

GEOGRAPHICAL DIFFERENTIATION IN THE EU AND THE LINK TO EU CRISIS SOLVING WITH AN OUTSET IN DENMARK

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Does differentiation in the European Union (EU) have a geographical dimension? This has been suggested in parts of literature on EU crises and differentiation in the EU. Europe is often divided into three geographical parts: North, South and East. The article focuses on a particular crisis in the EU, the EU populist crisis. Using Denmark as a case study, we ask whether populism exist in the Nordic countries, in which form, and whether the Nordic countries may be seen as a specific geographical area in this field compared to East, South and maybe even North Europe. Finally, the link between the growing distance between metropolitan big cities and small cities in rural areas, and EU crisis solving is drawn.

1 INTRODUCTION, METHOD, AND CONCEPTS

Does differentiation in the European Union (EU) have a geographical dimension? This has been suggested in parts of literature on EU crises and differentiation in the EU. Such literature often divides the Europe into three geographical parts: North, South and East.¹ Some studies understand North Europe as countries such as the UK, Ireland, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Finland. Other studies look at North-Western Europe and includes countries such as Austria, Britain, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.² Yet, other studies work with ‘three idiosyncratic groups of member states’ Anglo-Scandinavian member states; a Franco-German group and a group of central and east European member states.³ For the purpose of this study, we will define North Europe as the Nordic countries, the UK, Ireland and Germany. The article focuses on a particular crisis in the EU, the EU populist crisis. Using Denmark as a case study, we ask whether populism exists in the Nordic countries, in which form, and whether the Nordic countries may be seen as a specific geographical area in this field compared to East, South and maybe even North Europe. Finally, the link between geographical differentiation and EU crisis solving is drawn.

One aspect of the EU populist crisis has been studied intensively namely the rule-of-law crisis. However, the EU populist crisis has broader implications than the rule-of-law aspect and is now moving into new areas such as human rights including LBGT+ rights and

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¹ See Jan Fagerberg: One Europe or Several? Causes and Consequences of the European Stagnation (2015), in Jan Fagerberg, Staffan Laestadius, and Ben R. Martin (eds) *The Triple Challenge for Europe: Economic Development, Climate Change, and Governance* (OUP 2015), Chapter 2.

² See Swen Hutter and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds), *European Party Politics in Times of Crisis* (CUP 2019).

³ See Thierry Chopin and Christian Lequesne, ‘Differentiation as a double-edged sword: member states’ practices and Brexit’ (2016) *International Affairs* 531.

democracy.⁴ A particular aspect of the EU populist crisis is that the populist movement is normally critical towards Europeanization and globalization including the EU, which is why the populist crisis poses a special challenge to the EU. Furthermore, the EU populist crisis is closely linked to other EU crises, primarily the migration crisis and the economic crisis. In this article, we understand the EU populist crisis in a broader sense than the rule-of-law crisis. Populism is present to some degree in many member states – not just East Europe – and it poses great challenges to the EU not only because it challenges the EU values but also because it undermines solidarity between EU member states and may even lead to member states leaving the EU as we have seen with Brexit. Therefore, the EU needs to focus on populism as a broader challenge than values and as something, which exists also outside East Europe.

Nordic populism is a rather understudied subject compared to populism in especially East, but also South Europe. The developments in countries such as Hungary and Poland where the independence of the courts has been under severe pressure and LGBT-free zones have been introduced (just to provide a few examples), which have naturally drawn the attention of the EU institutions as well as many scholars. However, it would be a mistake to draw the conclusion that populism is not present in the Nordic countries. As we will show in this article, populism in the Nordic countries exists; it does however take a slightly different form and it is seldom characterized as ‘populism’ in public discourse. In the Horizon 2020 project, DEMOS on Democratic Efficacy and the Varieties of Populism in Europe⁵, the concept, mechanisms, drivers and impacts of populism are studied across a number of disciplines including Law and in different parts of Europe. This article draws on research carried out under the DEMOS project. Political parties which could be characterized as “populist parties” in 15 member states, were analysed and compared qualitatively, for instance through their party programs, and quantitatively among others by scraping party homepages and facebook profiles and studying statements in different policy areas. As a Nordic case study, we looked at Denmark, which is the only Nordic partner country in the DEMOS project. Denmark is also a member of the EU together with Sweden and Finland while Norway and Iceland are members of the EEA.

Populism is often defined through its characteristics:⁶

Initially, populism is characterised by claiming to represent one true and homogenous ‘people’ (the people or real people) often embodied in one charismatic leader. The goal is to implement the people’s will and in doing so not being limited or governed by anything but this same will. The people is positioned against the elite. Thus, populism seek to implement what can be described as a rule of majority.

⁴ See Helle Krunke, William Tornøe and Caroline Wegener, ‘The “EU populist crisis”: The effect of populism on the EU legal order and vice versa: Populism, EU responses and EU constitutional identity’, in José Maria Andreu and Marco Simonelli (eds), *Populism and Contemporary Democracy. Old Problems and New Challenges* (Palgrave Macmillan 2022).

⁵ Which has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 822590: <https://demos-h2020.eu/en>.

⁶ See Krunke, Tornøe and Wegener (n 4) and William Tornøe and Caroline Wegener, ‘What should the EU do about Poland’s populist PiS?’ Master’s thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2020. See also Xavier Groussot, and Anna Zemskova, ‘The Manifestations of the EU Rule of Law and Its Contest: Historical and Constitutional Foundations’ (2022) 43(2) *Journal of Constitutional History*.

In this rule of majority, elections or other appropriate mechanisms for signalling the people's will legitimise the government's power. As the people's will is the only true point of orientation and limitation, thus politics and political power have no other limitation, e.g. protecting minorities. This is of course a moral indicator and not a legal one. Populism is also inherently opposed to systems or institutions, for instance checks and balances and constitutional guarantees, that can slow or hinder the implementation of the people's will.

Less commonly, but still frequent, populism is characterised by a general aversion to 'outsiders'. Populism latches on to pre-existing ideologies, e.g. nationalism, as populism does not in itself entail a left- or right-wing policy. Populism may also, due to its 'impatience' and antipathy towards hindrances to the implementation of the people's will, pose a danger to democracy and the rule of law. Finally, populism seeks direct forms of government and strives to remove layers between the government and the people.'

2 DOES POPULISM EXIST IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES AND IN WHICH FORM?⁷

In order to answer this question, a case study in the form of a Danish political party was picked out based on general criteria, which applied to all the European case studies, which were analyzed as part of the DEMOS project.⁸ The chosen case studies tentatively had to fulfil some of the main characteristics of populist parties and it should be a well-established party represented in Parliament. Based on these criteria the Danish Peoples' Party ('Dansk Folkeparti') was the natural choice. Two other political parties, which could tentatively be characterized as populist parties existed at the time of the study, The New Right ('Nye Borgerlige') and Hard Line ('Stram Kurs'). However, 'Nye Borgerlige' had just been elected to Parliament with only four mandates and 'Stram Kurs' was not represented in Parliament. The Danish People's Party (hereinafter the 'DPP') was therefore chosen as a case study since it closely matched the predefined selection criteria. It is the oldest, most established and main political actor with populist features in Denmark enjoying the most electoral support compared to other Danish populist parties.

In the spring and summer of 2022 DPP has experienced challenges in the form of internal fragmentation and disputes in the party, which has led to several DPP members of Parliament leaving the party and joining the newly established party 'Danmarksdemokraterne' ('The Democrats of Denmark') led by Inger Støjberg a former minister of integration for the liberals, who recently faced an impeachment trial and was sentenced with prison. Inger Støjberg's new party apparently shares many views and values with DPP especially fear of possible negative impact of migration. Thus, DPP, The Democrats of Denmark and The New Right will most likely be competing over some of the same votes in the next election.

⁷ This section of the article is based on a report written by the authors for the Demos project, reference task 2.2 in Working Package 2. See more <https://demos-h2020.eu/en>.

⁸ Work Package 2.

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO DPP: HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Four Members of Parliament from the right-wing party The Progress Party ('Fremskridtspartiet') established the DPP in 1995. At the elections in 2015, DPP became the second largest political party in Parliament with 21 percent of the votes; however, in the elections in 2019 DPP suffered an electoral defeat bringing them down to 8.7 percent of the votes. While starting out by primarily focusing on stopping migration and on EU scepticism, DPP has over the years developed a more 'fully fleshed' party program, which also includes other political fields than migration policy and EU scepticism mainly as regards stricter punishment for crime and socioeconomic policies.⁹ This has happened alongside the growing popularity of the party and the strengthened political influence it has gained. Despite being the second largest party after the 2015 election, the strategy of DPP has been to stay out of government, since they expected that a support party position to a minority government would be more advantageous (as they had experienced in the 2001 and 2011 elections).¹⁰

DPP has acted as an important coalition party for liberal minority governments and has been successful in pushing the migration topic high on the political agenda in Denmark.¹¹ While the party programs have not been strongly anti-elitist, DPP politicians have sometimes expressed anti-elitist statements.¹² DPP's resistance towards the EU and immigration is grounded in a strong wish to preserve national and cultural differences, which indicates important elements of 'nativism'.¹³ Especially, as regards the EU and immigration, DPP argues against the established parties and has among other criticised the EU of being undemocratic.¹⁴ DPP has always seen immigration as a threat to the Danish 'peaceful welfare state'.¹⁵ While being radical as regards immigration policies and sociocultural issues more generally, the party has moved towards the center and even center-left as regards its socio-economic policies.¹⁶ According to literature, 30 percent of all the voters, which are not well-educated have right-wing views on value politics but left-wing views on economy and welfare, and this is the group that DPP has managed to mobilize.¹⁷

It has been discussed in literature, whether DPP has become partly 'mainstream'.¹⁸ A partial mainstreaming of DPP and the fact that two new even more radical parties entered the scene in the 2019-elections, might at least to some extent explain, the electoral defeat for DPP in the elections in 2019. Part of the success of DPP is that the party criticized immigration at a time when other political parties were more 'politically correct' and that they

⁹ See Flemming Juul Christiansen, 'The Danish People's Party. Combining cooperation and radical positions' in Tjitske Akkermann, Sarah L. de Lange and Matthijs Rooduijn (eds), *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe – into the Mainstream?* (Routledge 2016) 94-99.

¹⁰ See supra 1, p. 95.

¹¹ See Eirikur Bergmann: *Nordic Nationalism and Right-Wing Populist Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan 2017) 60-63.

¹² See supra n. p. 101.

¹³ See supra n. 1, p. 97.

¹⁴ See Christiansen (n 9).

¹⁵ See supra n. 1, p. 96.

¹⁶ See supra n. 1, p. 101.

¹⁷ See Ole Borre, 'To konfliktdimensioner' in Jørgen Goul Andersen and Ole Borre (eds), *Politisk forandring: Værdipolitik og Nye skillelinjer ved Folketingsvalget* (Djøf's Forlag 2003) Århus: Systime, and supra n. 1, p. 109.

¹⁸ See supra n. 1.

criticized the EU, when almost all other parties were in favor of and supported Danish EU membership. It turned out that the established parties did not represent the broad group of voters in these two fields. The result of the 2019-election might reflect that the established parties have adopted immigration as a challenge in their political agendas, while new more radical right-wing parties have appeared in the political arena thereby narrowing down the DPP's independent political maneuver room.

In the Party Program of the DPP¹⁹ it is stated, that the aim of the Danish People's Party is to assert Denmark's independence, to guarantee the freedom of the Danish people in their own country. The DPP has a strong focus on preservation of law and order, and therefore there must be coherence between crime and punishment. The DPP combines the public concept of justice with the consequence of crime, rapid conviction and punishment. Therefore, necessary resources must be allocated to crime prevention and investigation.

Furthermore, a strong emphasis is put on the Danish cultural heritage, which must be preserved and strengthened. Danish cultural heritage and Christianity (in contrast to Islam) are combined. The culture consists of the sum of the Danish people's history, experience, beliefs, language and customs it states in the Party Program of the DPP. Preserving the Nordic welfare system is important to DPP and this is linked to immigration.

As regards foreign affairs, DPP are critical towards the European Union, human rights conventions and globalization as such. DPP has criticized the EU of being undemocratic and run by EU bureaucrats.²⁰ In the European Parliament, they recently joined a new political group together with the Finnish right-wing party 'De Sande Finner', the German 'Alternative für Deutschland' and the Italian 'Lega'. DPP are strong supporters of NATO and of Denmark's close cooperation with the US and the UK.

Danish independence and freedom are the primary objectives of DPP. The DPP 'wishes friendly and dynamic cooperation with all the democratic and freedom-loving peoples of the world, but we will not allow Denmark to surrender its sovereignty.'

As a consequence, the DPP opposes the European Union, but are undecided if they want a Danish version of Brexit.²¹ DPP is the only Danish party combining EU-skepticism (beside the New Right) with an authoritarian position on the socio-cultural dimension. In this way, the party can attract EU-skeptical voters not sharing the cultural liberal positions (on for instance immigration and multiculturalism)²²

The founding of the Danish People's Party with Pia Kjærsgaard in the lead represented itself as supporters and protectors of the welfare state. The party marked a nationalistic line from the very start and was ideologically inspired by the Danish Association ('Den Danske Forening'), a radical right wing association claiming to protect Danish values.²³ Apparently, the Danish Association had provided DPP with three arguments against immigration as a

¹⁹ <https://danskfolkeparti.dk/politik/in-another-languages-politics/1757-2/> visited 31 June 2019.

²⁰ See Christiansen (n 9).

²¹ <https://danskfolkeparti.dk/politik/maerkesager/eu-politik/>.

²² Jens Rydgren 'Explaining the Emergence of Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties: The Case of Denmark,' (2004) 27(3) West European Politics 474, 488.

²³ See Bergmann (n 11) 60.

threat to Danish culture and ethnic identity, as a cause of crime and as a burden on the welfare state.²⁴ Bergmann states (with a reference to Widfeldt):

In view of the DDF [the Danish Association], Denmark was a homogeneous Christian nationstate where migrants and foreign workers could only be guests. Their continuous presence was seen as a threat. In this light the DDF was instrumental in framing the DPP's argument within an ethno-pluralist narrative, based on the doctrine that even though nations are equal they should be kept separate.

Although this discourse derives from fascist traditions, the DPP was able to apply it in a way that while firmly criticizing immigration, they avoided the stigma of discredited ideologies such as neo-Nazi-ism (Widfeldt, 2015). The DPP was adamant in avoiding being linked to the more controversial nationalist movements, for example the Danish neo-Nazi movement (*Danmarks Nationalsocialistiske Bevægelse*), Danish Front or the Danish Forum. DPP members have in fact been expelled for being associated with these radical movements or for making positive references to them or similar ones. While avoiding being openly racist the DPP kept distinguishing between immigrants and ethnic Danes, categorizing between 'others' and 'us.'

Prominent members of DPP have described love of fatherland and the nation-state as 'one of the loveliest human emotions, closely connected with honesty and decency'.²⁵ Ethno-nationalist and ethno-pluralist xenophobia is at the core of the ideology of the DPP.²⁶ In their party program it is stated, that they want 'a country of free Danish citizens empowered to fend for themselves and decide their own fate. However, the state is also bound to render support to those Danes who are in need, and bring them security and peace of mind.'

An interesting feature is that DPP underlines the importance of upholding the principle of rule of law: 'Denmark belongs to the Danes and its citizens must be able to live in a secure community founded on the rule of law, which develops along the lines of Danish culture.'

A feature that has also been seen in the Eastern Europe in the context of *Fidesz* in Hungary and the *PIŚ* (Law and Order) in Poland claiming to uphold rule of law. As pointed out by Groussot and Zemskova: "the concept of 'Illiberal Democracy' is growing in Europe and constitutes the main contender to the liberal application of the Rule of Law by the Court of Justice and the majority of the courts of the Member States."²⁷

In addition, other main political areas are found in the Party Program of the DPP: Focus on an efficient social and healthcare system, family and an education system of the highest standard, Danish prosperity and clean and healthy environment. DPP are strong supporters of the monarchy and link themselves to strong national symbols such as the Danish flag and the Danish Constitution.

²⁴ See Anders Widfeldt, *Extreme right parties in Scandinavia* (Routledge 2015) 146; Bergmann (n 11) 60 and <http://www.dendanskeforening.dk/>.

²⁵ See Karen Wren, 'Cultural racism: Something rotten in the state of Denmark?' (2001) 2(2) *Social & Cultural Geography* 141, 154.

²⁶ cf. Rydgren (n 22) 484.

²⁷ Groussot and Zemskova (n 6).

2.2 POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

The DPP has similarities with the ‘populist radical right’ by combining populism with nativism.²⁸ However, it is at the same time a special Nordic welfare state kind of populism with some distinct features, which we will revisit later. The DPP is often described as a ‘center-right’ party, but they see themselves as a ‘center party’. This might be explained by the fact that DPP is radical-right as regards immigration policies and sociocultural issues more generally, while the party has moved towards the center and even center-left as regards its socio-economic policies.²⁹

The ideational approach is the best model to understand the DPP. A starting point is the definition stated by Mudde where populism is an ideology:

[...] that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.³⁰

Interestingly, the DPP does not attack the elites directly in their party program. However, they have done so in public debate:³¹ ‘the core of the problem’ is ‘a self-serving political and cultural elite’ ‘living in the right places’ ‘without the least sense of passion of the conditions of others and the people’. And furthermore: ‘The people chose another immigration policy after 2001 against the wishes of this elite’.

A more recent example of an attack on the elites appeared in 2019, when the former leader of the DPP, who has been the chairman of Parliament from 2015-2019, wanted to introduce a new form of parliamentary investigations, where Parliament could demand that civil servants appeared as witnesses before a lower court judge in controversial political cases. This proposal was met with critique from among others interest organisations of judges, lawyers, and civil servants. Pia Kjærsgaard was asked whether this made an impression on her:³² ‘I do not understand that. The most important for me is to get a case solved as fast as possible. In that regards everyone must be helpful. There is no room for anyone being conceited.’³³

Although the attacks on the ‘political establishment’ have become less aggressive since the 2001 election – when DPP obtained a pivotal position and a *de facto* role as an unofficial coalition partner to a liberal government - the DPP commonly presents itself as an outsider to the establishment (in which all other parties represented in the parliament are included). Even after 2001, the MPs of the Danish People’s Party typically refer to politicians as ‘they’ rather than as ‘we’.³⁴ Much of the party’s populist rhetoric is directed against the Social

²⁸ See Bergmann (n 11) 65.

²⁹ See *supra* n. 1, p. 101.

³⁰ Cas Mudde, ‘The Populist Zeitgeist’ (2004) 39(4) *Government and Opposition* 541.

³¹ Quotes by the former leader of DPP Pia Kjærsgaard from 2005 cited in *supra* n. 1, p. 100.

³² <https://politiken.dk/indland/politik/art7048755/Embedsm%C3%A6nd-skal-kunne-vidne-i-byretten>. Visited on 2 July 2019.

³³ ‘Fine fornemmelser’ in Danish.

³⁴ Rydgren (n 22) 487.

Democrats. The former leader has stated: ‘The Social Democrats are today governed by a group of academic theorists that do not understand, and that would not dream of trying to understand [the worries of ‘ordinary people’].’

Since the Nordic countries, including Denmark, are rather wealthy countries with strong welfare systems, where equality and distribution from privileged to less-privileged citizens and equal access to the educational systems (including state-financed universities) play an important role, the separation between ‘the pure people’ and the ‘corrupt elite’ plays out in a less distinct way than we see in many other European countries. Furthermore, the Danish political system is generally characterized by good governance, rule of law, where the law applies equally to all citizens, democracy, transparency, respect of human rights and no corruption.³⁵ Public trust in political institutions and courts are high compared to other European countries.³⁶ Maybe for this reason, migrants and asylum seekers are often emphasized and targeted as the most important ‘others’.³⁷ This is among others due to the fact, that they are seen as a financial threat to the Nordic welfare systems, as a threat to Nordic values including democracy, liberty, gender equality, a safe society, security and Christianity to mention a few. Some of these values, for instance gender equality, does not necessarily resemble ‘nativism’ in the traditional form. We find it in other European countries, where populist parties focus on more traditional conservative values.³⁸ It can also be mentioned that the phrase ‘populism’ is seldom directly applied to DPP or other populist parties in the public debate, though academics apply this term to DPP.³⁹ This way we see a ‘hidden populism’, which is normally not directly formulated as populism in public discourse.

Furthermore, Danish courts are known to be rather reluctant in relation to the legislator, only setting aside legislation, which clearly violates the Constitution.⁴⁰ This could be one of the reasons, that we have not seen as massive a critique or an attempt to institutional change of the court system as we witness in some Eastern European countries, though we do see a tendency where politicians to a larger extent express opinions on on-going cases from the courts.⁴¹ Other sources of criticism, for instance the public media station ‘DR’, ‘experts’ and The Danish Institute of Human Rights (especially before 2009 when Morten Kjærum was the director), have been targeted more than the courts.

³⁵ See Helle Krunke and Björg Thorarensen, *The Nordic Constitutions. A Comparative and Contextual Study* (Hart Publishing 2018). Denmark scores high on ‘rule of law’ and ‘no-corruption’ indexes.

³⁶ Report from the Ministry of Justice ‘Tryghed og tillid til politi og retssystem’ (2021).

³⁷ Bergmann (n 11) 60.

³⁸ Gender equality and the position of women in society have always been part of agenda of DPP normally linked to the negative effect migration might have in this regard. See Bergmann (n 11) 54-57.

³⁹ DPP has been characterised as a populist party by many scholars including Johannes Andersen, ‘Dansk Folkeparti, Demokratiet og de Fremmede’ (UNI.PRINT, Aalborg Universitet 2000), Bergmann (n 11) and Juul Flemming Christensen, ‘The Danish People’s Party – Combining Cooperation and Radical Positions’ in Tjitske Akkerman, Sarah L. de Lange & Matthijs Rooduijn (eds.), *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe – Into the Mainstream?* (2016 Routledge).

⁴⁰ The Danish Supreme Court has only once set aside an Act as violating the Constitution in the so-called ‘Tvind-case’.

⁴¹ In August 2021 a controversial case against the vice leader of DPP, Morten Messerschmidt, who is accused of having committed fraud with EU funding when he was a member of the European Parliament, was adjudicated at a city court. After the judgment, Messerschmidt and other members of DPP criticized the judge at the city court (which found him guilty of fraud) of not being neutral, based on the private activities of the judge on social media. Messerschmidt has now raised a complaint in the court system. Messerschmidt is accused of having spent EU funding on DPP’s annual summer meeting.

In the summer of 2021, Danish universities were criticized by the Vice Chair of DPP and another Member of Parliament from a liberal party ('Liberal Alliance') for being 'activist' in their research especially in the fields of migration, gender and colonial studies. Following a long public debate initiated by the two politicians, the issue was discussed in a debate in Parliament during which names of several research centers from different universities working on the mentioned topics and even names of individual researchers were put forward as examples of activist non-objective research and researchers. A majority in Parliament (including the Social Democrats 'Socialdemokratiet' which is in government) concluded the debate with a statement according to which the leadership of the Danish universities (which are independent institutions) should take their responsibilities seriously and prevent activist research.

These characteristics are generally common to all Nordic countries (with only small differences), as reflected in the Nordic values and legal systems for instance the constitutions.⁴² Therefore, based on the mentioned characteristics we would argue that a special Nordic populism, which DPP belongs to, exists.

2.3 METROPOLITAN CITIES VS. SMALL TOWNS

One last observation as regards DFF is that there seems to be a geographical aspect to the distribution of DFF votes in Denmark. DFF seems to be more popular in small towns and rural areas than in the capital, Copenhagen, and the second largest city Aarhus. For instance, in the Danish 2014 election in 2014, 40% of the voters in a small town in South Jutland close to the German border voted for DPP, which has a strong focus on migration and EU scepticism including the open borders. In the same election, approximately 80% in Nørrebro, a district in Copenhagen, voted for three left wing parties (which have a strong green focus).⁴³ Furthermore, in the 2018 election, DFF received the most electoral support in the southern part of Jutland and in mid and west Zealand. Thus, DFF received 32.4 % of the votes in Billund, 31.8 % in Aabenraa, and 30.9 % in Kalundborg. The least electoral support for DFF was found in Copenhagen, Aarhus and the rather wealthy municipalities north of Copenhagen.⁴⁴

3 GEOGRAPHICAL DIFFERENTIATION: POPULISM IN NORTH EUROPE, SOUTH EUROPE AND EAST EUROPE⁴⁵

Populism in North Europe has been explained by different theories. Among others, Rodrik has highlighted populism as a reaction to economic globalization.⁴⁶ Northern Europe might

⁴² See Krunke and Thorarensen (n 35) 203-205.

⁴³ See Helle Krunke and Katarina Hovden, 'Transnational Solidarity among European Cities' and Helle Krunke and Hanne Petersen, 'Concluding Thoughts: Concept, Challenges and Opportunities', in Helle Krunke, Hanne Petersen and Ian Manners: *Transnational Solidarity. Concept, Challenges and Opportunities* (CUP 2020) 397.

⁴⁴<https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/nyheder-analyser-publ/bagtal/2019/2019-02-20-landkort-viser-forskelle-i-partiernes-stemmeandele>.

⁴⁵ This section of the article is partly based on a report written by the authors for the Demos project.

⁴⁶ See DANI Rodrik, 'Populism and the Economics of Globalization' (2018) *Journal of International Business Policy* 1,12-33.

not have experienced as strong an impact of the financial crisis and the Eurozone crisis as South Europe. However, Northern Europe experiences a loss of control due to anonymous global market forces leading to a de-politicization of the economic cleavage and the welfare state's loss of control over economic life.⁴⁷ Norris and Inglehart have highlighted populism as a reaction to decades of progressive value change as regards multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism and feminism.⁴⁸ Malthe Frøslee Ibsen has emphasized the need to understand populism in light of a legitimization crisis drawing on Claus Odde and Jürgen Habermas. According to him, both Rodrika and Norris and Inglehart 'fail to take seriously the normative and ideational content of populism, as a political reaction to a perceived legitimacy crisis'.⁴⁹ However, combined with theory of legitimation, Ibsen argues that we are enabled to integrate the economic and cultural grievances highlighted by Rodrik and Norris and Inglehart:⁵⁰

[...] into its account of the different political orientations that the populist resurgence has taken in Northern Europe (focused on cultural grievances) and in Southern Europe (focused on economic grievances). More specifically, I have argued that this divergence can be explained with reference to how the different immediate sources of the welfare state's loss of control over economic life – anonymous global market forces as opposed to clearly identifiable political agents – have affected a depoliticization of the economic cleavage in Northern Europe, thus paving the way for the politicization of the cultural cleavage, and a politicization of the economic cleavage in Southern Europe.

Based on our findings we would argue that the just mentioned explanation of the foundation of populism in North Europe applies to Denmark and the Nordic countries to a certain extent. However, it should be mentioned that Danes and other Nordic citizens, because of all the characteristics, which we highlighted above, still have more trust in public institutions than it is the case in other parts of Europe. Populism has so far not become as extreme as we have seen it in other European countries because of the special Nordic context with - among other - strong welfare states and more emphasis on equality than we see in other European countries (though more extreme Danish populist parties have appeared).

The high degree of equality, redistribution and a solid welfare state in Denmark and other Nordic countries is also a main difference to the UK, which has often been defined as part of North Europe in studies of differentiation. Empirical studies on Brexit have shown that 'the divide between winners and losers of globalization was a key driver of the vote', and

locally rooted individuals – defined as those living in their county of birth – were 7 percent more likely to vote Leave. However, the impact of immobility was filtered by local circumstances: immobility only mattered for respondents **in areas**

⁴⁷ See Malthe Frøslee Ibsen 'The Populist Conjuncture: Legitimation of Crisis in the Age of Globalized Capitalism' (2018) Political Studies 1.

⁴⁸ See Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, 'Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash' (2016) Faculty Research Working Paper Series, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge.

⁴⁹ *Supra* n 7, p. 15.

⁵⁰ See *supra* n 7, p. 15.

experiencing relative economic decline or increases in migrant populations (bold inserted by authors)^{51 52}

Cultural factors also played an important role in the Brexit referendum.⁵³ The Nordic countries also differ from Ireland, which has been mentioned as part of the North in some studies, since Ireland has a weaker economy and as a result was hit more severely by the financial crisis than the Nordic countries (and Germany).

As outlined above, the DPP can to a large extent be seen as a political party which captures the public fear of loss of the welfare state in a globalized world, where the political actors are losing their ability to control economic life and in our opinion importantly also the borders. The DPP addresses fear of losing jobs, welfare benefits, security etc. and they blame it on migrants and asylum seekers with a strong emphasis on open borders in the EU and on Human Rights Conventions. The DPP supports values that could be seen as a reaction to multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. However, in contradiction to very conservative and traditional populists in Europe, they want to uphold Danish values such as gender equality and a free open society, which must be seen as part of the progressive ideas, which populists in other countries protest against. An explanation for this might partly be that gender equality is seen as an important element in the Nordic welfare states. The former leader (1995-2012) and co-founder of the DPP was female, Pia Kjærsgaard, and a very strong political figure. It should be emphasized, that the DPP sees itself as protector of family values and is in opposition to rights of homosexuals to adopt children, having insemination and being married in the Danish State Church.⁵⁴ Nordic populism thereby overlaps with populism in North Europe but as shown, it also has some specific Nordic features where it distinguishes itself from North Europe.

In all parts of the EU, populism including its drivers must be seen in light of their specific geographical context. In the Nordic countries, populism is part of a strong welfare context, high equality in society, trust in institutions, gender equality, strong democratic tradition, good governance, low corruption and a quite heterogeneous population (traditionally). In this context, populism is driven by culture, the fear of losing the mentioned values and not least losing the welfare state. The EU migration crisis seems to have impacted on populism in North Europe but also in South and East Europe. In South Europe, the economic crisis has impacted on society much harder than in North Europe. Populism must be understood in light of the economic crisis and the impact of economic reforms, driven by the EU, on democratic and human rights in some member states. On top of that, certain member states, such as Greece and Italy, have suffered because of the migration crisis and the lack of solidarity across EU member states in this field. Weak economy is also present in East Europe. However, an important part of the Eastern context is also its history as part of

⁵¹ See Neil Lee, Katy Morris and Thomas Kemeny, 'Immobility and the Brexit vote' (2018) 11(1) Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society 143.

⁵² Sara Hobolt, 'The Brexit vote: a divided nation, a divided continent', (2016) 23(9) Journal of European Public Policy 1259.

⁵³ See Maria Abreu and Özge Öner, 'Disentangling the Brexit Vote: The Role of Economic, Social and Cultural Contexts in Explaining the UK's EU Referendum Vote' (2020) 52(7) Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space 1434-1456.

⁵⁴ See Ulrik Gad, 'Greenland: A post-Danish sovereign nation state in the making' (2014) 49(1) Cooperation and Conflict 98; Bergmann (n 11) 61.

the authoritarian regime in the USSR, a weak democratic tradition and a tradition where the collective is more important than individual rights.

Differentiation in the EU in the field of the EU populist crisis is characterized by culture, economy and democratic traditions. Even though populism in different parts of the EU share some of the same characteristics, for instance resistance towards the EU and migration, and this way may even pose the same challenges to the EU, the underlying reasons and drivers may differ because of the differences in the context.

4 THE IMPACT OF DIFFERENTIATION ON SOLVING EU CRISES

These observations also mean that the key to solving the EU populist crisis is not necessarily the same in different parts of the EU. The EU populist crisis in South Europe might be solved by economic support, and the EU seems to have much focus on this especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. To some extent, economic support is also a key to fight populism in East Europe. The EU is presently linking financial support after Covid-19 to budgetary sanctions of violations of the principle of rule of law. However, it seems that the context of a weak democratic tradition and authoritarian political culture from the USSR might demand more than financial support as a response to populism. As regards North Europe, it seems that economic support is not the key to fight populism since this is a wealthy region. In this region, the key must probably be related to some of the cultural and value related concerns among populists. Some examples of value driven focus areas as regards the Nordic countries could be to strengthen democracy in the EU from below for instance through including national parliaments and municipalities more in the democratic processes of the EU, to strengthen transparency in the EU decision making process, and not to pose a threat to the strong national welfare states in this region.

The differentiation aspect played an interesting role during the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has strengthened the economic crisis especially in South Europe and in East Europe, and it has strengthened the democratic challenges in some East European countries since power was centralised in the government, for instance in Hungary. Furthermore, the geographical differences in citizens' trust in institutions and institutions' were reflected in differences in the level of public protest and in the level of restrictions dictated by governments. For instance in the Nordic countries, the general trend was that citizens were not restricted from leaving their homes.

5 CONCLUSION: MOVING FOCUS FROM 'POPULIST AND NON-POPULIST COUNTRIES' TO 'COSMOPOLITAN CITIES AND RURAL AREAS' IN THE EU

The lessons learned from this article are that one needs to understand the underlying mechanisms of populism in the different parts of the EU in order to be able to respond more efficiently to the EU populist crisis. Apparently, the EU needs more than one type of 'medicine' or key to unlock the crisis. Populism exists in all parts of the EU even in the Nordic countries and the EU needs to be aware of that. Populism does not only pose a threat

to EU values, it may also undermine solidarity among EU member states. Economic support does not necessarily work in all parts of the EU.

However, there is one common feature in most EU member states, which is the growing distance between metropolitan big cities and small cities in rural areas, and this division is closely related to the EU populist crisis.⁵⁵ Small cities in rural areas are often areas, which fight Europeanization and globalization, fear migration and where populist parties have most voters. The French Presidential election in 2022 has recently underlined this. As shown, parties such as the DPP often have much support in such areas. Theory, has emphasized that a strong element in the identity of the DPP voters, is that they are critical towards society, and this critique is then aimed at ‘foreigners’ and at the EU.⁵⁶ The internal tension in the member states is growing and it was one of the reasons for Brexit. We see an EU with support in the big cities across Europe and with challenges in the more rural parts. In other words, ‘the solidarity crisis in Europe is not only a transnational solidarity crisis; it is also a solidarity crisis within different groups in the individual Member States, geographically expressed as a conflict between large cities and provinces’.⁵⁷ This way the EU is so to speak ‘breaking into halves’ within member state borders. If the EU can find a way of being part of the solution to this tension between big cities and rural areas in the member states, a key to open the doors in response to the EU’s populist crisis (and several related EU crises) would have been found.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ See Krunke and Hovden (n 43) 374-417 and Krunke and Petersen (n 43) 418-436.

⁵⁶ See Andersen (n 39) 15.

⁵⁷ See Krunke and Hovden (n 43) 397.

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