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Research Article

Shifting the blame. Populist politicians' use of Twitter as a tool of opposition

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Abstract

The advent of new social media has facilitated new means of political communication, through which politicians can address the electorate in an unmediated way. This article concentrates on political actors challenging the establishment, for whom new media platforms such as Twitter provide new tools to engage in a 'permanent campaign' against dominant mainstream parties. Such opposition is ostensibly articulated most strongly by populist parties, which can be seen as the ultimate challengers to the (political) 'elites'. By means of two often-identified cases of populism in the Netherlands (the radical right Freedom Party and left-wing Socialist Party), this study explores how populist party leaders use Twitter messages (tweets) to give form to their adversarial rhetoric in practice. Irrespective of the different ways in which the politicians utilised the medium, our study shows that Twitter can serve as a valuable source to study the oppositional discourse of populist parties, and (shifting) party strategies more generally.

Keywords

Populism; political parties; the Netherlands; Twitter; content analysis

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Twitter has grown out to be one of the most prominent microblogging and social networking services. For politicians, the medium provides a tool to engage in unmediated communication with a broad group of potential voters (Lassen and Brown 2011). In practice, Twitter is regularly used by politicians to voice their opinions, and tweets can be seen as typical vehicles for self-promotion (Golbeck et al. 2010). Even though a relatively small number of people 'follow' politicians on Twitter directly, tweets often lie at the basis of more widely consumed media coverage (see Larsson and Moe 2012; Jacobs and Spierings 2016).

While Twitter allows for a more general analysis of party positions and political ideologies, the focus of this article is narrower, as we are interested in the manner in which the medium is used as a means of political opposition. Several authors have noted the suitability of social media for so-called populist politicians, who are characterised by their appeal to the 'ordinary' people and hostility towards the (political) elites (Bartlett et al. 2011; Gerbaudo 2015). Yet research on how populist parties give shape to their anti-establishment rhetoric through Twitter remains sparse. In our study, we assess how leaders of two alleged populist parties at the ideological fringes of the Dutch political spectrum, Geert Wilders of the Freedom Party (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, PVV) and Emile Roemer of the Socialist Party (*Socialistische Partij*, SP), use Twitter to criticise their political opponents, and respond to changing political opportunities. Both these parties have habitually been associated with populism, not least due to their critical attitude towards the Dutch political elite. In our analysis we trace developments in the party leaders' 'adversarial tweets'; more specifically, we consider which actors they blamed over time, and which issues were at the centre of their adversarial tweets.

The following sections outline in more detail our theoretical starting points. Subsequently, a brief description of the Socialist Party and Freedom Party is provided. The article then moves on to present the research design and the results of this study. We find that the frequency in which the party leaders used Twitter has varied over time, but that the politicians' adversarial tweets reflected well their (electoral) strategies. They were selective in criticising particular opponents and shifted their targets and 'blame topics' throughout time, largely depending on who was in government, and which issues dominated their political agendas. Tweets thus proved a suitable source to track the strategies of political actors, and the findings point to the relevance of studying new means of political communication (see e.g. Lassen and Brown 2011; Towner and Dulio 2012). Indeed, much more than party manifestos, tweets allow researchers to map short-term developments in party strategies in between elections. The results also show that political actors branded as 'populist' do not necessarily voice criticism just for the sake of protest against the entire political system, but that they can act in a calculating manner, just like other political actors do.

TWITTER AS A TOOL OF POLITICAL OPPOSITION

Due to, inter alia, its low operating costs, interactive, unmediated and personal character, and 'virality potential', Twitter can be viewed as an important new political communication tool (see Vergeer and Hermans 2013; Jacobs and Spierings 2016). Compared with party manifestos, which primarily outline preferred policies and are only published prior to elections, tweets are also more suitable as means to react to current affairs and to criticise other politicians. This applies not least to politicians challenging the political establishment, for whom tweets provide the means to engage in a 'permanent campaign' against the political elites, and governing parties in particular (see Vergeer et al. 2013). Indeed, radical fringe parties have been observed to be among the most active users of online technology (Gibson and Ward 2012, p. 65), and also attract many 'followers' on social media relative to their mainstream competitors (Economist 2015). The format of tweets – which are limited to 140-characters – arguably offers more opportunities for politicians with a succinct and unambiguous message than for mainstream politicians whose positions are marked by more nuance and opacity.

Parties at the ideological fringes are often associated with 'populism', which can broadly be defined as an ideology or discourse which makes a Manichean distinction between the corrupt 'elites' and the virtuous 'people', and supports the idea of popular sovereignty (e.g. Taggart 2000; Mudde 2004; Laclau 2007; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008). It is debated whether populism is an element of certain politicians or parties only, or rather a strategic rhetorical devise or style which can in principle be applied by all political actors (to a certain degree) (e.g. Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Moffitt and Tormey 2013; Rooduijn et al. 2014; Van Kessel 2014). It may well be argued that for some parties populism is an essential element of their ideology – i.e. those parties which are marked by a consistent and frequent use of populist language – while for others populism is not more than a sporadic (strategic) devise to put distance between them and the parties they compete with. Be that as it may, in the Western European context populism tends to be associated primarily with parties of the radical left and radical right (e.g. Mudde 2007; March 2011). These parties have in common a criticism of the political establishment, but also of other 'elite' actors. Depending on the parties' broader ideological characteristics, these can be the corporate rich, bankers, but also the media or intelligentsia, whose (liberal) ideas, values and interests are at odds with those of the 'silent majority' (Canovan 1999, p. 3).

In their cross-national study, surveying Facebook fans of populist parties, Bartlett et al. (2011: 15, 30) observed that these parties are 'adept at using social media to amplify their message, recruit and organise', and that the Internet is 'deeply ingrained' in their strategy and identity (see also Mazzoleni 2015). Paulo Gerbaudo (2015: 68) similarly argued that for protest movements and parties 'social network sites such as Twitter and Facebook have become the means through which to address Internet users as the new prototypes of the 'common man' of populism: the ordinary hard-working citizens, victimised by an unfair political and economic establishment'. Through social media, an otherwise diversified mass can be mobilised against economic and political elites. Indeed, the format of social media outlets such as Twitter allows politicians with an anti-establishment agenda to voice unambiguous criticism and identify the culprits of social problems. In other words, tweets can be used as vehicles for these politicians' 'injustice frames', through which they identify the victims of a given injustice ('the people') and focus blame or responsibility on established (political) authorities (Gamson 1992; Benford and Snow 2000: 615-6). While in the past politicians and social movements were tied to traditional media as a resource though which to construct their injustice frames (Gamson 1995), social media such as Twitter now allow them to voice their discontent without an intermediary channel (see Schulz 2014).

That said, not all studies have come to the conclusion that Twitter is the ultimate medium for populist parties. From their analysis of Twitter use among Dutch politicians at the time of the 2010 parliamentary election, Vergeer and Hermans (2013) conclude that candidates from less established and smaller parties did not use Twitter more extensively. They found that the (populist) PVV and SP were actually among the parties with the lowest 'adopter rates' (see also Vergeer et al. 2013). Jacobs and Spierings (2016) also studied the political use of social media in the Netherlands, and similarly observed that the PVV and SP – which they also identified as 'populist parties' – lagged behind in terms of the number of candidates represented on social media platforms and the professionalisation of their online activities. What is more, particularly the PVV refrained from making use of Twitter's more advanced interactive features, and 'seemed to consider Twitter merely as an alternative to sending out press releases' (Jacobs and Spierings 2016, p. 181).

It is thus a moot point whether populist parties are truly that Twitter-savvy. However, even if only used as top-down 'press release centres', populist politicians' Twitter profiles may well feed into the political debate, not least because tweets are picked up by the mass media. It is therefore important not only to study the nature of politicians' use of Twitter, for instance in terms of adopter rates among party candidates, but also to focus on the *contents* of their tweets. For one, bearing in mind that tweets provide suitable vehicles for succinct and unambiguous criticism of other political actors, it is worthwhile to investigate how populist parties (i.e. those parties for which populism is a more or less consistent element) utilise Twitter in their opposition to the (political) elites. Does their Twitter usage reflect well their anti-establishment strategies, and can the medium therefore be considered suitable to study the construction of populist actors' injustice frames? This article has an explorative character and focuses on tweets with an explicit adversarial character; those which target actors for ignoring or causing social problems. We start out from the assumption that populist parties can be seen as rational and calculating players in the political 'market place' (see Scammell 1999). On the basis of this, several expectations can be formulated.

First of all, populist parties are likely to direct their criticism towards traditionally dominant parties, which are often in government and can most convincingly be portrayed as members of the political elite. As they are typically political outsiders in opposition, populist parties can often freely target parties in government (see Walter and Van der Brug 2014). It is wrong to assume, however, that they have no ambition to enter government themselves; several European populist parties have in fact entered, or supported, governing coalitions in the past few decades (De Lange 2012; Albetazzi and McDonnell 2015). In order not to destroy their 'coalition potential', populist parties may limit their criticism of prospective partners, whilst directing their criticism towards parties with whom there is less scope for cooperation.

Related to this, we further expect that populist parties predominantly criticise parties with contrasting ideological positions. This relates to their presumed caution not to antagonise potential coalition partners with similar programmes, but also their need to construct a consistent ideological narrative. In view of their nativist and authoritarian character, populist radical right parties are likely to criticise those parties that subscribe to 'progressive' values and have more favourable attitudes towards immigration and multiculturalism (see Mudde 2007). On the other hand, considering their 'emphasis on egalitarianism and the espousal of collective economic and social rights' (March 2011, p. 118), left-wing populist parties are more likely to criticise parties that are supportive of *laissez faire* capitalism (in addition to economic elites outside of the political sphere, such as bankers, managers and large companies).[i]

It would also be conceivable to hypothesise that populist parties primarily express criticism of ideologically proximate parties, since these are their main electoral competitors (see Walter 2014). We expect, however, that populist parties are more likely to focus on their ideological nemeses, in order to construct an anti-establishment message, which is consistent with their wider ideological attributes. Indeed, we also expect that the adversarial tweets of populist parties primarily relate to issues, which are at the centre of their programmatic appeal, with left-wing populists primarily placing emphasis on the malicious socio-economic policies of their political opponents, and right-wing populists blaming their adversaries for their welcoming attitude towards immigrants and promotion of cultural decay. All in all, we expect that populist parties, at least when they are in opposition, primarily target dominant mainstream parties which often take part in government. In addition, we presume that populist parties will be less critical of ideologically proximate parties with whom they seek to cooperate in office, and that their criticism is mainly focused on the issues that are central to their own political programme.

CASE SELECTION

We focus our analysis on two parties in the Netherlands. The country offers an ideal testing ground, as two different types of populist parties have been identified in the contemporary Dutch party system: the left-wing SP and the radical right PVV (see e.g. Lucardie and Voerman 2012). This allows us to assess the adversarial rhetoric of two ideologically distinct populist parties, while controlling for general developments in the domestic political context. The PVV, furthermore, provides us with a case that has acted as a support partner for a minority government (the Rutte I Cabinet, October 2010 – April 2012). By focusing on the PVV, we are able to explore developments in the adversarial tweets of a populist party leader once this party departs from its (natural) role as full-fledged opposition party. Further, the Dutch technological context is also suitable for our analysis of politicians' tweets. In addition to the relatively large presence of Dutch political actors on social media, the country is characterised by a high proportion of social network users in comparison with other European countries (see Jacobs and Spierings 2016, p. 13-4). This implies that Dutch politicians have a real incentive to use Twitter as a means of political communication, as they are able to reach a relatively large audience.

As far as the background of the two selected parties is concerned, the SP entered the Dutch Parliament first in 1994 (having won 1.3 per cent of the vote). The party steadily expanded its support base until its electoral high point in 2006, when it won 16.6 per cent of the national vote. In the subsequent parliamentary elections of 2010 and 2012, the SP failed to repeat this achievement – it received 9.9 and 9.6 per cent of the vote, respectively – but the party remained a substantial force in the fragmented Dutch party system.

By the time of its parliamentary entrance, the SP had moved away from its Maoist roots and could better be described as a radical left-wing protest party, exemplified by its slogan: 'vote against, vote SP'. The party was also populist in its appeals to the 'common man' and its denunciation of the political and economic elites (see Lucardie and Voerman 2012). Around the turn of the 21st century, the SP downplayed its anti-establishment image – in 2002 its slogan had remarkably changed to 'Vote *for*, vote SP' (see also Lange and Rooduijn 2011). Populist rhetoric could nevertheless still be found in the discourse of the party and its politicians (Lucardie and Voerman 2012, pp. 64-9), and the financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent economic downturn seemed to fuel the SP's populism; the party, for instance, held the 'political and economic elites' responsible for the crisis at the time of the 2010 parliamentary election (SP 2010, p. 5). In the recent literature, the SP has thus regularly been identified as a populist party (e.g. Schumacher and Rooduijn 2013; Akkerman et al. 2014; Otjes and Louwerse 2015). It is nevertheless evident that over the years populism became a more irregular and sporadic element in the party's discourse (see Rooduijn 2014; Van Kessel 2015) – making the SP a prominent case in the debate about whether populism is a matter of degree or kind. The 'borderline character' of the SP has to be borne into mind when analysing the results. In terms of concrete policy positions, the SP's signature issues have always related to socio-economic themes. After the party dropped its more radical communist policies, the SP continued to denounce the supposed supremacy of the neo-liberal philosophy. The party has advocated higher minimum wages, and opposed welfare state reforms, restricting unemployment benefit requirements, and privatisation of health care provision. The SP has also been sceptical of European integration, and has taken issue with the EU's supposed neo-liberal character in particular.

The Freedom Party, in turn, has been the dominant populist radical right party in the Netherlands since its entrance into parliament in 2006, when it won 5.9 per cent of the vote in the national election. The party filled the gap on the populist right left vacant after the electoral demise of the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF), which fell into organisational disarray soon after the assassination of its founder in May 2002. The PVV was founded and ever-since controlled by Geert Wilders, a former MP for the Liberal party (VVD). Wilders has appealed explicitly to the 'ordinary people', and his discourse has been marked by a strong hostility towards the political elite. In his 'declaration of independence', written after his departure from the Liberals, Wilders (2005, p. 1) for instance spoke of a 'range of interlinked crises flowing from the incompetence of the political elite in Brussels and [Dutch political capital] The Hague'. Wilders (2005, p. 2) declared that he intended 'to return this country to its citizens'. With this declaration Wilders set the tone for later statements in which populist rhetoric recurred frequently.

Besides its populism, the PVV has primarily become known for his anti-immigration policies and outspoken criticism of Islam. In terms of socio-economic policies, the PVV's programme had a neo-liberal character from the outset, favouring *laissez-faire* policies such as tax cuts and deregulation. The party's policy positions became more eclectic in 2010, and Wilders' party now called for the preservation of various welfare entitlements (see Vossen 2011, p. 186). During the election campaign of 2012, Wilders focused more than ever on the theme of European integration. Wilders condemned unelected 'Eurocrats', and opposed financial aid to troubled Eurozone members, as well as labour immigration from Eastern Europe. The Freedom Party had always been Eurosceptic, but now went so far as to support a Dutch 'exit' from the European Union altogether.

After its breakthrough in 2006, the PVV won 15.5 per cent of the vote in the parliamentary election of June 2010. The PVV subsequently provided parliamentary support for a governing minority coalition made up of the Christian Democrats (CDA) and the Liberals (VVD), in exchange for the implementation of some of its key policies. This Cabinet (Rutte I) fell in April 2012 when Wilders refused to sign up to newly drafted austerity measures, and withdrew his support. In the early election that followed in September 2012, the PVV suffered a substantial loss. The party received 10.1 per cent of the vote, yet remained the third largest party in parliament, at par with the SP.

DATA AND METHOD

As we are interested in the populist politicians' use of tweets as means to focus blame or responsibility on established (political) authorities, the study considers the tweets with an explicit adversarial character; those which target actors for ignoring or causing social problems. This is done through hand-coding Twitter messages ('tweets') of the PVV and SP party leaders: Geert Wilders (@geertwilderspvv) and Emile Roemer (@emileroemer).

As national party leaders can be seen as the most prominent representatives of political parties in the Netherlands, their personal tweets are considered good indicators of the general stance of the party. In case of the hierarchically organised SP and PVV, moreover, rank and file candidates have seemingly been discouraged to become Twitter-active in an effort to preserve party discipline and organisational unity (Jacobs and Spierings 2016). This applies in particular to the Freedom Party, which can be considered as the personal party of Geert Wilders (see De Lange and Art 2011). Except for the European Parliament fraction (@pvveuropa), the PVV does actually not have an official Twitter account, and a link on the party's website leads directly to the personal Twitter page of Geert Wilders. The SP does have its own account (@SPnl), but many tweets refer directly to the tweets of party leader Roemer. To secure equivalence across the units of observation, we chose to analyse the personal tweets of Roemer rather than the SP's party account messages.

The previously stated assumption that Twitter is a more suitable tool than party manifestos to express adversarial rhetoric is corroborated by the case of the SP. The 76-pages SP programme of 2012, for instance, was mainly filled with policy proposals and only included five critical comments about other parties or the incumbent government (SP 2012). The PVV manifestos included considerably more criticism of other actors (PVV 2010; 2012). In the 2012 document, we found that 52 of the 133 paragraphs (39 per cent) contained derogatory remarks, mainly targeted at domestic political- or EU actors. In this study we therefore also occasionally refer to the contents of PVV manifestos in order to compare these with the Twitter statements.

We gathered tweets in the period between the run up to the 2010 parliamentary election and the aftermath of the parliamentary election of September 2012. This particular period was selected, because it allowed us to track whether Wilders' rhetoric changed during and after the PVV's role as support partner. Four analytically meaningful periods can be distinguished within the period of study:

1. **20 February 2010 – 9 June 2010**: Period in between fall of Cabinet Balkenende IV (CDA-PvdA) and new parliamentary elections.
2. **10 June 2010 – 22 April 2012**: Period of formation and tenure Cabinet Rutte I (VVD-CDA minority coalition, with parliamentary support from the PVV).
3. **23 April 2012 – 12 September 2012**: Period in between fall of Rutte I and new parliamentary elections.
4. **13 September 2012 – 30 June 2013**: Period of formation and first seven months of tenure Cabinet Rutte II (VVD-PvdA).

Emile Roemer only started using Twitter on 12 January 2011, and his tweets were thus gathered since this date. Tweets were collected primarily from the front pages of both politicians' Twitter accounts, but to retrieve older (unavailable) tweets, and to ensure the completeness of the data, we also used the search engine http://www.twimemachine.com. Only original tweets from Wilders and Roemer were selected (hence: no 're-tweets' in which users share a message from someone else). Tweets were also excluded if they included personal messages directed to another user (i.e. when the message started with '@'). It can be noted that these decisions were mainly relevant for SP leader Roemer, since Wilders' tweets were mostly original and directed at the public in general. Throughout the four periods, we collected 660 tweets from Wilders and 445 from Roemer.

All tweets were double coded by the two authors, based on mutual agreement. We approached the data inductively at first, in order to determine which tweets could be considered to contain criticism. In cases of doubt, we came to an agreement on how to code ambivalent tweets – these decisions are reflected in the text and footnotes of this article.[ii] In the end, we selected all the tweets that contained a negative statement about another actor or a critical remark about proposed or enacted policies. These were coded as 'adversarial tweets'. Across the four periods under consideration, Wilders published 272 such tweets (41.2 per cent of his total), and Roemer 164 (36.9 per cent of his total).

The next step was to assess *who* was criticised or blamed for bad decisions or certain problems in society, using the tweets as coding units. The categories we created for this were non-exclusive, as a single tweet could target multiple actors at once. A first category was created for adversarial remarks aimed explicitly at specific domestic politicians, parties and cabinets. This category was especially relevant to test our assumptions about which political actors and parties were likely to be the prime targets of the tweets.

Since populist parties do not only blame domestic political opponents, we also kept track of pejorative references to certain other actors. A second category was created for the European Union and related actors (Commissioners, MEPs etc.). Populists typically view the EU as an elitist project and criticise its complex and opaque decision-making procedures (Canovan 1999). Populist radical right parties, in addition, tend to see European integration as a 'foreign' threat to the sovereignty of their nation, while left-wing populists often portray the EU as a neo-liberal project that encourages a 'race to the bottom' in terms of welfare entitlements and working conditions (e.g. Hooghe et al. 2002).

Third, we coded pejorative references to 'economic elites' (e.g. bankers, managers, companies) and, fourth, negative references to the media, as these are often portrayed by populist parties as mouthpieces of the establishment. A final 'other/unspecified' category was created for critical remarks directed at other actors; Dutch political institutions in general (such as 'parliament', *Tweede Kamer*); unspecified 'politicians'; or for criticism of policies without an explicit reference to whom exactly was to blame.

Besides keeping track of the targets of the adversarial tweets, we also considered for which reasons actors were blamed. Several broad categories were identified after a first inductive assessment of the data. Again, these categories are non-exclusive, as a single critical tweet could relate to more than one of these themes:

- Social, economic and financial issues (e.g. welfare state, health care, economy, budget)
- Immigration and culture (e.g. immigration, multiculturalism, national identity)
- Law and order (e.g. crime and safety, sentences for criminals)

- European integration (e.g. threats to national sovereignty, contributions to EU budget)
- Democracy (e.g. elite responsiveness, citizen representation and influence)
- Counter-criticism (e.g. countering criticism of other actors)
- Other or idiosyncratic issues

FINDINGS

General observations

We start with some general observations concerning the Twitter use of Wilders and Roemer. Figure 1 shows how many times the politicians tweeted in each quarter between January 2010 and July 2013, excluding tweets addressed to another user and retweets. Generally speaking, Wilders has used Twitter increasingly over time, irrespective of a few dips in 2010 (Q3) and 2012 (Q4). Particularly after the fall of the PVV-supported minority coalition in April 2012, the number of Wilders' tweets surged. Roemer's Twitter behaviour was somewhat more erratic; there is a remarkable dip in the third quarter of 2012, which happens to be the period in which (the campaign for) the parliamentary election of 2012 took place.

Figure 1. Number of tweets per quarter

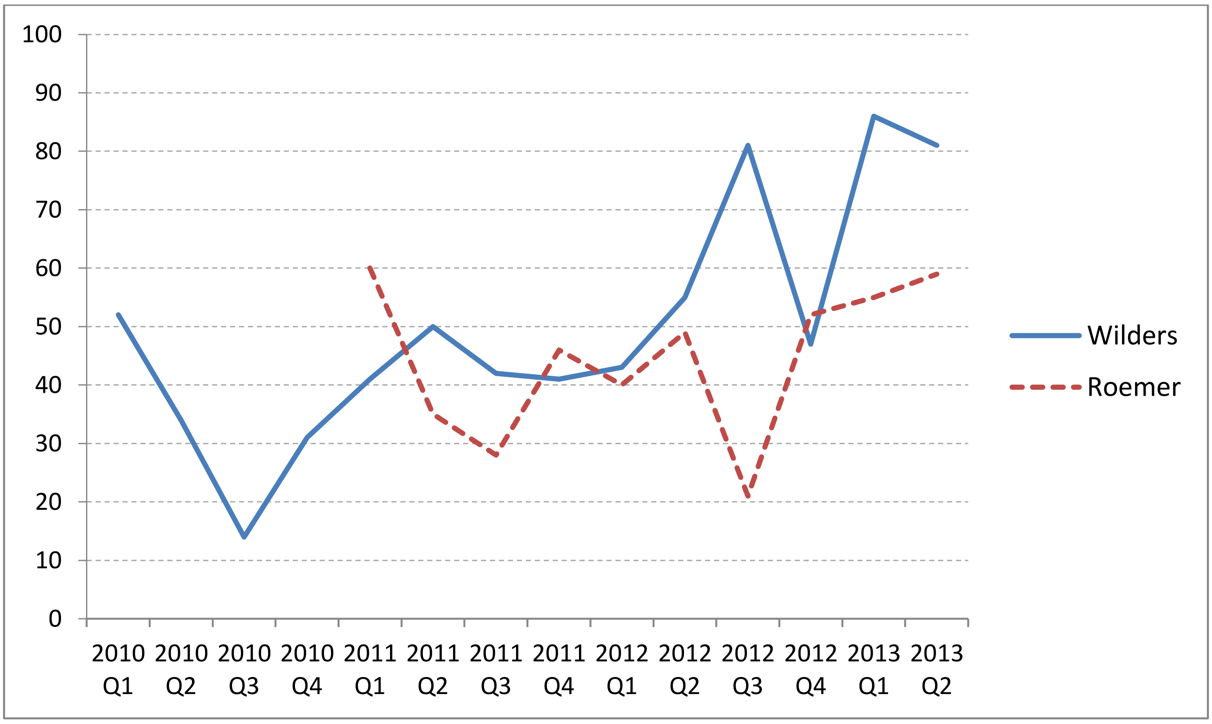
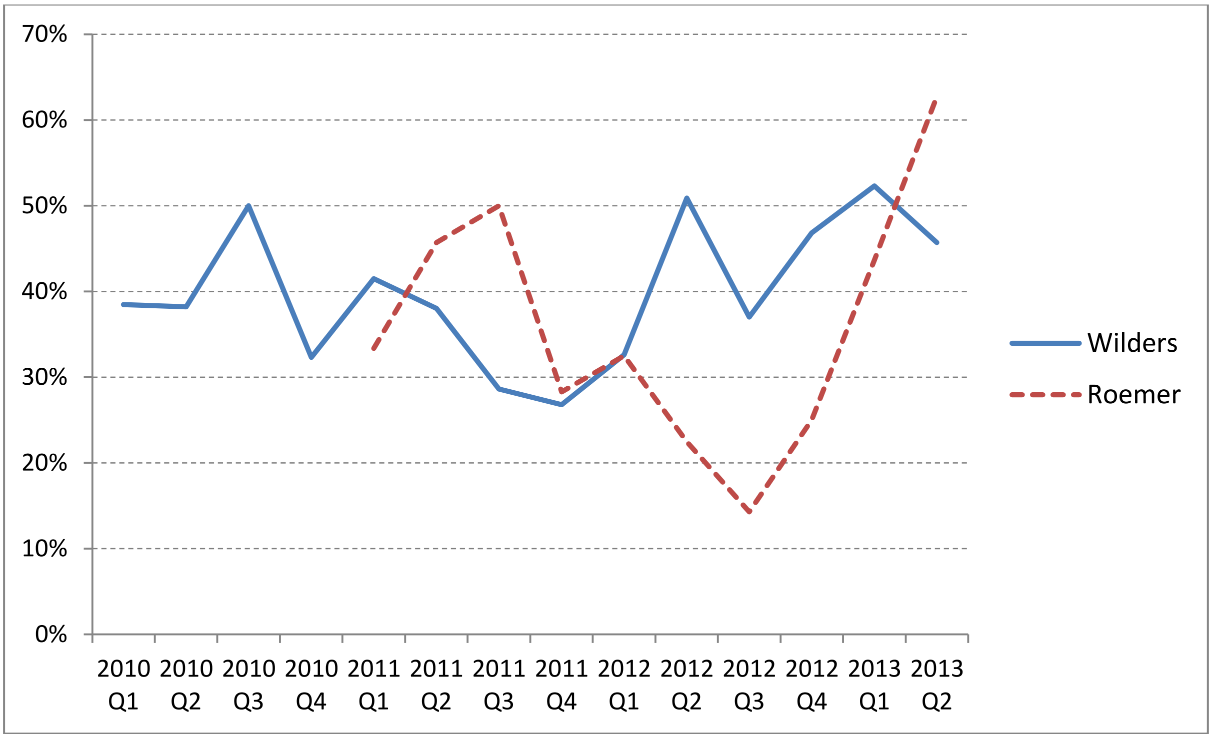


Figure 2 shows the percentage of adversarial tweets; those that contained criticism of a certain actor, or an explicit pejorative reference to government policy. One notable observation is that Geert Wilders did not only use Twitter more frequently after the fall of the Rutte I minority government, but also that his tweets became more adversarial. Roemer's tweets, on the other hand, contained much less criticism in the run up to the September 2012 election than before. Roemer's (relatively few) tweets during the campaign had a rather optimistic character, for instance reporting about the SP leader's local visits. His adversarial tweets soared after the instalment of the new coalition government in November.

Figure 2. Percentage of adversarial tweets per quarter



If we divide the time according to the four periods identified, we observe similar results (see Table 1). In the run up to the election of June 2010 (P1), 42.9 per cent of Wilders' tweets contained criticism, while in the period of the formation and tenure of the Rutte I minority government (P2) the relative number of adversarial tweets was lower (34.5 per cent). After Wilders withdrew his support from the minority coalition, the percentage of adversarial tweets of the PVV leader soared (P3 and 4). In the last period, nearly half of Wilders' tweets contained accusatorial statements. The tweets of SP leader Roemer were also most critical during the latter period, and least adversarial in the run up to the 2012 election (P3).

Table 1. Share of adversarial tweets of Wilders and Roemer

		P1: PE 2010	P2: Rutte I	P3: PE 2012	P4: Rutte II	All
Wilders	Tweets N	42	275	117	226	660
	Advers.%	42.9%	34.5%	44.4%	47.3%	41.2%

		P1: PE 2010	P2: Rutte I	P3: PE 2012	P4: Rutte II	All
Roemer	Tweets N	-	231	44	170	445
	Advers.%	-	35.1%	20.5%	43.5%	36.9%

Type of Actors Criticised

The next step is to assess which type of actors were targeted in the adversarial tweets of Wilders and Roemer. Table 2 shows that most derogatory comments of Wilders were directed towards national-level political actors (politicians, parties, governments or party coalitions). Across the entire period of investigation, almost two-thirds of Wilders' adversarial tweets included an explicit reference to domestic political actors. It is further apparent that Wilders' criticism of EU actors ('Brussels', 'pocket-lining Eurocrats', European Commissioners etc.) mounted in the period between the fall of the Rutte I minority cabinet and the new election of September 2012 (P3). This finding is consistent with the observation that European integration became a more important theme for Wilders in this election campaign. Indeed, also the PVV manifesto of 2012 was filled with criticism of EU elites: 29 out of the 133 paragraphs (21.8 per cent) contained pejorative references to EU actors, compared with 12 out of 118 paragraphs (10.2 per cent) in the manifesto of 2010. In the period after the 2012 election (P4) we see a decline in criticism directed at the EU. However, an important caveat is that, during this period, Wilders still frequently blamed the Dutch government for its submissive attitude towards 'Brussels'. The EU issue thus remained a relatively salient theme for Wilders.

Other actors were criticised only sporadically. Examples are certain media outlets, which received criticism after they had given the PVV bad publicity. In Period 2, Wilders targeted Queen Beatrix several times in relation to her visit to Islamic countries in the Middle East, and Dutch judges at the time when the PVV leader had to stand trial for inciting hatred against Muslims.[iii]

Table 2. Type of actors criticised in adversarial tweets of Wilders, in %

	P1 (N=18)	P2 (N=95)	P3 (N=52)	P4 (N=107)	All (N=272)
Political actors	72.2	57.9	61.5	68.2	63.6
European Union	5.6	11.6	38.5	14.0	17.3
Economic elites	0.0	5.3	1.9	5.6	4.4
Media	16.7	6.3	3.8	4.7	5.9
Other/unspecified	11.1	22.1	5.7	14.0	15.1

Notes: The categories are non-exclusive; a single tweet could relate to more than one actor category. The 'Political actors' category includes national level politicians, parties, governments or party coalitions. General unspecified references to 'politicians', 'parliament' or government policies were placed in the 'other/undefined' category.

Table 3. Type of actors criticised in adversarial tweets of Roemer, in %

	P2 (N=81)	P3 (N=9)	P4 (N=74)	All (N=164)
Political actors	44.4	44.4	52.7	48.2
European Union	3.7	11.1	6.8	5.5
Economic elites	13.6	22.2	10.8	12.8
Media	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other/unspecified	39.5	22.0	35.2	36.6

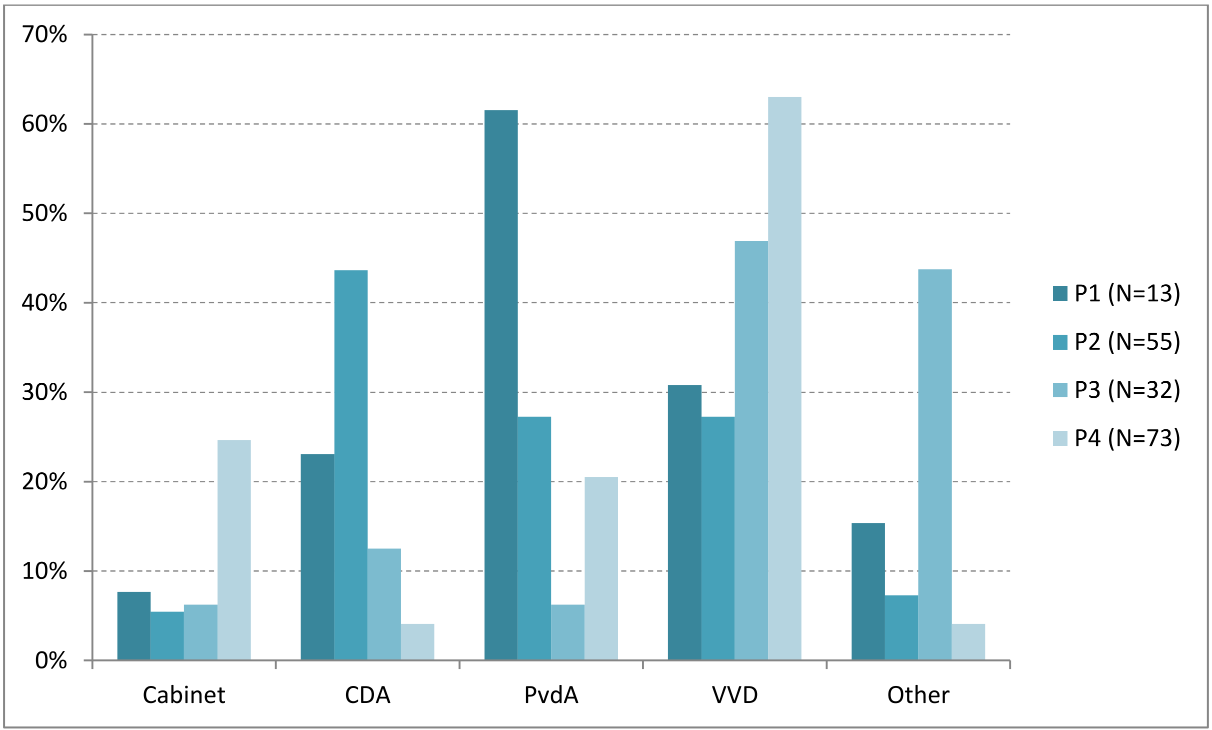
The plurality of Roemer's adversarial tweets were also targeted at domestic political actors. Yet, compared with Wilders, the percentages in the 'other/undefined' category are much higher (see Table 3). An important reason for this is that Roemer had the tendency to criticise government policies – not least austerity measures – without explicitly naming and shaming individual politicians or the incumbent cabinet. Since these messages evidently, albeit more implicitly, expressed criticism of the government, they were nevertheless coded as adversarial tweets.

It is further clear that Roemer criticised EU actors to a much lesser extent than Wilders. This suggests that the selection of targets depends very much on the (electoral) strategies of populist parties; unlike the PVV, the SP did not make European integration the central theme of its 2012 election campaign. SP leader Roemer did, on the other hand, devote more of his criticism to economic elites, such as bankers, money-grabbing managers, and high-income groups in general. This is not entirely surprising, as left-wing populist parties are more disposed to criticise the agents and presumed benefactors of capitalism. Despite his more pronounced welfare chauvinist appeal in 2012, Wilders remained a proponent of entrepreneurship, tax cuts and deregulation, and attacked economic elites only very sporadically.

The Domestic Political Targets

In order to assess which specific domestic political actors and parties were targeted, we dissected the 'political actors' category. As expected, within this category it is evident that most criticism of Roemer and Wilders was directed towards either the incumbent government as a whole, or at (politicians from) the three traditionally dominant parties: the Christian Democrats (CDA), Liberals (VVD) and Labour (PvdA).

Figure 3. Political actors criticised by Wilders, as percentage of the tweets explicitly directed at domestic political actors



As can be seen in Figure 3, Geert Wilders' pejorative references to incumbent cabinets were rather scarce in the first three periods. Regarding P1 and P3 – covering the months before the elections of 2010 and 2012, respectively – this does not come as a great surprise, as the governments were 'demissionary' and thus refrained from making politically sensitive decisions. More interesting is that Wilders was seemingly less critical of the PVV-supported Rutte I (VVD-CDA) Cabinet (P2) than of the Rutte II Cabinet, which was formed by the VVD and the PvdA (P4).

Matters are a bit more complex, however, if we consider the political affiliation of the individual politicians criticised. In the run-up to the 2010 election, PvdA leader Job Cohen was Wilders' favourite target. Cohen was portrayed as a multiculturalist soft touch on integration-related issues and problems with criminal Moroccan youths. In the PVV manifesto of 2010, too, the political left was the primary target. The terms 'left-wing elites' or 'clique' were used repeatedly, and four out of the five times a political actor or party was explicitly criticised, this was (a politican from) the PvdA.

In the subsequent period, however, CDA and VVD members received more criticism than the PvdA and its representatives. Wilders for instance attacked CDA and VVD politicians after they commented negatively on the PVV. In addition, the PVV leader occasionally criticised the actions of Immigration Minister Leers (CDA). Further, PM Rutte (VVD) and Finance Minister De Jager (CDA) were criticised several times in May and June 2011 for the decision to sign up to Eurozone bailout packages. Thus, even though Wilders made relatively few negative comments about the Rutte I government as a whole, he did occasionally criticise individual cabinet members for taking a 'soft' stance on the PVV's signature issues, which were not covered by the support agreement.

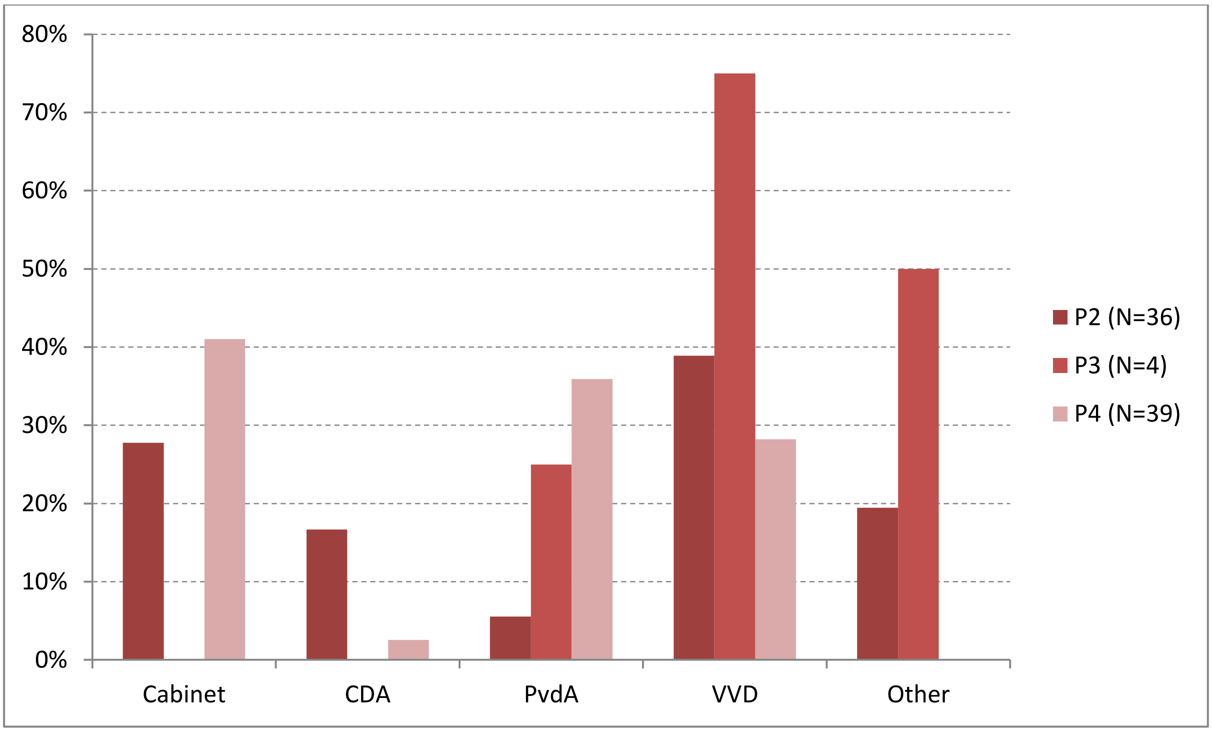
This finding is not completely in line with our expectation that the radical right PVV leader would criticise mainly political actors on the 'left' with whom there was little coalition potential. What is more, centre-right politicians, not least PM Rutte himself, actually became subject to most of

Wilders' negative judgements from Period 3 onwards. The PVV leader presumably anticipated that a renewed partnership with the VVD was unlikely after he withdrew his support from the Rutte I minority coalition.

In the third period we also see that Wilders directed a considerable amount of criticism towards the so-called 'Kunduz coalition', which is placed in the 'Other' category in Figure 3. This coalition of parties was formed after the break-up of Rutte I, when the CDA and VVD struck a deal on a new budget with three opposition parties, in order to comply with the EU's 3 per cent budget deficit rule.[iv] The centre-left PvdA remained outside of the Kunduz coalition and the party was also hardly targeted in Wilders' tweets in the run up to the early 2012 election. In the PVV manifesto of 2012 we also observe critical references to Kunduz in eight paragraphs, and only one to a PvdA politician (Cohen). The PVV still spoke derogatively of 'progressive elites' or 'politically-correct politicians' five times, but used the adjective 'left-wing' only once.

Only after the PvdA entered a coalition government with the Liberals, criticism of Labour politicians soared again. In Period 4, the government was frequently criticised for its austerity measures (e.g. concerning pensions and health care provision), proposed tax increases, and for slavishly following orders from 'Brussels' to fund the EU budget and support southern European countries. The VVD clearly remained Wilders' favourite target.[v] VVD Prime Minister Rutte was criticised personally on a regular basis, and on one occasion characterised as a 'walking ATM' for poorer EU countries (27-03-2013). In fact, even though negative references to Mark Rutte personally were all coded under the 'VVD' category, Wilders' criticism of 'Rutte' often seemed to denote a denunciation of the government as a whole. During this period we only observe a few negative references to the CDA, which lost heavily in the election of 2012 and ended up in opposition.

Figure 4. Political actors criticised by Roemer, as percentage of the tweets explicitly directed at domestic political actors



As discussed, SP leader Roemer did not explicitly direct his criticism to specific domestic political actors as frequently as Wilders. In the months before the parliamentary election of 2012 (P3) only four such tweets were aired – which is reason to approach the corresponding distributions in Figure 4 with caution. Compared with Wilders, Roemer criticised the Rutte I Cabinet more frequently (P2). In fact, Roemer also targeted the support partner PVV six times. In the fourth period, Roemer directed more criticism towards PvdA than VVD actors, and the Rutte II Cabinet was also criticised repeatedly as a whole.

It is further noteworthy that, unlike Wilders, the SP leader devoted several tweets reporting about his cooperation with other parties, including the Greens (GroenLinks) and the PvdA. The conciliatory tone of these tweets sits somewhat uneasily with the notion that the SP is a populist party, as the PvdA can certainly be considered to be an established party. The fact that Wilders' references to the established parties were hardly ever positive suggests that populism is a more consistent and central element of the PVV's ideology, than it is for the SP (see Lucardie and Voerman 2012). This observation is also in line with the previously mentioned caveat that the SP seriously moderated its anti-establishment discourse since the turn of the century. There is, in any case, little evidence for our expectation that left-wing populist parties mainly direct criticism towards right-wing politicians and parties. Emile Roemer primarily attacked whichever parties were in office: CDA, VVD (and PVV) in Period 2; PvdA and VVD in Period 4.

What were Actors Criticised for?

We finally assessed the substance of the adversarial tweets of Wilders and Roemer. Table 4 shows to which issues the criticism of PVV leader Wilders related in the four different periods. Although issues related to immigration and culture were initially quite prominent in Wilders's adversarial tweets, two different themes stand out overall: socio-economic and financial issues, and European integration. Particularly in the third and fourth period, Wilders's criticism often related to austerity measures (e.g. concerning pensions and health care provision), proposed tax increases, and the malign effects of EU membership. Wilders regularly connected the themes of austerity and Eurozone bailout packages to deliver welfare chauvinist messages, as is for instance evident in a tweet of 19 July 2012: 'Incomprehensible: cabinet grants billions to Southern European countries, but our own pensions are being cut'. Again, the increased attention towards the theme of European integration is in line with the programmatic developments of the PVV.

Table 4. Issues related to adversarial tweets of Wilders, in %

	P1 (N=18)	P2 (N=95)	P3 (N=52)	P4 (N=107)	All (N=272)
Social/economic/financial	16.7	30.5	51.9	55.1	43.4
Immigration and culture	33.3	23.2	7.7	19.6	19.5
Law and order	11.1	8.4	1.9	7.5	7.0
European integration	5.6	32.6	63.5	29.9	35.7
Democracy	0.0	9.5	1.9	1.9	4.4

	P1 (N=18)	P2 (N=95)	P3 (N=52)	P4 (N=107)	All (N=272)
Counter-criticism	22.2	25.3	9.6	0.9	12.5
Other/Idiosyncratic	44.4	14.7	5.8	17.8	16.2

Note: The categories are non-exclusive; a single tweet could relate to more than one issue category.

It must be noted that Wilders spent more attention in his tweets to immigration and culture than the percentages in Table 4 suggest – examples of specific issues being crime levels among Moroccans and the 'Islamisation' of neighbourhoods. However, the PVV leader did not always relate these issues explicitly to the failure of political actors, which is a reason why the themes of immigration and culture – and law and order for that matter – were not more prominent in Wilders's adversarial tweets. Furthermore, not all tweets could be related to specific substantive issues; particularly in the first and second period, for instance, Wilders regularly used tweets in a personal attack against politicians who had criticised the PVV.

Table 5. Issues related to adversarial tweets of Roemer, in %

	P2 (N=81)	P3 (N=9)	P4 (N=74)	All (N=164)
Social/economic/financial	70.4	88.9	86.5	78.7
Immigration and culture	2.5	0.0	1.4	1.8
Law and order	2.5	0.0	2.7	2.4
European integration	9.9	11.1	10.8	10.4
Democracy	4.9	0.0	0.0	2.4
Counter-criticism	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.6
Other/Idiosyncratic	19.8	11.1	9.5	14.6

Table 5 shows that social and financial issues clearly dominated the adversarial tweets of SP leader Roemer. In essence, Roemer's criticism of the Rutte I and Rutte II cabinets was very similar. The SP leader frequently condemned cuts in the education and health care sectors, and criticised austerity measures that were deemed to hamper economic growth and hit low-income groups. Socio-economic themes were thus more dominant in Roemer's adversarial tweets than in Wilders's, whereas the PVV leader focused more than Roemer on themes related to immigration and culture, law and order, and European integration. It is notable, however, that Wilders only truly began to criticise austerity measures after the breakup of the PVV-supported Rutte I government, whereas Roemer criticised the policies of both Rutte I and Rutte II. These results again suggest that Wilders has been selective in targeting opponents, and also that he has criticised different actors for different reasons across time.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Twitter has become a potentially potent new political communications tool, and several authors have noted the suitability of social media for populist politicians in particular (Bartlett et al. 2011; Gerbaudo 2015). Tweets – which are limited to 140-characters – are suitable means for populist politicians to express their unambiguous and succinct criticism of (political) elites, and to construct their 'injustice frames' (Gamson 1992). Although it is questionable whether populist parties always make full use of the more advanced (interactive) features of Twitter (Vergeer and Hermans 2013; Jacobs and Spierings 2016), the mere use of the medium as a top-down advertisement tool may boost the impact populist parties have on the political debate. In our explorative study we assessed how populist parties used Twitter as a means of political opposition. Did their Twitter usage reflect well the anti-establishment strategies of populist parties, and can the medium therefore be considered suitable to study the construction of populist injustice frames?

We aimed to answer these questions by studying the adversarial tweets of the party leaders of two (alleged) populist parties in the Netherlands: Geert Wilders of the radical right PVV and Emile Roemer of the left-wing SP. Our results indicated that populists tend to be selective in choosing their enemies, and that the targets of their criticism can change over time. This was clear in the Twitter behaviour of the radical right PVV leader Geert Wilders in particular. From the outset, Wilders' criticism – in tweets as well as in the 2010 election manifesto – focused more often on cultural issues than on the economy, blaming primarily politicians from the 'left'. Especially after his party withdrew its support from the centre-right VVD-CDA minority government, Wilders shifted his targets. The PVV leader now condemned the representatives of the EU elite, and also the 'Kunduz coalition' and the Rutte II government for giving in to the demands from 'Brussels' and passing 'a-social' austerity measures. Thus, even though Wilders remained a fierce opponent of progressive elites, immigration and Islam, the nature of his adversarial tweets changed throughout the years, both in terms of actors targeted and issues at stake.

The Twitter behaviour of SP leader Roemer, on the other hand, was characterised by more continuity as far as the substance of his criticism was concerned. In both the Rutte I and Rutte II governing periods, Roemer criticised the enacted or proposed austerity measures and spending cuts, and mainly targeted the responsible parties in power. Unlike the PVV, the SP did not make European integration a central theme of its 2012 parliamentary election campaign – even though the party was clearly Eurosceptic – and this was reflected in SP leader Roemer's tweets. It was remarkable that the SP leader expressed little criticism through his tweets in the run up to the 2012 election. This may be a reflection of the party's office-seeking strategy, and aim to portray itself as a responsible coalition partner (see Lucardie and Voerman 2012). The 'moderate' course of the SP was also apparent in the party's manifesto of 2012, which contained few critical remarks of other political actors, certainly in comparison with the PVV document. Indeed, these findings corroborate the observation that the SP's populist rhetoric has become more episodic and muted after the turn of the 21st century (see also Rooduijn 2014).

In general, the results show that, quite unsurprisingly, populist parties mainly target incumbent mainstream parties and politicians in their adversarial tweets, even though their criticism may be more muted once they are in power themselves (see Walter 2014; Walter and Van der Brug 2014). Our findings further suggest that populist parties do not always target domestic opponents on the basis of their ideological proximity. Consistent with the socialist character of his party, SP leader Roemer criticised economic elites more often than Wilders, but also targeted the ideologically proximate PvdA when this party was in office. Wilders, in turn, shifted his focus from the PvdA to the centre right VVD, and Prime Minister Rutte in particular. As a direct electoral competitor, the VVD had ostensibly become a more logical target after relations with the PVV had soured and a renewed cooperation appeared unlikely. Thus, concerning the domestic targets of populist parties' criticism, the two cases in the Netherlands suggest that the incumbency status of mainstream parties, as well as the potential for cooperation, play a larger role than ideological proximity as such.

The analysis has shown that developments in the politicians' adversarial tweets were in line with the wider ideological characteristics and developments of their parties. This suggests that Twitter messages can be a valuable source to assess the ideological course and strategies of political parties. As expected, tweets proved to be particularly useful in assessing whom politicians seek to blame and criticise. Even though PVV programmes did contain many derogatory remarks as well, we have seen that critical comments were much more frequent in Emile Roemer's tweets than in SP party manifestos. Furthermore, the fact that many politicians use Twitter on a day-to-day basis allows for an assessment of the discourse of political actors continuously over time and outside of election periods. Indeed, Twitter is a particularly useful source for the observation of short-term strategic shifts.

For populist parties in particular, tweets provide a good insight into their anti-establishment strategies and the targets of their criticism. Although further research focusing on other cases (beyond the Netherlands) is required to verify this, our analysis also suggests that 'genuine' populist parties are more likely to use Twitter as a means to construct injustice frames than parties with a less outspoken populist character. It is evident that the leader of the PVV used Twitter as a tool of political opposition quite consistently throughout time, while the leader of the SP, a party which toned down its populism substantially over the years, was found to air more 'positive' tweets. In terms of content, furthermore, Wilders' adversarial tweets had a personal character more often than Roemers', explicitly naming and shaming the political actors held responsible for societal problems or bad decisions. The differences between the two cases thus suggest that genuine populist actors use Twitter more consistently as a tool of opposition than politicians and parties who do not, or only sporadically, voice populist rhetoric. Again, comparative analyses focusing on more cases are required to explore this suggestion further. Relatedly, while it was not our aim to measure populism as such, Twitter also seems to provide a good source for measuring degrees of populism, or, if the concept is used as a means of dichotomous classification, to determine whether or not a party can be classified as a genuine populist party (see e.g. Rooduijn et al. 2014).

That said, not all politicians use Twitter for the same purpose or with a similar frequency (see Golbeck et al. 2010; Lassen and Brown 2011). Roemer, unlike Wilders, tweeted remarkably little in the run-up to the 2012 election, and did not appear to use the medium as an important tool in his campaign. This implies that Twitter can be seen as an addition to, rather than a replacement of, other sources to study party discourse and campaigning strategies. Indeed, while the medium can be seen as a potent new campaigning tool (see Towner and Dulio 2012), Twitter is unlikely to replace official party documents or traditional media as means of political communication. At the same time, the differences in Twitter usage, and developments in this over time, as such provide room for further research. Future studies may also focus on the actual impact of twitter messages on people's attitudes or voting behaviour (see Gibson and McAllister 2011; Spierings and Jacobs 2014).

Finally, our findings related to the tweets of Geert Wilders in particular tell us something about the general behaviour of populist parties. Assuming that developments in the adversarial tweets of Wilders were driven by strategic considerations, it is evident that the PVV leader responded to changing political opportunities, similar to any other vote- and office seeking politicians. The case thus suggests that populist parties behave like normal players in the electoral marketplace, and do not voice criticism just for the sake of protest against the entire established political system. This also means that we have to qualify the notion that populists portray the two groups central to their discourse (‘the people’ and ‘the elite’) as homogeneous entities (see e.g. Mudde 2004). While in populist discourse ‘the elite’ often constitutes ‘a broad and indeterminate amalgam of political, economic and cultural actors’ (Mudde 2007, p. 65), it is not the case that the criticism of populist parties is unfocused or unrelated to political developments. Populist parties blame specific political actors and parties for their supposed failures concerning concrete policies. There is thus reason to be cautious about treating populist parties as extraordinary, or inherently dangerous, players in the domain of party competition, and to take seriously their claims and demands. [vi]

***

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[i] It is worthwhile to point out that the terms ‘left’ and ‘right’ essentially relate to different issue dimensions: we expect that populist radical right parties direct their criticism primarily towards left-wing mainstream parties due to their culturally liberal issue positions, whereas left-wing populist parties mainly target right-wing mainstream parties because of their position on socio-economic issues (e.g. their support for the free market).

[ii] The database is available upon request. No inter-coder reliability tests were run; the coding was a mutual exercise and we did not make use of a team of trained coders.

[iii] In the fourth period the relatively high percentage in the ‘other/undefined’ category is partly due to Wilders’ references to his protest (‘*teken verzet aan*’) campaign against the government. Since several of these tweets did not mention the government explicitly, they have been coded under the ‘other/undefined’ category.

[iv] These three parties were the social liberals (Democrats 66), the greens (GreenLeft) and the Christian Union. Oddly enough, the agreement was soon dubbed the ‘Kunduz Agreement’, since the five parties that signed up to it were the same, which previously supported a ‘police mission’ to the Afghan province of Kunduz in 2011.

[v] In the fourth period Wilders occasionally blamed the VVD for making too many concessions to the PvdA, for instance regarding its position on the mortgage interest relief and illegal immigrants. In these cases, only the VVD was coded as the party being criticised, unless an explicit critical judgement is made about the PvdA as well.

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Research Article

Does the European Employment Strategy favour the convergence of activation policies? The cases of Spain and the United Kingdom

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Abstract

The European Employment Strategy (EES) illustrates the most ambitious attempt to regulate and coordinate employment policies. However, some doubts arise about its capacity to favour convergence in the field of employment due to the regulatory nature of the process, based on the so-called soft regulation. This article aims to contribute to the debate of whether the EES can favour the convergence of employment policies by focusing on the effects of the policy discourse. It analyses the EU discourse on activation developed in the European Employment Strategy (EES) from 1997 to 2010 and its influence in Spain and the United Kingdom by means of a policy frame approach. The conclusions show that we are observing a process of moderated convergence of the activation models due to the influence of the EES discourse.

Keywords

European Employment Strategy; activation; discourse; policy frame; Spain; United Kingdom

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The European Employment Strategy (EES) is the flagship programme that illustrates the most ambitious attempt to regulate and coordinate employment policies, thus promoting convergence. However, European Guidelines approved within this process have been seen as examples of "soft law", because they are not legally binding instruments such as regulations or directives and lack sanctions like those applied in the Stability and Growth Pact. Drawing on those features of the regulatory nature of the process, some authors (Keller 2000; De la Porte 2008) stressed the weakness of the EES in order to favour convergence in the field of employment and social policies. Responding to those critics, other authors noted the strength of social regulatory mechanisms such as the "discourse regulatory mechanisms" (Jacobsson 2004a, 2004b; Serrano 2005).

Activation was a central notion within the EES since its onset. However, it has been assessed as and vague concept, especially within the EU discourse (Barbier 2005), and criticised in analytical terms for been used to describe political measures that can be diametrically opposed (Geldof 1999; Barbier 2004) and been understood according to a mixture of different elements or dimension: as a goal, as an ethic, as a discourse, as a method, etc. (Serrano 2007). Partly as a result of this, the question of whether the EES has favoured the convergence of the Member States towards the activation principles has been left unsolved. Comparative studies have found variety of consequences and considerable differences between Member States (De la Porte and Pochet 2001, 2003; Mailand 2006, 2008; López-Santana 2007; Zartalouids 2014). They also suggest that we can simultaneously observe a process of convergence and a process of divergence, depending on which elements are taken into consideration, thus calling for a need to distinguish potential effects of convergence on different levels, namely discourses and policies or methods (Serrano 2003, 2004), but also outcomes (Van Rie and Marx 2012).

Drawing from these debates and discussions, this article analyses the EU discourse on activation developed within the EES from 1997 to 2010 and its influence in two countries that represent different employment and welfare regimes and have different cultural meanings on Europe: Spain and the United Kingdom. The article aims to three research questions:

- How is activation discourse produced within the EES?
- Is the EES discourse on activation accepted and similarly understood in countries with different policy traditions such as Spain and the UK?
- Are the employment policies of both countries converging due to the influence of the EU discourse on activation?

In order to answer these three questions that guide the article, the study follows a constructivist approach, based on a frame analysis methodology that aims to capture how the EU discourse produces policy frames of activation, understood as specific construction of meaning of reality connected to policy solutions or proposals related to this approach. Once dominant EU policy frames of activation were identified, in a second step the extent to which those policy frames were accepted and similarly understood in Spain and UK and transformed into policies was examined. To this aim, legislative texts and policy document were analysed and 9 interviews were conducted in both countries[i].

Following this introduction, the article first analyses the regulatory nature of the EES, explaining the different mechanisms through which it can influence member states and stressing, among theses, discourse mechanisms. It also explains the different phases through which it has been developed. Secondly, the article exposes the methodology, based on a frame analysis approach. The third section presents the outcomes of the analysis of the EU discourse on activation, i.e., the policy frames of activation. The fourth section examines how the discourse and policy frames on activation have been understood and put in practices in Spain and United Kingdom.

THE EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY: REGULATORY NATURE AND PHASES

Regulatory nature and mechanisms of influence

The EES was initiated with the inclusion of an employment title in the Amsterdam Treaty (Title VIII, Art. 125-130) that made a ‘high level of employment an explicit goal of the EU and a question of ‘common concern. Under this process, the Community acquired new competences to promote a coordinated employment strategy. In doing so, it was stated that the competences of the Member States would be respected. Thus, employment policies remained under the control of the Member States.

Although Employment Guidelines have a Treaty basis, they are seen as examples of ‘soft law’ because they are not legally binding instruments such as regulations or directives. This regulation, finds a middle ground between legal and political intervention that can increase legitimacy of EU-level action by respecting the institutional diversity and policy traditions of the European Member States (Goetschy 1999; Ashiagbor 2005). This method is also in line with the subsidiarity principle.

Soft-law regulation raises the sociological question of how non-binding agreements can gradually become politically, socially and morally binding for the actors involved. As Jacobsson (2004a, 2004b) notes, in the absence of binding recommendations, it is necessary to pay attention to other social regulatory mechanisms that accompany the soft law regulation. According to Zeitlin (2005), a distinction can be made between three mechanisms of influence: 1) peer review pressure that member states put upon each other to achieve common targets, 2) strategic use by national actors for external legitimation of measures or reforms, usually unpopular, and 3) socialisation and discourse diffusion. Recently, some studies have also stressed how compliance with the EES has been created by means of other mechanisms, external to the EES such as European Social Fund conditionality (Zartalouids 2014). While the peer review and strategic use of the EES by national actors would be connected to a rational choice approach, socialisation and discourse would be associated with a constructivist approach (Mailand 2006).

In this research, we have limited ourselves to study the effects of the knowledge and meaning making mechanisms, that is the 'discursive regulatory mechanism' (Jacobsson 2004a). As Barbier (2005), Crespo and Serrano (2004) and Serrano (2005) have noted, a powerful influence within the EES relates to the socio-cognitive dimension of the policy discourse. Within a regulatory method that lacks sanctions and penalties, convergence can be fostered by establishing a common vocabulary and a common interpretative framework for analysing the labour market that includes particular problem definitions, diagnosis and causal relationships. Discourses disseminated within the EES follow assumptions that tend to be implicitly or explicitly connected to policy solutions and approaches. For instance, focus on employability is associated with a supply-side approach on employment policies and an attention on individual features of the unemployed while quotes to the knowledge-based economy tend to stress the value of education and training policies.

The EES discourse, that has normative weight for being part of a common strategy to which Member States have committed themselves, can lead to changes in ideas and discourses among national actors through a 'logic of appropriateness'. Thus, actors can be progressively socialised in European policy frames that introduce new problem definitions or alternative explanations and decide to act according to them instead of exclusively national ones. As Jacobsson has shown (2002), effects may include subtle impact on national debates and discourses, but also changes in the way in which policies are thought about. Nevertheless, effects of discourses on policies and policy convergence can show a great variety of consequences. Discourses can be 'translated' into practices in many different ways according to the social context and, it is likely, there will not be an automatic succession from one level to the other (Pitllet 2001).

PHASES OF THE EES FROM 1997 TO 2010

Since the EES was initiated in 1997 until 2010, the year that the Lisbon process ended, different phases can be identified related to the general agenda and priorities of the EU as well as the relationship of the EES with other processes such as the European economic policy. Bearing those elements in mind, we can divide the EES in three main phases.

A first and initial phase of consolidation goes from 1997 to 2000. This phase starts with the Luxembourg summit (1997), when the first Employment Guidelines were approved. In 2000 we can identify a second phase. In this period, the Lisbon agenda was approved. In 2003, the four pillar structure was revised at the Brussels summit in order to fully integrate the European Employment Strategy (EES) with the Lisbon strategy. The pillar structure was replaced by three objectives: full employment; quality and productivity at work; and cohesion and an inclusive labour market. The integration of the strategy goals in the EES is relevant in terms of its effects in the activation discourse, since this process revitalised to some extent the social dimension, being considered by some authors as the 'Maastricht of Welfare' (Rhodes 2000). Finally, in 2005 a third phase started. This phase has been marked by the integration of the Broad Economic Policy and Employment Guidelines. In 2005, the first integrated set of Guidelines was approved on a three yearly basis (2005-2008). In 2008, the next set of Guidelines was approved, still related to the Lisbon Strategy. Both plans were practically identical. Thus, the effects of the economical crisis initiated in 2008 were not reflected in the new set of Guidelines. According to some authors, (Zeitlin 2008) guidelines integration reduced the visibility of employment policy co-ordination and, accordingly, its potential influence. Indeed, the production of documents on employment policies decreased in this period compared to previous phases. In this sense, Mailand (2008) found that the level of impact of the EES diminished since 2005.

The phases of the EEE were taken into consideration in our analysis due to the potential impact on the activation discourse. Once the phases of the EES have been identified, in the next section we expose the methodology followed to analyse the EU discourse on activation and its influence in Spain and the UK.

METHODOLOGY: A FRAME ANALYSIS APROACH

In order to analyse the EU discourse on activation and its influence in Spain and the UK, we followed a frame analyses approach. The concept of frame was first applied in sociology by Goffman (1974) to explain how individuals perceive and construct social reality. In the mid 1980s, the concept was used by the constructivist approach that researched social movements (Snow et al 1986; Snow and Benford 1988). According to this approach, movement actors are viewed as signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning. That work of meaning construction developed by movement actors is conceptualized by using the concept of 'framing'.

The notion of framing was introduced in the policy analyses by Rein and Schön (1993: 146), who defined a frame as a 'way of selecting, organizing, interpreting and making sense of a complex reality to provide guideposts for knowing, analysing, persuading and acting'. Drawing from that definition, Verlo (2005: 20) defined a policy frame as 'an organising principle that transforms fragmentary or incidental information into a structured and meaningful policy problem, in which a solution is implicitly or explicitly enclosed'. Recent research focused on analysing the frames of gender policies have built on those definitions.

The underlying assumption of this perspective is that frames are not description of reality but specific construction of meaning of reality connected to policy solutions or proposals. Since we seek to analyse how the discourse regulatory mechanisms operates in the EES, understood as a mechanisms related to knowledge making and meaning making, we assumed that this constructivist approach was in line with the main goals of the research. Accepting that policy frames have a typical format that includes diagnosis and prognosis (Snow and Benford 1988), we also aimed to identify the 'blame attribution', i.e. the target groups, since activation measures have tended to be focused on certain groups such as women, older people, people at risk of social exclusion, etc.

In order to guide the discourse analysis of the documents aiming to identify the policy frames, some 'critical questions' were designed. The 'critical questions' were: which is the problem and how is represented? (Diagnosis); who has the problem? (Blame attribution); what must be done? (Prognosis); which specific measures are recommended in the guidelines? (Prognosis).

In a first stage of the research, we identified the policy frames of activation developed in each of the three phases of the EES described in the previous section by applying the 'critical questions' to the documents selected. The corpus of the documents analysed mostly included Communications from the European Commission. These are the key documents as far as knowledge and meaning making is concerned, being the most important sources contributing to the dissemination of different concepts, perspectives and causal relationships. They are crucial in introducing the diagnoses that tend to be explicitly connected to the activation approach. Secondly, European Council Conclusions were analysed. Its relevance relies on the fact that they set up the general goals that guide the EES. They also justify the election of those problems and establish particular diagnoses, which are connected to proposals. which, however, are presented in a more general way than in the EC communications. Thirdly, the expert groups document 'The future of Social Europe: Recasting Work and Welfare in the new Economy' (Ferrera, Hemerijck and Rhodes 2000) and 'Jobs, jobs, jobs- Creating more employment in Europe' (Kok 2003) were analysed due to their influence on the EES discourse. Both documents have been extensively quoted and referred to in the EC communications and European Council Conclusions. Finally, Employment Guidelines were analysed, since they contain the specific recommendations forwarded to the Member States.

In a second phase, we analysed to what extent the policy frames of activation identified favoured convergence towards activation in Spain and the UK in both discourses and policies. To this aim, we analysed in both countries National Action Plans (1998-2005) and National Reform Programmes (2005-2010), since these reports provide information on the main measures taken or to be taken to implement employment policies in line with the Guidelines. In addition, legislative texts and policy documents related to activation measures were analysed, including policy programmes of political parties. Finally, this information was completed with 9 interviews that were conducted to policy makers and social partner's officers from both countries. Interviews were conducted in both countries with top-level policy makers; and senior officer's social partners (from employer organisations and trade unions) that were actively involved in the discussions related to the implementation of the EES in both countries. The goal of these interviews was to enrich the discourse analyses of the documents by approaching some privileged informants that were closely involved in the process of EES implementation.

THE EU DISCOURSE ON ACTIVATION DEVELOPED IN THE EES: THE POLICY FRAMES OF ACTIVATION

By applying the critical questions previously described to the UE documents selected, we identified the dominant policy frames of activation on the EES discourse: the 'policy frame of the knowledge driven economy" and the "policy frame of the disincentives'. They are present along the whole period analysed, although they show some differences in each phase, mostly in relation to the first phase.

The policy frame of the knowledge driven economy describes in the first phase of the EES (1997-2000) the new economic order as an indisputable fact and an inevitable process that is imposed on individuals and structures. By means of an ideological process, the concept of knowledge driven economy is transformed, via discourse, into a fact of nature (Cresco and Serrano 2004). This definition of the economic situation provides a diagnosis on unemployment understood as a problem related to supply side factors such as lack of skills and lack of capacity to adapt to changes of being unemployed. Therefore, unemployment is conceptualized in terms of lack of 'employability' rather than in terms of lack of employment. In parallel, the notion of 'security' is redefined, being understood as capacity to adapt to the changes and to improve employability instead of protection against risk. The corollary of those explanations is that employment policies are focused on supply side measures (prognosis). Moreover, the functions attributed to the welfare state is no longer to protect citizens against the risks associated with the market economy but to provide them with incentives and opportunities to upgrade their skills and to improve its employability.

> The main lesson from the last 20 years is that income maintenance programmes will not provide adequate security. The huge resources in the benefit system need to be made more employment oriented. Unemployment benefit schemes must become more effective: increasing incentives for the unemployed to look for a job by giving them opportunities to upgrade their skills, so as to create progressively a real employability insurance instead of a simple unemployment compensation.' (European Commission 1997a: 3).

Accordingly, Employment Guidelines 1 and 2 (1998-2000) recommended (prognosis) providing a fresh start to young unemployed and adults **(**blame attribution) before they reach 6 and 12 months of unemployment respectively. That fresh start was not understood as a job guarantee that could imply demand side policies. As the Commission exposed, 'a fresh start means providing the individual with capabilities and opportunities to give them real chances to gain access to jobs in the open labour markets' (EC 1998: 12). This policy orientation was conceptualized as a 'preventive approach.

In the second and the third phases of the EES (2001-2010) the policy frames are a bit different. In this period, the knowledge driven economy was mostly represented as a 'restructuring guide' of the policies and as a goal to be achieved instead of an inevitable process that requires mere adaptive responses. At the Lisbon Summit, the EU assumed the goal 'to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (European Council 2001: 3). The argument that justifies the need to foster the advance towards the knowledge driven economy (diagnosis) is that it can favour a high road approach to achieve full employment, to improve the quality of work and to match economic competitiveness and social cohesion. This discourse was associated to the revitalization of the social model debates within the Lisbon process (Rhodes, 2000). However, recommendations (prognosis) continued to be mainly focused on supply side measures. The main idea, formulated within a rather optimistic discourse was that training policies, combined with new technologies, could favour the transition towards a knowledge driven economy that would create a new virtuous circle.

Bearing this in mind, national governments (prognosis) were asked to provide individuals with technical skills and other skills demanded by an economic order subject to continuous change. In return, workers were required to have a vast range of technical skills and psychological qualities. 'Workers in the digital age therefore need to be ICT literate, highly skilled, empowered, mobile and ready for continuous training.' (COM 2000:14). Within this policy frame, differences between the situations of workers are explained in terms of difference in individual's skills (diagnosis). In connexion with that diagnosis, the function attributed to the Welfare State is no longer to promote equality by redistributing wealth or incomes but to promote equal opportunities through improving the access to knowledge (prognosis). 'The pervasiveness of knowledge is crucial to enhance and diffuse throughout the whole economy the use of new technologies and to prevent segmentation of the labour market between workers with different types of education.' (COM 2003:10). Accordingly, the European Commission recommends focusing public investment on training policies rather on redistributive policies. Due to this, Employment Guideline 4 (2003-2005) recommended (prognosis) promoting the development of human capital and lifelong learning. At the same time, Employment Guideline 23 (2005-2008, 2008-2010) recommended increasing investment in human capital through better education and skills. References to policies aiming to distribute wealth are not found within the Employment Guidelines.

The ‘policy frame of the disincentives’ is formulated to justify a proposal aiming to decrease the dependency rate by ‘making work pay’. The main argument to persuade member states to include this goal within their policy agenda (diagnosis) relates to the sustainability of the Welfare State. According to the European institutions, the sustainability of the Welfare States is challenged by the new demographic trends linked to the aging population, and the deficit and public debt demands assumed by the Member States of the Euro Zone. Due to those challenges, activation measures must (prognosis) increase employment levels, especially for some groups (blame attribution) such as old workers aged 50-64 years (50 per cent employment rate in 2010), women (60 per cent employment rate in 2010) and people excluded from the labour market. With regard to the causes (diagnosis) that determine that an excessive percentage of active population remain out of work, living from a safety net provided by the Welfare State, explanations are different for the different target groups (old workers, people excluded from the labour market and women). Nevertheless, there is a general trend within the EU discourse on activation to attribute the responsibility to the Welfare State, designed in a way that favours welfare dependency.

With respect to older workers, early retirement policies are blamed as they encourage them to remain out of work (diagnosis). Moreover, they decrease workers and companies’ incentives to invest in those measures that can make active life longer such as lifelong learning. That diagnosis is connected to a proposal (prognosis) that recommends eliminating incentives for early exit from the labour market, notably by reforming early retirement schemes. This proposal was included (prognosis) in Employment Guideline of the second and third phase of the EES (Guideline 5, 2003-2005; Guideline 18, 2005-2008 and 2008-2010). As far as the people excluded from the labour market are concerned, European institutions stressed in the first phase of the EES (1997-2000) that ‘Social protection has both a success, in terms of alleviating poverty, and a failure, in terms of promoting full integration within society’ (COM 1997a:2). The explanation to this failure (diagnosis) connects with the ‘welfare entrapment’ argument. Thus, European Commission stresses that in many European countries the net gain expected from return to work is smaller that net gain expected for remaining within the social protection system, thus discouraging people to enter into the labour market.

Besides, a psychological discourse focused on individual’s attitudes towards work is observed. This discourse stresses lack of motivation of individual to accept available jobs and lack of ability to adapt to work demands (diagnosis). In the framework of those explanations, the European institutions propose (prognosis) measures aiming to increase incentives for people excluded from the labour market to look for work and to accept suitable jobs. Within this approach, the individual is represented as a behaviouristic person, influenced by external factors, who will choose the most gratifying course of action (Crespo and Serrano 2004). Although those moral and psychological explanations for unemployment (diagnosis) are less frequent in the second and third phase of the EES, proposals (prognosis) in line with them remain. Thus, Employment Guideline 8 (2003-2005), titled ‘make work pay through incentives to enhance work attractiveness’ made recommendations to

> [R]eform financial incentives with a view to making work attractive and encouraging men and women to seek, take up and remain in work (…)Whilst preserving an adequate level of social protection, Member States will in particular review replacement rates and benefit duration; ensure effective benefit management, notably with respect to the link with effective job search.

As Watt (2004) noted, this was clearly the guidelines that could be quoted by those governments seeking to reduce unemployment by imposing pressure on the unemployed themselves. In the third phase, Employment Guideline 19 (2005-2008, 2008-2010) made recommendations, in the same line, to 'enhance work attractiveness, and make-work pay for job-seekers, including disadvantaged people'. Under these guidelines the focus is clearly on paid work rather than on improving skills of unemployed. With respect to women, diagnosis on their low employment rates is more complex. In this sense, the European institutions mention, especially since the onset of the second phase (2001), disincentives rooted in the lack of public care services. Indeed, this is the only social protection field that the EES recommends to expand (prognosis) due to its positive effects on the employment levels of women. That recommendation was included in the Employment Guideline 6 (2003-2005) and 18 (2005-2008, 2008-2010). This social field must be developed because in this case, social protection system acts as a 'productive factor' that promotes employment rather than discouraging job acceptance, as is supposed to happen with certain income policies. That reflects a common feature of the activation discourse, where social policies appear to be subordinated to the goals of competitiveness and efficiency (Jessop 2002).

THE INFLUENCE OF THE EES DISCOURSE ON ACTIVATION IN SPAIN AND THE UK

The Spanish case

The EES discourse on activation has had some impact on Spain although mostly associated to one policy frame, namely the 'policy frame of the disincentives', and to the first two phases (1997-2005). The 'policy frame of the knowledge driven economy' legitimises during the years that the right-wing government of the Popular Party was in office (1996-2004), the growing role that training policies were starting to have. However, the alignment of the Spanish policy discourse with the EES policy frame only became very explicit in the second phase of the EES. In the first phase, diagnoses related to this frame were practically non-existent. Indeed, other problems affecting the Spanish labour market such as the high rate of temporary employment were stressed and determined, rather than a 'translating process', a very different understanding of core perspectives within the EES such as the 'preventive approach'.

> Preventive approach in Spain must start by achieving that a higher number of workers have open-ended contracts instead of fixed-term contracts in order to avoid them becoming unemployed (PNA 1999).

In the second phase of the EES, diagnosis associated to the policy frame of the 'knowledge driven economy', specially related to its representation as a 'restructuring guide', were particularly welcomed by policy makers as well as social partners who, in Spain, have an important role in training policies design and implementation. Also trade unions, traditionally reluctant to support supply side approaches, converged with those discourses:

> We agreed with the Lisboan Strategy. We thought that was the progress: new technologies, more investment in training, etc. That was the way to make the Spanish economy competitive and the way to provide added value to the activities (Interview with trade union senior officer).

The policy documents analysed from 2000 onwards show that the Spanish government reproduced the optimistic discourse disseminated by the EES that trusts that the advance towards the knowledge driven economy can contribute to improving the quality of work and to match economic competitiveness and social cohesion.

> To foster professional qualifications is fundamental to improve working and living conditions, to promote social cohesion and economic growth and to foster employment (Ley 5/2002 of Professional Qualifications)

In addition, it is observed that in these years, new functions are attributed to the employment and social policies (prognosis). The formal adoption, in the new Employment Law of 2003, of the preventive approach, which, in this period, seems to be understood in the same way as it is presented in the EES since 1998, is particularly relevant:

> Employment policy will tend to adopt a preventive approach to unemployment and anticipate change through training actions that will allow the worker to keep his job and to improve his/her qualification and employability (Law of Employment 56/2003)

The ideas related to this policy frame were practically non-existent in the employment policies discourse of the 1980s and early 1990s, mostly associated with a flexibility approach focused on deregulating labour market legislation (Bilbao 1999). Thus, the EES discourse appears as an important driver in the introduction of the knowledge driven economy discourse, disseminating concepts but also policy perspectives, such as the preventive approach. However, it is also worth noting that although resources allocated to training policies for both workers (lifelong learning) and the unemployed increased, partly as a result of ESF provisions, they continued to be below the EU average (Lope and Alós 2013). Moreover, a lack of resources allocated to the Public Employment Services did not contribute to a smooth implementation of the preventive approach. Accordingly, a gap between discourses and politics related to this policy frame was visible, which raises some doubts about its actual influence, at least at the policy level.

The 'policy frame of the disincentives' had more influence on the Spanish policy discourse and policy reforms. Interviews conducted as well as documents analysed reveal that the government of the Popular Party ended reproducing the diagnosis formulated within this policy frame with regard to the people excluded from the labour market, i.e., that the passive' unemployment benefit system of Spain fostered unemployed to remain out of work. Previous to this reform, diagnoses about unemployment associated to this policy frame were totally absent from public debates, official policy documents, National Action Plans (PNA, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001) or Popular Party policy documents.

This situation radically changed from 2002, when diagnosis explicitly explaining unemployment as a result of the disincentives of the benefits systems started to appear in policy documents. 'Concerns on disincentives exist because a considerable proportion of unemployment benefit receiver (around 20% of men and more than 30% of women) state that they are not actively looking for a job' (PNA 2003:32). Moreover, in 2002 the government approved a radical reform of unemployment benefits (prognosis), clearly connected to those explanations and explicitly quoting the EES in its introduction. As maintained by Serrano et al. (2009), this activation reform, for the first time in history, introduced the notions of supposed dishonest conduct or inadequate behaviour of the unemployed person by demanding–at least formally– new commitments from the unemployed. One of the main changes of the reforms can be attributed to the inclusion of a

> '[C]ommitment to activity', which established that 'the recipients of unemployment benefits must actively seek employment, accept a suitable job and participate in specific motivational, informational, training, reconversion or professional insertion activities in order to increase their employability' (Law 45/2002).

Besides, suitable job was redefined in a less restrictive way. In addition, new sanctions were enacted that implied the withdrawal or the reduction of unemployment benefits in case unemployed rejected suitable job or refused to participate in active labour market policies. Nevertheless, those discourses and ideas present in the policy reform were not put into practice. Indeed, formal disciplinary requirements were barely implemented (Aragón et al. 2007). The fact that the new regulation was not accompanied by more resources (especially more staff in the Public Employment Services) probably explains this 'implementation gap', as noted in the interviews.

Although this reform has been clearly associated with the EES influence (Aragón et al. 2007; Torrents 2006), as it is explicitly cited in the law, one could wonder if it was approved as an effect of the discourse regulatory mechanisms and policy socialisation or as a result of other mechanisms such as 'peer pressure' or 'strategic use by national actors'. With respect to the peer pressure mechanisms, it could occur to some extent, bearing in mind that Spain was not 'at the top of the class' with regards to the implementation of EES activation guidelines. However, as the last economic crisis has proved, recommendations within the EES tend to be less soft when countries face economic difficulties or experience serious labour market problems since, in those contexts, pressure from other member states becomes stronger (Dufresne 2015). But this was not the case of Spain in 2002. In that period, unemployment recorded a sharp decrease (from 20.7 per cent in 1997 to 11 per cent in 2002), public deficit was at the lowest levels since 1996 and the incidence of cases of fraudulent uses of unemployment benefits represented the 3.6 per cent of all the cases on average, in 2002 (Torrents 2006). The interview conducted with the person who was in charge of the Spanish Ministry of Employment from 1999 to 2002 confirmed that other countries barely put pressure on Spain to reform the unemployment benefit system in this period. Moreover, he stressed the government compliance with the EES diagnosis and policy recommendations.

> The reform started with a feature that both Europe and Spain detected: Spain was one of the countries where unemployed people remained living on unemployment benefits for a longer time. This was a differential and evident feature […] the law aimed to correct this lack of motivation of unemployed people. It is not a positive feature the fact that unemployed that can come back to the labour market the next day- wait until the entitlement to unemployment benefits is finished. (Interview Ministry of Employment 1999-2002)

To ascertain whether the Popular Party, a right-wing political party traditionally reluctant to provide generous social protection policies, strategically invoked the EES to legitimise an unpopular reform, which was already in line with its interests or it indeed converged with it as result of a logic of appropriateness, is however more complex. Nevertheless, there are some reasons to conclude that the discursive mechanisms had a decisive impact. On the one hand, 'welfare entrapment' arguments that followed the reform were absent in employment policy debates in Spain, even in times when unemployment was dramatically rising, such as in the 1992-1994 crisis, as opposed to what has occurred in other contexts (for instance, UK in the crisis of the 80s). On the other hand, it is worth noting that the Popular Party did not mention proposals or measures in line with this approach in its policy programme for the 2000 elections or in the policy documents produced when it was in the office from 1996 to 2000. Of course, not all the policy measures finally implemented by a government are included in its policy programme, but this fact provides some evidences that this policy frame was to some extent alien to its employment policy discourse. This clearly contrasts with other policy reforms, such as the 2012 labour market reform, where the government strategically invoked the EES to legitimise an approach, labour flexibility, which has traditionally been in line with its policy discourse. The 'policy frame of the disincentives' that focused on old workers and women had less influence. Thus, measures to reform early retire were not implemented and the public care services continued underdeveloped.

In 2004, the Socialist Party took the office. Overall, the policies implemented until 2010 did not alter the main features of the Spanish activation model developed by the Popular Party. Investment in training policies reflected a high degree of continuity. However, it is also true that although the Socialist Government did not modify the 2002 unemployment benefits reform, it approved some measures aiming to increase social protection. For instance, it extended unemployment benefits to persons aged over 45 years without family responsibilities. Those measures were 'passive policies' unconnected to employment demands, as opposed to what the EES was recommending. This proves that the EES had fewer incidences in this period. This fact can be related to the loss of visibility of the European employment policy after the integration of the economic and employment guidelines (Zeitlin 2008; Mailand 2008).

The UK case

In the UK case, a first aspect to be stressed is that the main ideas on employment and social policies of the 'new Labour', close to the so-called third way (Giddens 1999), were aligned with EES discourse in many aspects. It accepted that investment should be focused on human capital measures rather than on the direct provision of economic maintenance and it was in favour of an active and preventive welfare state based on rights and duties (Powell 2000). Partly as a consequence of that ideological alignment, we did not observe that the EES was a key driver of the activation reforms implemented in this country. Moreover, those ideas were clearly exposed in the Labour Party Manifesto for the 1997 elections, as opposed to what happened with the activation reforms in Spain. In this sense, it can be pointed out that the case of the United Kingdom shows that in this country the EES has reinforced and supported activation policies rather than directly inspiring those policies. Analyses conducted by Lindsay (2007) and Mailand (2008) achieve similar conclusions.

The 'policy frame of the knowledge driven economy' is crucial in the Labour government discourse (Jessop 2003). The imaginary of the knowledge driven economy is used to explain main changes and challenges affecting the labour market (diagnosis). On some occasions, the new economic order is presented in the first phase (1997-2000) as a fact of nature and as an inevitable process.

> We are in a new age - the age of information [...] We have no choice but to prepare for this new age in which the key to success will be the continuous education and development of the human mind and imagination (DfEE 1998a).

In parallel, it is also represented as a 'restructuring guide' that require active government involvement in order to promote competitiveness (Jessop 2003). In connexion with that discourse, some training measures were introduced to improve basic skills and employability of unemployed (prognosis). To this regard, most important programmes developed in the first phase were New Deal programmes addressed to young people and adult workers (blame attribution). New Deal for young people was the most important. It received 70 per cent of the total financing. This programme was mandatory for young people aged 18-24 who were registered as unemployed for six months or more. It started with and assistance period for up to four months, that prepared people for a choice within four options: full-time subsidises employment; full-time education or training; participation on Environmental Task Force projects; and work experience within voluntary sector. Training option was the most elected one, although some doubts were raised about its efficiency to favour labour insertion (Finn 2003).

In the second phase (2001-2005), the Labour government welcomed the enactment of the Lisbon agenda, presenting itself as a strong supporter of it (DfES 2003). Thus, it seemed to be in line with the EES in the idea of promoting social cohesion by redistributing opportunities through the investment in training: 'By increasing skills levels of all under-represented groups, we will develop an inclusive society that promotes employability for all (DfES 2003: 18). Paradoxically, training option included in New Deal programmes for young people lost importance in this period in favour of a variety of assistance services and short training schemes. Moreover, the Labour government rejected Country Council specific recommendations that demanded UK government in 2002 to reinforce training policies in favour of adult unemployed. As stated in the National Action Plan 2002 and confirmed in the interviews conducted to policy officers, the Labour government understood that implementation of such programs could distance jobseekers from the labour market and so reduce their chances of finding work quickly. In this sense, we observe that the centrality given to the market and the paid worker within the UK activation approach implies that training to unemployed is not the primary option of the government, albeit there is general policy discourse that stresses the importance of promoting skills. This feature is maintained in the third phase. In this sense, it can be stated that the Labour government did not find the way to combine a 'work-first' approach that encourage people to enter into the labour market as quick as possible with a human capital or employability approach that may require that unemployed take part in long-term education or training programmes.

> A key challenge is to bridge the gap between the 'work-first' strategies which have been found to be effective and the shortfall in skills that is evident in the UK economy (Lord Freud 2007).

A high degree of alignment is observed with regard to the 'policy frame of disincentives' focused on those excluded from the labour markets in terms of the diagnosis of the problem (welfare dependency), and the prognosis or proposed solution (the centrality of paid work, 'making work pay'). As Fairclough (2000) or Daguerre (2004) have argued, new labour rhetoric stressed that Welfare State was creating the conditions for welfare dependency, entrapping low-income households in poverty. Those ideas clearly appear in the documents analyzed. 'Rather than being a solution to these problems, the welfare system has become part of the problem itself. For an increase number of people, it offers little more than a fortnightly benefit cheque' (DfEE, 2001: 1).

As opposed to Spain, in the UK, the unemployment benefit was a 'stricter benefit regime' since the last 1980s. Reforms such as the 1989 Social Security act implemented by the Conservative government required unemployed to prove that they were actively seeking work. Moreover, receipt of benefits was conditional to compulsory activities such as short training schemes or re-motivation programmes (Blackmore 2001). Bearing that in mind, activation reforms implemented by the Labour government, specially since 2001, were focused on those benefits such as 'Income Benefits' or 'Incapacity Benefits' that were still of a 'passive' nature. In this sense, activation was mostly focused on two target groups that the EES barely mentioned (blame attribution): lone parents and disabled. Those groups were required in 2001 to take part in 'work-focused interviews'. Thus, regular control of their behaviour was made effective. These reforms were linked to the development of the Jobcentre Plus in 2001, a single gateway service for all benefit claimants that integrated social benefits and labour market programmes.

Besides, different in-work benefits addressed to lone parents were created in order to make labour participation more attractive. Since 2006, frequency of compulsory work-focused interviews was also increased (they were required every six months rather than twelve). For disabled people, 'Employment and Support Allowance' replaced previous Incapacity benefit in 2008. The new benefit introduced a much more rigorous incapacity assessment by means of the so-called 'Personal Capability Assessment'. Accordingly, it made more difficult for disabled people to remain on welfare dependency. With respect to old workers, the UK presented and employment rate for workers aged 50-64 years in 2001 equal to 53 per cent (DfEE 2001). This rate was higher than the EU average and higher than the objectives assumed in the Stockholm summit to be achieved in 2010 (50 per cent). Moreover, institutional features of the social protection system of the UK mean that early retire measures are not usually implemented. Bearing this in mind, measures to encourage old workers to remain in the labour market were not in line with the Employment guidelines. They were focused on financial incentives addressed to the workers.

As far as women are concerned, Labour government accepted the diagnosis that lack of suitable and affordable childcare was a barrier to work for women (DfES 2001). In connection with that, it increased investment on childcare services by means of measures such as the 'National Childcare Strategy' (prognosis**)**. However, organization of care remained difficult for parents (usually mothers), and then impacted on their choice to enter the labour market (Lewis y Campbell 2007).

CONCLUSION

The article has showed that the EES has tried to promote activation by means of a relatively contradictory discourse based on two dominant policy frames: the 'policy frame of the knowledge driven economy' and the 'policy frame of the disincentives'. Its contradictory character relies on the fact that, while the 'policy frame of the disincentives' is connected to a work-first approach that gives priority to a quick labour market insertion over the promotion of quality of employment, the 'policy frame of the knowledge driven economy' is linked to a human capital approach that may require unemployed people to take part in medium or long-term training and education programmes while receiving an adequate income protection.

The EES discourse on activation has had an uneven impact in Spain and the UK, having more influence in Spain. In Spain, the EES has contributed to the introduction of new explanations and representations on unemployment related to the 'welfare dependency' thesis, which were alien for the national context. Accordingly, it is possible to point out that the EES has favoured some convergence trends at the level of discourses, by introducing in Spain analytical frames on unemployment, which already had a consolidated policy consensus at the UK. As a result, both countries become more similar at this level, converging towards a European activation model that attributes social protection policies as favouring welfare dependency.

At the policy level, the article has also shown that due to the EES influence, the Spanish unemployment benefit system has formally converged with the UK unemployment system, by legally requiring those in receipt of unemployment benefits to prove that they are actively seeking work and to take part in motivation or training measures. However, the activation model developed in Spain is not fully consistent with Employment Guidelines. In Spain, as opposed to UK, unemployment benefits play a minor role in the purpose of activation, because albeit as being presented as a model that encourages the responsible involvement of the unemployed in the job-seeking process since the 2002 reform, contracting is low despite formal disciplinary requirements. Thus, only a moderated convergence towards this work-first European activation model is observed at the policy level. In any case, this moderated policy convergence observed contrast with the lack of policy convergence produced as a result of the knowledge driven economy frame. Symptomatically, although both countries gave to some extent a new impetus to training policies during these years compared to the previous period, investment remained relatively poorly developed and below the EU average in both Spain and UK.

These findings show firstly, that discourse mechanisms can have different effects as a result of the way the discourse is produced and constructed. In the case EES discourse on activation, its contradictory character may have hindered a socialisation process that could have led both countries to modify its policy orientation in line with a human capital approach. Accordingly, both countries but especially the UK, have given priority to a work-first approach which, also being in compliance with the EES, is much cheaper to apply and, in the case of this country, is more in line with its policy traditions. Secondly, they reveal that the regulatory discourse mechanisms can indeed foster the introduction, at the level of the Member States, of new debates that orient the direction of the reforms, as proves the Spanish case. However, this finding also shows how complex it is to isolate the discursive effects from other mechanisms such as strategic uses by national actors. When national actors and political parties accept or even transform into policy reforms EES ideas that could be considered to be in line with its interests or thoughts, it is complex to ascertain which mechanisms prevailed and, it is likely, that different mechanisms can partly overlap. Thirdly, findings prove that discourses can have an effect into policy reforms although these reforms cannot be automatically transformed into practices due to different reasons such as a lack of resources accompanying the reforms. Accordingly, its actual effects on policy convergence can be moderated, at least in the short-term. This calls for a need to explore within a longer period how those discursive effects evolve in relation to the policy reforms but also with regard to its actual implementation.

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Research Article

Coordination of EU Policy Positions in Germany and Denmark: A Politics of Institutional Choice Approach

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Abstract

This article examines the coordination mechanisms, in Germany and Denmark, which develop negotiation positions for the Council in the European Union (EU). The analysis studies these mechanisms through the lens of the 'politics of institutional choice' approach, which previous scholars have applied to examine EU coordination in Eastern and Central Europe. The results demonstrate that the approach travels well to EU member states in Western Europe. More precisely, they show that the power of the individual ministers, as well as the type of government (minority vs. majority), are important factors in explaining differences in the way the two member states handle EU coordination. This strengthens the argument that the traits of the EU coordination mechanisms in EU member states are a function of power relations between domestic actors.

Key words

EU coordination; Germany; Denmark; domestic politics; 'politics of institutional choice'; veto players.

What are the key factors behind how member states develop positions for the negotiations in the Council of Ministers? This is the central question examined in this article for the cases of Germany and Denmark. Member states of the European Union (EU) send representatives to the Council who should be authorised to commit their countries in the negotiations. These national representatives usually act in accordance with instructions or positions from their governments. To develop the instructions for their representatives, member states have established an EU coordination mechanism (Kassim et al. 2000; Kassim 2003a; Dimitrova and Toshkov 2007; Panke 2010; Jensen 2014). This coordination mechanism is a structure containing interlinked units whose function is to align national EU-related activities to develop negotiation positions (see Figure 1 and 2 below).

The determinants behind EU coordination mechanisms are important, because they are the main devices for aggregating national preferences and transmitting them into the EU decision-making system. The EU adopts from 3,000 to 4,000 legislative acts every year, many of which have great impact on citizens (Wessels 1991; Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace 2005). Several studies have inquired into EU coordination mechanisms (for an overview see Burnsens 2007; Laffan 2007; Goetz and Meyer-Sahling 2008; Jensen and Nedergaard 2015). The studies differ in their research focus in terms of the number of countries under scrutiny and in the number of national dimensions included. However, coordination with regard to the negotiations in the Council is the intersection common to all (Kassim et al. 2000; Kassim et al. 2001; Bulmer and Burch 2001; Wessels et al. 2003; Kassim 2003a; Blumer and Lequesne ed. 2005; Dimitrova and Toshkov 2007; Fink-Hafner 2007; Panke 2010; Johansson and Raunio 2010; Gärtner et al. 2011). Although the analytical vocabulary differs, the studies all draw similar conclusions, finding few signs of convergence between national coordination mechanisms. This striking finding is consistent over time and regardless of the methodological and theoretical approaches used.

Researchers have put forward a number of factors, ranging from abstract concepts to concrete features of political systems, to account for the observed variation in national coordination mechanisms (Kassim 2000; Goetz and Meyer-Sahling 2008). Dimitrova and Toshkov (2007) suggested a promising actor-based approach, and they successfully applied it to grasp the EU coordination, taking place in the new Eastern and Central European EU member states. In the present paper, we combine this approach with the veto player approach to examine factors, which may account for variation (Caporaso 2008). This study contributes to the level of knowledge about the determinants behind national coordination mechanisms by generating two propositions based on the 'politics of institutional choice' and the 'veto player' approach and empirically assessing them by focusing on Germany and Denmark as the two cases selected on the basis of the number of veto players, the size of the country, and variation as far as the power of the individual minister and the type of government is concerned. The article is structured as follows. Firstly, we develop two propositions, which aim at explaining variation in EU coordination mechanisms. Secondly, we set out the research design and put the propositions into operation. Thirdly, we outline and compare the coordination mechanisms of Germany and Denmark with reference to our propositions, and identify avenues for future studies to pursue.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, we focus on the adjustment made within member states to reach national positions for negotiations in the Council, which corresponds to the traditional top-down Europeanisation perspective (Schmidt 2002: 896). In agreement with Dimitrova and Toshkov (2007), we propose a framework taking domestic political actors as the main architects behind the institutional settings responsible for EU coordination. We take Dimitrova and Toshkov's (2007) framework, previously used with the Eastern and Central European member states and apply it to a comparative study of two diverse West European EU coordination mechanisms. Our work will demonstrate if the framework can perform well in two very different settings. Hereby, we point to the general use of Dimitrova and Toshkov's framework.

The rationale behind Dimitrova and Toshkov's approach is that actors benefit from one organizational configuration more than they benefit from another; as a result, they try to achieve their preferred institutional arrangement to maximize their influence on the positions uploaded to the European arena. We combine their approach with the concept of the veto players, which has gained prominence in Europeanisation studies in recent years (Caporaso 2008: 31-32). Veto players are, according to Tsebelis (2002), actors who cannot be opposed if change is to occur. In this study, we use the veto player concept because it helps generate explanations that we can match against the ways in which these member states organize their coordination mechanisms.

The veto player concept was originally developed to account for decision-making processes; however, in this context we use it as a systemic explanation to account for similarities and differences in coordination mechanisms. We expect that the coordination mechanism will reflect the equilibriums of power between actors of the political system. The mechanism underpinning this argument is that veto players will have an interest in maximising their influence vis-à-vis other actors in the coordination process and are in privileged positions to do so because they possess veto powers (Börzel 2002a: 28; Dimitrova and Toshkov 2007: 963-964).

Two propositions can be generated by combining the 'politics of institutional choice' approach with the veto player approach, regarding the coordination within the government (intra-government coordination mode) and between the government and the parliament (the government-parliament coordination mode). At the heart of the veto player concept lies the insight that the larger the number of veto players in a political system, the more difficult it will be to change the status quo (Tsebelis 2002: 3). This logic leads one to expect that coordination mechanisms embedded in political systems with many veto players are not likely to have a strong, authoritative centre, because of fears of agency loss. Thus, the veto players will oppose a centralized structure in which one unit is responsible for the coordination process. Instead, the coordination mechanisms are more likely to be decentralised to embrace the various veto players[1]:

Proposition 1: The larger the number of veto players, the less centralised the coordination mechanism will be.

The second proposition focuses on the government-parliament mode of cooperation. Minority governments may not have a monopoly on agenda-setting, and they may therefore confront proposals from an opposition party that may be able to garner the necessary support from other opposition parties or from within in the government (Ganghof 2002). In addition, in a minority government, opposition parties can impose strong checks on a government to control its room for manoeuvre in the EU, and, hereby, reduce potential agency slack. Conversely, the political parties of a majority government have no interest in placing restrictions on themselves:

Proposition 2: Parliaments will have stronger control over the government in EU coordination matters under minority governments than under majority governments.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is based on the method of structured focused comparison, which entails that the structures and processes of coordination is traced on a range of dimensions according to the same set of collection parameters (George and Bennett 2005: 67). This paper focuses on the two Western European EU member states, Germany and Denmark. They are selected due to the fact that they vary considerably with regards to the number and constellation of veto players. An explanation for some of this variation in their coordination mechanisms is expected to be found in the configuration of veto players in each political system. The study relies on different sources: political and administrative papers describing the coordination mechanisms; academic literature on EU coordination mechanisms; and a number of interviews conducted since 2010 with key actors from the two member states involved in the coordination process (see list after the references).

The coordination mechanisms will be disaggregated to create cases-within-cases by examining two key dimensions along which coordination normally takes place (Wessels et al. 2003): intra-government coordination, and government-parliament coordination. The table 1 operationalises the two propositions developed above and identifies a battery of indicators for each in order to assess their explanatory value.

Table 1. Operationalisation of the constellation of veto players

Independent variables	Dependent variables
Proposition 1: Number of veto players deletion Germany: Bundesrat, Bundestag, and Bundesverfassungsgericht Denmark: Folketinget	Coordination mechanisms' degree of centralisation and formal procedures deletion The existence of a centre in the coordination mechanism. Procedural authority given to the centre.

Independent variables	Dependent variables
	Substantial authority given to the centre. Location of the centre in ministerial system
Proposition 2: Veto power of the opposition in first chamber (yes/no) Germany (no) Denmark (yes)	Strength of parliaments in controlling the government (strong/weak) Assent necessary when defining government position (yes/no). Amount of information given to the parliament Number of cases examined (all-none). Involvement of specialised committees.

To operationalise the independent variables, we must identify the constellation of veto players in each political system by looking at actors whose veto power is ascribed by the constitution (i.e. the institutional veto players) and actors whose veto power is contingent on the partisan setup (i.e. partisan veto players) (Tsebelis 2002: 85–86). Veto players are intentionally operationalised in a restricted way, which favours parsimony over complexity, with the awareness that actors who may be granted veto power by established practices or non-constitutional rules are excluded. In that sense, we differ from Dimitrova and Toshkov (2007), who look at broader constellations of actors.

According to the German Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*), there are three institutional veto players in the political system; the parliament, which comprises two chambers — the Bundestag (article 38–49), and the Bundesrat (article 50–53a) — and the constitutional court, the Bundesverfassungsgericht (article 94–104). The Bundestag has a number of component partisan veto players. The 'grand' coalition government elected in September 2013 comprises three partisan veto players: the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the Christian Social Union of Bavaria (CSU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD). The Bundesrat should, according to Tsebelis (2002), be absorbed if the coalition government in the Bundestag also enjoys a majority in this chamber. This is currently not the case but even if it was, this only makes sense if the conflict dimension is socio-economic, but not if it concerns the balance of power between the two chambers. In other words, the Bundesrat is a veto player regardless of its party composition. The Bundesverfassungsgericht is a veto player under very special circumstances: e.g. in connection with treaty changes or new financial instruments of crisis management in the Eurozone.

The Danish unicameral parliament, the *Folketing*, is the only institutional veto player in the political system of Denmark, according to the constitution (Danmark Riges Grundlov 1953, Article 3). Minority governments have been the norm in the Danish political system since 1973 (Kurrild-Klitgaard et al. 2000) and the centre-left government elected in 2011-2015, comprised of Social Democrats, Social Liberals, and (until the beginning of 2014) Social People's Party, or the present (2015-) centre-right government (Liberal Party) has been no exception. Contrary to Tsebelis' contention (2002), the opposition can be a veto player, as we argued in the analytical framework. It is not possible to assign veto power to a specific party in the opposition—although the government has the support of a fixed party—as majorities form on a case-by-case basis as far as the EU issues are concerned (Damgaard and Jensen 2006). Although the government has some agenda-setting power through its right to make the last amendment, in several instances it has faced alternative majorities or has been forced to make considerable concessions to the opposition to enable policy to pass (Damgaard and Jensen 2006). Thus, opposition parties are veto players, which is in correspondence with Dimitrova and Toshkov's (2007) approach.

As for the dependent variable in the intra-government coordination mode proposition, a decentralized mechanism is characterized by the fact that no single actor controls the process of aligning domestic preferences, whereas in a centralized mechanism a unit has the overall responsibility for coordination (Kassim 2003a). The dependent variable for the government-parliament mode proposition contains standard indicators for parliamentary control in EU affairs, such as the right to instruct the government and the scope of the scrutiny process (see table 1) (Raunio 2007). In short, the dependent variables consist of certain features as far as the coordination mechanisms and strength of parliaments are concerned. Still, however, the framework applied in this paper is actor based. Hereby, it takes on board some of the forgotten insights from the political science EU research before the heydays of institutionalism. Actor's choice comes logically before the creation of institutions in the 'politics of institutional choice' approach.

COMPARING EU COORDINATION IN GERMANY AND DENMARK

CENTRAL EU COORDINATION IN GERMANY

The German EU coordination mechanism is based on a division of labour between the Foreign Office (MFA) (*Auswärtiges Amt*) and the Ministry of Economics (*Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie*) (for the principles of coordination see: Maurer 2003: 124; Beichelt 2007: 423-427). The former is responsible for intergovernmental and intra-institutional affairs concerning Coreper II, while the latter is responsible for coordinating sector policies concerning Coreper I (In_GPR_ Feb_2010)[2]. In practice, the two ministries function, in addition to their own competences, as secretariats and coordinators of the instructions for the permanent representation in Brussels on Coreper I or II issues (Bulmer et al. 2000: 23−48).

The German coordination mechanism is decentralised, and coordination competence on an EU proposal is given to the ministry most concerned with the EU policy at hand (*Federführendes Ministerium*) (In_GPR_Feb_2010). The ministry responsible coordinates within its own jurisdiction, with other ministries, and with the two chambers of parliament (In_AA_Apr_2013). Intra-ministerial coordination is handled at the lowest level that processes technical matters, while political issues are pushed upwards in the system (In_BMWi_Apr_2014).

Firstly, the ministry defines a house position, which is then accepted by the minister. Next, the inter-ministerial coordination process strives to reach a common position with the other ministries (*Ressort Abstimmung*). Based on this coordination, the lead ministry will prepare an instruction for the permanent representation in Brussels on the agreed position. However, in general, the lead ministry has a good deal of leverage in determining the position, unless the case is of high political salience (Miklin 2009). In accordance with the 'federal ministries' order of business' (*Gemeinsame Geschäftsordnung der Bundesministerien*), the ministry responsible for coordination must consult interest groups affected (In_CDU_Feb_2010).

All ministries in Germany have established EU-departments responsible for both intra- and inter-ministerial coordination (Maurer 2003: 125; Bulmer, et al. 2002: 251). Moreover, all ministries have appointed an EU delegate (*Europabeauftragter*), who is in charge of connecting the internal information and acts as a point of contact with the world outside the ministry. To overcome problems not solved through horizontal self-coordination, a hierarchical system of ‘institutional choice’ is used (Wessels and Rometsch 1996: 74).

At the lowest level are the weekly meetings between EU coordinators from different ministries, who discuss the agendas of both Corepers to delegate tasks and identify critical points (see also Figure 1). The meetings are chaired by the MFA and the Ministry of Economics, which take turns in presiding and conveying the instructions to the permanent representation (In_EBD 2014). At the level above are the EU delegates (*Europabeauftragte*), who meet on an *ad hoc* basis and discuss basic EU issues or procedural questions and may take care of any problems. Their group is made up of heads of units or desks from the different ministries and meets in the MFA.

The next level is the European Affairs Directors General (*Europa-Abteilungsleiter*) meetings. The participants try to identify and solve inter-ministerial conflicts on a monthly basis and follow up on decisions made by the State Secretaries’ Committee. The group is comprised of heads of departments for EU affairs in the various ministries, and meetings are co-chaired by the MFA and the Ministry for Economics, with the additional participation of the permanent representation.

The level above the *Europa-Abteilungsleiter* is the State Secretaries’ Committee for European Affairs (*Staatssekretärsausschuss für Europafragen*). This is composed of EU state secretaries from the ministries, who meet every month to settle problematic cases (In_AA 2013). The committee is chaired by the state minister for European affairs in the MFA, whose deputy is the state secretary for European affairs of the Ministry of Economics. The state secretaries take a binding decision by common agreement. The German permanent representation also participates but does not have decision-making powers.

The Cabinet (*Kabinett*), which discusses EU cases, is at the top of the hierarchy. The Bundeskabinett meets every Wednesday morning in the Chancellery and discusses EU affairs as a specific agenda item. The state minister for European affairs of the MFA also takes part in these meetings. In many cases, however, political disagreements on EU issues are dealt with informally in the ‘coalition round’ (*Koalitionsrunde*), traditionally made up of the different party leaders, their party secretaries, and important ministers. However, this format of a coalition round has not been used yet in the third Merkel term. Instead, the chancellor (CDU) and the two other party leaders (CSU and SPD) of the grand coalition have been meeting alone. Compared with the Cabinet, the coalition round has the advantage of being less formal as a problem-solving mechanism. The different levels function in the same way as the structure of the Council of Ministers as a sorting system, with the goal of ensuring decisions are made at the most appropriate level. In addition, the Chancellor’s Office has established an EU department that follows the coordination process closely (In_Bundesregierung 2014). As a last resort, the Chancellor’s Office plays a problem-solving role. However, this responsibility is somewhat undefined and varies depending on the topic and the personality of the chancellor.

Table 2: The intra-governmental coordination mechanism in Germany

Body	Chair	Frequency	Purpose
Minister (Ministerkabinett)	Chancellery	Weekly: agenda item Europe	Discusses politically salient cases and imposes solutions in case of deadlock

Body	Chair	Frequency	Purpose
State Secretary for European Affairs Committee (Staatssekretärsausschuss für Europafragen)	The MFA	Monthly	Handles cases of strategic importance; takes a binding decision by common agreement
European Affairs Directors General (Europaabteilungsleiter)	Meetings are co-chaired by the MFA and the Ministry of Economics	Monthly	Solves inter-ministerial conflicts and follows up on decisions made by the State Secretaries
COREPER-coordinating	Meeting is chaired by the MFA and the Ministry of Economics, depending on the COEPER in question	Weekly	Handles information flow between Berlin/Bonn and Brussels
European Affairs Officers (Europabeauftragte der Ministerien)	MFA and the Ministry of Economics take turns chairing the meetings	Ad hoc	Discusses the agendas of both COEPERs to delegate tasks and identify critical points
Coordination at the lowest possible level by the lead department (Federführendes Ministerium)	Officials in lead ministry and affected ministries	Continual	Processes proposals and attempts to justify positions

Source: Own content but categories partly inspired by Bulmer et al. 2001: 196.

CENTRAL EU COORDINATION IN DENMARK

In Denmark, the sector ministries are initiators in the EU coordination process. These ministries are responsible for the hearings of other public bodies and concerning private interests (Nedergaard 2005: 354). The coordination responsibility allocated to the sector ministries contributes to the decentralisation of the Danish EU coordination mechanism. This decentralisation is balanced by one omnipresent coordinator: the MFA (*Udenrigsministeriet*). The MFA is represented at all levels throughout the Danish coordination process (In_ØEM_Jun_2010). The MFA is responsible for the coordination of the EU Committee with representatives from sector ministries that meet every Tuesday and coordinates the upcoming meetings in the Council of Ministers in Brussels. The MFA also acts as the secretariat for the government's Foreign Affairs Committee (see below). In addition, all contacts with the European Affairs Committee (EAC) of the Danish Parliament—the *Folketing*—also come under the responsibility of the MFA even though the presentations of the upcoming meetings in the Council of Ministers are done by the sector ministers (In_UM,_June_2010).

Generally, EU coordination in Denmark consists of an interlinked system of 'institutional choice' of committees organised on three different levels: the lowest but nevertheless most important level is comprised of the committees with civil servants in ministries, i.e. 'the EU Special Committees' (*EU Specialudvalg*) (see also Figure 2). There are 34 of these under the sector ministries, with the chairmanship and secretariats of each in the hands of the most relevant ministry. There are a Special Committee in all EU relevant ministries and several Special Committees in ministries with many EU legislative initiatives (e.g. the Ministry of Business). The EU Special Committees form the core of the system, as they spend the most time on EU coordination (Nedergaard 2014).

Normally, the reading of the proposals in the EU Special Committees begins at the same time as in the Council's working parties in Brussels (Udenrigsministeriet 2010). Four to six weeks after a proposal has been presented, a draft position paper (*Grundnotat*) is produced by the secretariat of the EU Special Committee in Copenhagen. Together with the actual proposal, the secretariat sends it out to members of the committee for consideration. On the basis of responses from other ministries and interest groups a so-called framework paper (*Rammenotat*) is prepared by the sector ministries in cooperation with the MFA (Nedergaard 2014).

This framework paper provides guidelines for negotiations in the working parties in Brussels. The content of the negotiations corresponds to the framework paper, with an annotated agenda (*Kommenteret dagsorden*) prepared immediately before the meeting of the Council of Ministers, which discusses all the points on the agenda. However, the annotated agenda differs from the framework paper by a sentence at the end setting out a recommendation that Denmark works for x or endorses y in the actual negotiations before the Council of Ministers meeting in Brussels (Nedergaard 2005: 399).

The next step in the coordination after the case handling of the Special Committee process is the EU Committee (*EU udvalget*) under the auspices of the MFA. This committee meets every Tuesday morning. The points on its agenda mainly concern the upcoming meetings of the Council of Ministers (In_UM_Jun_2010). The EU Committee deals with each of these meetings for the first time two weeks before it is due to take place, and then discusses it a second time a week later. The basic documents for the first meeting of the EU Committee consist of the framework paper that has also been sent to the EAC of the Folketing. The EU Committee is a link between the substantial case handling in the EU Special Committees, the political decisions taken by the government, and the subsequent presentation in by the minister of his or her proposal for the Danish position in the Folketing's European Affairs Committee on the points on the agenda at the upcoming meeting in the Council of Ministers.

The government's Foreign Affairs Committee (*Regeringens Udenrigspolitiske Udvalg*) forms the top level of the inter-ministerial EU coordination mechanism (Udenrigsministeriet 2010). In practice, the Foreign Affairs Committee hardly ever convenes, normally handles cases by written procedures. In almost all instances, the recommendations from the Special Committee and the EU Committee are confirmed. These policy positions also represent the Danish negotiating mandate in the Council of Ministers, unless the EAC in the Folketing objects and demands changes, which it often does (however, most often these changes in the Danish position are of minor importance) (In_ØEM_Jun_2010).

Table 3: Denmark's intra-governmental coordination mechanisms

Body	Chair	Frequency	Purpose
The Government's Foreign Policy Committee (*Regeringens Udenrigspolitiske Udvalg*)	The Minister of Foreign Affairs	Ad hoc — most cases are handled by written procedure.	To approve the government's position, solve conflicts and determine Denmark's EU policy.
EU Committee (*EU udvalg*)	MFA	Meets every Tuesday	To approve the work of the special committees and se-cure consistency, solve inter-ministerial con-flicts, and formulate the overall EU policy strategy.
Special Committee (*Specialudvalg*)	Officials in lead ministry and other affected	Continually	To disclose the Danish society's interest in the case.

Source: Own content but categories partly inspired by Bulmer et al. 2001: 196.

COMPARING CENTRAL COORDINATION IN GERMANY AND DENMARK

Proposition 1. The larger the number of veto players, the less centralised the coordination mechanism will be.

At first glance, this proposition fits somewhat with the review of the EU coordination mechanisms in Germany and Denmark; however, it does not hold up to a closer inspection. Reviewing existing studies, Kassim classifies the German coordination mechanism as 'decentralised', but characterizes its Danish counterpart as 'centralised' (2003a: 91–97). His reasoning behind these classifications is that no single actor in the German coordination mechanism controls the coordination process and can intervene in cases involving disagreement among different actors. In the Danish system, however, the MFA is responsible for the overall coordination process and acts as a broker.

This line of reasoning must be up-dated in light of the empirical data. It is correct to say that the German MFA and Ministry of Economics are granted relatively weak coordination competences, while the Danish MFA has a marginally stronger coordination competence. However, both coordination mechanisms are decentralised in the sense that the establishment of positions is handled by the ministry most concerned with a specific issue. More specifically, the Danish coordination mechanism is decentralised when it comes to the substantial coordination of cases, while procedural coordination is overseen by the MFA. In Germany, the system is decentralised both for substantive and procedural coordination.

The veto player constellation as the underlying determinant for the degree of centralisation of the coordination mechanism does not fit well with the empirical evidence. The prime reason for the lack of a central coordination mechanism in Germany is not the vertical diffusion of power whereby the German states (Länder) assume roles as veto players through the Bundesrat; instead, it is the horizontal actor-based power diffusion that allows for a high degree of ministerial autonomy. Although the German and the Danish political systems are similar in having a high degree of ministerial autonomy de jure—following the Ressortprinzip in Germany and ministerstyre-princippet in Denmark—the de facto application of the principles are different, and partly accounted for by the different types of government (Rometsch 1996: 71; Knudsen 2000; Beichelt 2007: 423), i.e. majority governments versus minority governments (cf. also Dimitrova and Toshkov (2007). This can be accounted for through the "politics of institutional choice" approach. Despite the complex structure established in Germany to solve the problems of aligning national preferences, each minister has considerable margin for manoeuvre within his or her portfolio to determine the negotiation position (Derlien 2000; Maurer 2003).

COMPARING PARLIAMENTARY COORDINATION IN GERMANY AND DENMARK

PARLIAMENTARY COORDINATION IN GERMANY

According to Article 23 of the German Basic Law, the government is obliged to brief the Bundestag comprehensively as early as possible on the negotiations (§ 2). Moreover, the federal government must give the Bundestag the opportunity to state its position; the government must then take that position into account when negotiating in Brussels (§ 3). The specific criteria are defined in the Cooperation Law, according to which the government must send all EU documents to the Bundestag before meetings in the Council.

The EU Committee (*Ausschuss für die Angelegenheiten der Europäischen Union*) is the locus of EU coordination in the Bundestag (see also Figure 1). All EU documents from the government go through the EU Committee, which is responsible for issues related to European integration (In_GPR_Feb_2010). The German scrutiny system in EU affairs is document based: the government must allow time for the Bundestag to sift documents, deliberate proposals, and issue opinions (COSAC 2007; Auel 2007; Sprungk 2010).

The material scrutiny of draft EU sector policies takes place in the special committees of the Bundestag. However, the EU Committee has leverage and can ask the special committee responsible to adjust its resolution before submitting it to the plenary. The committees seek to gather as much information as possible by having contact with the EU institutions, parliaments in other member states, and experts, and by organizing hearings. Based on the recommendations of the lead committee and the EU Committee, the plenary adopts a resolution to deliver to the federal government. The government must use this resolution in its negotiations in Brussels. Nonetheless, the government may diverge from the resolution for particular reasons, in which case it must appear before the Bundestag to give compelling justifications (Linn and Sobolewski 2010).

While over time the EU Committee and special committees have improved the Bundestag's control over the government, there are still problems with slow procedures, resulting in only a minority of the cases being substantially examined (Maurer 2003: 129; In_BT_Feb_2011). According to the new cooperation laws, however, the government must await clearance from the Bundestag before issuing an opinion in the Council, by applying a parliamentary scrutiny reserve. This can be lifted when the Bundestag has given its opinion. The emphasis on the Bundestag's right to bind the government follows from the ruling of the Constitutional Court in June 2009 and subsequent changes in the cooperation agreement which were turned into law and thereby gained authoritative binding status (Schäfer and Schulz 2013).

As a result of the Maastricht Treaty, the Bundesrat (which is composed of members of Länder governments) achieved a central position in the EU coordination mechanism (Börzel 1999, 2002). According to Article 23 of the revised German Basic Law from December 1993, the Länder have the following competences with regard to the EU. Firstly, the Bundesrat must approve any transfer of sovereignty to the EU. Secondly, the Bundesrat must take part in the process of coordinating issues if competent to do so, be it a domestic issue or one, which used to belong to the competences of the Länder. Thirdly, as far as issues within the Länders' jurisdiction are concerned, the Bundesrat can define the German position and represent it in negotiations in Brussels.

The government is obliged to inform the Bundesrat about new proposals from the European Commission. The EU Secretariat of the Bundesrat briefly examines the proposals and decides which to scrutinise. Each of the 16 Länder can ask for additional scrutiny of a proposal (In_BR_Feb_2010). The Secretary General assigns the dossiers to relevant special committees in the Bundesrat, which deliberate on them and give their opinions to the EU Committee (*Ausschuss für Fragen der Europäischen Union*). The EU Committee may occasionally override an opinion from a special committee for reasons concerning European integration, but this rarely happens. Following the debate of the EU Committee, a report is hammered out which is allocated to the plenary for a final vote. A Chamber for European Affairs (*Europakammer*) exists in the Bundesrat, according to Article 52 (3a) of the Basic Law, which mirrors the composition of the plenary and can take a decision on its behalf in particular cases, if they are urgent or confidential.

Figure 1. The most important features of EU coordination of the German political system

PARLIAMENTARY COORDINATION IN DENMARK

The Folketing's EAC (*Europaudvalget*) reflects the strength of the government parties in the parliament vis-à-vis the strength of the opposition parties. However, no matter which parties are in the government, in practice, the political parties' general support of a government does not necessarily mean that they will support the government in specific EU cases (see also Figure 2).

All EU cases are first submitted to the Folketing's various parliamentary committees before a mandate is given to the minister in the EAC. Some committees have traditionally been more active in handling EU cases than others. The Folketing's Agricultural Committee (*Landbrugsudvalget*) and the

Environmental Committee (*Miljø- og Planlægningsudvalget*) have for years been actively involved in EU affairs, with the aim of submitting recommendations to the EAC (In_FEU, Sep_2010). Other committees have been more reluctant to be dragged into scrutinising EU dossiers due to low electoral salience, and the fact that the final mandates were always given by the EAC.

Historically, the existence of the EAC is a concrete expression of the desire by the Folketing to control the EU decision-making process handled by the executive branch. The committee in its present form was established in 1972 to prepare Denmark for membership of the European Community (Auken et al. 1995; Jensen 2003). The Danish Accession Act of 1972 states that the government shall inform the Folketing of proposals for Council decisions which apply directly in Denmark or the implementation of which requires the participation of the Danish Parliament.

After the first report from the EAC in 1973, the requirements of this information were more clearly specified (Auken et al. 1975). In 'questions of considerable importance' (*vigtige eller væsentlige spørgsmål*), the government shall inform the EAC. In 'decisions of wider scope' (*sager af større rækkevidde*), the government shall obtain a mandate for the negotiations in the Council. These qualifications mean the government has to estimate whether or not a specific EU case should be submitted to the committee for a mandate or just for orientation. However, normally, the government plays it safe by classifying most proposals for new EU directives and regulations as dealing with 'questions of considerable importance'. The Danish scrutiny system for EU affairs is the classic example of a mandate-based procedure, whereby the government needs support from a majority in the parliament to take binding decision in the EU (COSAC 2007).

The other face of the powerful EAC, however, is that of a committee with the ability to exercise judgment on mandates rather late in the EU decision-making process, meaning the committee only has limited influence on the actual content of the EU negotiations (Sousa 2008; Jensen and Martinsen 2014). To accommodate a wish for earlier involvement in the decision-making process, the sector ministries always send basic memos to the EAC on EU proposals of major importance within four weeks of the Danish version of the proposals being published (Udenrigsministeriet 2010). Although all ministers try to accommodate the opinions of the EAC beforehand and anticipate what will happen, the ministers are sometimes unsuccessful in gaining a mandate. In such cases, the minister will formulate a new position, which can satisfy a majority in the committee. However, this might limit his negotiating possibilities in the Council of Ministers.

Figure 2. The most important features of EU coordination of the Danish political system

COMPARING PARLIAMENTARY COORDINATION IN GERMANY AND DENMARK

Proposition 2: *Parliaments will have stronger control of the executive under a minority government because they are veto players, whereas under a majority government they are not.*

A comparison of the de jure competences of the 'politics of choice' of the two parliaments leads to the surprising conclusion that the German EU Committee is stronger because its instructions to the government are based on the law, whereas the Danish EAC's instructions are based on an established practice (Nedergaard 2005: 414-415). Furthermore, the German Bundestag and Bundesrat have access to all relevant information and make active use of expertise in specialised committees when scrutinising EU proposals, compared to the more restricted information provided by the government and more random use of other parliamentary committees in the Danish Folketing (Sousa 2008).

However, looking at how scrutiny is exercised de facto, one sees that the German Bundestag and Bundesrat have a selective approach whereby the government is tightly controlled in only a few highly salient cases. Moreover, the government can override the positions of the Bundestag and Bundesrat for special reasons[3], provided it is not necessary that a law is concluded by the two chambers. The Folketing, by contrast, controls the government tightly and continuously, as the minister must stand before the EAC to obtain a mandate that the minister is then obliged to follow and for which the minister must subsequently account in writing to the EAC. The underlying explanation for this variation can be attributed to the partisan setup of the two parliaments, which is in line with the findings by Dimitrova and Toshkov (2007) in their analysis of the EU coordination mechanisms of Eastern and Central Europe. It shows the fruitfulness of the 'politics of institutional choice' approach. In the Danish Folketing, there is a tradition for minority coalition government, which makes the opposition parties veto players (Damgaard and Jensen 2005; Sousa 2008). To grasp the veto power of the opposition parties in the Folketing, it is necessary to pay closer attention to its partisan setup. To stay in office, the Danish governments rest on the support of the right-wing Danish People's Party as well as the Liberal Alliance Party (Liberal or Liberal Conservative governments) or the left-wing Unitary List (centre-left governments). Yet when it comes to EU affairs, both the Danish People's Party and the Unitary List adopt sceptical attitudes that often force the government to rely on support from EU-friendly opposition parties at the political centre aspiring to gain office.

Prima facie, the opposition parties are in a strong position to define the coordination mechanism's setup as well as the government's negotiating position on concrete issues. However, the power of the opposition is limited by counteracting forces, which are often neglected in the literature when praising the strengths of the distinguished Danish mandating system (Raunio 2007; Holzhacker and Albæk 2007: 147-148). The first is 'the shadow of the future' (Axelrod 1984: 13), meaning the parties are involved in an on-going game: if the opposition parties aspiring to get to government adopt restrictive measures for EU coordination at Time 1 together with the EU sceptical opposition, they will be faced with the same measures at Time 2, should they gain office. The same logic applies if the EU positive opposition ties the hands of the government tightly through mandates, thereby limiting its freedom to manoeuvre in Brussels. In that case it might experience payback in the future when it takes office. The other force curbing the power of the (both left- and right-wing) opposition is its internal division, on which the government can seize (Nedergaard 2005). Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that the government supporting party will back the opposition aspiring to gain office in a vote of 'no confidence' based on EU issues. Factoring in the partisan setup of the opposition demonstrates that it is powerful—but not almighty.

Turning to the German Bundestag, and again analysing it through the lenses of the ‘politics of institutional choice’ approach, the picture looks different. Here, the government is comprised of a majority of parties that are in favour of the EU. This implies that harmonisation of preferences takes place within the government coordination machinery rather than in the Bundestag. Nevertheless, the Bundestag has considerable power in the scrutiny process. Moreover, the setup of parliamentary control also gives backbenchers an opportunity to influence the position of the government on EU issues and gives the opposition the chance to question the government in public. A certain animation of the Bundestag in EU affairs is observable from 2010 onwards. Partially this was the case, when the then-junior coalition partner, FDP, attempted to use the European debt crisis as an extraordinary factor to increase support; hence, this seemed to be an exception. On the other hand, structural factors also played a role: the rulings of the constitutional court on the Lisbon Treaty and the financial stability mechanisms (EFSF and ESM) strengthened the Bundestag’s position in the coordination mechanisms, notably in cases of European divisions with budgetary implications.

CONCLUSION

The number of veto players did not seem to impact the degree of centralisation in the coordination mechanisms as highlighted by the veto player approach. Instead, the degree of centralisation seems to be contingent on the degree of ministerial autonomy in a political system. The predominant type of government influenced the strength of the parliament in the coordination mechanism, as the tradition for minority coalition government in Denmark accounted for the Folketing’s stronger position as compared with the German Bundestag in EU affairs. Even though Eastern and Central European EU coordination mechanisms have a different legacy than those in the Western European member states, these findings about the importance of domestic actors resonates with those of Dimitrova and Toshkov (2007).

These findings create implications for a number of scholarly debates. Firstly, the study speaks to public administration literature, showing how EU coordination is dominated by the administrative level. The vast majority of issues are processed and adapted in the bureaucratic engine room before they reach the political level (Larsson and Trondal 2005; Goetz and Meyer-Sahling 2008). Secondly, the study of EU coordination has implications for the theory of liberal intergovernmentalism (LI) (Moravcsik 1993). In contrast to classical intergovernmental theory, LI opens up the black box of the state by adding a liberal component, according to which national governments aggregate the national interest based on the power relationship between different interest groups (Moravcsik 1993). In light of this study, this tenet is open to criticism: as demonstrated, there is significant variation in how preference formations take place in the two member states.

Generally, this analysis opens up a number of avenues for future studies to examine. Theoretically, it points to the importance of including ministerial autonomy in the analytical equation. This could be done either by relaxing the definition of veto players to encompass ministries whose consent is necessary when defining the national position or by incorporating the concept of ministerial discretion crafted by Laver and Shepsle (1996: 33). This is in line with Dimitrova and Toshkov (2007)’s framework, which seems to have generalizability for a broader group of member states. Methodologically, the explanations found in this paper could be tested more widely on EU-28 by developing scales for the organisational traits of the coordination mechanisms, and then applying regression analysis to test the explanatory value of veto players and ministerial autonomy. Empirically, future studies could conduct a number of in-depth case studies to obtain detailed information about the informal coordination dynamics, which have not been captured by this study’s focus on formal structures and processes.

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[1]The coordination system's degree of centralisation/decentralisation concerns the power concentration within the government (see Kassim 2003a) and not between the state and sub-states, as defined in much of the literature on federalism.
[2] Coreper is the French abbreviation for Le Comité des représentants permanents, which translated to English means the Committee of the Permanent Representatives. The Committee which has no formal decision making powers is comprised of on high ranking official from each member state called the Permanent representative who prepares cases for formal decisions by the ministers in the Council. The Committee actually breaks into two committees called Coreper II dealing with issues pertaining to economic and the Council of financial affairs, foreign affairs, general affairs and jus-tice and home affairs as well as Coreper I handling all other Councils configurations including agriculture and fisheries (only financial issues or technical measures on veterinary, phytosanitary or food legislation), competitiveness, education, youth, culture and sport, employment, social policy, health and consumer affairs, environment, transport, telecommunications and energy .
[3] One exception being issues belonging to the Länders' exclusive competences, where the Länder can define the German negotiation position and represents it in the Council.

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In_GPR_ Feb_2010: Interview with representative from the Permanent Representation of the Federal Republic of Germany to the European Union (*Ständigen Vertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland bei der Europäischen Union*) in February 2010.

In_AA_Apr_2013: Interview with representative from the German Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Auswaertiges Amt*) in April 2013.

In_BMWi_Apr_2014: Interview with representative from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (*Bundesministerium Für Wirtschaft und Technologie*) in April 2014.

In_CDU_Feb_2010: Interview with representative for Christian Democratic Union of Germany (*Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*) in February 2010.

In_EBD 2014: Interview with representative from the European Movement Germany (*Europäische Bewegung Deutschland*) in April2014.

In_Bundesregierung 2014: Interview with representative from the Federal government (*Bundesregierung*) in March 2014.

In_BT_Feb_2011: Interview with representative from the German Parliament (*Bundestag*) in February 2011.

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In_ØEM_Jun_2010: Interview with representative from the Danish Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior (*Økonomi- og Indenrigsministeriet*) in June 2010.

In_UM,_June_2010: Interview with representative from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Udenrigsministeriet*).

In_FEU, Sep_2010: Interview with representative from the Danish Parliament's European Affairs Committee (*Folketingets Europaudvalg*) in September 2010.

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Research Article

Innovating Teaching and Learning of European Studies: Mapping Existing Provisions and Pathways

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Abstract

The selection of the pedagogical approach plays a crucial role in determining the learning approaches that students engage with (e.g. surface or deep learning) and the knowledge and skill transfer. This paper maps the existing student-centred pedagogical practices in European Studies (ES) using a worldwide survey conducted within the framework of the Innovating Teaching and Learning of the European Studies (INOTLES) project. This research investigates to what extent the ES teaching uses student-centred approaches worldwide and what are the factors that influence the practical application of these methods. The results do not highlight clear recurring patterns of interaction between the major indicators related to instructors' profile, course profile and the selection of the innovative teaching approaches. A certain degree of uniformity and consistency is revealed in the practical application of innovative ES teaching worldwide across various disciplines. While this finding may represent the evidence of a high degree of exchange of practices and internationalization of teaching ES, it requires further research.

Keywords

innovative teaching; European Studies; student-centred learning; deep learning

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INTRODUCTION

The European Studies (ES) field has been evolving and strenghtening its place within the social sciences. While the study of the European Union (EU) and the European integration process represents a common focus of teaching ES, the diversity of curricula in this field presents both advantages and limitations. On the one hand, it provides a variety of disciplinary and teaching approaches, which are particularly valuable for tackling the complex nature of the EU, European integration process, or the multi-level governance. At the same time it raises certain challenges. Often ES lacks a 'core curriculum' (Umbach and Scholl 2003) and pedagogical approaches that would define the profile of ES graduates and provide them with some core knowledge and skills.

Moreover, the contemporary higher education reforms, including the EU-driven reforms within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), have been aiming at strengthening the skills development, life-long learning and increasing the employability of students and professionals. (European Commission 2010). Thus, the questions of "*how* students learn and *how* we teach" (Maurer & Lightfoot 2013, p.1) are vital. There is a need to identify and apply suitable pedagogies (i.e. the teaching approaches) that ensure that students have both knowledge and transferable real-world skills (Timus 2013).

To achieve the desired learning environment, a student-centred pedagogical approach is needed. This implies a transition from the traditional role of the teacher as the knowledge provider to a facilitator of the learning process, that is, ensuring the student is at the centre of the learning (Trigwell, Prosser, & Waterhouse, 1999). The selection of the pedagogical approach plays a crucial role in determining the learning approaches that students engage with (e.g. surface or deep learning) and the meeting of the intended learning outcomes (Biggs 1999; Biggs & Tang 2007). Further, the pressure of globalization requires modern education systems to provide learners with necessary knowledge and skills to succeed in the current job market. In this respect, creativity, innovation, and competitiveness are the prerequisites. Therefore, current higher education pedagogical practice seeks to achieve a deep learning process, where students make practical connections with the knowledge acquired. This type of learning is in contrast to surface learning, where students try to reproduce materials (Marton & Säljö 1976).

One of the issues facing academics is encouraging students to engage in various types of interaction - *learner-learner*; *learner-content*, and *learner-instructor* interaction (Moore 1989) - in order to prioritize deep learning rather than surface learning (Trowler 2010). Thus, the use of appropriate teaching methods contributes to the enhancement of the deep learning (Biggs 1999). Previous studies have shown that the teaching approaches can affect students' deep learning (Trigwell et al. 1999). In particular, they indicate that the traditional teacher-directed approach is related to a surface learning approach. Teacher-directed environments are where the learning is focused on the teacher and the transmission of knowledge (Norton et al. 2005). By contrast, a student-centred approach, where learning centres in, on and with students (Neumann 2013), is related to deep learning. Baeten, Kyndt, Struyven, and Dochy (2010) found that this was more likely occur for those students in the human sciences, such as, in ES. Hannan and Silver (2000) have shown that active teaching, based on the active involvement of students at every step of the teaching experience, has been reinforced via several specific innovative, student-centred methods. Among these methods they identified simulations or learning games; project- or work-based learning, team work, special expert sessions, peer-tutoring, distance learning, exchange programs and internships.

Comparative cross-national research in student-centred pedagogical approaches within ES is rather sparse. For example, in 2009-2010, the Thematic Network of European Studies (SENT) surveyed the pedagogical practices in ES based on the non-traditional teaching methods identified by Hannan and Silver (2000) such as active learning. However, this was limited to EU members (Baroncelli, Fonti, & Stevancevic 2014; Fonti & Stevancevic 2014), having also a special interest in the analysis of teaching methods applied by Jean Monnet instructors and the EU-driven innovative pedagogies. They found that within this region the most popular student-centred pedagogies were based on teamwork, student-led discovery (approximately 90% used at least 'sometimes'), expert sesions and project-based learning (81% and 68 % respectively,) (Baroncelli, Fonti, & Stevancevic 2014, p.104).

ES however is an evolving and expanding field, taught beyond the EU, such as in Eastern Europe and in non-European countries. The extent to which student-centred approaches are used in these geographical contexts is uncertain. However, if the ES student across the world is expected to have certain knowledge and transferable skills, it is necessary to gauge the extent of student-centred approaches. Depending on the results, this would then have implications on how the ES community share their pedagogical practices to ensure similar qualities in their graduates.

Moreover, as there is an increasing demand for active learning in order to ensure knowledge and skills transfer, it is vital to map and assess the extent of the practical use of student-centred teaching methods and the advantages and constraints in their application within the ES discipline.

Therefore, this paper maps the existing student-centred pedagogical practices in ES using a worldwide survey conducted within the framework of the EU TEMPUS project "Innovating Teaching and Learning of the European Studies" (INOTLES).[1] It extends and complements the SENT survey in several ways. Firstly, it gathers respondents worldwide and allows for an assessment of the geographic factor on the use of student-centred teaching methods. Secondly, although it builds on

Hannan and Silver's (2000) methods identified as innovative, i.e. non-traditional and student-centred, it expands the range of examined teaching methods. Also, the survey has designed specific open questions for defining the major advantages and disadvantages for the practical use of most often applied teaching methods. This offers a practical understanding of the pedagogical approaches within the ES discipline and a better understanding of the context-specific factors facilitating the choice and application of teaching methods within ES. Last, but not least, the methodological approach applied for data analysis within this study varies from the one applied by the SENT team, revealing new insights regarding the relationship between various indicators and the choice of the teaching method.

This research investigates to what extent ES teaching uses student-centred approaches worldwide and the factors that influence the practical application of these methods. The empirical analysis is focused on instructor profile (position, experience, geographical location) and course profile (discipline, level of studies, class size and number of teaching hours). The analysis seeks to identify also the degree of uniformity and consistency of use of innovative teaching methods by ES scholars across various disciplines and geographic locations.

The paper is structured as follows. The following section examines the academic debates on the student-centred pedagogical approaches, presenting also the hypotheses guiding this research. Next, the survey methodology is explained. The study turns then to the analytical strategy of data analysis and the empirical results. The paper concludes with summative observations and specific recommendations for implications of teaching within ES and further research based on the survey data.

HYPOTHESES

We developed specific hypotheses for several major independent variables (IVs) identified in the literature as determining the choice and use of innovative teaching methods - our dependent variable.

IV1 Academic position of the instructor

We expect that the professional stability provided, for example, by the academic tenure, would give more time and 'safer' opportunity for instructors to engage in experimenting with innovative teaching methods. The potential danger with testing new teaching methods is that something might go wrong. Often this also has an implication on instructors' evaluations and their academic promotion. Professional stability, in this respect, provides an incentive for engaging with innovative methods, as the career risks are low. Moreover, some studies claimed that senior or tenured faculty might have greater access to university or external financial resources for promoting innovative pedagogies (Fonti & Stevancevic 2014, p.113). In line with this reasoning, we expect the following hypothesis (H) to hold true:

H1. Senior or tenured professors are more likely to use innovative teaching methods.

IV2. Instructor's experience

The instructor's experience of teaching in a specific field of study can relate both positively and negatively to the use of innovative teaching methods. The teaching experience is positively associated with the age of the instructor (i.e. the older a person, the greater the experience). The age contributes to setting in certain teaching habits that are resistant to change (Stasz & Stecher 2002) and lower awareness of new teaching methods (e.g. e-learning and digital skills).

We hypothesise, therefore:

H2a: Researchers who are more experienced in teaching European Studies are less likely to use innovative teaching methods.

However, the opposite might also be true. The experience in a particular subject is a valuable factor in enacting the practical implementation of teaching innovations (Fonti & Stevancevic 2014, pp. 115-116). We would expect this line of argument to hold true, taking into account also ES characteristics. The interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary character of ES and the constantly evolving EU political system demand a constant revision of teaching material and pedagogies. Thus, pedagogical experience in this specific field of study is expected to have a significant weight in enacting the use of innovative teaching methods. Hence:

H2b. Researchers who are more experienced in teaching European Studies are more likely to use innovative teaching methods.

Several variables based on course profile are expected to influence the innovativeness of teaching ES.

IV3. English language

English-language programs are more open to the internationalisation and exchange of knowledge and skills among academic staff and students (Huang 2006). In our globalised world, English is the leading language in exchange programs, dual degrees or academic research on sharing best practices on innovating teaching in higher education. Therefore:

H3. English language courses are more open to innovative teaching than other languages of instruction.

IV4. Class size

The literature investigating the role of class size on the learning process has mixed results. However, we focus on innovative teaching, which requires a higher degree of student engagement and motivation, and a community of practice. Thus, we argue in line with scholars that claim that smaller class size fosters a learning environment where students are more engaged (Harfitt & Tsui 2015) and affords powerful teaching opportunities (Finn & Achilles 1999):

H4. The smaller the size of the class the higher the use of innovative teaching methods

IV5. Number of teaching hours

When instructors are limited in the number of contact hours with students, or teaching hours, we expect them to be more likely to stick to their old habits. The time constraint leads to a more risk-averse behaviour and teachers are less inclined to experiment with new teaching methods. Thus:

H5. The higher the number of contact hours with students, the higher the likelihood of using innovative teaching methods.

Apart from the mentioned above specific hypotheses, we also control whether there is a relationship between the use of innovative methods and the course level: graduate and undergraduate, the specific discipline (e.g. certain skills required by a discipline), and geographical factor.

METHODOLOGY

The study largely builds on the indicators used in a previous survey on teaching ES, carried out within the framework of the SENT project[2] in 2009-2010 (see Baroncelli et al. 2011, chapters 7-9). This allows a comparative overview of the evolution of teaching ES, planned as a further step of this research. The major goal was to ensure the opportunity of identifying the continuity and change in the pedagogical approaches and the traditional and innovative teaching methods and tools applied within the ES field. This study expands from the SENT methodology and incorporates two additions. First, our survey integrates a wider range of innovative methods to accommodate the later techniques in the study curricula of ES. Second, our survey extends its sample beyond the European geographical area and includes respondents from around the world. The interest in teaching and doing research in the area of ES has gained increased popularity in countries beyond the geographical area of Europe. Therefore, accounting for diversity in coverage of respondents is paramount to understand how the innovative teaching methods are currently applied in the field of ES.

Survey Data and Sample

The survey was carried out as part of the EU TEMPUS project INOTLES. This project tackles core problems of the ES field by identifying common and specific needs of teaching ES in both EU and Partner Countries universities, developing innovative pedagogical strategies that transfer both knowledge and skills, and providing an example of curricular reform.[3]

The survey was conducted in LimeSurvey, a web-based anonymous survey that allows the online setting of the questionnaire and free access for answering the survey. LimeSurvey is user-friendly and self-guiding for the respondents. The survey invitation was sent to lecturers teaching ES courses worldwide (both at graduate and undergraduate levels) via major European and international networks related to ES (such as University Association for Contemporary European Studies (UACES), European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), European Union Studies Association (EUSA) etc.), the INOTLES website, as well as personal and professional networks of INOTLES project partners. The survey, conducted between March and May 2014, yielded data from 159 academics teaching ES, which represents our sample. The response rate in of the survey was 87% (182 respondents approached the survey and only 159 respondents completed the survey). The sample employed in this analysis retains only completed survey cases. As we used online contact points to approach respondents, the resulting sample may not be representative at the region, country or university levels but detailed protocols have been established to allow future replications.

Respondents were asked to provide information across a wide range of questions, including their teaching methods for at least one of their courses taught in the area of ES. The questionnaire provided the option of recording multiple teaching methods used by respondents in their teaching practice.

The questionnaire was divided in three main parts. In the first part, respondents were asked to provide general information about their institution and location, position held, field of expertise and experience in teaching ES. In the second part of the questionnaire, we collected information about the ES classes taught, such as – among others – the main subject, the type of degree, course level, the number of students enrolled, teaching language, and course length. Finally, in the last part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to detail the methodological approaches they used to teach in classes, with a focus on teaching methods and tools. Here, the respondents were asked to name the teaching methods and tools, the advantages and disadvantages for employing such a teaching methodology, and the frequency the methodology is applied.

Dependent variable

Similarly to SENT survey, our survey operationalized the dependent variable (student-centred pedagogical methods) based on the Hannan and Silver (2000) categorization. This includes: team work, special expert sessions, simulation/role plays/learning games, project-based learning (e.g. research project), work-based learning (e.g. collaboration with companies), peer-tutoring, distance learning, field-work (e.g. excursions), internship/student's volunteering and exchange programs. Moreover, it examines two other methods: problem-based learning[4] and blended learning (face-to-face and distance learning), becoming more widespread in the last years within the ES field.

To test our hypotheses about the innovative teaching methods in the area of ES we use six different measurements: team work, project-based learning, simulations, problem-based learning, expert sessions, and exchange programs. We chose innovative teaching methods that were named by at least 40% of all respondents in our sample as being used moderately and often in their teaching routine. The regularity of implementation of these methods signals that students are more likely to benefit from their use. Additionally, these methods are relevant for more practical reasons, such as the enhanced mobility of students (exchange programs), the focus on student interaction (problem-based learning, simulations, and team work), and their applied nature in relation to the job market skills.

From the operational point of view, we asked respondents to indicate the frequency of use of the six teaching methods on a three point scale: 1) never, 2) sometimes, and 3) often. For the purpose of this study, the scale of each method was recoded as binary where 1 indicates that the method is sometimes or often used by the respondent. The dependent variables were standardized as binary to facilitate their comparability in our study.

Independent and control variables

There were five variables of interest in this analysis (academic position of the instructor, instructor's experience, language of instruction, class size and the number of teaching hours) and three indicators used as controls (course level, main subject of the course, and the region). We captured the *academic position* of lectures by distinguishing their level of seniority: graduates (PhD students or masters), junior level (lectures, assistant professors and post-docs), and senior level (associate and full professors). We measured respondents' *teaching experience* by distinguishing between those with five years or less and those with six years and more of experience in teaching ES. Since the analysis spans over a large spectrum of countries, we recorded the information of whether the *language of teaching* of the respondents was English or non-English. As for the *number of students*, we employed a continuous indicator recording the total number of students enrolled in the program in which respondents taught. The analysis also used some control variables. The first one is the *course level*, whether graduate or undergraduate, taught by the respondent. Since innovative driven approaches can also depend on the intrinsic nature of the *ES disciplines*, we included an indicator that differentiates between courses taught in the area of EU political and administrative studies, EU historical studies, EU legal studies, EU interdisciplinary studies, EU economic studies and EU international relations and diplomacy. Finally, we considered the *geographic area* of respondents in relation to teaching innovative methods. We extracted the geographical location of respondents based on their home universities. The region indicator was coded to comprise four geographical areas: EU (28 members), Eastern Europe, the United States (US) and Others (Canada, Egypt, Singapore, Turkey, Uruguay, New Zeeland and Chile). Correlation scores were produced for all indicators and no strong relationships were observed for any given indicators included in the analysis. The correlation matrix is not included in the analysis but it is available upon request.

Analytical strategy

As the dependent variables employed by this analysis are modelled as binary, we used binary logistic regressions for our models (Greene 2000). Regression results are reported as odds ratios with confidence intervals. Data are presented in both descriptive and inferential ways. Initially, for our analysis we considered including all 12 teaching methods as dependent variables. Based on initial screening of data, we decided to keep only six teaching methods that were found to be employed in the teaching practice by 40% or more of our respondents. The decision to establish a threshold for selecting the six teaching methods was motivated by the need for consistency of results given the sample size.

Regression models were performed by including a full set of control indicators for each teaching method. A multilevel modelling technique was considered but the test for intra-class coefficients showed limited variation (below 0.10) when cases were clustered at the regions' level. However, an indicator specifying the regions was included as fixed effects to account for unobserved differences among responses. All measurements were tested for co-linearity and none was detected – the variation inflation factors (VIF) ranged between 1 and 1.4 and the tolerance values were optimal (0.7-0.9).

RESULTS

This study employs both descriptive and inferential data analysis. Table 1 presents the descriptive data of the dependent and independent variables of our study. Data revealed that the most used innovative research methods by respondents were teamwork (74.4%), followed by project-based learning (66.2%), simulations (65.0%), problem-based learning (54.4%), expert sessions (50.6%) and exchange programs (43.1%). A significant proportion of the respondents were at the senior, professorial level (55.7%) and almost one third were at the mid-career level (30.4%). A large majority of respondents (69.8%) were teaching in the area of ES for six years or more. Also, the majority of respondents were involved in teaching ES at the graduate level (53.2%), with courses mostly taught in English (59.3%). It is worth noting that a significant proportion of respondents taught ES in local languages (40.7%), attesting to a widespread teaching of ES in different national environments. The average number of students enrolled in programs in which the European courses are taught was 34.6%. Consequently, the average number of teaching hours for the courses in the area of ES was

75.6%. The main subjects of the courses in which respondents teach were in the area of EU political and administrative studies (38.5%), followed by EU international relations and diplomacy (21.8%), EU economic studies (12.8%), EU historical studies (9.6%), EU legal studies (9.6%) and EU interdisciplinary studies (7.7%). There is a certain degree of regional diversity in the sample. The majority of respondents were from the EU member states (56.6%), followed by those residing in Eastern Europe (19.5%), the United States (13.8%) and other countries around the globe (Canada, New Zeeland, Chile and Uruguay, etc.) (10.1%).

Table 1 Means/percentages of variables in the analysis

Variable	%/mean	N/n
Dependent Variable(s)		
Using Team Work	74.4	159
Using Project-Based Learning	66.2	158
Using Simulations	65	159
Using Problem-Based learning	54.4	159
Using Expert Sessions	50.6	159
Using Exchange Programs	43.1	159
Using Field-work	35	159
Using Internship/student volunteering	32.5	159
Using Blended Learning	30.6	159
Using Peer-tutoring	30.6	159
Using Distance Learning	19.4	159
Using Work-Based Learning	16.9	159
Independent Variables		
Academic Position	100	158
Senior level	55.7	88
Graduate: PhD student, Masters	13.9	22
Junior: Lectures, Post-doc	30.4	48
Experience	100	159
≤5 years	30.2	48

Variable	%/mean	N/n
≥6 years	69.8	111
Course Level	100	156
Undergraduate	46.8	73
Graduate	53.2	83
Language	100	182
Non-English	40.7	74
English	59.3	108
Nr. of students enrolled	34.6 (24.2)	155
Nr. of teaching hours for the course	75.6 (154.7)	154
Main subject of the course	100	156
EU Political and Administrative Studies	38.5	60
EU Historical Studies	9.6	15
EU Legal Studies	9.6	15
EU Interdisciplinary Studies	7.7	12
EU Economic Studies	12.8	20
EU International Relations and Diplomacy	21.8	34
Region	100	159
EU	56.6	90
Eastern Europe	19.5	31
USA	13.8	22
Other	10.1	16

Note: *n* indicates the number of observations with a given attribute when a variable is categorical.

Table 2 Number of methods used by respondents

Nr of methods used	% = 100	N = 159
No use of innovative teaching methods	6.9	11
1 method	3.8	6
2 methods	5.6	9
3 methods	11.8	18
4 methods	16.3	26
5 methods	8.8	14
6 methods	12.4	20
7 methods	17.5	28
8 methods	5	8
9 methods	3.7	6
10 methods	4.4	7
11 methods	1.3	2
12 methods	2.5	4

Table 2 presents data on the number of innovative teaching methods employed by respondents in their teaching activities. Interestingly, the teaching staff in our sample rarely employ a single teaching method (3.8%). Most respondents employed on average three or more innovative teaching methods in programs pertaining to ES. The survey allowed each respondent to detail up to three advantages and three disadvantages in using each innovative method they chose to declare. Among the most declared advantages of using innovative research methods were linked to financial affordability, the administrative capacity and the academic return from using them. Among the disadvantages, the most declared were crowding conditions, time-consuming and rigidity in administering and improving the method. However, one must be aware that the advantages and disadvantages in using specific methods should be placed in the context of characteristics surrounding each environment where the respondent teaches.

Table 3 summarises the results of the regression models, which examined the relationships of six innovative teaching methods, i.e. teamwork, expert sessions, problem-based learning, simulations, project-based learning and exchange programs, with a number of independent factors presented in Table 1. The results in Table 3 are presented as odds ratios. Overall, the academic staff at the junior and graduate levels did not show a differing trend in employing more innovative methods than their colleagues at the senior level. There are two exceptions however: the staff at the junior level appeared to be more likely than the staff at the senior level to use simulations while the graduate-level staff were less likely to use exchange programs when compared to senior-level staff. This result is perhaps not surprising. While responding about the advantages of the most often used teaching method, the junior academic staff confessed to perceiving simulations as boosting student participation, improving student skills and being easily manageable. At the same time, the senior level staff had more experience in managing large scale exchange programs which might explain why junior respondents were less likely to be involved in this particular methodological action. Thus, the empirical evidence does not provide support for hypothesis 1.

Regarding hypothesis 2, the experience in teaching ES does not show a clear relationship, be it positive or negative, with engagement with innovative teaching methods. However, we are inclined to interpret it as supporting the H2b. A large majority of our survey respondent (69.8%) had six years or more of ES teaching experience and they appeared to still actively engage in the use of innovative teaching methods.

The language of the subjects in which ES was taught did not associate, positively or negatively, with the use of specific methods. There is one exception to this statement: programs in which English was the language of teaching were more likely to be involved in exchange programs. The association between English and the use of exchange programs is perhaps intuitive, as the use of English may indeed prepare students for exchange periods abroad. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is confirmed partially when related to exchange programs but rejected when considering all other methods. The class size was associated only with the use of exchange programs – i.e. the higher the number of students enrolled, the more likely the program involved exchange programs – thus providing only limited support for hypothesis 4. As for the number of teaching hours, the more time the courses had, had largely no effect on teaching innovation, thus disconfirming hypothesis 5. A small exception is noted: the higher the number of teaching hours the more likely teachers were to involve expert sessions. There was no difference in the use of methods between graduate and undergraduate classes, except for simulations where graduate courses were more likely to involve these particular methods when compared to undergraduate course. The results showed no difference in the use of methods across different disciplines in the area of ES. One exception was noted: scholars in the area of EU economic studies were more likely to use problem-based learning. This might be directly related to the specific needs of economic studies, focused on problem-based approaches.

Another interesting observation was that scholars in the US were less likely than scholars in Western Europe to use expert sessions and exchange programs. At the same time, scholars in countries other than Europe and the US (i.e. Canada, Egypt, Singapore, Turkey, Uruguay, New Zeeland and Chile) were more likely to use project-based learning. Apart from this specific variation, results showed no differing use of methods across different regions of the world. More analysis should focus on the differences in the use of some methods – i.e. expert sessions and exchange programs – between the US and Western Europe, which represented two main hubs for the development of high academic teaching standards. For example, based on our US respondents, the distinctive lack of expert sessions might be an indicator of lack of ES expertise, in contrast to the EU members. Furthermore, this observation might highlight the need of a stronger exchange of practices and inter-university cooperation (e.g. online or face-to-face) between the US and EU institutions in order to benefit from the ES expertise of the latter. The lower rate of exchange programs in the US as compared to EU countries might be a consequence of the limited experience of the US students within the European environment. This could play a main role in placing the US students at a disadvantage compared to the European students. But the higher use of exchange programs in the EU and Eastern Europe has to do also with the merit of EU educational policies and the Bologna process, encouraging the mobility of faculty and students in order to exchange best practices and mutual learning (European Commission 2010).

Overall, the analysis suggests a certain degree of uniformity and consistency in the practical application of innovative ES teaching worldwide across various disciplines. However, there are no clear patterns of interaction between the major indicators related to instructor' profile (position, experience), course profile (discipline, level of studies, class size and number of teaching hours) and the selection of the innovative teaching approaches.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents the findings of a worldwide INOTLES survey mapping pedagogical provisions in teaching ES. By focusing on the factors that determine the use of various innovative teaching methods, current research opens up new terrain for empirical and normative discussion on ES pedagogies and the extent that ES has encouraged student-centered pedagogies. Understanding the latter is important for assessing students' level of engagement in their ES degrees and their attitudes and confidence when using ES later in life (Trowler 2010).

The empirical study revealed a certain degree of uniformity and consistency in the use of innovative teaching methods across various instructors' profiles (tenured or not, more or less experienced in teaching ES) and various class characteristics (language of instruction, class size and the number of teaching hours). While this finding may represent the evidence of a high degree of exchange of practices and internationalization of teaching ES, it requires further research.

Moreover, INOTLES survey data has to be interpreted taking into account the specific context in which the survey was carried out and the resulting limitations. First, we captured a snapshot of time in which respondents declared use of a specific method or methods. Future research would require longitudinal measurements of using innovative methods among respondents. Second, our pool of respondents was gathered through a specific number of entry points, which may involve some kind of selectivity bias. The survey invitation has been circulated within personal professional networks of INOTLES universities as well as among major international associations specialized in ES (such as UACES, EUSA, ECPR). But we acknowledge potential distortion in the overall numbers of the use of some methods, such as problem-based learning, due to a high level of respondents from a specific university (e.g. Maastricht University), which officially applies a particular method included in our analysis. Third, our sample size is rather small and condensed mostly in the larger geographical area of Europe. Future research should make better use of larger sample and of a better geographical distribution. Lastly, our survey data does not include some indicators, such as gender, for example, and it limits the explanatory power of our findings.

Although this paper makes only partial use of the survey data, future research based on this data may provide directions on how to further develop ES pedagogies and provide appropriate capacity building for ES academics. A comprehensive comparison between INOTLES and SENT survey would be welcome in order to reveal the evolution of the teaching provisions and pathways in the field of ES. Also, it might be interesting to consider some in-depth case studies of specific methods, such as simulations, which have shown significant relations with several indicators (academic position, course level). Another interesting line of research would be to explore the regional similarities and differences. We would recommend engaging further in academic debates regarding cultural learning styles, considering learning as a culturally based phenomenon (De Vita 2001, Hofstede 1986). It could be interesting to assess to what extent teaching methods and learning environments in some cultures may be (in)effective in others as pedagogical methods and their perceived efficacy sometimes vary depending on culture. For example, whilst exchange programmes and expert sessions were common in Europe, the extent of their effectiveness in helping student-centred learning in places such as the US with less commonality with Europe should be evaluated.

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1 Maastricht University staff has been especially active in sharing pedagogical insights into the use of PBL within the ES during the last years, within the SENT network, but also UACES, ECPR and EUSA.

2 For more information see the official website: www.inotles.eu .

3 The Network of European Studies – SENT – brought together 70 partners from all EU members and candidates and other countries worldwide. Its major objective was to provide a comprehensive, comparative, cross national and cross-disciplinary picture of the developments in European Studies.

4 See more about the INOTLES survey at http://inotles.eu/survey-teaching-es"

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Research Article

Grade Uncertainty and the Adverse Selection of Erasmus Students: a Spanish experience

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Abstract

Erasmus scholarships are generally allocated on the basis of academic merit, and yet there is a growing concern in some Spanish universities that beneficiaries are often worse students than average. I argue that this paradox may be due to an adverse self-selection of applicants caused by the increased information asymmetry between students and teachers in study-abroad programmes. Such self-selection will have a greater impact in countries where Erasmus is widely available, in which the effect of any merit-based supply-side selection will be smaller. Faced with uncertainty about the performance of individual mobile students, teachers may tend to base their grades on the average performance of mobile students. This will (1) reduce the relationship between academic ability and the final GPA, and (2) discourage good students from participating. I find empirical support for both hypotheses by applying a Heckman endogenous switching-regime model to data from the academic records of 400 graduates from a Spanish university, including 68 Erasmus students. I discuss possible solutions, such as awarding differentiated degrees to Erasmus students. Although the results of this case cannot be automatically translated to other universities or countries, the method could be exported to other cases where there are similar concerns.

Keywords

Grading; international education; adverse selection; Erasmus programme; study abroad

INTRODUCTION

It is increasingly common that university students do part of their studies abroad and gain credit towards their degrees at home. In Europe, this is mostly done in the framework of the Erasmus programme, one of the flagship programmes of the European Union. When it was created in 1987, the programme aimed to enable study abroad periods in order to develop a pool of graduates with direct experience in European co-operation that would provide a broader basis for intensified economic and social co-operation and strengthen the ties between the citizens with a view to consolidating the concept of a People's Europe (Corbett 2003). In its 25th anniversary in 2012, the programme had shown considerable success in quantitative terms, as nearly three million students had participated in it.

Based on a very detailed statistical analysis of a Spanish case, I investigate the paradoxical result that despite the fact that scholarships are awarded on the basis of academic merit, empirical evidence indicates that good students are less likely to go on Erasmus than bad ones. The analysis of this case, I will argue, beyond its particular interest, might help us understand an underlying feature of the Erasmus programme, and generate testable hypotheses and methods that can be applied to other comparable cases.

The concept of information asymmetry can help us understand this paradox. Akerlof (1970) used the market for used cars as an example of the problems arising from the relationship between asymmetric information and quality uncertainty. In his model, the quality of a second-hand car is uncertain to the buyer due to the asymmetry of information between the seller, who knows the history of the car, and the buyer, and the incentive of sellers to pass off low-quality goods as higher-quality ones. Under those circumstances, the buyer's best guess is that the car is of average quality, so he/she will be willing to pay for it only the price of a car of known average quality. As a consequence, the sellers of cars that are above average in terms of quality will be driven out of the market because they will be unable to get a high enough price to make selling those cars worthwhile. This will in turn reduce the average quality of the cars on the market. The repetition of this mechanism can lead to the disappearance of a market.

The same argument can be applied to the Erasmus programme, especially in certain universities where Erasmus scholarships are so widely available that the selection of Erasmus students is driven by the self-selection of applicants. Here, quality uncertainty arises from the fact that teachers face a problem of asymmetric information about how much their students have learned, as all students have an incentive to try to pass as good ones. It is sometimes difficult for a teacher to decide the grade a student deserves. Exams are designed to help in this decision, but they are sometimes imperfect. As a result, the teacher in general remains with some degree of uncertainty about what the student really knows or what the student has really learnt.

This uncertainty may apply to any kind of student, but will typically be greater in the case of international visiting students for two main reasons, namely language barriers and background diversity. As far as language barriers are concerned, it is well documented that these barriers can affect student performance at tests. There is, for instance, a study of the California State Department of Education (1969) that shows an average 13.5 point increase in the IQ test results of a sample of students of Mexican descent when they take the same test in their native language. These averages, however, hide many interpersonal differences. The net impact of the language barrier varies from case to case and it is difficult for a teacher to assess its impact for a particular student.

As far as background diversity is concerned, some teachers, when they have students from different educational backgrounds, try to assess student effort or student learning (added value) rather than only their level of knowledge at the end of the course. In these cases, it is also more difficult to grade visiting students, as it is more difficult for the teacher to know their background. In either case, there is an information asymmetry between the student and the teacher, as international visiting students have an incentive to exaggerate their disadvantage in order to get a better grade.

This uncertainty will not only affect host university teachers but may also extend to home university authorities. The latter must ultimately transfer and often translate foreign grades into the academic records of their returning students, but also have uncertainty about foreign grading practices and how to translate them. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was designed to help in this respect, but many difficulties still remain. For instance, the highest grade under the ECTS grading system (A) is reserved for the top 10% students in the class, whereas the highest grade in the Spanish university system (*matrícula de honor*), which includes a tuition-fee waiver, can only be awarded to less than 5% of students. It is not always easy to translate from ECTS grades to national ones, and this is supposing that the host university is using ECTS grading, which far from fully extended. It is even more difficult to translate among national systems.

Faced with uncertainty, teachers at the host and home university may consciously or unconsciously try to apply a correction to their grades (even in universities with anonymised grading, which is far from generalised in Europe, it is often possible for teachers to guess if a student is a native speaker or not). But lacking precise information about the conditions of a particular student, they may base their decisions partly on an average experience. This will lead to a compression of the grade structure among mobile students, as teachers will be wary of failing the apparently worst performing students and giving the maximum grades to the apparently best ones. The resulting “grade insurance” will benefit lower-performing students to a greater extent than the better ones, and will create an incentive for adverse self-selection into the Erasmus programme. This will have the effect of lowering the average quality of the participants and, as teachers update their expectations, grades will also fall, thus reinforcing the problem.

In summary, there are two kinds of selections in operation simultaneously in the distribution of Erasmus grants that work in opposite directions. On the supply side, there is a positive selection implemented by university authorities on the basis of academic merit. On the demand side, there is an adverse self-selection of applicants for the reasons stated above. The final selection is a result of the interaction of both, which explains why, in universities where Erasmus is more widely available, university selection procedures play a lesser role, and the adverse self-selection of candidates is more apparent. Conversely, in universities where Erasmus places are more heavily oversubscribed, university selection procedures have a greater relative impact, and mask any possible adverse self-selection of candidates taking place in the background.

The objective of this paper is to confirm whether such adverse selection is actually taking place and, if so, explain why it is happening. In particular, I want to test two main hypotheses. First, I want to test whether there is actually an adverse selection of participants in the programme on the basis of academic aptitude. Secondly, I want to test whether study-abroad participation tends to reduce the relationship between academic aptitude and the final GPA, therefore compressing the grade structure and acting as a sort of grade insurance. In order to do so, I will use data from the academic records of 400 graduates from a Spanish university, including 68 who did part of their studies abroad within the Erasmus programme. The contribution of the detailed analysis of this particular case can not only be the generation of hypothesis and methodologies to test them in other contexts in which a similar problem might be perceived.

Analysing a Spanish experience is interesting for several reasons. First, Spain has traditionally been the largest source of Erasmus students in the whole EU. In 2011-12, as in the previous academic year, Spain sent the most students abroad under the Erasmus programme, with 39,545 students leaving for another country, thus overcoming larger countries such as Germany, France, Italy or the UK. Secondly, Spain also featured some of the highest numbers of outgoing Erasmus students as a proportion of the number of graduates, only overcome by Luxembourg, Liechtenstein and Finland. This indicates the wide availability of the programme, which, as explained, should downplay the role of university selection procedures and make the adverse self-selection of candidates all the more apparent. Finally, in the context of an ongoing trend of popularisation of Erasmus, the Spanish case is particularly relevant to understand what we could expect from the future in other countries.

There is an explanation for Spain's quantitative success. Until 2014, the distribution of the Erasmus budget among EU member states was based mainly on past student mobility numbers, and the Spanish national Erasmus agency implemented a policy of distribution of its national allocation of funds among Spanish universities in proportion to their actual mobility numbers. This meant that there was a virtually unlimited supply of scholarships for universities that encouraged them to grant as many as possible in order to maximise their Erasmus budgets. An additional Erasmus outgoing student would be funded from the national budget at the expense of reducing the national average Erasmus grant, a reduction that would be imperceptible by the sending institution, but would mean an increase in the national allocation for Spain in the next year. Not surprisingly, a side-effect of this policy was that Spain not only had the greatest number of Erasmus students, but the Spanish average Erasmus grant was also the lowest in the EU.

If it turns out to be an adverse selection of Erasmus students in terms of academic ability, there may be important implications. On the one hand, the bias of the Erasmus programme in favour of less academically able students may be seen as a case of positive discrimination in favour of those who are likely to become less advantaged on economic grounds in the future. On the other hand, such an adverse selection may undermine the prestige of the programme and the participating member states. This is particularly serious if Erasmus students are seen as “ambassadors” of their home countries. From this perspective, rather than serving as a means to make students aware of their commonalities and fostering a supranational identity, Erasmus may foster negative stereotypes about the people from other nationalities based on a biased sample of mobile students. The ongoing process of popularisation of Erasmus can aggravate the role of self-selection and make matters worse.

I will divide the rest of this paper in four parts. Firstly, I will present a brief review of the literature on the issues involved (asymmetric information, sample selection, self-selection, student grading). Secondly, I will introduce the sample and some preliminary evidence, and present the two main hypotheses of the paper. Thirdly, I will present an endogenous switching regime model and apply it to test those hypotheses. Finally, I will present the main conclusions of the study and derive some policy implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of studies have tried to assess the degree to which the Erasmus programme has met its objectives. Some of those studies have tried to measure the impact of an Erasmus period on the career prospects of the participants (Teichler and Janson 2007). Other studies have tried to assess whether Erasmus has actually strengthened the European identities of participating students (Sigalas 2010a; Sigalas 2010b; Wilson 2011).

Often the studies raise issues related to the selection into the programme and the representativeness of the participants. Such studies have raised doubts about the inclusiveness of less advantaged students, either those of lower socio-economic backgrounds or those from lower levels of study. Thus, Souto-Otero (2008) analyses the financial issues and family background of Erasmus students, showing that despite the fact that access to the programme has been moderately widened, there are still important socio-economic barriers to participation in the programme. Kuhn (2012) argues that the reason why the Erasmus programme misses its mark to reinforce a European identity is that it addresses university students, who are already very likely to feel European.

I am not aware of specific studies about the adverse selection of study abroad participants or the inclusiveness of these programmes in terms of academic aptitude. In fact, prior reports of the individual motivations of students to participate in Erasmus based on their experiences do not even mention grades as incentives to participate in the programme (Papatsiba 2005). This contrasts with anecdotal evidence on the role that grades may play in the decision to participate. One only has to search the internet to find a multitude of forum entries and student reviews that relate the terms “Erasmus”, “easy” and “pass”. A review about the *University of Economics Prague* reads: ‘When you're in exchange it's really easy to pass without working a lot (I think it's different for the Czech students who have more serious courses and have to study quite a lot).’[i] Another review about *Katholieke Universiteit Leuven* states: ‘As an Erasmus student, it's you who decides how tough the courses will be: it's easy to pass, but really hard to get a very good result.’[ii]

In spite of the lack of specific literature on the role of grades in the decision to participate in study-abroad programmes, the issue is related to a rich body of literature on topics such as asymmetric information, quality uncertainty and adverse selection, sample selection, self-selection in labour markets, and academic grades as incentives. I will briefly review those issues in turn.

The above-mentioned influential paper by Akerlof (1970) about the market for lemons brought informational issues to the forefront of economic theory. The subsequent literature would deal with two primary solutions to the adverse-selection problem posed by Akerlof, namely signalling and screening, with numerous applications to the field of education. Michael Spence originally proposed the idea of signalling. He argued that, in a situation with information asymmetry, it is possible for one party to signal his or her type, thus credibly transferring information to the other party and resolving the asymmetry. Spence argues, for example, that going to college can function as a credible signal of an ability to learn (Spence 1973). Similarly, screening is a technique by means of which the under informed party can induce the other party to reveal his or her information. They can provide a menu of choices in such a way that the choice depends on the private information of the other party. Stiglitz (1975) discusses the role of education as a screening device.

Adverse selection is related to another problem that is endemic to empirical social research, namely sample selection bias. Statistical analyses based on non-randomly selected samples can lead to erroneous conclusions and poor policy so a number of econometric techniques have been developed to deal with sample selection issues. Heckman (1979) saw sample selection as a sort of omitted variables problem and developed a two-stage method, often known as Heckman correction, which allows researchers to correct for selection bias.

Participant selection bias, be it based on financial conditions, family background or academic performance, may not only pose equity-related problems as the ones pointed out by Souto-Otero (2008) or Kuhn (2012). It will also make it more difficult to assess the effectiveness of the Erasmus programme, as the variables influencing participation may be correlated to the programme's objectives. Whether you want to measure the impact of Erasmus on European identity, employability, or grades, it is necessary to take into account possible sample selection bias. The methodology I present in the paper is useful to correct such problems caused by selection bias.

Self-selection is a core topic in labour economics, because rational actors make optimizing decisions about what markets to participate in, such as job, location, education, etc. The starting point of the formal treatment of this topic is a paper by Roy (1951), which discusses the optimizing choices of 'workers' selecting between fishing and hunting. Borjas (1987) applies a simple parametric 2-sector Roy model to the problem of immigration. One of the possible scenarios his model predicts is called "negative hierarchical sorting", in which migrants are negatively self-selected from the source country distribution and are also below the average of the host country distribution. The conditions for this scenario are that wages should be sufficiently correlated between the source and host country, but the source country should have higher wage dispersion than the host country. As a result, low skill workers will want to migrate to take advantage of the 'insurance' provided by a narrower wage structure in the host country. In a later paper, Borjas (2002) applies this argument to self-selection into the public sector. He argues that that between 1970 and 2000 there was a significant compression of the wage distribution in the public sector relative to the private sector, making it increasingly difficult for the public sector to attract and retain high-skill workers.

Incentives to self-select into different regimes are also present in education contexts. Sabot and Wakeman-Linn (1991) argue that grades represent a powerful set of incentives in response to which students make their course choices. They show that these incentives have been systematically distorted by grade inflation, which has split universities into high- and low-grading departments. Using data from a particular college, they estimate the impact of differences in grading policies across departments on the distribution of enrolments.

THE SAMPLE, PRELIMINARY EVIDENCE, AND HYPOTHESES

In this paper I use data from the academic records of 400 students that graduated in business administration from a Spanish university between 2008 and 2011. All these students followed the same 5-year degree course. Out of these, 68 participated in a study-abroad experience in other

European university through the Erasmus programme. For each of these students I have coded the university-access GPA, the first-year GPA, the final GPA, and dummy variables indicating whether they have participated in Erasmus and their gender.

The university access score is a weighted average of the high-school average grade (60%) and a university access examination (40%), a sort of scholastic aptitude test (SAT), both measured on a 0-10 scale. The first year's GPA is the average of the grades obtained in the first year's university courses, also on a 0-10 scale. The purpose of these variables in the paper is to measure the academic record of students prior to participation in a study abroad experience as a proxy of their academic aptitude. Both of these measures are available because one of the requirements for participation in a study abroad under the Erasmus programme is to have spent at least one year of studies at the home university. The use of different measures of scholastic aptitude is in line with the recommendation by Grove et al. (2006) that scholars should control for academic aptitude with college grades and either SAT scores or high school GPA or rank.

The Erasmus dummy variable is aimed at measuring the differential effect of study abroad participation, whereas the gender dummy will serve as an instrument in the decision to participate in Erasmus.

Table 1. The sample and some preliminary statistics

	N	Mean university-access grade	Standard error of mean	Mean first-year GPA	Standard error of mean	Mean final GPA	Standard error of mean
Non-Erasmus	332	6.7269	.05251	6.3736	.04267	6.5774	.0350
Erasmus	68	6.4000	.10829	6.1365	.09419	6.3389	.0660
Combined	400	6.6713	.04766	6.3333	.03908	6.5369	.0314
Difference		.3269***		.23713 **		.2385* **	

* α < .10; ** α < .05; *** α < .01.

Table 1 presents some preliminary statistics of the sample analyzed. The mean university access grade is lower for future Erasmus students (6.4000) than for the ones that will stay home (6.7269). The mean difference of .3269 points is highly significant at a 1% level. If we look at the mean GPA of the first year at the university, we also find worse results for future Erasmus students (6.1365) than for the ones that will not participate in the programme (6.3736). The mean difference of .2371 points is significant at a 5% level. Finally, when we look at the final GPA, we find that students who do an Erasmus study abroad tend to perform worse, with a mean GPA of 6.3389, than students who have stayed home (6.5774). The mean difference of .2385 points is highly significant at a 1% level.

All this evidence seems to point in the direction of a certain degree of adverse selection of Erasmus students, which contrasts with the formal criteria of the calls for applications based on academic merit. However, this is only preliminary evidence and, as such, it should be treated with caution at this stage.

HYPOTHESES

The main argument I make in this paper is that because of uncertainty about the grade an Erasmus student deserves, teachers will tend to base their judgements on average Erasmus performance, which will tend to reduce the relationship between academic ability and the final GPA. This in turn will create an incentive to participate in the programme that is inversely related to academic aptitude, namely an incentive to participate for bad students and a disincentive for the better ones. The result will be an adverse selection of Erasmus students. There are two testable hypotheses that can be drawn from this model, which I will try to test in the following section:

Hypothesis 1: The probability of participating in the Erasmus programme decreases as academic ability increases.

This hypothesis concerns the actual existence of an adverse selection of Erasmus students based on academic aptitude.

Hypothesis 2: Erasmus participation reduces the relationship between academic ability and the final GPA.

This hypothesis refers to the mechanism for adverse selection, based on information asymmetry that leads teaches to assess Erasmus students based on average Erasmus performance, thus reducing the relationship between the final GPA and individual academic aptitude.

There are two issues related to the implementation of these hypotheses that merit special attention. The first one concerns how to correctly measure the prior academic record. As Grove et al. (2006) point out, despite the fact that academic ability is the most important explanatory variable in studies of student learning, researchers control for it with a wide array and combinations of proxies. The authors investigated how the proxy choice affects estimates of undergraduate student learning by testing over 150 specifications of a single model, each including a different combination of 11 measures of academic performance, namely high school grade point average (GPA) and rank and variants of college GPA and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores. They found that proxy choices alone cause the magnitude of the estimated learning gains to vary by large and significant amounts. The authors found that collegiate GPA data offer the best proxy for students' individual propensities to learn economics, a result that runs counter to researchers' actual proxy choices. The results suggest that scholars should control for academic aptitude with college grades and either SAT scores or high school GPA or rank.

We have two candidate variables to measure academic aptitude, namely the university-access grade, and the GPA of the first year of university studies. As mentioned before, both variables are available and fixed before the Erasmus study abroad, because one of the few academic requirements of the Erasmus programme is that the participants must have completed at least a year of university studies at their home institution before their study abroad. The way I have chosen to incorporate both variables into a single measure of academic ability is by means of a weighted average of the form

$$Academic\_record = w \cdot GPA_0 + (1-w) \cdot GPA_1 , \tag{1}$$

where *Academic_record* stands for the grade point average prior to the decision to participate or not in Erasmus, on a scale from 0 to 10. GPA_0 stands for the university-entry grade, whereas GPA_1 stands for the grade point average of the first year of university studies, both on a scale from 0 to 10. This means that *Academic_ record* is a weighted average of the university entry grade and the GPA of the first year of registration, which tries to summarise the academic record prior to study abroad participation.

The second issue relates to the fact that participation to the treatment group (Erasmus) is not random but based on self-selection. As a consequence, if we try to estimate the average treatment effect on the treated by simply including Erasmus dummies in an OLS regression, we risk obtaining biased estimates. The reason is that self-selection into the Erasmus and control groups by the students may not be independent from potential outcomes in terms of GPA. If this is the case, then the observed difference in academic outcomes may not be a good indicator of the average treatment effect on the treated because it will also include what is known as selection bias (Angrist and Pischke 2009). For instance, the decision to participate in Erasmus may be influenced by an unobserved feature, such as intelligence or entrepreneurship, which may also affect academic outcomes in the same or the opposite direction.

Randomized experiments such as those used in the natural sciences play an important role in uncovering causal effects, because random assignment solves the selection problem by making selection independent of potential outcomes (Angrist and Pischke 2009). In a randomized experiment, assignment to the treatment (Erasmus) and control groups would be random, thereby eliminating selection bias. In the social sciences, however, such randomized experiments are relatively uncommon because they are not always easy to implement.

AN ENDOGENOUS SWITCHING REGIME MODEL

In order to address the sample selection issue, I use an endogenous switching regime model. Such a model is needed because the allocation of subjects to the treatment group (Erasmus) and control group is non-random, as is generally the case with observational (as opposed to experimental) data. The model will allow me to estimate different regression equations for students participating in Erasmus and those staying home, both relating the final GPA of students to their prior academic record. A treatment-effects model would not be sufficient because I am not only interested in an additive treatment effect of Erasmus participation on the final GPA, but also, and most importantly, on the differential slope effect that relates the prior academic record to the final GPA for mobile and non-mobile students.

Essentially, the model I use is an application of the classical Heckman selection model. Instead of observing a truncated distribution of the GPA, we observe two truncated distributions. On the one hand, we observe $GPA_{Erasmus}$ for students participating in Erasmus, a type of students for whom we do not observe how they would fare had they stayed at home. On the other hand, we observe GPA_{Home} for students staying at home, for whom we do not know how they would perform if they had taken part in Erasmus.

Let Erasmus* denote the net benefit of participating in Erasmus, a latent variable with the following index function:

$$Erasmus^* = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 \cdot Academic\_record + \gamma_2 \cdot Female + \nu \qquad (2)$$

Where γ_0, γ_1 and γ_2 are constants, *Academic_record* is a variable on a 0-10 scale calculated according to equation (1), Female is a dummy indicating the student's gender, ν is an error term that includes the effect of other non-observed variables. Note that the constant term γ_0 allows for benefits of Erasmus participation which are constant for all the potential students and thus unrelated to the prior *academic_record*.

$$Erasmus = 1 \; if \;\; Erasmus^* > 0; \; Erasmus = 0 \; otherwise \; ; \tag{3}$$

So Erasmus is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 for Erasmus participants and 0 for non-participants. This binary variable that can be estimated by means of a Probit model:

$$\Pr(Erasmus = 1) = \Phi(\gamma_0 + \gamma_1 \cdot Academic\_record + \gamma_2 \cdot Female) \tag{4}$$

Then suppose that we observe the following outcome estimation functions:

$$GPA_{Home} = \beta_{00} + \beta_{01} \cdot Academic\_record \; if \;\; Erasmus = 0 \tag{5}$$

$$GPA_{Erasmus} = \beta_{10} + \beta_{11} \cdot Academic\_record \; if \;\; Erasmus = 1 \tag{6}$$

Where the betas are constants and GPA stands for the final grade point average on a scale from 0 to 10. We observe either GPA_{Home} for non-participating students, in which case $GPA_{Erasmus}$ is unobserved, or $GPA_{Erasmus}$ for students who have participated in Erasmus, in which case GPA_{Home} is unobserved. Note that, in practice, we observe student outcomes in only one state, either Erasmus = 1 or Erasmus = 0.

It is possible to estimate this endogenous switching regime model by using the original two-step approach introduced by Heckman (1979). The advantage of this procedure is that its results may be easier to interpret, as it estimates a single selection equation, and self-selection bias is presented as a form of omitted-variable bias.

The first step of this procedure consists in estimating a Probit model of the selection equation according to equation 3. The second step consists in calculating the inverse Mills ratio for each observation and introducing it as an additional variable in the outcome equation. For Erasmus participants the formula for the inverse Mills ratio is

$$IMR_1 = \frac{\phi(\gamma_0 + \gamma_1 \cdot Academic\_record + \gamma_2 \cdot Female)}{\Phi(\gamma_0 + \gamma_1 \cdot Academic\_record + \gamma_2 \cdot Female)} \tag{6}$$

For non-participants, due to the truncation of $Erasmus_0$ from above, the formula for the inverse Mills ratio is

$$IMR_0 = \frac{\phi(\gamma_0 + \gamma_1 \cdot Academic\_record + \gamma_2 \cdot Female)}{1 - \Phi(\gamma_0 + \gamma_1 \cdot Academic\_record + \gamma_2 \cdot Female)} \tag{7}$$

HYPOTHESIS TESTS

I will use Heckman's two-step approach to fit both regression models with selection. This will produce estimates both for the selection equation that relates the prior academic record and gender to Erasmus participation (equation 4) and the outcome equations that relate the prior academic record to the final GPA, for regular students staying at home (equation 5) and Erasmus students (equation 6). The reason for choosing the original two-step method instead of a maximum likelihood alternative is that the former will estimate a single selection equation, whereas the latter will estimate two different selection equations (one for each regime). Thus, the two-step option is easier to interpret, whereas the substantive results are equivalent in this case.

In order to determine the appropriate weights for the university-access grade (GPA_0) and the first-year grade point average (GPA_1) in the weighted measure of performance prior to Erasmus (*Academic_record*) according to equation 1, I undertake a grid search. This consists in running the above-mentioned endogenous switching regime model for different pairs of weights in order to find out the pair that minimizes the residual sum of squares of the outcome equations.

Table 2. Grid search of university-access and first-year GPA weights

w	(1 – w)	RSS Erasmus=0	RSS Erasmus=1	Unrestricted RSS
0.0	1.0	52.3392	8.4543	60.7935
0.1	0.9	48.1529	7.8804	56.0333
0.2	0.8	45.5653	7.4767	53.0420
0.3	0.7	44.8857	7.3126	52.1983
0.4	0.6	46.1834	7.4330	53.6164
0.5	0.5	49.2719	7.8407	57.1126
0.6	0.4	53.7689	8.4924	62.2613
0.7	0.3	59.1989	9.3126	68.5115
0.8	0.2	65.0950	10.2162	75.3111
0.9	0.1	71.0697	11.1288	82.1985
1.0	0.0	76.8445	11.9971	88.8416

Source: Own computation using Stata's heckman function.

Table 2 presents the results of the grid search, which turns out to be that the best-fitting pair is the one that gives a 30% weight to the university-access GPA and 70% weight to the first-year GPA. The results of the Heckman model using the prior academic record calculated according to those weights are presented below.

Table 3. Probit model of self-selection into Erasmus

	Coef.	Std. Err.	Z	P > |z|
Intercept	.9660	.7119	1.36	0.175
Academic_record	-.2670	.1124	2.38	0.018
Female	-.3955	.1524	-2.60	0.009

Source: Own computation using Stata's Probit function.

The results of this estimation are presented in Table 3, which indicates that Erasmus*, the latent variable in equation 2, which is positively associated with the probability of participation in Erasmus, is adversely related to the prior academic record. The estimated coefficient for the *academic_record* variable (-.2670) is significant at conventional levels, which confirms hypothesis 1 about the adverse selection of Erasmus students. Another result is that female students also tend to participate less than their male counterparts. The coefficient for the female dummy (-.3955) is very significant at a 1% level.

Table 4. Marginal effects of probit model of self-selection into Erasmus

	dPr(Erasmus)/dx	*Std. Err.*	*z*	*P>|z|*	*x-bar*
Academic_record	-.0650	.0270	-2.38	0.018	6.4347
Female*	-.1005	.0399	-2.60	0.009	.6125

(*) dPr(Erasmus)/dx is for discrete change of dummy variable from 0 to 1.

z and P>|z| correspond to the test of the underlying coefficient being 0.

Table 4 presents the marginal effect of the academic record in terms of probabilities as in equation 4, evaluated at the mean values of the regressors, which are 6.43 for the academic record and .61 for the Female dummy, respectively. Thus, at the margin, an increase in the prior academic record reduces the probability of participating in Erasmus at a rate of 6.50 percentage points for a point increase in the prior academic record, in line with hypothesis 1 about the adverse selection of Erasmus participants based on academic aptitude. The table also reports the marginal effect of the gender dummy for a discrete change from zero to one, when evaluated at the mean academic record. Under these conditions, the probability of participating in Erasmus for female students is predicted to be 10.05 percentage points lower than for their male colleagues.

Table 5. Outcome equations with and without selection bias correction

	Erasmus = 0		*Erasmus = 1*	
Intercept	2.0790*** (.1767)	2.3612*** (.3311)	2.7391*** (.3900)	2.7513*** (.6624)
Academic_record	.6943*** (.0271)	.6646*** (.0408)	.5792*** (.0624)	.3722** (.1519)
IMR_0		.3082 (.2934)		
IMR_1				.8913* (.469291)
N	332	332	68	68
RSS	45.0585	44.8857	8.6049	6.7861
R^2	0.6656	0.6669	0.5666	0.6317
Adjusted R^2	0.6646	0.6649	0.5600	0.6203

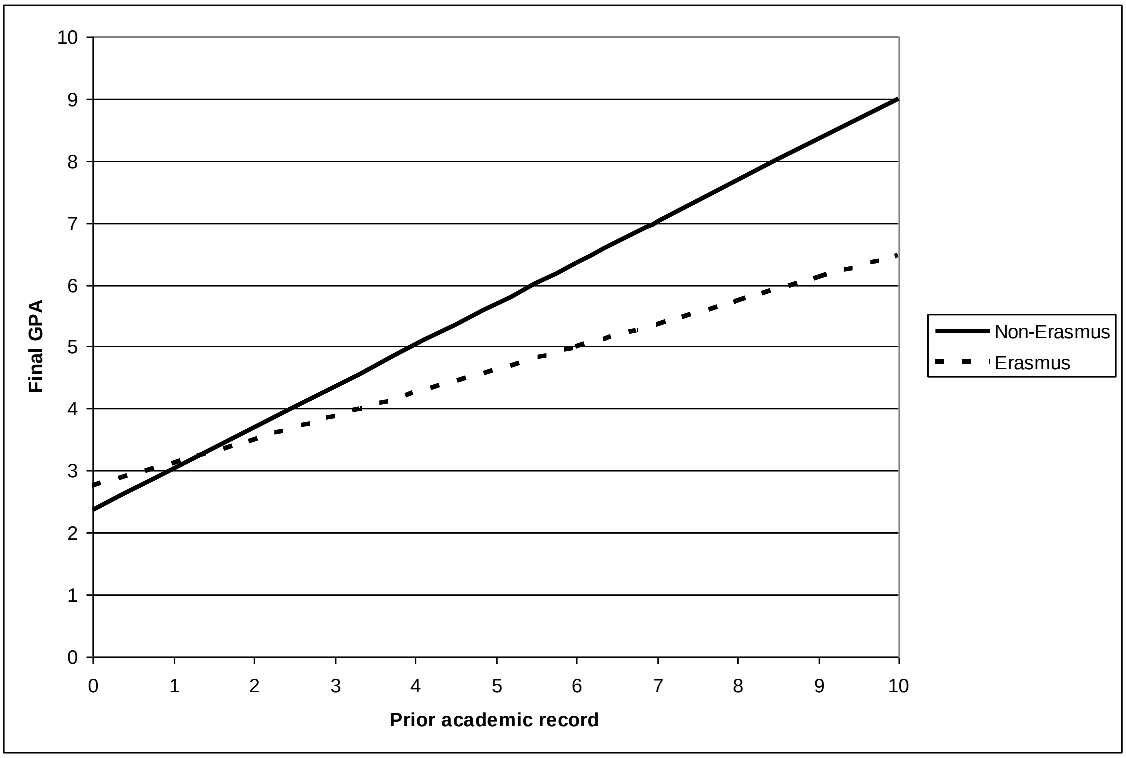
Source: Own computation using Stata's regression and heckman-twostep functions.

Standard errors within parentheses. * α < .10; ** α < .05; *** α < .01.

Table 5 presents the results of estimating the outcome equations with and without correcting for selection bias by including the inverse Mills ratios as additional variables. In all the cases the intercept and the academic-record coefficients are significant or highly significant. When we look at selection bias, we observe that the inverse mills ratio for non-participants (IMR_0) is not significant, but the correction term for Erasmus students (IMR_1) is fairly significant, pointing at the existence of selection bias into Erasmus.

As far as hypothesis 2 is concerned, about Erasmus participation reducing the link between academic aptitude and the final GPA, in the standard OLS model without bias correction, academic-record coefficient is lower for Erasmus students (.5792) than for those staying at home (.6943). The effect of selection bias correction is to further reduce the link between the prior academic record and the final GPA for Erasmus students, by reducing the estimate for the academic-record coefficient from .5792 to .3722. The reason why the observed Erasmus effect tends to be smaller in the models without bias correction is that students who self-select into the Erasmus regime tend to be those that will be less severely affected by the Erasmus treatment. All in all, the equations show that Erasmus students will get a final GPA that is less related to their prior academic performance, with a slightly higher fixed component (2.7513) than non-participants (2.3612), but a lower coefficient for the prior academic record (.3722) than non-participants (.6646), all the estimated coefficients being highly significant. A Chow test for the equality of the slope coefficients across the two regimes also shows that the difference is highly significant, at a 1% level.

Figure 1. GPA as a function of university prior academic record



Source: Own computation using Stata's heckman function (maximum likelihood).

Figure 1 represents the regression lines estimated according to the outcome equations with bias correction in Table 5. The line for Erasmus students starts from a slightly higher intercept, but is less steep than the general one. This means that the final GPA will be less related to the prior academic record for Erasmus than for the rest, in line with hypothesis 2. This also means that the average decrease in the GPA due to Erasmus participation will be greater as the prior academic record increases. Therefore, the incentive to participate in Erasmus will be smaller the higher the initial academic record. As a consequence, the probability of participating in Erasmus will decrease with increases in the initial academic record, in line with hypothesis 1 on adverse selection of Erasmus students.

Please note that, although the expected Final-GPA line for Erasmus students is always lower than the one for non-Erasmus students for feasible levels of the prior academic record (i.e. above 5), this is not in conflict with the fact that some students do participate in Erasmus. There are two reasons for this. First, there are incentives for Erasmus participation that are unrelated to the prior academic record, in line with the latent score function in equation 2. These incentives are greater for male than for female students, and would raise the break-even point to 2.14 and 3.62, respectively. Secondly, the lines in Figure 1 represent a central expectation. There will be variation among students around this central expectation due to other unmeasured factors summarised by the error term ν in equation 2.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I have analysed the academic records of 400 hundred students from a Spanish university to investigate whether there is an adverse selection of Erasmus students, and whether the cause of this adverse selection is related to problems with the grading system that discourage the best students from participating.

The fact that students self-select into Erasmus, possibly on the basis of the likely effects of Erasmus participation on their final GPA, makes this an interesting case from a scientific point of view. In particular, if we want to analyse the effect of Erasmus participation on grades, we cannot just compare the performance of mobile and non-mobile students. It will be necessary first to correct for possible selection bias, which I have done in this paper by using an endogenous switching regime model based on Heckman selection.

Using data from the academic records of a sample of 400 graduates, 68 of which participated of an Erasmus mobility, I have shown that Erasmus participation does reduce the relationship between the prior academic record and the final GPA, acting therefore as a sort of grade insurance. I have also shown that this creates an incentive for the less performing students to participate (and a disincentive for the better ones), leading to a sort of adverse self-selection into the programme. I argued that this phenomenon is particularly apparent in the Spanish case because Erasmus is widely available in this country, which reduces the impact of merit-based university selection procedures and increases the role played by the self-selection of applicants.

Caveats

An alternative explanation why Erasmus students would be selected from the lower tail of the home country distribution would be theoretically possible. It would correspond with a case known as "refugee" sorting in the model of migration developed by Borjas (1987), which requires the correlation between grades in the two countries is sufficiently low (in some cases negative). This might occur, for example, for a minority group whose opportunities in the home country are depressed by prejudice, or in the case of migration from a system where the set of skills rewarded is quite different from the system in the receiving country (typical cases are European Jews migrating to America in the first case, intellectuals from the former Communist bloc in the second). I find this explanation less convincing in the case large amounts of Erasmus students moving between EU member states, but it would certainly be compatible with the two main empirical results of this paper.

Needless to say, the substantive results of this paper based on a particular sample cannot be automatically generalized to the whole Erasmus programme in which thousands of students from dozens of countries participate each year. Having said that, it should be stressed that, in spite of the seemingly local character of this study, its methodology could be easily applied to different datasets from other universities, countries and academic disciplines. This would allow confirming whether the adverse selection of Erasmus students is indeed a general phenomenon, and whether it becomes more apparent as the availability of the programme increases.

Policy implications

As mentioned in the introduction, the adverse selection of Erasmus students on the basis of academic ability may be seen as case of positive discrimination in favour of less performing students, but also as unfair discrimination that puts at risk the prestige of the Erasmus programme and participating states. In the latter case, the findings of this paper should also have policy implications. If, as this paper suggests, the source of such adverse selection is some problem with the grading system that creates disincentives for more able students, solutions could be directed to improving the grading system in order to remove those disincentives. I will analyse three such policy alternatives.

A common option is to assess study-abroad courses on a pass/fail basis so that they do not affect the final GPA of the participant. This option has two main shortcomings. First, Erasmus participation can affect the final GPA not only through the grades obtained abroad, but also later if the experience abroad affects the later grades of students, because it may limit the remaining course choices, alter the normal timetables or alienate classmates and teachers, for instance. The latter option may be particularly relevant if Erasmus participants carry the stigma of adverse selection. Secondly, grading Erasmus students on a pass/fail basis may create a problem of moral hazard, by discouraging student effort. Thus, Merva (2003) investigates if grades motivate students and, if so, by how much by using a unique data set of 436 students enrolled in an American university located in Europe composed of approximately 50% study-abroad students and 50% degree-seeking students to examine whether there is a significant difference in semester grade point average (GPA) outcomes between students whose grades are averaged into their cumulative GPA with those who take courses on a pass/fail basis. Using linear regression models controlling for academic ability as well as other relevant variables, the study finds that students whose grades are averaged into their cumulative GPA are estimated to have an increase in the mean semester GPA of .36 points, or 11.4% above the average. For study-abroad students who take courses on a pass/fail basis, the results suggest that academic incentives are adversely affected by this grade transfer policy.

A second policy option would be to try to introduce some correction in the grading system in order to remove the disincentive for better students. For instance, the ECTS system suggests a distribution curve for student grades. Perhaps the key would be that host universities employed different grade distribution curves for incoming Erasmus students than for local students in order to ensure that their grades have enough variation and allow differentiating the relative ability of the students without damaging their GPA. The difficulty to implement this option would be that sometimes the number of incoming Erasmus students in a given course is too small to be able to develop a specific grade distribution curve. An alternative option would be that the home university corrected the grades of Erasmus students when they are translated to the home university by means of some objective system. But this option also has the difficulty of few observations to develop such an objective system.

Finally, an interesting option would be to award different degrees to students participating in Erasmus than to those doing their whole degrees at their home university. The rationale for this would be that, on many occasions, the benefits of good grades in terms of awards, scholarships or job offers, for instance, do not depend on the absolute GPA but the relative position of the individual compared to other classmates. Creating a distinct “class” for Erasmus students, certified by a different diploma, would eliminate the disincentive to participate for the more able students, while keeping their incentives to work for good grades during their study abroad. This solution might appear difficult to implement in some universities and disciplines due to their small Erasmus student numbers. However, it becomes all the more feasible in the cases when Erasmus is more widely available, which are precisely the cases in which such a measure would be most needed.

There have been some recent reforms in EU-wide Erasmus funding that can contribute to alleviating the adverse-selection problems raised in the paper. Since 2012 there were indications that the European Commission was not happy with the existing distribution of Erasmus funds among member states, and wanted to reform it. A new system was agreed after a standoff at the end of 2013, just days before the existing Lifelong Learning Programme expired. The result was a new agreement under Erasmus+ for the 2014-20 period in which national allocations of funds would be mainly based on member state populations and not on mobility numbers as used to be the case. Minimum and maximum values for Erasmus scholarships were also set in order to avoid the "race to the bottom" encouraged by the previous system. Under the new conditions, the Spanish government announced it would ration the number and duration of Erasmus scholarships. This result, as sad as it may be for the quantitative growth of the programme, may also have the positive side effect of increasing the role of university selection of Erasmus students, which may offset the adverse self-selection tendencies presented in the paper.

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[i]http://erasmusu.com/en/erasmus-vse-vysoka-skola-ekonomicka-v-praze/erasmus-experiences/easy-to-pass-when-you-39-re-in-exchange-80290 (consulted on 3 February 2013).

2 http://www.iagora.com/studies/uni/Katholieke_Universiteit_Leuven?review_id=5911 (consulted on 3 February 2013).

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