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FACING ONE ANOTHER: ETHICS OF FRIENDSHIP IN TOWN TWINNING

Abstract

This article explores the significance of the concept of ‘friendship’ in town twinning in Europe from a praxeological perspective. In historiography and political theory, town twinning is usually associated with the political aim of instilling friendship between people of different municipalities in different countries, and thus between different nations. In contrast to these presuppositions, the present article reconstructs what friendship means in the framework of twinning practices on the basis of semi-structured qualitative interviews with twinning practitioners. The collected material challenges the commonly held belief that the political importance of twinning is in the presumed capacity of friendship to enable an understanding of the other. Research results show that at least for the first generation of twinning practitioners, twinning is primarily concerned with facilitating encounters prior to any linguistic and semantic communication or understanding. Contact with the other has been more important than understanding and communicating with the other. In other words, the concept of friendship as actualized in twinning has more in common with Georg Simmel’s notion of sociability (social intercourse for its own sake, based on assumed status equality and reciprocity) than with the modernist notion of friendship as an intimate relationship to another person to whom one exposes one’s innermost thoughts. This article concludes with some brief remarks on the historical contribution of town twinning, and its peculiar practice of trans-local friendships, to the grand projects of postwar restoration of peace in Europe, European integration since the 1970s, and to

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coping with the contemporary crises of the European Union, and thus of the European project.

Key words: friendship, european integration, town twinning, ethics

INTRODUCTION: FRIENDSHIP AND THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF TOWN TWINNING

Considering the European Commission's Europe for Citizens Programme, which was in place from 2007 to 2013 and the new Programme of the same name that will run from 2014 to 2020, it is safe to say that the European Commission has been attributing town twinning in Europe, and more generally inter-municipal relations, a paramount importance in achieving a more thorough political inclusion of citizens in the project of fostering a European polity¹. For instance, according to the old Programme, town twinning, based on 'thematic and long-lasting cooperation between towns' [Programme Guide, 2013: 38], was expected

"to contribute to giving citizens the opportunity to interact and participate in constructing an ever closer Europe, which is democratic and world-oriented, united in and enriched through its cultural diversity, thus developing citizenship of the European Union; developing a sense of European identity, based on common values, history and culture; fostering a sense of ownership of the European Union among its citizens; enhancing tolerance and mutual understanding between European citizens respecting and promoting cultural and linguistic diversity, while contributing to intercultural dialogue". [Programme Guide 2007: 6]

The new Europe for Citizens Programme begun in 2014 and set to run through 2020 continues to place town twinning at the center stage of political integration in Europe: according to the preliminary description, the Programme aims at

"supporting projects bringing together citizens from twinned towns. By mobilising citizens at local and EU levels to debate on concrete issues from the European political agenda, this measure will seek to promote civic participation in the EU policy making process and develop opportunities for societal engagement and volunteering at EU level"².

What is the reason that the rather particular practice of forging partnerships between municipalities that gained broader ground in Europe only after World

¹ I thank Jill Grinager (International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture at Justus Liebig University, Giessen) for proofreading this article.

² S. http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/europe-for-citizens/strands/democratic-engagement-and-civic-participation_en, accessed February 4, 2014. The full Programme was not yet published when this article was finished.

War II is regarded as so significant for the European project? Inter-municipal contacts, it seems, are attributed a particular saliency and power when it comes to the establishment of friendly relations among nation-states and their populations. So, for instance, the most recent handbook on town twinning issued by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) mentions ‘friendship’ and ‘trust’ as genuine resources that twinning can be based upon in order to build and reach its political potential:

“Based on friendship and trust, twinning can be a source for exchanging experiences and mutual enrichment in numerous areas. We can see this from the partnerships that developed between European towns around projects on waste treatment, water management, economic development, and improving social services, all thanks to twinning”. [CEMR, 2007: 2]

The present article explores the significance of the concept of ‘friendship’ in town twinning in Europe from a praxeological perspective. In historical texts and political theory, just as in European institutional discourses, like that of the EC and the CEMR just referred to, town twinning is usually associated with the political capacity to instill friendship between people in municipalities of different countries, and thus, as it were, metonymically, between different nations. In contrast to these political presuppositions, the article reconstructs what it means to enter into friendship with someone in another country in the framework of twinning practices on the basis of interviews with twinning practitioners in Europe. Research was conducted between 2012 and 2014 in a total of 12 small towns in the state of Hessen, Germany, through participant observation of twinning-related events held in these towns or self-organized excursions. In addition, semi-structured interviews with approximately 65 twinning practitioners in these towns rounded out the qualitative analysis. The small town was selected as the site of investigation on several counts. First, there is the particular assumption that the social processes that feed into town twinning, like the emergence of inter-town friendships, surface most visibly in small towns. Second, in the small town, town twinning is mostly left to a civic constituency, unlike in big cities where it is largely orchestrated by the municipal administration³.

The collected material challenges the commonly held belief that the political importance of twinning is in the presumed capacity of friendship to enable an understanding of the other. Research results show that at least for the first generation of twinning practitioners, twinning is primarily concerned with facilitating encounters prior to any linguistic and semantic communication or

³ All names of interviewees and towns have been changed.

understanding. ‘Being with’ the other [cf. Smith, 1990: 188], it seems, has been more important than understanding and communicating with the other. In other words, the concept of friendship as actualized in twinning has more in common with Georg Simmel’s notion of sociability – social intercourse for its own sake, based on assumed status equality and reciprocity– than with the modernist notion of friendship as intimate relationship to another person to whom one exposes one’s innermost thoughts. This article concludes with some brief remarks concerning the historical contribution of town twinning, and its peculiar practice of trans-local friendships, to the grand projects of postwar restoration of peace in Europe, European integration since the 1970s, and coping with the contemporary crises of the European Union, and thus of the European project.

1. ‘FRIENDSHIP’: THE CORE OF TOWN TWINNING

The idea that town twinning is about establishing and deepening friendships between local populaces has been prominent in the town twinning movement from a very early stage. Accordingly, most practical, political, and journalistic contributions to the discourse of town twinning since the 1950s subscribe to the view that successful twinning is about the establishment of personal friendships. So, for instance, Johannes Sticker [1982: 39] writes that ‘[i]n the end the extension of a twinning can prove successful only when strangeness can be overcome, [that is,] through a reduction of xenophobia with the aim of [establishing] personal friendships’. (translation AL) With a view to the U.S. Sister City movement established by Eisenhower, David H. Smith [1990: 188] states that ‘[t]he essence of the Sister City movement is people getting to know, understand, appreciate and care for each other as individuals’. Beate Wagner [1995: 66–69], extending the idea of friendship from the interpersonal to inter-municipal level, argues that town twinning as international and transnational practice is distinguished from other types of international relations in that it is by definition constituted by friendly relations among the twinned municipalities.

This ideal of friendship in town twinning is also mirrored in many statements found in my interview material with twinning practitioners and local supporters. Asked about the primary function of town twinning, a respondent from Breital stresses the ‘building up of personal relationships’ and an ‘understanding for other peoples’ as the ‘main task’. A person interviewed in Bittlich asserts the self-evidence of friendship: ‘the German-French friendship and the German-Polish friendship have been declared as taken for granted’. A respondent from

Tiefwaldendraws a parallel between the de facto nature of friendship in town twinning and the postwar constellation: ‘For us today it’s totally clear: we tend the friendship, for sure. Yet back then, what was the driver, the trigger? Maybe it came from the war period, such that people simply wanted to quite simply build up again friendship with their neighbors. Maybe that was one of the main reasons’.

However, what does friendship actually mean in this context? The literature on town twinning favors an in-depth analysis of the goals of friendship – namely, peace, understanding, and integration in Europe – rather than an actual understanding of friendship or the relationship building process. Before turning to twinning practitioners’ understandings of friendship (section 4), it is worthwhile to turn to historical and conceptual arguments that help localize the notion of friendship within a broader horizon of European history.

2. THE MODERNIST FRIENDSHIP IDEAL AND ITS CRITIQUE

Friendship from an emic perspective is a highly reflective type of social bond, with individuals constantly discussing what it means to be friends; it is also a powerful ‘social fact’ that puts very strong normative expectations upon individuals. The emic perspective has for the most part been ignored in the field of sociology, both empirically and theoretically, although this line of questioning did play an important role in early modernization theory. So, for instance, Georg Simmel interpreted the rise in significance of friendship in modern societies as a consequence of the rising importance of social relations that the individual could voluntarily choose, and was held accountable for [Simmel, 1890]. In the same vein, Jochen Dreher [2009] has contributed a phenomenological viewpoint on friendship with the aim of depicting the features and meaning of friendship for the subject in relation to the other before touching on the societal circumstances that would specify how particular friendship arrangements are structured. Drawing upon elaborations on friendship from Greek antiquity to Ferdinand Tönnies’s definition of friendship as a ‘kind of invisible location, a mystical city and meeting place which comes alive through the medium of an artistic sympathy or creative purpose’ [ibid.: 403], he localizes the phenomenological essence of friendship in a ‘symbolization of a unique we-relationship’ [ibid. 404] that in turn rests on ‘the [symbolic] basis of an everyday transcendent idea, [where] the two individual persons in their specific we-relationship function as symbols for this particular, unique idea of friend’ [ibid.: 412]. The friendship relation thus (re-)defines the self-concept of the subject ‘who attains his/her uniqueness by way of the friend’

[ibid.: 413]. Friendship, in short, consists in an intensive, mutual, and symmetrical exposure between alter and ego which has a strong associative and at the same time subjectivistic power.

However, this phenomenological reconstruction of friendship, which seems to be adopted by representations of town twinning as well [cf. Sticker, 1982: 21], runs into trouble precisely as it tries to engage a moment prior to socially changing notions of friendship, and thus cannot pay tribute to the historical context in which certain of its own features emerged in the first place. Precisely the importance given to the constitution of a seemingly self-serving and self-sustaining ‘we-relationship’ might be prone to efface the social context in which friendships, like any other social relationships, take place [Bell/Coleman, 1999: 2]. From the point of view of the present article, which is interested in fleshing out the social meaning of friendship in a particular context of social practice, it seems necessary to reconstruct friendship as a social practice as well as a social idea (I) bordering on neighboring notions of sociality. For instance, the common notion of friendship has been challenged on the grounds of considerations which dispute the claim that equality between friends is a universal feature of friendship, instead pointing to forms of hierarchical relations (such as between female heads of household and maids) which, although producing ‘different understandings of affinity,’ all the same might be endowed with ethical expectations not that dissimilar to those among friends in the common understanding [Barcellos Rezende, 1999: 93]. Conversely, the rigor with which the modernist concept of friendship has been delineated from economic activities and contractual relationships, according to James Carrier [1999: 21–27], conceals the actual parallelism in which the friendship ideal and the modern doctrine of contractual relations have both contributed to lending legitimacy to the notion of the modern subject as highly individualized. Thus, there is indication that the common notion of friendship is *modernist* insofar as it materializes in connection with crucial characteristics of modernity (such as individualism), while at the same time tending to conceal its modern historicity and genealogy.

The historical genealogy of such a modernist notion of friendship, according to Allan Silver [1989, 1990], is intimately intertwined with the sphere of the market. As Silver argues, both the friendship ideal and the notion of contractual relations stem from the same political and epistemological constellation, namely, the Scottish Enlightenment. Both were juxtaposed against the still reigning feudal power, and in particular against the feudal ethics of friendship. These ethics were on the one hand hierarchically organized so that friendship mostly meant the fulfillment of obligations between lords and vassals, while on the

other hand friendship was consolidated against an enemy feudal power, so that friends recognized and knew each other, as it were, as defined against a common foe. In refuting this notion of friendship that denotes mutual obligations within hierarchies on the occasion of feuds and warfare, Silver suggests that the modern idea of friendship emerged as the flip side of the claim that contractual relations among equals ought to be accorded a societal dignity. Both were interconnected by the concept of equality and voluntariness, which lacked or held a limited role in the feudal idea of friendship-as-loyalty. The advent of commercial society thus led to the emergence of two novel types of social relationships: those between 'indifferent strangers' who are neither friends nor foes and can therefore engage in mutual contracts; and those between friends who, on the basis of 'sympathy,' appreciate each other as individuals and share concerns. Thus, Silver argues that friendship is the twin of contractuality and that friendship and commerce have the same genealogical origin – namely, having been articulated as alternatives to feudal bonds and conflict [Silver, 1990: 1484–1486].

In this respect, friendship entertains important relations with the adjacent, but not identical, notion of 'sociability,' as conceptualized by Georg Simmel [1949]. Simmel introduces sociability to his formal sociology as a prime example of the formal mechanisms of sociation (*Vergesellschaftung*), because sociability, according to him, is pure form. It consists in individuals conversing with each other in the absence of both individual aspirations and substantive matters about which to communicate, whereby it is constituted exclusively by the acts of addressing themselves: 'At the moment when people direct their association toward objective content and purpose, as well as at the moment when the absolutely personal and subjective matters of the individual enter freely into the phenomenon, sociability is no longer the central and controlling principle' [ibid.: 256]. Thus, the notion of sociability actually occupies a kind of middle ground between friendship and commerce, or rather, is positioned perpendicular to that pair of notions in excluding both 'objective content and purpose' and 'personal and subjective matters' from the conversation. It does so by strictly adhering to reciprocity norms: 'everyone should guarantee to the other that maximum of sociable values (joy, relief, vivacity) which is consonant with the maximum of values he himself receives'. [ibid.: 257]

Reciprocity is thus endowed with the function of fostering social relations *prior to* contract-based individual utility maximization, as in commerce, and *prior to* sharing with the other substantive concerns, as in friendship. In other words, sociability raises to a socially reflective level the conceptual argument that reciprocity must not be reduced to *only* contract or to *only* 'sympathy', but instead

precedes both. Bringing together Silver's genealogical approach with Simmel's formal argumentation, one can thus say that the entanglement between friendship and commerce is based on a twofold ground: genealogically on their co-emergence as alternatives to feudal bonds, and conceptually on the anteriority of the concept of reciprocity from which the two notions of friendship and commerce developed their characteristics; in fact the differences between friendship and commerce have been overemphasized by social scientists in modernity and misinterpreted as pointing to a *conceptual* juxtaposition of friendship and commerce.

What can be gained from this historical and conceptual discussion on the question that informs the present article, namely, how friendship is being practiced in town twinning in Europe? In the face of the arguments described above, the European Union presents itself as pursuing a radically modernist project in which friendship and commerce are being welded together. Town twinning, in its turn, reminds us that the project of European integration, when it began after World War II, emerged from an imaginary scene, or even a utopia, in which friendship and commerce, it was hoped, would replace wartime international relations that had had much in common with the structures of feudal power. Hierarchical bonds of loyalty and the ability to recognize one's friends from one's foes distinguished this period. Reciprocity, finally, appears as the concept, which ties together friendship and commerce in that it is conceptually, and symmetrically, anterior to both friendship and commerce. These arguments provide a heuristic with which to approach the empirical question of friendship practices in town twinning with a conceptual lens that focuses on the role of reciprocity in practices of friendship.

3. A PRAXEOLGY OF FRIENDSHIP IN SMALL-TOWN TWINNING

Taking into account the criticisms of the modernist idea (1) of friendship discussed in the last section, this section introduces a praxeological methodology in order to investigate what friendship means in the practice of town twinning. Praxeology denotes a broad array of research approaches that all have an interest in the regularities of social processes that are not ascribed exclusively to the overarching social structures nor to the motivations and meaning-making on the side of the actors [cf. Giddens, 1979]. Thereby, the notion of 'practice' can be inflected in various ways, with the different conceptual emphases owed to different theoretical entry points. For instance, Pierre Bourdieu, whose practice-theory prominently features a notion of 'habitus' as a way of presenting oneself to the world acquired from the point of earliest socialization, which puts a strong

emphasis on the corporeal dimension of praxis ('hexis') [Bourdieu, 1977]. By way of contrast, approaches coming from Science Studies strongly accentuate the materiality of practice [Knorr Cetina/Schatzki/Savigny, 2001, Knorr Cetina/Bruegger, 2000], up to a point where material objects are themselves attributed the power of agency, as in Latour [1996]. Andreas Reckwitz [2002], combining the perspective of corporeality and materiality, adds the notion of the 'subject' as the seat where knowledge forms blend together to then inform social practice, thus linking the term practice via knowledge to discourse.

In the following, I shall opt for a praxeological approach that can be traced back to ethnomethodology (EM). EM, and more generally situationist approaches, have been present in praxeology mainly through Science and Technology Studies, with authors like Bruno Latour [1988] who rely upon the work of Harold Garfinkel. The point that is crucial about EM for the purposes of the present article is that EM is best equipped to tackle the micro-structures of social address, that is, the practices through which role sets are distributed and negotiated in situations. Primarily EM does not take for granted processes of social inclusion and attribution, but sees them as rather unlikely and always only precariously and provisionally stabilized outcomes of interactions [cf. Garfinkel, 1967, Garfinkel/Sacks, 1970]:

“Candidate [social] structurings are not to be accepted unless lay persons recognize the essential invariance of that structuring. [...] candidate structurings must themselves appear within substantive reality work. Members themselves must recognize candidate structurings in their everyday affairs”. [Mehan/Wood, 1975: 181]

Therefore, EM is not only a methodology, but an epistemology that is best suited to analytically penetrate town twinning friendships in all their historical and logistical *unlikeliness* because it looks at social processes per se as non-trivial. In the interviews I conducted, the interlocutors often addressed this unlikeliness of cross-national friendships as 'candidate structurings' which appeared highly presuppositional, even counter-intuitive, in the historical context in which they formed. Given this explicit reflection of the unlikeliness of encounter, I am tempted to view my interlocutors' accounts of encounters with 'friends' as a kind of vernacular ethnomethodology. The question following is this: what are the trans-local twinning situations that allow 'doing being friends' as well as 'passing as friends'? This methodology does not aim at a reconstruction of an anthropologically fundamental attitude implied in friendship relations but, on the contrary, at the ways that relations are socially established and stabilized *as* friendships. The question thus is how those situations are structured that allow

for an acknowledgment of the other as friend and for attributing friendship to some relations but not to others.

3.1. Friendly encounters

The modernist notion of friendship, as noted above, tends to universalize certain features of friendship that have not only emerged fairly recently but have been functioning as regulative and evaluative ideas at least as often as ‘actual’ social relations [Silver, 1989: 294]. Central to this modernist-universalist notion of friendship are practices of communication, because it is only through the latter (as opposed to bodily contact, for instance) that the personalities of the two involved persons can be calibrated toward each other and developed further: ‘This process leads to mutual reflections on the particular individuality of the single person, who attains his/her uniqueness by way of the friend, so to speak’. [Dreher, 2009: 413] While Jochen Dreher in his article sticks to the notion that friendship is ‘existential’ and thus has to be analyzed in universalist terms, Anthony Giddens [1999: 61] has hypothesized that the potential inherent in friendship to arrive at a completion of oneself in the other through ‘emotional communication’ is bound to be realized only in modernity, in the form of ‘pure relationships’. So, regardless of whether one chooses a phenomenological or a modernization-theoretical viewpoint, the idea (I) of friendship is ultimately about the potential unfolding of individualism through communication in an intimate relationship.

Already here the unlikeliness of twinning friendships can be observed. According to a significant number of respondents, many friendships and relations between people of different towns and countries cannot have a strong emphasis on communication simply because people, due to a lack of language proficiency in a common language, do not or hardly understand each other. A respondent from Breital, recalling the encounters of the first generation engaged in twinning-related exchange, states, ‘But none of them – most of them can’t (speak) French and the others (can’t speak) German so that communication is difficult anyway’. While the phenomenon that people cannot understand each other in twinning friendships seems to be peculiar with respect to the first generation, there are many statements that testify to a felt lack of command over the friend’s language. So, as soon as topics of discussion become more complicated in nature, many respondents simply rely on interpreters’ assistance.

And yet, these relationships are termed friendships. A crucial moment in those friendships seems to be the moment of first encounter, that is, when people meet face to face for the first time. These moments of encounter are not left to chance,

but are rigorously organized. For instance, respondents reported that matching procedures are favored which pair hosts and guests based upon commonalities. These relate, for instance, to social status ('class,' as a respondent from Bittlich put it), occupational background, hobbies, or to being a member of comparable voluntary associations (for instance, belonging to the voluntary fire brigade, the fishery club or a folk dance group). The twinning committees and the voluntary associations supporting them, thus compose lists of matching pairs before the arrival of new guests.

The normative expectation toward those first meetings seems to be that they should be repeated and become more intense over time. For instance, it is sometimes remarked that people failed to return for a repeat visit, which is met with critique: 'They come once, as new guests, they are pretty excited and never turn up again'. Also, often there is a constellation in place where the same persons (including their family members) always stay with the same host families, and vice versa. So, many respondents told me that, although they know many people in the other town, they always stay with the same family, and that it is generally rather a delicate affair to change the host: 'There were cases, where things didn't work out so well, so people changed [their host] but that's always a complicated affair'.

These observations add plausibility to the hypothesis that the first moment – the moment of encounter, as I would like to call it – is of decisive importance for the notion of friendship in town twinning. The notion of 'encounter,' thereby, bundles a certain set of significations. First, encounter is about a meeting of unknown persons, as Erving Goffman's [1961] use of the notion reminds us. Encounters are therefore valuable sources of sociological data about how people structure their relationships even in the absence of thorough (or any) knowledge about the other person. Then, 'encounter' can also have the meaning of a military confrontation, as for example in a war, where it signifies the moment that troops of enemy camps clash with each other. In such situations, 'communication,' being part and parcel of the modernist notion of friendship, usually takes the form of exchanging not symbols but violence. Encounters, thus, run the risk of turning into confrontations when 'communication' in the emphatic sense is not an option. That this latent meaning of encounter-as-confrontation accompanies the ways that town twinning practitioners view their practice becomes evident from an interview with a respondent from the town of Bittlich, who, being in his seventies, narrates more than one episode of how he managed to turn risky encounters into friendly encounters. For instance, being taken to an elderly person by the

grandfather of his host, who had told him that he might not be welcome there as a German because that elderly man had lost his son in the war, he recalls:

“And so he [the grandfather] says, let’s go there. And when we arrived there he says: But I don’t know how the elderly man is going to receive me because I’m German and his son with the war, his only son was killed in the war. Well, I moved in there and listened how they talked to each other, and raised my ears and finally said that I was a voluntary firefighter in Germany [orig.: in Allemagne amateur-pombier], I said, we don’t look at denomination or skin color or religion, I said, we help anyone if there’s something, also on the highway [orig.: grand autoroute] [...] And because he – when we were in that man’s house, I realized: I am *welcome* here. As I had been telling them that we as firefighters, that was where my connection came from in the first place”.

In this episode, which ends on the affirmation that he finally knew he would be ‘welcome,’ it becomes clear that the overcoming of (supposed, expected, feared) reservations regarding his new acquaintance could be condensed into one moment, which he manages to maneuver even with his restricted command of French. This ‘communication’ is arguably much more about the structuring of a potentially risky situation, which may as well have ended in disaster, than about communication as a means of opening up to the other (as in the modernist conception of friendship).

To sum up this subsection: the ‘friendly encounter’ is the foundational scene of friendship in town twinning. Unlike the modernist idea(l) of friendship, which usually focuses on the development of mutual inclination and the accompanying perfection of personalities as the friendship unfolds, the friendly encounter does not give much attention to the moment a friendship is conceived and town twinning practitioners are keenly aware of the decisive moment of encounter as a potentially risky moment.

3.2. Hospitality

According to the interviews, the most paradigmatic scene of friendship in town twinning is mutual hospitality. Visits by friends from the partner towns provide an occasion for staging the friendship through acts of hospitality. These acts seem to have evolved over time. For instance, respondents report that twinning-related visits, which were often started in the 1950s or 1960s (especially between French and German municipalities), were an occasion for leaving the parents’ bedroom to the guest. With respect to more recent twinings with towns in the post-Soviet space, similar acts of hospitality are reported: ‘You know this hospitality is really still quite enormous over there [in the Polish partner town], and even a poor family, if they are willing, would never say something like: we can’t host anybody

because we have no space,' as a respondent from Bittlich explains. However, the interlocutors also often mention that comfort standards have meanwhile changed, so that hospitality nowadays consists rather in providing the guests with a 'separate' sphere than in sacrificing one's own privacy.

Yet these improved standards can become an obstacle to the emergence of friendships through hospitality. For instance, it is remarked by some respondents that potential participants in excursions to other towns might shy away from such a trip upon the consideration that they might not be able to reciprocate the hospitality. Also, assumed expectations regarding the comfort standards of the visitors might discourage potential hosts from offering hospitality, as the respondent just mentioned explains: 'You know here in Germany it is common that when I ask families (to host somebody), they say: well we don't have a bathroom for them, how can we host two persons for a (whole) week when we don't have a guest bathroom'.

Thus, hospitality appears as the basis of friendship. Many respondents, especially of the first and second twinning generations, are not engaged in very regular communication with their friends apart from visits (which are often embedded into excursions to the partner town organized by the twinning committee) and ceremonial occasions, like sending Christmas cards or congratulating the friend for birthdays, etc. This concentration of friendship practices on situations of hospitality comes along with a decidedly reciprocal arrangement of the visits. Visits are expected to be returned (that is, to the same family); dinner invitations are given and received; and the selection of gifts belongs to the delicate art of duly reciprocating without showing off. These arrangements equip the practice of friendship in town twinning with a somehow formalized outlook: it seems as if the scene of hospitality was designed to serve as a stage for Georg Simmel's concept of sociability to materialize, which demands that the foundation of social intercourse occur in a strict reciprocity and that there is equality of those participating.

3.3. Socializing, welcoming, being welcomed

Friendship and hospitality thus are tightly connected to a notion of sociability. This becomes evident in an interview with a couple in Breital. This couple draws parallels and establishes connections between having friends in the partner town, being invited there to visit different families, and being generally known in the other town. Asked about how many friendships they entertain in that town, they first mention the 'family where we go, there are eight siblings,' and

those siblings ‘in turn have children themselves, and those already have children themselves, that is we’re in the third generation’. The family, so to speak, is the vessel of friendship. However, the respondents subsequently mention that ‘when we cross the street down there [in the French twinned town Châpillon] – well, I constantly know somebody,’ which is likened to ‘me walking over the market square here in Breital, that was just like in Châpillon’. Finally, the husband expands the notion of friendship to those families ‘where we go for dinner, who invite us for dinner’.

Being known in the other town is a feature of twinning-related sociability that many respondents mention, like a Breital respondent who says about the number of her friendships in the twinned town of Redwich, UK, ‘I don’t know, I can’t name a figure, when I’m walking through town somebody always shouts “Hi [...]” I don’t know – a lot’. Thus, although relationships to the friends one hosts, relationships to individuals as dinner guests, and relationships to the general public are not the same, there is an intimate connection between these three ways of approaching the other. I suggest two conceptual frames in order to specify these characteristics of friendship in town twinning.

First, friendship generally follows the logic of sociability and can be re-constructed in its social meaning from this perspective. Very much unlike the modernist friendship idea (I), where ‘true’ friendship is juxtaposed to seemingly superficial social intercourse, twinning friendship is strictly based on practices of reciprocal exchange, thus bringing it close to Simmel’s concept of sociability which gives great importance to the mutual acknowledgement of equality; sociability, Simmel argues,

“must, because of its very nature, posit beings who give up so much of their objective content, who are so modified in both their outward and their inner significance, that they are sociably equal, and every one of them can win sociability values for himself only under the condition that the others, interacting with him, can also win them”. [Simmel, 1949: 257]

The matching procedures that stand at the beginning of many twinning friendships are designed to enable the achievement of this ‘sociable equality’ by bringing together individuals and families who have something in common. The social function of these commonalities thus does not reside in creating topics *over which* to communicate or to exchange but rather in making it easier to exchange and communicate without ‘objective content and purpose’ [ibid.: 256]. The proximity between twinning friendships and sociability, lastly, creates a common ground in terms of situational features between familial, associational, and official/ceremonial practices: much like familial hospitality, associational socia-

bility and ceremonial practices (such as receptions and banquets), both depend on the right conduct of practices of exchange and on the successful performance of sociable conduct.

Second, the notion and social meaning of friendship in twinning can also be circumscribed from the point of view of hospitality: friendship in town twinning is about welcoming the other and being welcomed. In Jacques Derrida's reconstruction of Emanuel Levinas' ethics of the anteriority of the other (epitomized in the 'face' of the other that one faces in encounters) in the constitution of the self, the notion of hospitality is reconstructed as precisely the moment in which the other is 'welcomed' as being anterior to the self. In Emanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida argues, 'The word "hospitality" here translates, brings to the fore, re-produces, [...] "attention" and "welcome." An internal paraphrase, a sort of periphrasis, a series of metonymies that bespeak hospitality, the face, welcome: tending toward the other, attentive attention, intentional attention, *yes* to the other'. [Derrida, 1999: 22] In other words, the ethics of hospitality account for the social nature of the self (here, the host's self) being a function and effect to his/her welcoming the other and offering hospitality to him/her. So, what the scenes of friendship and sociability reported by the interlocutors all allude to – be it the hosting of friends, the reception of dinner guests, or public recognition as being known in the other town – is a moment of 'welcome' in Jacques Derrida's sense, with 'welcome' referring to the acceptance and appreciation of the anteriority of the other who is welcomed and thereby generates the subjectivity of the host's self: 'The subject: a host'. [ibid.: 55] In this reading, hospitality thus refers to an ontology of the subject that highlights the prior and constitutive role of the other in the emergence, recognition, and viability of subjectivity.

This interpretation of twinning friendship as a generalization of the gesture of 'welcome' is supported by, and historically characterized, with a measure of risk, because by definition, hospitality contains the possibility of 'hospitality to the worst' [ibid.: 35], for instance, when one welcomes one's enemy. In other words, to conceive of friendship in town twinning as a practice of hospitality in the sense of Emanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida, the belief that there is a *general* risk that friendship might fail altogether along with the *historically specific* risk that hospitality is especially shaky and improbable among enemies remains constant, yet despite this it is of particular worth to strive for friendship against all historical odds: 'this possible hospitality to the worst is necessary so that good hospitality can have a chance, the chance of letting the other come, the *yes* of the other no less than the *yes* to the other'. [ibid.: 35] In other words, the historical peculiarity of the establishment of friendship in postwar Europe shifts Jacques

Derrida's ethics of hospitality onto epistemological terrain, thus embedding it in the ethnomet hodological epistemology proposed here: the constitution of self and society through the anteriority of an other becomes a specifically apt way to view the establishment and stabilization of friendships in a historical constellation in which the 'yes' to the other was utterly unlikely because the 'yes' of the other could in no way be taken for granted.

I thus maintain that friendship as practiced in town twinning ought to be historically understood from the perspective of two adjacent concepts, namely, that of sociability and that of reciprocity. Sociability instills friendship with a formal, sequential, and normative structure, namely, to reciprocate. At the same time, it emphasizes the mere existence of social intercourse over any particular thematic direction of a conversation, or over the notion of 'theme' as such. Thereby, hospitality provides twinning practitioners with a stage on which to practice friendship, whereby this stage is relatively public: it inclines more toward the official and public twinning-related ceremonies, events, and festivities (anniversaries, the inauguration of new twinings, cultural events, etc.) than toward an understanding of hospitality as a private and intimate practice. Yet hospitality also has a conceptual weight of its own in twinning friendships, exposing both the significance of the other, who is welcomed, in attaining a social self and the risk inherent in welcoming the other as the power of subjectivization is left to that other.

The reference to Jacques Derrida's reconstruction of hospitality, far from a 'philosophical' interpretation, accounts for the historical specificity of town twinning in postwar Europe. In the aftermath of utter devastation and among former enemies, civic welcome addresses took place that must have appeared to contemporaries, regardless of previous involvement, as extremely unlikely, risky, pointless, or even dangerous. This is still echoed today in reports by respondents regarding reservations among the local population against the development of new twinings with towns in Eastern Europe. As a respondent from Bittlich remembers: 'I was asked with regard to the youth exchange (with the Polish partner town) whether it's necessary to hide the silver spoons, to lock up the jewelry [*laughs*]. So I say, do as you like or don't host anybody. You know this is, was weird. This I wouldn't have expected, this I really wouldn't have expected'. Hospitality and friendship in situations where there is rampant prejudice and stereotypes thus have been as needed and valuable as they have been risky and unlikely.

In this manner, the practice of friendship in town twinning appears utterly alien to the modernist concept of friendship. On the one hand, it reminds us that this concept in actuality was very close to that of 'exchange' in the sense of reciprocity, contractuality, and commerce. The superficiality today often attributed

to ‘merely’ contractual relations, as opposed to ‘thick’ sociality, figured in the Scottish Enlightenment as the positive condition of peaceful and friendly relations in society. On the other hand, the reconstruction of the meaning of hospitality in friendship as proposed here is far more radical than the usual modernist argument that “‘friendship’ is constituted on the basis of the symbolization of a unique we-relationship’ [Dreher, 2009: 404]. This is because hospitality refers to a recognition of the other as the generic *alter* that constitutes *ego* as a social being; and, in giving *alter* this power, hospitality points to the possibility of risk, mischief and failure in attaining friendship, which is conceptually the flip side of hospitality, and which appeared historically rather likely, or even inescapable, after World War II.

Given Jacques Derrida’s [1999: 22–23] emphasis on Emanuel Levinas’ argument that welcoming the other takes place prior to any ‘theme’ for the exchange, one might go so far as to suggest that there is an intimate connection between twinning hospitality’s potential to circumvent theme-oriented communication and its (precarious) power to instill friendship. Together, hospitality and the avoidance of thematic communication may be seen as the signature of relations between members of the European nation-states after the war and the Holocaust: far from being able to explicitly address the atrocities of those macro-crimes, twinning practitioners returned to a kind of minimalist ethics that shunned ‘communication’ (as in the modernist concept of friendship) and instead tried to prove the possibility of sociability⁴. Rolf-Richard Grauhan, who conducted one of the first empirical studies about French-German town twinning and found out that in many cases, foreign language proficiency was absent among the practitioners, especially among older people, suggests that ‘we have to face the strange, and maybe disconcerting, fact that in many cases language is not, or only to a very modest extent, necessary for human communication (*Verständigung*)’ [Grauhan, 1968: 71, translation AL]. However, it seems to me that the absence of language does not so much point to any ontology of human interaction but rather to the specificity of an historical constellation in which communication would most likely have made it unavoidable to the matize the atrocities of the recent past in the face of the other, the former enemy.

To conclude, the ethics of friendship in town twinning, from the practitioners’ point of view, did not reside in a straightforward notion of communication but rather in exposing oneself to the risk of welcoming the other – a gesture that, apparently, has been stabilized and generalized by practices of reciprocal

⁴ I thank Albrecht Koschorke (University of Konstanz) for pointing this out to me.

and 'friendly' exchange. Seen in this light, the postwar constellation appears as a moment of vernacular ethnomethodology in which reflection upon potential crises and interruptions in cross-national interactions structured social processes in those interactions.

4. FRIENDSHIP AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND CRISIS

Within the framework of this article, I will not be able to offer more than a very brief overview of possible implications of my conception of friendship for more general questions of integration and crisis in Europe. During its first stage, the concept of friendship in town twinning was intimately related to the absence of language, both on practical and on metaphorical grounds. For the first generation, which mostly had very little foreign language capacities, twinning practices facilitated contact and friendships that did not presuppose a deep understanding of the other because they were held together by a ritualized series of visits, invitations, exchanges of gifts, of hospitality, and of socializing. However, on a metaphorical level, twinning provided a framework for encountering the other without hostility precisely because, in the absence of a 'language' to address the past, thematic communication could be avoided in the hospitable and reciprocal balance of visits and counter-visits.

The genuinely political qualities of town twinning, in which towns emerged not only as sites of friendship but as carriers of politics, took shape only since the 1970s and in situations in which 'municipal foreign policy' was articulated as a challenge to national foreign policies [Sticker, 1982; Kodolitsch, 1989; Mirek, 1989]. From my observations, 'friendship' did not figure prominently during this stage, instead notions like 'peace,' 'disarmament,' 'solidarity,' 'aid,' or 'development' prevailed. These were projects that presupposed a greater degree of articulateness than the original West European twinings. This drive toward the articulateness of what twinning ought to be about has become even more prevalent in the present wave of Europeanization, which demands that town twinning 'projects' contribute to the deepening of European integration. This comes along with the differentiation of functional roles within the twinning constituency (mostly allotted to persons with good foreign language command), for which 'friendship' slips over into the auxiliary role of enabling and fostering issue-defined cooperation just as in the aforementioned CEMR guide to town twinning and covers such topics as 'waste treatment, water management, economic development, and improving social services' (see above). Thus, respondents who

were involved in the organization of twinning-related events hold that friendship has an instrumental role to play here.

In the original twinings, it was the postwar inaccessibility of language that endowed practices of reciprocity with the dignity of friendship because reciprocity made it possible to engage with the other – literally, to welcome the other – without much conversation or even discussion. The recent advent of ‘thematic,’ that is, project-oriented approaches to town twinning, however, exposes friendships to the pressure of project management, with the consequence that reciprocity loses the dignity of friendship: it figures not so much in the welcoming of the other but rather in cooperation on concrete issues.

This shift of reciprocity from a conceptual frame of friendship to one of contractuality, I venture to say, parallels the advent of contemporary political crises in the Eurozone. European states in danger of going bankrupt are not ‘welcomed,’ that is, they are not acknowledged as constituting political subjectivity; instead, they are forced into cooperation on the basis of clearly defined, and contracted upon, economic goals. Both in small-town twinning and in the present European Union, that is, an emphatic notion of reciprocity as basis of friendship tends to be displaced. In the immediate postwar period, town twinning had anticipated the political ethics of friendship-through-reciprocity that later formed part and parcel of the integration project of the European Union; today, challenges that surface in small-town twinning projects serve as barometer of similar challenges to European integration and the success of the European project.

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SPOTYKAJĄC SIĘ ZE SOBĄ. ETYKA PRZYJAŹNI W MIASTACH BLIŹNIACZYCH

Streszczenie

W artykule bada się znaczenie koncepcji „przyjaźni” w odniesieniu do miast partnerskich (bliźniaczych) w Europie z perspektywy prakseologicznej. W historiografii i teorii polityki pojęcie miasta bliźniaczego zwykle jest związane z politycznym celem wprowadzania przyjaźni pomiędzy ludźmi różnych jednostek administracyjnych w różnych krajach i w konsekwencji pomiędzy różnymi narodami. W opozycji do pierwotnych założeń prezentowany artykuł rekonstruuje znaczenie przyjaźni w ramach „bliźniaczych” praktyk na podstawie wywiadów swobodnych ze standaryzowaną listą informacji przeprowadzonych wśród osób zaangażowanych w „bliźniacze” relacje miast. Zebrany materiał kwestionuje powszechnie podzielane przekonanie, że polityczne znaczenie partnerstwa leży w domniemanej zdolności do zawiązania przyjaźni po to, aby lepiej się rozumieć. Wyniki badania wykazują, że przynajmniej w pierwszym pokoleniu praktykujących to partnerstwo, jest ono głównie skupione na organizowaniu spotkań przed podjęciem komunikacji językowej, znaczeniowej, a także porozumienia. Wzajemny kontakt był ważniejszy od zrozumienia się nawzajem a także skomunikowania się. Krótko mówiąc, pojęcie przyjaźni realizowane w partnerstwie ma więcej wspólnego z pojęciem towarzyskości według Georga Simmela (pożycie towarzyskie dla samej idei, oparte na przyjętym statusie równości i wzajemności) niż z modernistycznym podejściem do przyjaźni jako intymnej relacji z drugą osobą wobec której ujawnia się najskrytsze przemyślenia. Niniejszy artykuł kończy się wnioskiem wyrażonym krótkimi uwagami o historycznym wkładzie partnerstwa miast, szczególnie praktyki przyjaźni ponadlokalnych, do głównych projektów przywrócenia pokoju w powojennej Europie.

Słowa kluczowe: przyjaźń, integracja europejska, miasta partnerskie, etyka