Rebuilding Europe: Western Europe, America and Postwar Reconstruction* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 1992).

118) On the point of self-evidence, see for example Gienow-Hecht, *Vom Staat zur Marke. Die Geschichte des Nation Branding*.

119) Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski, ‘Europeanization through Violence? War Experiences and the Making of Modern Europe’, in *Europeanization in the Twentieth Century. Historical Approaches*, ed. Martin Conway and Kiran Klaus Patel (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 189.

120) ‘Propositions de la direction de l’information pour le script du Pavillon commun CE/OECE à l’Exposition de Bruxelles 1958’, 25 June 1956, CACOE, EXPO/BRUX/GRT/SG (56) 14 (translation my own).

121) As quoted in J. Peter Burgess, ‘Coal, Steel and Spirit. The Double Reading of European Unity (1948-51)’, in *Europe and the Other and Europe as the Other*, ed. Bo Stråth, 4th edn (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2010), 421.

122) ‘Palais de la Coopération Mondiale’, 1956, HAEU, CECA_DOAC-895, 158-166, 160 (translation my own).

All in all, in both form and content, the European exhibitions at Expo 58 emphasised the difficulty “to bring the idea of European politics to life”.¹²³⁾ Furthermore, they outlined a particular, if incoherent script of what it meant for early Western European organisations to brand themselves as liberal in the early Cold War, and more specifically in the peculiar setting of the ‘world’s fair’: even though they represented different varieties of ‘Europe’, they all aligned ‘Europe’ with a US Cold War conception of liberalism – especially in their focus on democracy and allegedly apolitical, economic themes. In dealing with the dilemma between self-determination and political persuasion, the three European exhibitions performed a balancing act: they tried to balance reason and emotion, education and entertainment. And even though they came to different results, they not only branded themselves as liberal – they also branded liberalism in the process. They branded ‘Europe’ as liberal, but they also branded liberalism as European. In line with the framing of their branding policies as ‘non-propaganda’, they branded liberalism as a ‘non-ideology’. And consequently, they expressed and affirmed what Duncan Bell has described as liberalism’s far-reaching reframing as the “ideological other of ‘totalitarian’ ideologies, left and right”,¹²⁴⁾ starting in the 1930s, particularly in Britain and the US.

Conclusions and Outlook: What Remained of Expo 58?

Even though it was challenged by the increased availability of visual media, Expo 58 still presented a central “cultural platform of global display culture”.¹²⁵⁾ It has often been described as “a mirror of society in transition”,¹²⁶⁾ and it became a landmark in the collective memory of modern-day Belgium. Still, Expo 58 was a snapshot rather than a lasting image: it celebrated “a Belgium that would soon no longer exist”,¹²⁷⁾ especially with a view to the Belgian empire. And when Expo 58 closed on 19 October 1958, all pavilions and attractions were quickly dismantled, except for the Atomium.¹²⁸⁾ Regarding Western European ‘integration’, Expo 58 had captured the political tug of war between different approaches to ‘integration’

123) ‘Exposé de la Haute Autorité sur la participation de la Communauté à l’Exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles de 1958’, 24 September 1956, HAEU, CEAB03-922, 76-85, 83 (translation my own).

124) Duncan Bell, ‘What Is Liberalism?’, *Political Theory* 42, no. 6 (2014): 699.

125) Leerssen and Storm, ‘Introduction’, 7; Kunkel speaks of ‘the rise of the visual age’, cf. Sönke Kunkel, *Empire of Pictures. Global Media and the 1960s Remaking of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 14.

126) Gonzague Pluvinage, ed., *Expo 58: Between Utopia and Reality* (Brussels: Éditions Racine, 2008), 12.

127) Arnaud Bozzini, ‘From One Expo to the Next: The Universal and International Exhibitions in Belgium Prior to 1958’, in *Expo 58: Between Utopia and Reality*, ed. Gonzague Pluvinage (Brussels: Éditions Racine, 2008), 29; a Belgium that Pluvinage characterised as ‘politically unitarian, rich through its coalmines and a country that jealously protected its colonies’, cf. Pluvinage, *Expo 58: Between Utopia and Reality*, 12.

128) The ECSC considered to use the ECSC pavilion as office space for its so-called Parliamentary Assembly, cf. Michel Dumoulin and Matthieu Lethé, ‘The Question of Location’, in *The European Commission, 1958-72: History and Memories*, ed. Michel Dumoulin (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2007), 284; the OEEC considered recycling parts of its exhibition for a ‘floating exhibition’, i.e. a travelling exhibition on a ship, organised by the Council of European American Associations. For the correspondence between Donald Mallett, head of the OEEC’s information service, and representatives of the Council of European American Associations, see HAEU, OEEC-196.

that was characteristic for the 1950s – especially between the ECSC and the Council of Europe. Furthermore, Expo 58 had demonstrated the tension between national and pro-European interests that determined the post-war era. Plus, as a “theater of conflict”,¹²⁹⁾ it had exhibited the ideological rivalries of the early Cold War, leading the OEEC, the Council of Europe, and the ECSC to align their exhibitions and rhetoric with the antagonism between liberalism and its illiberal others.

The fair’s success obviously depended on its visitors – millions of visitors – to see the exhibitions, but also to buy tickets and cover the immense expenses. Still, the documents stored in national or institutional archives rarely account for the experience of this “embodied community”.¹³⁰⁾ Neither do the available documents reveal the impact that Expo 58 had on different “imagined communities”,¹³¹⁾ i.e., the target audiences of TV shows, cinema newsreels, newspapers, or radio broadcasts. It is therefore difficult to tell how effective or successful the OEEC, the Council of Europe, and the ECSC ultimately were in shaping visitors’ perception of them as individual organisations and of ‘Europe’ in general. All of them officially considered Expo 58 a success. But in retrospect, at least Paul Lévy at the Council of Europe also regretted the visible lack of unity within the international section, which, in his opinion, failed to “impart a sense of international cooperation to visitors”.¹³²⁾

The European organisations at Expo 58 all evidently struggled to curate exhibitions that were recognisably European, liberal, persuasive, and entertaining at the same time. Yet, looking beyond the international section, Expo 58 suggests that the three European organisations were not the only self-proclaimed liberals struggling to brand themselves. Or at least, they struggled to keep up with their illiberal competitors: the most popular pavilion, according to a public survey was that of Czechoslovakia.¹³³⁾ And at least following USIA polls, the physical and symbolic juxtaposition of the Soviet and the US pavilion in the foreign section of Expo 58 ended with a “small victory for the Soviet Union”.¹³⁴⁾ What remains of Expo 58 are therefore also preliminary answers to topical questions: why do self-proclaimed liberals seem

129) Arthur P. Molella and Scott Gabriel Knowles, ‘Introduction’, in *The World’s Fair in the Cold War : Science, Technology, and the Culture of Progress*, ed. Arthur P. Molella and Scott Gabriel Knowles (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019), 7; on the idea of the ‘world’s fair’ as ‘a giant theatre – or a great multiplicity of theatres’ cf. also Knight, ‘Discovering the World in Seville: The 1992 Universal Exhibition’, 23.

130) Ann Rigney, ‘Embodied Communities: Commemorating Robert Burns, 1859’, *Representations* 115 (2011): 71-101.

131) Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed. (originally published in 1983) (London: Verso, 2016).

132) “Peut-on faire le bilan de l’exposition de Bruxelles?” (Transcript of Panel Discussion between Paul Lévy, Jean de Villers, Freddy François, Camille Bivers, and Jacques Biebuyck), January 1959, 13 (translation my own), CACOE, Box 3061; for Paul Lévy’s review of the Expo 58, see also Felice Dassetto and Yves Conrad, ‘Débats faisant suite aux témoignages de MM. Levy, Rabier, Collowald, Giro, Chittolina et Santarelli’, in *Naissance et développement de l’information européenne: Actes des journées d’étude de Louvain-la-Neuve des 22 mai et 14 novembre 1990*, ed. Felice Dassetto and Michel Dumoulin (Bern: Peter Lang, 1993), 77-87.

133) Anthony Swift, ‘Soviet-American Rivalry at Expo ’58’, in *The World’s Fair in the Cold War : Science, Technology, and the Culture of Progress*, ed. Arthur P. Molella and Scott Gabriel Knowles (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019), 27-45.

134) *Ibid.*, 44.

to struggle when it comes to communication and aesthetics? And is this a flaw or a constitutive feature of the “liberal script”?¹³⁵⁾

On the one hand, the European exhibitions at Expo 58 were peculiar and specific instances of liberal place branding. And their difficulties to develop effective branding strategies not only stemmed from their self-descriptions as ‘liberal’, but also from their already established boring reputation, their tense relationship to the nation-state, highly restricted budgets, and a lack of expertise among their personnel.¹³⁶⁾ On the other hand, the European exhibitions at Expo 58 did exemplify the specific challenges of liberal place branding: They illustrated the irresolvable contradiction between self-determination and political persuasion that has concerned liberals ever since.¹³⁷⁾ They vividly demonstrated their tendency to simply trust the self-evidence of their political ideas. And not least, Expo 58 shows that branding-wise, liberalism’s reconfiguration as “the ideological other of ‘totalitarian’ ideologies, left and right”¹³⁸⁾ came at a cost – for it effectively foreclosed aesthetics, topics, rhetorics, and emotional registers that could potentially be associated with totalitarian ‘propaganda’. This explains the palpable self-consciousness among early ‘Eurocrats’ and their perplexity at the task of finding a political and visual language for ‘Europe’. Yet, Expo 58 also suggests an assessment of continuous relevance: the communicative and aesthetic disadvantages of the ‘liberal script’ are both – a flaw *and* a constitutive feature. It will always pose a challenge to reconcile self-determination and political communication. At the same time, it is true that, historically, self-proclaimed liberals have simply not cared as much about aesthetics and communication as their illiberal competitors – and this is, ultimately, a choice.

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138) Duncan Bell traces this development to the 1930s-50s, cf. Bell, ‘What Is Liberalism?’, 699.

By file code

AS/CS(AS/Cult) Assemblée consultative. Commission des questions culturelles et scientifiques
EXP/Cult Comité des experts culturels

HAEU: Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence

CECA_DOAC Documentation et archives centrales, 1953-1967
CECA_SEGE Secrétariat général, 1952-1967
OEEC Organisation for European Economic Cooperation

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