

Abstract

In a 1986 interview on hopeless situations, such as prison, Vaclav Havel describes hope both as 'a dimension of the soul' and 'an orientation of the heart'. Hope, he says, "is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out". The connection Havel makes with both the soul/ psyche and the heart/emotions is of the utmost relevance to discuss the role of the political in our times.

It is both noteworthy and interesting how research on the political has treated the soul and the heart as objects of suspicion, since Gustav le Bon 1895 seminal book on the crowds. His description of the impulsiveness, incapacity to reason or absence of critical spirit of people involved in political demonstrations, echoes with our own accounts of political leaders and their followers today. For decades, research tended to persist on a negative vision of the role emotions played on the political, both for political leaders (e.g., manipulation, charisma) but also for citizens (e.g., narcissism, prejudices). Rather than giving room for the heart and soul to come into play, scholars preferred a rational approach to political phenomena viewing citizens as people who would make informed decisions on the basis of strategic interests – it turned out pretty well in explaining political behaviour, did it not?

I will argue that no understanding of the political could be done without involving minds, souls, hearts and hands. I will also argue that this is particularly true for the generations of young people who, against all odds, are still hopeful and strongly committed to, as Hannah Arendt would stress, saving our common world from its inevitable ruin – "if not for the coming of the new and young". I will depart from mixed-methods research used on collaborative European projects (PIDOP, Catch-EyoU) and other, more recent, studies, to try to make (some) sense on why and how young Europeans insist on being hopeful.