

Andrea Rosengren:
Europe - A brand in the eyes of the world

We have met here because we have issues with our European brand. In our eyes, we don't have a strong identity, and we don't think we have that much in common as Europeans.



But for people outside Europe, the fact that we think this way could be rather surprising. In their eyes I believe things look different. And I'll tell you why based on some of my own experiences.

When travelling outside Europe I've often been surprised when people use the label "European". Something I almost never hear at home. For example:

– When I was a design consultant in China I remember having lunch with several Chinese designers. One told me that if he had to live somewhere else than China it would have to be a place with a long history and a strong cultural heritage. **Like Europe**. The prominent cultural history of China was something that made him very proud. So he could not imagine living in the US but for example in France because of the long **European history** and strong **European cultural heritage**.

– And when I was working in New York, my design colleagues quite often talked about **European film** and **European architecture**. And the way they did it made it clear to me that **European** was a really high quality label. Felt really nice.

– Another time, just arriving in Australia as an exchange student and looking for a place to live, I ran into this girl. We started to talk about music and she name-dropped a number of **European bands** she really liked. I happened to like the ONE Australian band she thought lived up to the music coming out of Europe:) It felt like we became friends right there, and she wondered if I wanted to have the spare room they had in their townhouse. I was relieved. I had a home. And a friend. And that was thanks to **European music**.

Another example:

– Travelling in India and Nepal for 6 months I recall this American traveller telling me how we Europeans seemed to go so well together, that we have so much common and some sort of **European way of socialising**. She really seemed a bit jealous!

– Last spring in San Francisco, our American friends described the nice areas of the city as more “**European neighbourhoods**”. Pretty common to hear people describe flourishing areas with pedestrian streets as European. And isn’t that really nice?

– Japanese people I’ve worked with while living for a shorter period in Tokyo had this thing about **European café culture...** They took me to replicas of the type of cafes we have here, and told me that the Number One place for Japanese people to go to for their honey moon is Europe, because **Europe is so romantic**. Adorable generalisation of our continent :)

– And then one last example, again from China. Because I still remember the sadness in my Chinese colleague's eyes when he told me that I was very lucky to live somewhere where I could choose to have more than one child. **Like we can in Europe**. A big family with many kids is something unreachable for them. And a freedom we take for granted.

I could go on and on. Maybe you’ve experienced similar situations when travelling outside Europe. To people from outside Europe, we have so many things nice things that differentiate and unify us. Things that make me so proud of being European.

But we, here in Europe, are inevitably looking at ourselves from too a short distance to see our own identity clearly.

In my impression there is a huge gap between the inside and outside perspective. But the good thing about this: The branding guru Neumeier says:

“A brand is not what YOU say it is, it’s what THEY say it is.”

By that definition we have a smashing brand. Without even working on it! But what we **REALLY** need to work on is Europe’s internal image. Imagine what we could do if we put some effort into this. If we could enforce this strong identity on the **INSIDE**.

I guess the easiest thing would be to start talking about all the nice and special things about Europe at home, too. In school or even in the next election campaign for the European Parliament. I'm pretty sure all this would increase our pride in our European identity.

To this day, we deal very passively with our amazing common cultural heritage. Exactly that thing people outside Europe talk so much about. I'm far from an expert on how to put this treasure to use, but for example I would love to see an art exhibitions tour our modern museums which would consist of a collection of brilliant European artists shown together. Different European bands touring together would create a sort of European music festival where ever they go. We could institute European creative awards. I'd also appreciate a shortlist of important shared European literature, film etc.

But besides a common identity, we need to think about how we wish to move forward with the European brand in the future. Because every brand needs a clear VISION.

What if, standing on the shoulders of earlier European cultural giants, we would strive to become the continent that excels in creative industries, in arts, design, architecture and music?

Creating an awareness of all the amazing things that people already see as European, and on top of that, building something new: That would make future generations proud to be European.