Thinking of Europe

Young perspectives on Social Injustices in Europe

in Times of Transformation

The world is undergoing significant transformations.

Thirty-two years ago, the Alfred Herrhausen Gesellschaft embarked on its mission and is now finally concluding its journey. Our focus spanned significant challenges of our times, from urbanization to digitalization, all the while adhering to the core values of Alfred Herrhausen fostering democracy and the unity of an open and free society.

We are living amidst disruption and upheaval, in the form of economic turbulence, geopolitical tensions, the imperative of decarbonization, and the introduction of AI into aspects of every-day life. The speed of change is ever increasing, and we need to adapt to these circumstances—and shape them. How will the multitude of elections in 2024, with 70 elections around the globe in total, shape the destiny of our democracy? The future eludes our predictions and control, yet we wield influence over the "now", the present moment where we act and interact.

Drawing from personal experience, navigating the present sometimes requires a pause between impulse and reaction. Reflection and a change in perspective enable us to respond wisely, based on past experiences, our values and future objectives. While we can't predict the future, we can prepare for it with visionary thinking, foresight, a goal in mind and building those narratives for a life and future we desire.

In this endeavour, we need to focus more on the younger generation, who are and will be shaping the future.

> ► Do we listen carefully to the ideas, values, wishes and perceptions of young people?
> ► How do they view Europe and its transformative powers?
> ► What narratives do they wish to construct for a utopian and worthwhile Europe?

Through the network Understanding Europe we empower young Europeans to express themselves, learn, and engage politically—fostering a dialogue among peers. In 2022, we explored *narratives and perspectives on Europe* of network members, examining *narratives of change*.

This summer, we invited the Peer Educators to depict and capture their visions through photographs and texts. Integrating Photovoice into this process allows us to listen and see things through a different lens—an exercise in changing perspective.

How can we set aside our privileges, embrace diverse viewpoints, break away from outdated patterns and beliefs, and collaboratively find solutions? Then, now and in the future, we are bound to change. There still is a lot of work ahead. I wish you success continuing the path that echoes our mission—fostering change for a better future.

I hope you enjoy the read and find some thought-provoking images. It has been an honour to accompany you along this journey!

Elisabeth Mansfeld
November 2023

The Understanding
Europe network

Understanding Europe is an educational network run by and for young people. This youth-led network offers courses for school classes, transnational training events and a fellowship programme, strengthening young Europeans' civic participation. Understanding Europe, currently active in 12 European countries, is committed to a democratic, diverse and open-minded Europe. The network creates protected spaces for young people to learn about and discuss Europe, the media, participation, social and climate justice and other issues that young people care about.

Understanding Europe's formats are based on the approach of peer education: young people in our network (peers) act as role models and mediators at eye level with other young people in their countries and throughout Europe. The peers are prepared for this role through a qualification programme based on democratic citizenship education, which provides them with the knowledge and skills needed. While young people can bring new, creative and innovative ideas to societal

problems they are confronted with and affected by, they often lack the efficacy, access or resources to make their voices heard. Our peer-driven formats help young people understand that their voice matters. By offering courses in schools, transnational training events as well as in-depth engagement with our network's members, we aim to achieve long-term societal impact.

Every year at the European Summer School, we enable experienced trainers of the network to become Peer Educators. They then train new trainers in their regional teams and in the country, they are currently active in. During the European Summer School in Berlin in August 2023 the Photovoice Workshop for Peer Educators took place.

In times of crisis, transformation is a central term and an anticipated need. The Understanding Europe network is dedicated to a diverse and pluralistic Europe, aimed at developing a critical-visionary stance on Europe, which can be achieved by reflecting on it's past, present and the future. We see young people as the driving force of these transformational processes, actively shaping the future of Europe.

Within the framework of the project "Thinking of Europe in Times of Transformation", a collaboration between the Understanding Europe network and the Alfred Herrhausen Gesellschaft, we are presenting the *Photovoices* of our participants—photos and texts that allow insights into the perspectives of young Europeans from various backgrounds. The Photovoices were created as part of a workshop. The workshop was developed and facilitated by Nigerian-British Photographer Mariochukwu Washington-Ihieme, who is an expert in the field of Photovoices and working with young people. To reflect the future of Europe, we identified four core topics to improve living together in today's European society/ies: democracy and participation, social justice, digitalisation and technology and climate justice.

   The Photovoices describe experiences such as feeling alienated from nature in a fast-paced tech-oriented society, living in times of war, facing discrimination in a predominantly white north-western European society, and different consequences of injustice. The diversity of our participants coming from different countries around Europe, spanning from Portugal to Armenia, and Türkiye to France showcases a broad range of experiences (see Index of Contributors). The topic that most Photovoices address is social injustice, which young people see as the most pressing issue today. The Photovoices, therefore, present reflections on Europe's colonial past, inherited racism, as well as current experiences of war and its consequences. Furthermore, the reflections presented also look into the future and name the pressing issues that we as a European society need to tackle.

   In light of the current poly-crisis that we are experiencing, such as the rise of anti-democratic tendencies in the prologue of the European Elections in June 2024, we would like to draw the readers' attention to the issues and experiences that are closest to young people.

The Photovoices are structured and put into order according to the topics that they tackle. They are meant to be put into dialogue with each other and guide the reader through different experiences of young Europeans.

   On the following pages you can dive into the perceptions of young people on current issues and areas that need to be transformed in European society. Through photography and writing, our young network members are making pressing issues and daily experiences visible to the reader.

We would love for you to take a look and get inspired by the thought-provoking texts and photographs.

November 2023
Lena Strehmann & Rebekka Pfennig

Photovoice

A participatory method
to address social injustices

"To photograph is to appropriate the thing photo-graphed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and therefore, like power."
—Susan Sontag

What is Photovoice?

Photovoice is a participatory action research methodology that involves using pho-tography as a tool for participants to partake in meaningful discussions and gain a deeper understanding of our socially constructed realities and cultures. The method-ology was developed in the 1990s by professor Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris, program officer for women's health at the Ford Foundation. Its objectives involve rec-ognizing, documenting, and contemplating community needs, fostering crucial conver-sations, and influencing policymakers to instigate social improvements within commu-nities (Wang and Burris 1997). Born out of documentary photography, feminist theory and empowerment for critical consciousness frameworks, photovoice expands the role of photography beyond a form of fine art and is instead essential in socially and polit-ically active practice. **I would like to think that the ultimate objective of Photovoice is to bring a means of visual expression to communities that are marginalised, un-der-represented and unheard in mainstream society.**

Whilst a tool for needs assessment and originally used in the public health field by enhancing communities through reflective practices, photovoice can also be used as an empowerment tool for communities to address multiple forms of injustices, such as racial, class and gender inequality or cultural exploitation. It has been carried out in a range of contexts across the world: in Yunnan Province, China where photovoice was first conducted, Wang & Burris gave film cameras to women to visually portray their daily work and health realities (Wang & Burris, 1997); in South Africa photovoice has been used to decolonise environments (Kessi, 2018); and in the US to engage Latino communities with intellectual disabilities have a say in research and policy develop-ment (Jurkowski, 2008). In over 20 years photovoice has transcended many disciplines across the globe, confirming the use of photography as a universal communication tool.

My first encounter with photovoice was in 2017 as I was taught by mentors and course mates to embed photovoice alongside my passion for visual storytelling. I found myself volunteering with a youth-led German NGO called Bridging Gaps whose mission is "to dismantle intersectional injustices inherited and reproduced in our social structures in line with the 10th SDG "Reduced Inequalities". Based in Germany and South Africa, the NGO works to open up conversations on topics surrounding racism and social injus-tices at a local and global scale through exchange programmes. By facilitating group discussions using critical analysis of societal issues, participants were able to dig into more personal reflections and subsequently capture images and produce abstracts that speak to their lived experiences. This was a riveting experience not only for the

participants who learned from one another, but for me as a facilitator to see young people using photography as a means to visually represent their understanding of the world, from their own gazes. This kind of exposure requires levels of vulnerability and respectability which in return is compensated by feelings of empowerment and critical consciousness.

Photovoice: Understanding Europe

We're currently living in a time where democracy, climate and social injustice and the new technological revolution are topics where debates and exchange of ideas and perspectives among young people is more vital now than ever before.

Collecting an array of visual stories, representations and ideas on topics transcending the continent from the young participants at Understanding Europe provided this space. Peer Educators across Eastern and Western Europe took part in the 1-day photovoice project, from Armenia, Portugal, Türkiye, Greece, Austria, France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Germany, Romania, and Ukraine. We cultivated a space which encouraged open and vulnerable discussions in the morning. Questions ranged from "What top three values would you consider the most important when living in a democratic society?" to "How do you think your country is doing when trying to combat the effects of the climate crisis?", providing a space for alternative dialogues and experiences to come to the table. Our social privilege activity, by which participants were asked to sit down when a statement relating to one's own lived experiences resonated with them (examples included: "I often worry about my personal safety when walking alone at night.", "I have experienced a situation where I felt I was treated differently based on my race, ethnicity, or cultural background." and "I have had to navigate the complexities of language barriers, either as a native or non-native speaker of a particular language.") also opened a window of opportunity for the group to become vulnerable and encourage sharing of personal experiences.

In the end, these experiences coupled together with their own social representations stemming from their cultural upbringing were used as an empowerment tool to produce the imagery that they ended up creating in the streets of Berlin in the afternoon. The beauty of Photovoice is the high level of accessibility to carry it out. In the 90s, participants were provided with disposable film cameras (Wang & Burris, 1997). These days, if you have a functioning camera phone, then you are good to go.

Armoured with compositional techniques and tricks, participants explored in groups the Hermannstraße neighbourhood in Berlin-Neukölln, with the aim of taking images of environments, objects, and situations that resonated with their answer to this question: How does your experience and social representations of democracy/social injustice/climate justice/tech and digitalisation play into your European identity? This question was broad, and at first intimidating for me as a facilitator to give to participants who were introduced to photography only a couple of hours prior. Looking back, I am reminded of a great saying by documentary photographer Gordon Parks: "I feel it is the heart, not the eye, that should determine the content of the photograph. What the eye sees is its own. What the heart can perceive is a very different matter."

What transpired in that hour when the participants were taking photos has now developed into a photo-series, each image accompanied with a short abstract detailing not only the participants' own experiences, but a collective sense of identity that can be found in their home countries. I'm reminded of the story of one participant who struck up a conversation with the barrista at a coffee shop, who happened to be from a country with a historically strained relationship with their own, or the story of a family who are facing eviction and are protesting in their homes, and the story of two men having coffee in front of street art subliminally depicting social privileges of certain groups. I learned so much about each person's own understanding of social representations of place and belonging in Europe, in the context of the topics discussed.

Photography

My passion for photography began in 2015 as an exchange student where I found myself surrounded by creatives from all over the world. We were capturing the cityscapes, nature, and people as we saw them. As I was acquiring technique and local knowledge, I was able to capture my own visual perspectives, gazes, and interpretations of urbanism in a city with an abundance of history and rich culture. Coupling this with an underlying interest in the social psychology of different cultural groups, normative behaviours and the intersections that make humans have more in common than meets the eye, I came back from my experience in the Far East wanting to know more about the histories and present-day practices of cultures outside my own.

My Master's program (MSc) subsequently allowed me to learn more about the core theories that explain how individuals interpret their social environment. Exploring how people craft and share everyday beliefs and practices about diverse social phenomena was a real eye-opener. It allowed me to better understand the individuals inside and outside my general surroundings, and the historical events, and social dynamics that shaped beliefs, traditions, and how these contribute to a community's social perspective. Coupling this with photography as a means to visually depict these behaviours and social representations became an interest of mine that I wanted to develop. By making photography more about community empowerment and knowledge sharing, I believed that I would help to make a difference in the lives of those who were to take part in such a project.

The images you will see on the following pages of this brochure and in the exhibition are testaments to the day I spent with the young participants, where we found ourselves in critical dialogue about the future of Europe in relation to its current trajectory. Whilst the outlook is as uncertain as ever, I'm reminded that work being done to stimulate dialogue and raise up a ge neration of creative and international young European leaders means that tools such as photovoice can continue to be used in a range of different community settings, bringing to the forefront perspectives that otherwise would not be included. In line with the objectives of photovoice as a tool for social change I hope that the stories alongside the images will become instigators for further policy movements in these areas in the coming years to include more voices from the younger generation.

Biography

Mariochukwu Washington-Ihieme is a Nigerian-British travel, portrait and documentary photographer based in London. Originally self-taught, she likes to embark on adventures and immerse herself in stories and experiences from cultures around the world, capturing the beauty of fleeting moments.

A graduate of Social and Cultural Psychology at The London School of Economics and Political Science, she cherishes the histories, personalities and social representations that shape different places, weaving them into playful visual narratives with photography. Mario is a contributor to publications such as the Guardian, and her photography has appeared in several publications such as Fault Magazine, Invisible Britain, Open House London, The Independent, Shado-mag and Gal-dem.

References:

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Photovoices

Social Injustices in Europe

People come and go. We will probably not be remembered in a 100 years time. And it's fine (really). But what do we leave behind, if not ourselves? What will represent us in the future?

Stickers give us a temporary sense of belonging through anonymity. We don't know who was there before us and why they decided to place their sticker. And yet their ideas stay with us. Some stick together and survive (or get old fashioned and new ones arrive) and others prefer loneliness. Who can say which choice is the best? Who can decide who will be outcasted and for what reasons? What's truly left behind?

In this picture we can see how nature begins to reclaim a building, how plants still grow over and adapt to man-made structures. This is a reminder of the consequences our actions have on the environment and it highlights the need for responsible construction and preservation of natural areas
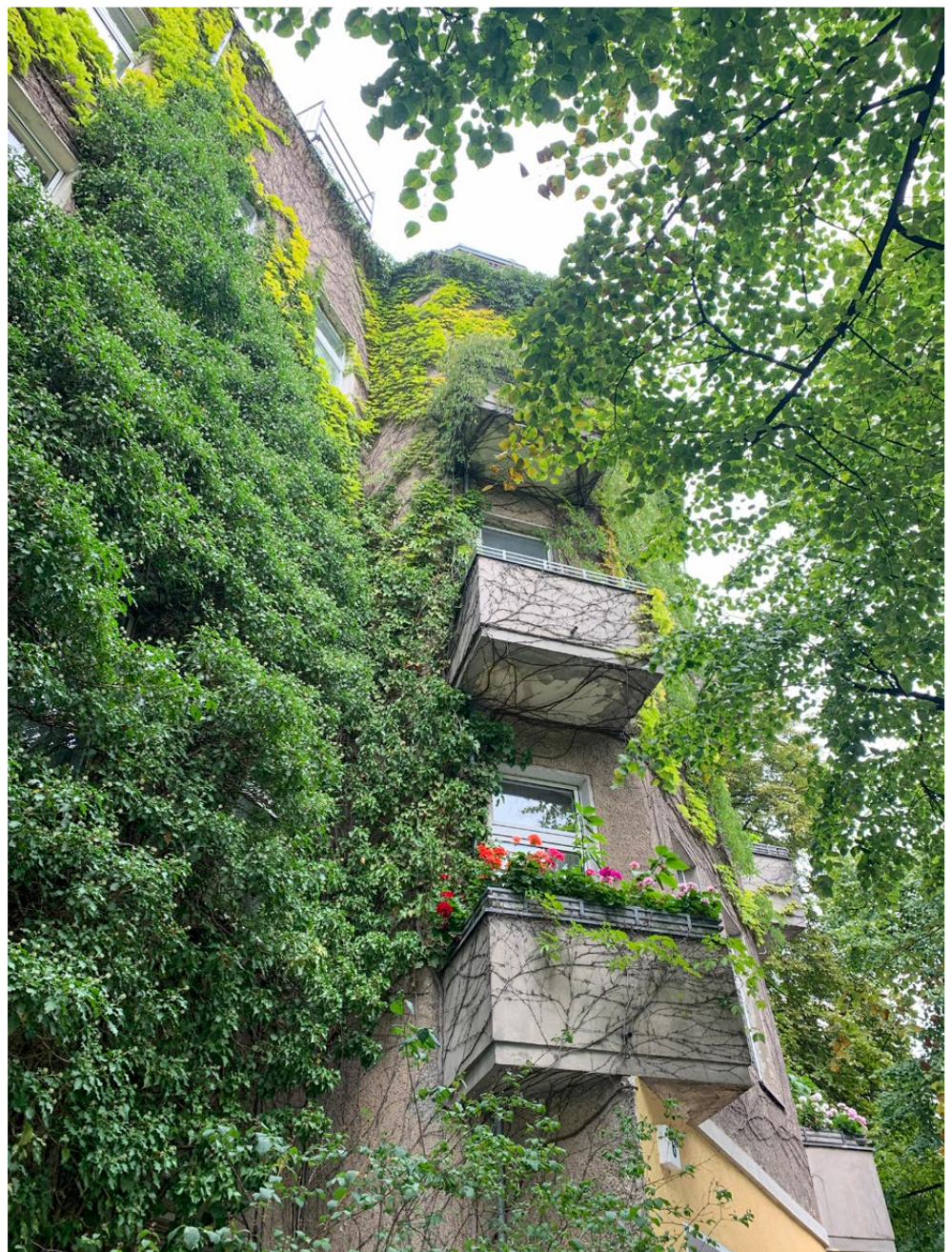
Reject modernity, and embrace nature, at least for a second. Why are you hurrying? Why are you always hurrying in life? Where do you want to get to so quickly with that scooter? What is waiting for you at the end? Get off your scooter and put it away, take a slow walk and a deep breath, hear the leaves, look around you, and see how nature has its rhythm, not chasing anything. So why do you always try to chase a reason, a motivation, or a prize? You are too focused on getting something, on having a productive lifestyle, or on creating an easier system, but do you remember listening to the sound of the alley's gravel while you are walking? Or do you remember how it felt to sit on a bench forgetting about your phone? Maybe you should try to reconnect with that version of yourself that is waiting for you lying in the grass.

From a crowded and hectic road to a silent and quiet park.
From not even having the time to focus on the passing faces on the street (around you)
to just being still with your thoughts in a green corner of the city.
I saw this carry-on suitcase with a pair of shoes on top of it, objects that are normally
moving, that are used to move, standing still in the middle of the grass.
We, humans, are usually moving, always working. Resting, staying still – slowness is
almost a guilty pleasure for us nowadays, a privilege of a few (moments).
I am craving for a slower democratic society, where quietness and calmness are not
rare feelings trapped in little green corners around immense never sleeping roads.

In this picture, you can see the contrast of the NFT trend together with middle class protest- and demonstration posters. The monkey represents the NFT trend: it has their eyes blindfolded, which means they don't want to see the problem. On the other side you have middle class demonstration, which fights for the problems that the upper class (consumers of NFT) don't want to see.
NFTs face criticism for their environmental impact due to blockchain energy consumption, speculative market behaviour, potential copyright issues, and concerns about exclusivity and accessibility. Additionally, the lack of regulation raises risks related to fraud, privacy, and digital rights.

This picture shows pigeons. In the past pigeons were used to deliver messages from one household to another. With advancements in technology pigeons lost their role as messengers. In the past we valued them for fulfilling a function, yet nowadays pigeons are considered a burden. The picture shows several bowls and loaves of breads. While looking at the pigeons I saw a hand providing the birds with water. I captured an act of altruism. Is there something to gain from feeding the birds? Do we value objects and people only if we can profit off them?
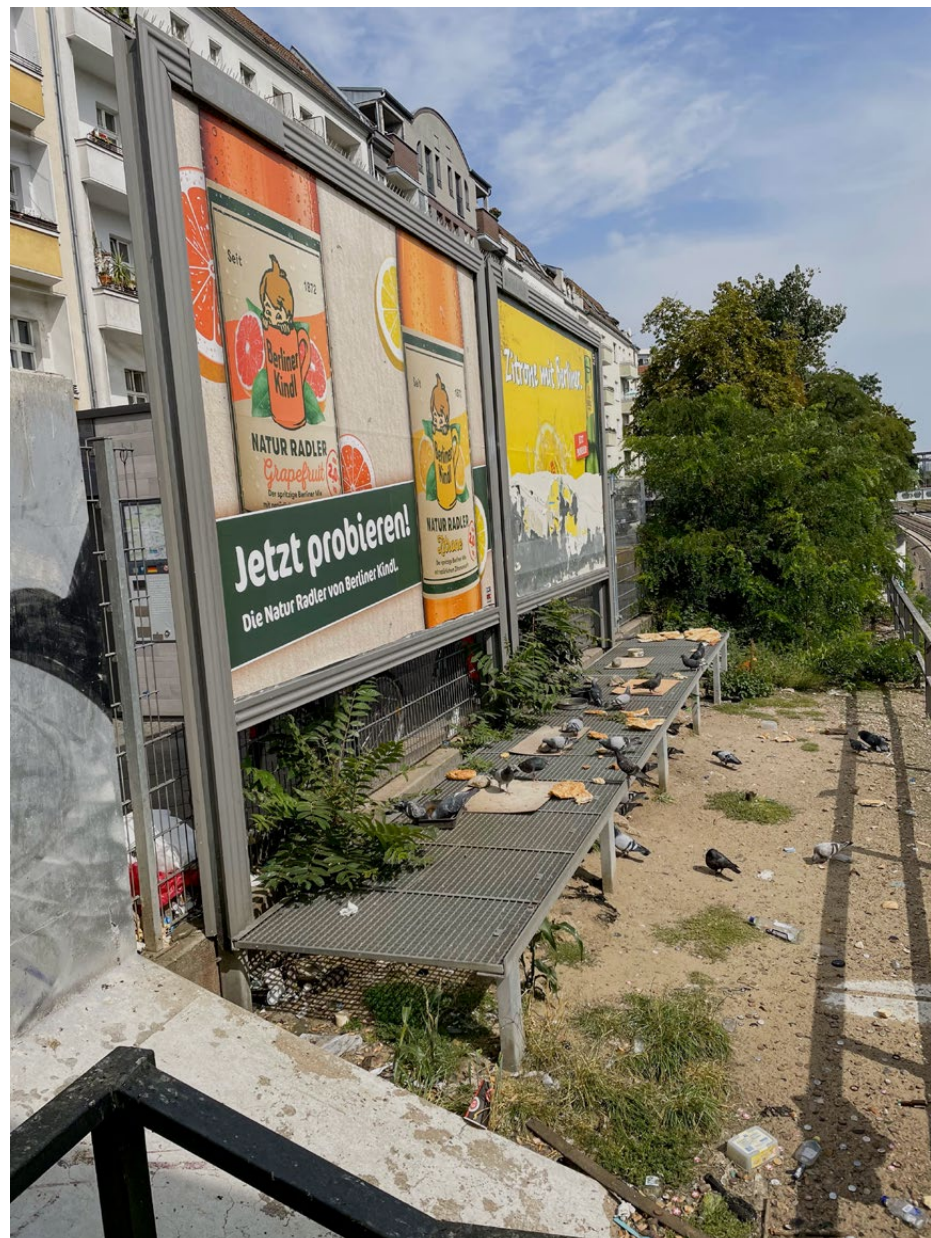
While waiting for my order at a small coffee shop in Germany, I was chatting with the owner, who happened to be Turkish. As we talked, he found out about my Armenian roots, and to my surprise, he kindly offered me a slice of cake.

It might seem small, but it felt like a big gesture, a way of recognizing our countries' past problems. It represented a willingness to acknowledge historical struggles and engage in a dialogue that seeks to overcome barriers. This can serve as a reminder that addressing social injustice often requires acknowledging and understanding different perspectives, as well as taking steps toward empathy and healing.

Waiting in line

Living in Berlin, what do you usually wait in line for? To enter Berghain, to pass the security check at Berlin airport, or to get your scoop of ice cream.
In the meantime, people in Artsakh stand in endless bread lines at night or even worse, under the sun. Yesterday, 13-year-old Arsen was in the bread queue three times but still returned home empty-handed. He was waiting under the number 1620 meaning there were 1619 people in front of him. At 1:20 AM.

Written on August 25, 2023.

The people of Artsakh have been living under Azerbaijan's unlawful blockade for over eight months without food, medicine, and fuel. Artsakh has become a con-centration camp where Azerbaijan is carrying out yet another genocide. With the whole world silently observing.

November 2023

I attended a keynote once in which we talked about the imaginative dimension of borders.
Nations only exist because we believe in them.
Most of the time, there is no physical margin, nothing that can be touched, just the notion of separation. The same has been done to these stones: no physical border, just a different structure. And in the end, everything is still just stone.

A beautiful old building full of graffiti. A very expensive car parked right outside.

One may wonder what such an expensive car is doing in a neighbourhood like this, under a building like this. But there they are, next to each other, each of them telling a different story, their own story. Each of them being used by people with their own personal stories, backgrounds, and lives. We oftentimes judge people by the houses they live in, the cars they drive, the clothes they wear and, in what way. And while being completely ignorant about it, we adapt and promote stereotypes and systemic racism. So, imagine how different the world would be if we just considered it "natural", "normal" or at least felt unbothered with this car and this house being next to each other.

The Reality Of Social Justice And Equality

This might not be someone's home, but this is a great representation of the reality we live in. A lot of people are leaving their "second world" countries hoping for a better life, a better future for their children. Hoping that as soon as they pass the border, everything is going to be fine. They will settle down, buy a nice apartment, have a nice job, afford a better education for their children, etc. But the reality is that those families, those people are still going to struggle. They won't be able to find a nice job because a xenophobic and chauvinistic society will meet them with comments like "they are not locals", "their physical appearance won't make the company look good" (because of the skin colour or other body/facial features, ethnicity, etc). So, they will be stuck in the same vicious cycle: struggling to make minimum wage, afford a place to live and to have three meals a day.

Don't forget that you are still going to live "with your own kind'', but this time not in your own country with the rest of your family. But in a ghetto, somewhere on the periphery of a big city, isolated from the rest of civilization.

Anna Sole Italy   #border # racism #migration

Social Justice
Yes it's me.
Again.
I have been here before but you sent me back to hell.
Shouldn't this be a crime?
Please, can you accept me this time?
I don't know why
I'm hungry and tired
Look into my eyes
I feel so undesired
We look the same
you are a little taller, but that's okay
Yes my eyes are not blue
Is that why I am not enough for you?
Please
I need another opportunity,
another life
I might not be white
But I long for this country because I lost mine

"Die Waffen liefern die Reichen die Armen die Leichen" *

A matcha latte costs 5€.
Across the street there is a fence with offerings. For every piece of
clothing you leave, please pick one up from the floor.
Do the people that go here donate a lot?
Do they have a guilty conscious when they pay for their drink?
I did.

I chose this picture because it frames and illuminates these two
opposite sides of society. It puts a neon-focus on social injustice,
from the inside of a beautiful Café.
We came from the left, so the fence was the first thing we noticed.
It is a nice gesture. Then we read the quotes.
There are two.
We crossed the street and walked into Kaffeeraum. How incredibly
privileged we are.

* Translation: "Rich people deliver weapons, poor people dead bodies"

"The new owners are evicting us; this is our home."

Let those words resonate. Imagine being expelled from your sanctuary, the place where you find peace and blossom quietly amidst the rigours of daily life, only to be confronted with the spectre of homelessness. Displacement is not a remote concept; it is a harsh reality for many, occurring abruptly and without warning due to a variety of unpredictable circumstances.
As you walk through the streets that are familiar to you, take a moment to truly observe your surroundings. Allow awareness to take root. Some of the most profound struggles are concealed in plain sight, on the very sidewalks you traverse without giving them a second thought. The privilege of a stable home is precisely that—a privilege, delicate and invaluable. Bear in mind, the ground beneath our feet is as unstable as the lives of those who might soon find themselves without it.

This text was edited with the support of ChatGPT.

Everyone can make it

We are constantly confronted with the narrative that everyone can make it. That with the right mindset you can achieve anything in life. That it solely depends on what you make out of your life. However, we often neglect the different starting points, abilities and capabilities of people. And certainly, privileges or the lack of those.

The photo can be understood as a metaphor for "making it in life".

Some people take the escalator. They are effortlessly moving upwards, while others must take the stairs and work for every step they take.

Nonetheless, both can make it to the top.

Unlike other people who are neither allowed on the escalator nor able to take the stairs.
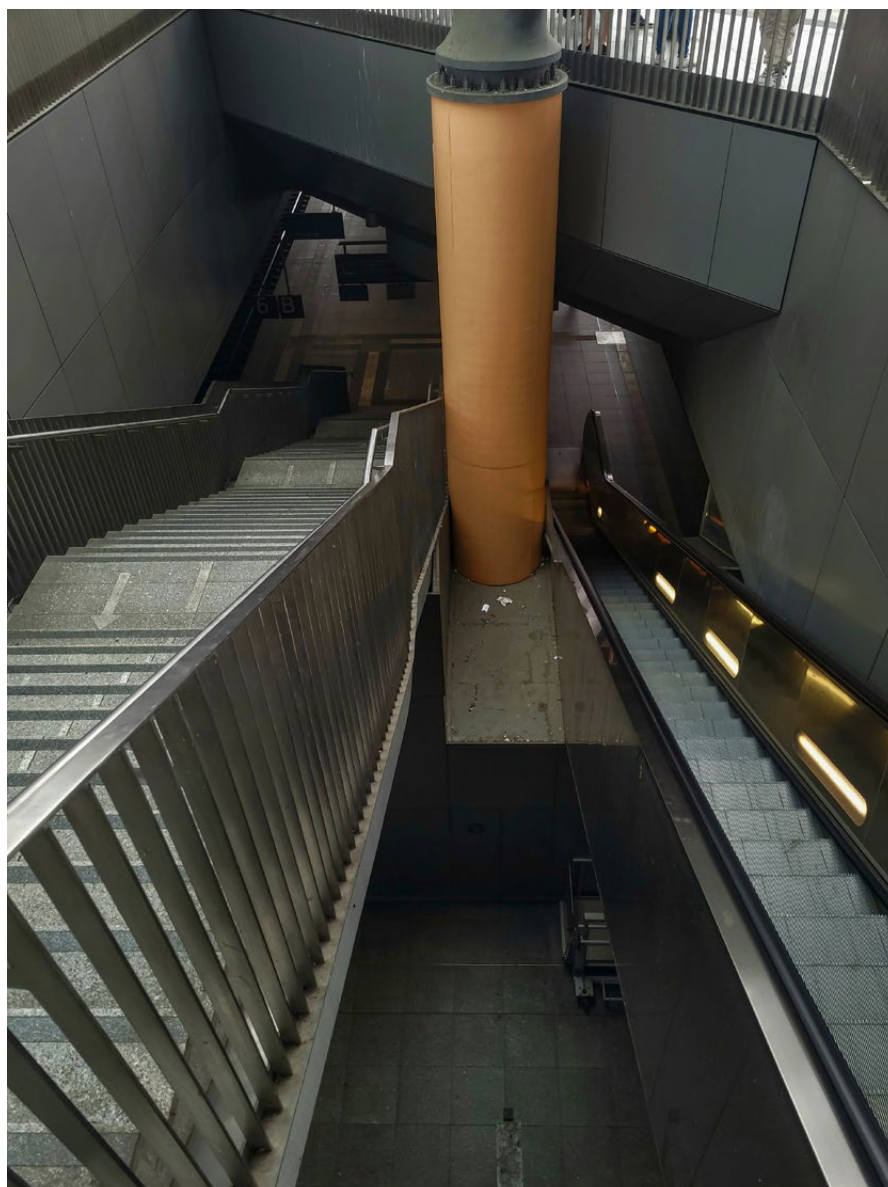
Catch a glimpse
of the parallel world
On the other side of the street
sometimes the glass
Is a mirror
Take one step back
Don't project, just respect
There's some knowledge you might get
Who's inside can't light up
the lamp on the street
now that you've taken a peek
will you do it?

Most of the times, when we see something, that we don't understand, we tend to project our own prejudices onto it without really trying to be aware, acknowledge and really see things being free from constructions. That could be about different traditions, religions, people. It might be difficult to see through the half mirror, but at the bottom you can see the books inside. Educating yourself and being able to use your privilege to empower others: Will you walk away, or will you turn on the light for the next ones to come?

Inexactness brings confusion.

Behind this confusion, there are unspoken and disregarded facts.
So, are we assuming that everything is straightforward, because we believe this is what it is?

Or should we dare to challenge our perspectives through which we perceive things?

"When you put yourself in someone else's shoes."

Walking aimlessly through Berlin streets, I found this "shoe exhibition"—from toddler to children to adult shoes.
I imagined a trading point where you can leave shoes that once helped you walk your path, and now represent the beginning of a new journey for somebody else.
The shoes have different sizes, they will fit each one in their unique way.

Everything is temporary and all we are is "dust in the wind" in this constantly moving world.

People come, people go, but they leave a trace behind. We all create an effect in the world, whether we want to or not. We should be mindful of what we stand for, what we are changing and how. We might not be able to see ourselves, our effects in the world, but we can see it through reflections, through looking at the things we have changed. We can stop for a while and see how we all change the bigger picture despite how *small* we are, and then continue moving forward to create meaningful change.

[This is a photo of people participating in the Photovoice event walking away from the reflection of the window of the venue where the group met a day ago. People walking are not visible apart from their trace, taken with long exposure. Everyone except for the photographer is moving.]

For most people, the train is only a form of public transport. However, for some Ukrainians it's the start of a new life, the thing which connects your past and takes you to an unknown future. Every Ukrainian is a person at the end of the train, waiting for an unknown station to an unknown city because of others' imperial ambitions.

Claire and Nohela <small>France</small>

European integration is based on trust and mutual exchange despite differences. As in a friendship. In reality, the European Union is a big friendship. There's a transition in this image. The lower part represents Europe as it is today. The black graphs represent the many attempts intended to correct the shortcomings in participation policy and the commitments made to improve the situation. On the other hand, the top part with the label represents the direction in which Europe is moving.

The silhouettes represent the Member States. They stand out against a green background, the colour of hope, and a purple background, the colour of equality. There are many efforts and attempts to improve Europe, but the solution lies in solidarity, the main reason for the creation of the European Union, represented by the two figures holding hands. We can transform Europe and make it shine like the yellow balloon.

The Future of Europe

I took a picture of this colourful building under construction. Colours represent the multinational nature of the EU, and all of them are as bright, beautiful, and stunning as their people. However, currently, they are going through a healing process and might not be the same as in the past. All construction ends, and this one will end as well, bringing with it a remodelled and flourished Europe.

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