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# Bath Spa – a Utopia of the Past, Present and Future?

The 8<sup>th</sup>  
Café of Europe  
Komedia, Bath  
5<sup>th</sup> March  
1.30pm



*Join a debate about the role of  
Bath and European Spa Towns  
in creating ideal towns and cities of the future.*

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**Bath Spa  
– a Utopia  
of the past,  
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future?**

Since time immemorial writers have attempted to describe visionary perfection; a place enjoying a perfect social, legal and political system housed in the Ideal City. In creating such visions of the ideal - an image of heaven on earth - writers, politicians, philanthropists, socialists, artists and architects have tried to put vision into reality. Did any get close to creating a workable vision of Utopia? Did any get close to building it?

Spa towns are a unique form of settlement and do not conform to the usual settlement types established for the purposes of protection, worship, kingship, politics, industry, trade or expansion. They were cities of leisure and health, where boundaries of class and gender were blurred, and where artistic and cultural activity came to the fore. These places of healing were the first tourist destinations, attracting people to stay for lengthy periods of time, inventing themselves as islands of leisure and pleasure, where life was somehow *different*. Spa in Belgium was nicknamed the "Café of Europe" because, as in a café, all manner of people gathered together, while taking the cure, to discuss the arts, politics, philosophy, music, and of course to gossip! The Café of Europe debate takes its inspiration from the rich and varied heritage of Europe's historic spa towns.

The City of Bath is the only European spa town currently listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, having been inscribed in 1987. The inscription is based on the natural thermal springs, the Roman archaeology and the 18<sup>th</sup> Century urban plan and architecture. In creating his vision of the Ideal City, John Wood the Elder, creator of Georgian Bath, saw Bath as an imaginary place, a garden city of great vistas and grand public spaces merging with the surrounding landscape and... *"A Region that sets Paradise itself before one's Eyes...the very Elysium Fields of the Antients."*

The Bath Café will debate a range of inter-related topics with interludes and presentations to stimulate discourse concerning the future of Bath and other famous European spa towns. Do these places have the potential as model cities for urban living in the future with the health and well-being of its inhabitants and visitors underpinning all policy decisions?



The Bath Café of Europe will be built around a series of short presentations on one of the many themes linking the unique qualities of our famous spa towns. These presentations will be by writers and specialists in their fields and be short and to the point.

After each presentation a panel of local experts; the people responsible for managing and protecting the various aspects of Bath's fabric, its offer and its image will respond to the themes and relate them to their current roles when considering the future issues facing Bath and North East Somerset as a place to live, work and visit.



**The Mayor of Bath, Councillor Cherry Beath** whose portfolio includes Spa Ancient and Modern, the Cultural sector and Health & Wellbeing, will host the Café.

**Paul Simons**, World Heritage consultant and the B&NES representative to EHTTA, will Chair the event and introduce the speakers:

**John Carey**, writer and editor of "The Faber Book of Utopias" will guide us through Utopian thought and writings of the past.

**Ian Bradley**, lecturer with a lifelong fascination with spas and music and author of "Water Music – music making in the spas of Europe and North America".

**Amy Frost**, architectural historian, curator and writer on the works of architect John Wood the Elder whose mystical inspiration created much of Georgian Bath.

**Christopher Woodward**, art historian, Museum Director and writer who includes in his passions swimming and Bath.

**Susan Sloman**, an independent scholar and author of "Gainsborough in Bath"

**Gillian Clarke**, town planner, writer, and garden specialist with a particular interest in Prior Park garden, Bath.

**Christopher Pound**, architect, town planner, writer and World Heritage expert, author of "A Very excellent treasure – values of the Bath spa resort".

There will be plenty of opportunity for participation, questions and debate and interventions of both the serious and not-so-serious kind.

### **A Performance from the Chancery of Lost and Found**

A small group of young people from Bath will present a fictional version of the city with Alice Maddicott, who is curating "The Chancery of Lost and Found" in Milsom Place as part of the Bath Literature Festival. There will also be a discussion, led by Alice, with the young people around the theme of the "ideal city".



Some background & practical information

The Bath Café of Europe is the last in a series of debates that have been developed as part of the "SOURCE" project, "Sources of Culture: the Cafés of Europe", by the European Historic Thermal Towns Association (EHTTA), and part-funded by the European Union Culture Fund. The Project is run by the Route des Villes d'Eaux of the Massif Central.

In 2010, Bath & North East Somerset Council was a founding member of EHTTA, which is designated as one of 30 "Cultural Routes" by the Council of Europe, putting it at the heart of European thinking on tourism, culture, heritage, and wellbeing.

The SOURCE project has several strands, which have been woven through the series of cafes:



- The themed Café debate, in partnership with major festivals
- The Interactive Novel
- Festivals and Travel Diaries and Celebration@Sources
- The "Centre des Sources" digital archive in Vichy, France

Bath completes the cycle of "Café of Europe" debates which have taken place across Europe and examined diverse subjects since June 2013 - from digital media and film, to pilgrimage and tourism. All the previous café events and all the works created as a result, such as the beautifully illustrated travel diaries, and the multi-media interactive novel are available on the SOURCE project website, [www.sources-of-culture.com](http://www.sources-of-culture.com).

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#BathCafe

**Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2015**

**Komedia, 22-23 Westgate Street, Bath, BA1 1EP**

**Doors open at 13.00 for a 13.30 start. The Café will finish by 6pm.**

**Coffee and tea will be available during the Café of Europe and there will be breaks between each of the four main sessions to mingle, stretch your legs and meet other delegates.**

**To book your free delegate place, please contact  
Bath Festivals on 01225 463362  
or go to [www.bathfestivals.org.uk](http://www.bathfestivals.org.uk)**