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SHADES OF POPULISM

Anti-Migrant Rhetoric in Political Discourse in the United Kingdom, Ireland and Sweden, 2020-2024

ABSTRACT: The paper discusses anti-immigrant rhetoric in three countries: the United Kingdom, Ireland and Sweden, covering the period of 2020 – 2024. Based on an in-depth analysis of the statements issued by leading politicians of the countries and civic expressions in the form of protests and demonstrations, some common traits can be identified as leading motives in the public populistic discourse. The three shades of populism have, however, their distinctions stemming from cultural, political and economic specifics of the countries. Deconstructing of the internal pattern of the populistic discourse may help liberal democracies respond effectively to the challenges posed by simplistic and thus often misleading rhetoric.

Keywords: populism, anti-immigration rhetoric, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Sweden.

INTRODUCTION

The paper puts into comparative perspective the main themes concerning immigration, immigrants (including refugees) present in the political discourse of the three countries: the UK, Ireland and Sweden. The analysis is based on data from years 2020 – 2024, derived from statements by leading politicians as well as civic expressions in the form of protests and demonstrations. The scope is to show the different shades of populism, which have their common traits but also their distinctions stemming from the

cultural, political and economic specifics. The analysis of the political and public discourses has been conducted by using the critical discourse analysis (CDA).

HOW TO STUDY POPULISM

Populism, as a complex socio-political and cultural phenomenon, requires an interdisciplinary approach. This implies the need to engage the combined potential of the social sciences and the humanities to undertake a comprehensive analysis of a phenomenon that, from the perspective of the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, is growing not only on a regional but also on a global scale.[1] Taking into account technological progress and the increasing application of so-called Artificial Intelligence (AI) in many areas (e.g. the media), also the sciences will be indispensable for observing, monitoring and forecasting populist trends in post-modern societies.[2]

When studying the phenomenon in question, it is worth to stress the range of issues and aspects that are being conceptualised and in-depth analysed. These include definitional issues – how populism is defined and described in terms of its regional, national or international scope,[3] which is often accompanied by historical aspects that form the contextual framework of the analyses. This research pays particular attention to the sources, causes, motives and main actors – animators, embedded in history rather than in the present.[4] The aim is to trace the evolution of populist currents, shaping or co-shaping the socio-political and cultural landscape of a given community(ies), at a specific historical moment.

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[1]   "Why Is Populism on the Rise?," *European Commission*, 25 July 2022, at https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/436598-why-is- populism-on-the-rise, 21 March 2023; C.R. Kaltwasser et al. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Oxford 2017.

[2]   K. Hiebert, "Tech-Fuelled Inequality Could Catalyze Populism 2.0," *Center for International Governance Innovation*, 19 October 2022, at https://www.cigionline.org/articles/tech-fuelled-inequality--could-catalyze-populism-20/, 9 February 2023.

[3]   G. Mills, "The Problem with Populism," *The Brenthurst Foundation*, 23 November 2018, at https://www.thebrenthurstfoundation.org/news/the-problem-with-populism/, 13 March 2023; J-W. Müller, *What Is Populism?*, Philadelphia 2016; Ch. Lamour, "A Radical-Right Populist Definition of Cross--National Regionalism in Europe: Shaping Power Geometries at the Regional Scale beyond State Borders," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2022), pp. 8-25; F. Wishlade, *The Rise of Populism, Regional Disparities and the Regional Policy Response*, Glasgow 2019; D. Kübler, M.A. Strebel, F. Marcinkowski, "Populism and the Scales of Statehood: Localism and Populist Attitudes in Western Europe," *European Political Science Review*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2024), pp. 431-447.

[4]   R. Santaniello, "Populism and European Institutions: A Historical Perspective," in C. Ruzza, C. Berti, P. Cossarini (eds), *The Impact of Populism on European Institutions and Civil Society*, Cham 2021, pp. 45-66; R. Kerr, S. Robinson, M. Sliwa, "The Discursive Work of Populist Politicians: An Historical Perspective on English Populism," *Academy of Management Proceedings*, no. 1. (2021), pp. 100-150; M. Funke, M. Schularick, Ch. Trebesch, *The Cost of Populism: Evidence from History: ECONtribute Policy Brief, No. 015*, Bonn–Cologne 2021.

This perspective makes it possible to identify the cyclical occurrence of populist attitudes and slogans. Their dynamics, in turn, is the primary subject of researchers focusing on the factors generating populism, as well as the factors driving it.[5] Economic, cultural and political aspects are considered, focusing on issues such as the standard and quality of living, ethno-national (including racial) resentment, the politics of fostering individual and collective identity, globalisation and deglobalisation processes, the protection of traditional values, or openness to intellectual currents prompting social change.[6]

An important analytical area in the study of populism is the process of communication, particularly in politics. Researchers focus on the messages generated by political leaders, political parties, activists and other political actors, analysing the rhetoric used, the structure of the narrative, its dynamics, the way in which issues are portrayed and the type of media applied to connect with audiences.[7] The role of the media, as with many other phenomena concerning postmodern societies, is fundamental due to their powerful influence on the attitudes of the audiences.

The analysis of the substrate and the conditions that foster non-resistance to populist slogans is yet another aspect of this research. In this case attention is directed on the compilation of factors that form a kind of 'readiness'/inclination to respond positively to populist slogans and narratives. What is important to note is the processual nature of this phenomenon, often growing discreetly to a mature phase, later openly exposed in political declarations by political party leaders and in the voters' choice.[8]

Another important field of research relates to the analysis of the impact of populist movements on the condition of democracy and democratic procedures. Key questions concern the quality of institutions present in the public life, procedures, norms and laws that determine the functional framework of actors participating in political life and how populist narratives affect the aforementioned categories. This manifests itself

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[5] A. Baggio, "Populism and Its Definitions: Interpretations and Perspectives of a Multifaceted Political Model," in A.M. Baggio, M.-G. Baldarelli, S.O. Idowu (eds), *Populism and Accountability: Interdisciplinary Researches on Active Citenship*, Cham 2023, pp. 9-53; M. Caiani, P. Graziano, "The Three Faces of Populism in Power: Polity, Policies and Politics," *Government and Opposition: An International Journal of Comparative Politics*, vol. 57, no. 4 (2022), pp. 569-588.

[6] Y. Margalit, S. Raviv, O. Solodoch, "The Cultural Origins of Populism," *SSRN* (2022), pp. 1-36; M. Morgan, "A Cultural Sociology of Populism," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 35 (2022), pp. 179-199; M.A. Williams (ed.), *Cultures of Populism: Institutions, Practices and Resistance*, London 2022.

[7] B. Krämer, "Populism, Media, and the Form of Society," *Communication Theory*, vol. 28, no. 4 (2018), pp. 444-465; L. Sorensen, "Populism in Communications Perspective: Concepts, Issues, Evidence," in R. Heinisch, C. Holtz-Bacha, O. Mazzoleni (eds), *Political Populism: A Handbook*, 2021, pp. 383-398; M. Rheindorf, "Rhetorics, Discourse and Populist Politics," in A. De Fina, A. Georgakopoulou (eds), *The Cambridge Handbook of Discourse Studies*, Cambridge 2020, pp. 622-643.

[8] Y. Dai, A. Kustov, "The (In)Effectiveness of Populist Rhetoric: A Conjoint Experiment of Campaign Messaging," *Political Science Research and Methods*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2024), pp. 849-856; A. Wuttke, C. Schimpf, H. Schoen, "When the Whole Is Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts: On the Conceptualization and Measurement of Populist Attitudes and Other Multidimensional Constructs," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 114, no. 2 (2020), pp. 356-374.

in the rule of law (or its absence), media freedom (or limitation/absence) or political pluralism (or absence).[9]

A relevant research perspective is provided by comparative studies that allow us to compare the phenomenon in question in its different variants, depending on the world region, time, cultural or economic conditions. By doing so, a structured knowledge is established about the persistence/impermanence of populist tendencies depending on the context: geographical, temporal, social, economic or religious.[10]

Complementary to the above perspective is research dedicated to the way and modus in which individuals and communities respond to populist argumentation. The main objects of interest here are social attitudes, reactions, mobilisations, contesting or accepting the populist narrative.[11]

When studying populism of the first decades of the 21st century, it is plausible to identify both its sources and the reasons for its growth. Among the most frequently mentioned in the literature on populism are those relating to economic factors, like for instance: perceived financial inequalities resulting from income disparities, unequal redistribution of wealth, rising living costs, accumulated frustration of less privileged social groups etc. The growing number of dissatisfied citizens, especially those eligible to vote, becomes an attractive target group for populist discourse produced by politicians, the so-called 'defenders of the common man struggling to meet the ends'. This is facilitated by the processes of globalisation, in which transnational corporations are able, in a relatively short period of time, to open or close workplaces employing a significant workforce.

Periodic stabilisation, combined with (periods) of individually perceived uncertainty, may give rise to resentment related to the subjectively perceived vulnerability – one of the effects of globalisation. Dislocation of certain branches of the global economy and, consequently, changes in the labour market, had forced individuals to adapt quickly to new circumstances and challenges. Some of these individuals failed to do it. Populist movements, thus, often gain support in areas where traditional industries had been reduced or removed (e.g. mines, textile factories, assembly plants etc). Anti-globalisation sentiments, expressed in attitudes contesting international institutions (e.g. UN, EU, World Bank, IMF) and international agreements, may also contribute to the rise of

9   B. Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation*, Stanford 2016; K. Weyland, "Populism's Threat to Democracy: Comparative Lessons for the United States," *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2020), pp. 389-406; J. Kyle, Y. Mounk, *The Populist Harm to Democracy: An Empirical Assessment*, London 2018.

10   C. Mudde, C.R. Kaltwasser, "Studying Populism in Comparative Perspective: Reflections on the Contemporary and Future Research Agenda," *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 51, no. 13 (2018), pp. 1667-1693; S. Hunger, F. Paxton, "What's in a Buzzword? A Systematic Review of the State of Populism Research in Political Science," *Political Science Research and Methods*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2022), pp. 617-633.

11   A. Bourne, T.V. Olsen, "Tolerant and Intolerant Responses to Populist Parties: Who Does What, When and Why?," *Comparative European Politics*, vol. 21 (2023), pp. 725-741; A. Malkopoulou, B. Moffitt, "How Not to Respond to Populism," *Comparative European Politics*, vol. 21 (2023), pp. 848-865.

populism, expressed by so called 'defenders of national sovereignty and statehood', stressing the need to protect national interest in all dimensions of the public life. Periods of economic, political or health crisis (e.g. COVID pandemic), create conditions conducive to the rise of populist attitudes, as individuals are more inclined to follow leaders offering simple solutions in difficult times. Institutional distrust animates populist, anti-establishment movements seeking to break with 'corrupt elites'.

Demographic changes, concerning not only the number of the population, but also its composition and origin, may also become a significant motif in populistic slogans. Global migrations and refugee crises, may fuel attitudes averse to migrants, positively responding to anti-immigrant narratives. Populist movements are present where old values are confronted with new ones. Rapid cultural change constitutes an attractive material/pretext for populists who may provoke and reinforce fear about the loss of cultural, national, ethnic, religious or linguistic identity of a nation/community.

In some cases, the rise of populism can be driven by the lack of effective political opposition on the national scene. In situations where the party/parties in power are unable or unwilling to address problems affecting a significant part of the population, populist movements attempt to replace ineffective institutions by offering simplistic solutions embedded in 'catchy', nicely formulated promises.[12]

The above-mentioned methods of producing populist discourses rarely occur in a single form. Mostly, they are produced as a compilation growing out of a specific socio-political, economic and cultural context, including the media. The ways in which narratives are constructed, arguments formed, interpretative frameworks employed, metaphors, images, symbols used, is the subject of critical discourse analysis that helps identifying the driving force of contemporary populism.

ACTION THROUGH LANGUAGE

While elaborating on populism, its forms and the effectiveness in attracting social appeal, the role of language and the role of words, should be included. Words, being the basic building components of any utterance, more or less complex, carry – depending on the circumstances – a load of causality. John Austin, in *How to Do Things with Words*, argued that two basic communicative objectives are pursued by a speech act: 1) conveying information and/or 2) giving instructions to perform a certain action. The British philosopher of language described this concept in his theory of speech acts, distinguishing their three types:

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12   C. Mudde, C.R. Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 2017; R. Eatwell, M. Goodwin, *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy*, London 2018; P. Taggart, *Populism*, London 2000; E. Harteveld et al. "Multiple Roots of the Populist Radical Right: Support for the Dutch PVV in Cities and the Countryside," *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 61, no. 2 (2021), pp. 440-461; C.R. Kaltwasser et al. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook…*; G. Elgenius, J. Rydgren. "The Sweden Democrats and the Ethno-Nationalist Rhetoric of Decay and Betrayal," *Sociologisk Forskning*, vol. 54, no. 4 (2017), pp. 353-358.

- locutionary acts relating to the act of speaking,
- illocutionary acts corresponding to the utterance (the word corresponds to an action), and
- perlocutionary acts resulting in the attainment of a goal previously contained in the utterance (the spoken word results in the concrete state to which it refers).[13]

Simplifying: the locutionary act is the spoken words and phrases in their physical form, the illocutionary act contains the intention enclosed in the spoken words being an emanation of the will of the utterer, and the perlocutionary act refers to the real effect of the spoken words on the recipient – animating the recipient to a specific behaviour. On this basis, Austin identified speech acts that carry causal potential, 'programming' individuals and groups, according to a strictly spoken pattern. This is particularly evident in phrases containing words such as: 'I promise', 'I declare', 'I vow', 'I announce', 'I make known' etc. The effectiveness of such performative acts depends on the coincidence of the intentions of the utterance with the expectations of the addressees and with the circumstances/conditions of the environment that favour the uttered intentions. The latter condition is important insofar as it affects the process of the message itself, the transmission of the message, which may lead to a distortion of the message content.

Austin also distinguished between constative and behabitive acts. Constative acts refer to statements announcing something, but not necessarily reflecting the real state of matters. Such statements may therefore be true or false. Behabitive acts, on the other hand, contain causal potential, meaning that such acts oblige the recipient to act in a specific way, in a specific temporal frame. Examples are utterances containing commands, orders, prohibitions, recommendations or requests (e.g. to provide assistance).

The effectiveness of the above speech acts depends on contextual specificity, defined by Austin by the notion of 'required engagement' (felicitous conditions), which refers to the necessary conditions for a speech act to bring the intended effect. Felicitous conditions form a set of features consisting of:

1) the grammatical correctness of the speech act,
2) the linguistic competence that allows the sender to formulate and convey the message effectively and the receiver to receive/understand it,
3) the congruence of the intention with the intentionality of the speech act, and
4) the authority of the sender.

The complex nature of linguistic messages and the speech acts proposed by Austin was later discussed and developed by John Searle, who sought the source of causation for spoken words. Introducing the concept of illocutionary force, he focused on a speaker's intentions described as: assertions, questions, orders, wishes, and promises. With this distinction, Searl pointed to the unequal impact of utterances and thus their actual outcome.[14] Thus, the three dimensions of a speech act: the utterance, its meaning and its effect, are interrelated, constituting a set of rules with practical application. One of

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[13]   J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford 1975.

[14]   J.R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*, Cambridge 1979; J.R. Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization*, Oxford 2010.

them regulates social life, the other defines and establishes new forms of behavior. The central issue here is the specific disposition of speech acts originating in their constitutive character, i.e. their ability to moderate human action in its individual and collective form. Searl also pointed out that the act of speaking (as opposed to making sounds) itself becomes/is an institutional fact in which the sender, the receiver and the world surrounding them establish a certain well-defined context necessary for the transfer of the message. So established context, thus, possess two types of properties: humanly independent (e.g. the solar system) and dependent (e.g. education, politics, economy). The human-dependent context is a subject of constant transformation through confronting discourses in which words, or more precisely their meaning, become increasingly labile, vague, matter of subjective interpretation. This in turn, draws on individual and collective memory, individual emotions and experiences and the community with which an individual identifies him/herself.

The complex nature of the process of action and interaction through the word implies the application of a multidisciplinary body of theoretical and practical knowledge, incorporating: critical text and speech analysis, distribution of power, access to media, and civic participation, including politics.[15] This may help identifying of mechanisms employed in the process of constructing a message with a strong potential to influence audiences in accordance with the sender's intentions or – *vice versa* – a message that fails to achieve its goal. Deconstructing both types of messages involves using the method of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine the components of a text, its structure, its form, dynamics of transformation, temporal and special circumstances of (re)transmission.

CDA is particularly useful in researching the relationship between language, power, ideology, politics and social structure, as well as the cognitive processes characterising a community. Thus, within the studies devoted to CDA, dominant approaches focus on: 1) power and ideology, 2) hegemony, 3) social change, 4) culture, 5) social constructivism, 6) social cognition, and 7) science.[16]

Theories and research within the framework of CDA, provide tools to identify complex processes that form the social, political, cultural, as well as economic order, not only on local, regional, national, but also international, global scene.[17] In times of accelerating technological changes, including digital communication, CDA finds application in the analysis of digital discourse – its content, forms, dynamics, audiences, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to construct messages in their verbal and/or visual form. This is particularly relevant in the context of social movements, civic activism,

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[15] T.A. van Dijk, "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis," *Discourse & Society*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1993), p. 253; R. Wodak (ed.), *Language, Power and Ideology: Studies in Political Discourse*, Amsterdam 1989; N. Fairclough, *Language and Power*, London 1989.

[16] T. van Leeuwen, "Critical Discourse Analysis," in *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics*, 2006, pp. 290-294.

[17] S. Cummings et al. "Critical Discourse Analysis of Perspectives on Knowledge and the Knowledge Society within the Sustainable Development Goals," *Development Policy Review*, vol. 36, no. 6 (2018), pp. 727-742.

protests or citizens' discontent manifested in various ways, which can be rapidly acti-vated and moderated through digital media.[18] However, discursive strategies used by participants of the communication processes differ from each other. They vary depend-ing on a number of factors, among which the key role is played by resources in the broad sense, including knowledge, information (in the qualitative and quantitative sense), fi-nancial capital, access to the means of mass communication, the ability to construct successful messages being addressed and transmitted effectively. Complementing the above is the receiver's ability to receive messages and interpret them correctly (in ac-cordance with the sender's intention), and consequently influencing the receiver's sub-sequent decisions and actions.

Discursive strategies impact the formation of recipients' attitudes/behaviors, mak-ing them active or passive participants in a shared space. CDA thus provides an oppor-tunity to identify the components, methods, uses of linguistic tools for empowering individuals and communities, or conversely for weakening, deactivating, making them passive and reluctant to engage in public life.[19] These mechanisms are reflected in the practices of influence, power distribution, domination or oppression, being located in the discursive structures of the society.[20] These structures form a network of relation-ships, the collective mental landscape, determining the ways in which reality is inter-preted and meanings constructed.

Although the mental landscape of a collective (community, group, society) may be accessible to all users (provided they are culturally competent, which happens through socialisation and acculturation), its formation is the privilege of only those who have real potential to shape the public discourse. The others with a passive access, contrib-ute only occasionally, in exceptional circumstances like for instance testifying in court, participating in a demonstration, or voting. These two types of activity, according to Van Dijk, are determined by the institutionalised power and domination, supported by the media, and processes of social cognition, preparing the ground for well-defined narratives.[21]

The media, in an increasingly digitalised Western culture, play a fundamental role in social cognition. They are a fundamental instrument in discourse management and its distribution, which leads to establishing of specific knowledge structures, consist-ing of so-called cognitive scripts, allowing individuals to function within a broader so-cial construct.[22] Considering this, the role of education cannot be overlooked in the

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[18] M. Banaś, "Changing the Course – The Role of the Internet and New Media in Reshaping the Polish Political Scene: The Case of the Presidential Elections of 2015," in *Contours of the Future: Technology and Innovation in Cultural Context*, Saint-Petersburg 2017, pp. 88-95, at https://english.spbstu.ru/media/news/nauka_i_innovatsii/polytech-contours-future/, 11 February 2024.

[19] T.A. van Dijk, "Principles…", p. 257.

[20] Ibid., p. 257.

[21] Ibid., p. 256.

[22] R.C. Schank, R.P. Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding: An Inquiry into Human Know-ledge Structures*, New York 1977.

context discussed here, thus, it affects media literacy of a community in general and an individual in particular.

Social sciences and humanities generating knowledge for a better understanding of collective and individual lives, are examples of areas where competing narratives are constructed, which in turns impacts other spheres of life, such as politics, economy, culture.[23] They all together co-create a universe in which concepts are produced and re-produced, and mechanisms are established to influence individual and collective mind, behavior and action.

THREE COUNTRIES

Populism, as indicated, takes different forms and shapes. In the following paragraphs, the issue is exemplified by the UK, Republic of Ireland and Sweden. These countries and societies have been selected based on their geographical and cultural proximity, also some shared traits relating to the history of their statehood.[24]

These countries,[25] like many others in Europe in the 2020s, face serious problems generated inter alia by migration. Migration, especially uncontrolled, contributes to many societal changes including (in some cases) rapid population growth. As the population grows, adaptation and integration challenges may increase too, caused not only due to cultural differences. This problem is reflected inter alia in citizens' electoral preferences supporting political parties who call for stricter migration policies and stricter integration requirements for immigrants.[26]

The first decades of the 21st century for the UK, Ireland and Sweden brought a revision of previous relatively liberal regulations on immigration and related integration policies. Although these liberal policies initially brought positive results, in the long term they proofed that their effects were different than previously expected. In all three countries, the number of incidents indicating that the immigrant population had integrating difficulties increased, also in the subsequent generations. In the case of Sweden, this is evidenced by persistent ethnic enclaves, resembling ghettos, inhabited mostly by people of non-European origin (neighborhoods in Stockholm, Goteborg, Malmo,

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[23] L. Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, Chicago 1979; Th.S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago 1962; M. Erickson, *Science, Culture and Society: Understanding Science in the 21st Century*, Cambridge 2005.

[24] The paper, due to space limitation, does not allow to outline the relationships of the three countries. However, there is a rich balk of literature, inter alia: J. Graham-Campbell, M. Ryan (eds), *Anglo-Saxon/Irish Relations before the Vikings*, Oxford 2009; É. Féron, "Prisoners of History? British-Irish Relations and the Conflict in Northern Ireland," *European Review of International Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3 (2014), pp. 94-109.

[25] I deliberately use the term *countries* and not states because I associate a state with administrative structures and a country with historical, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious and territorial (land) heritage.

[26] M. Banaś, "Migrant Integration Policy in Sweden after 2015: A Revised Approach in the Shadow of the Migration Crisis," *Fuori Luogo: Journal of Sociology of Territory, Tourism, Technology*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2021), pp. 69-85.

Orebro, among others). These areas constitute a real challenge for the Swedish police, who in their official 2023 report identified 59 of so called *utsatta områden* (vulnerable areas) being particularly at risk of crime, high unemployment, early school drops, risk of marginalisation and social exclusion.[27]

These enclaves are located in the larger Swedish cities (vide the figure below), which have changed considerably in the last two decades due to liberal migration and integration policies implemented by successive governments since 1960s. Sweden, experiencing at that time significant labour force shortage started to import foreign workers and their families, on a regular basis. Work combined with a high standard of living were strong pull factors also in the following decades. Even during the economic crisis of the early 1990s, immigration continued, involving mainly refugees from Iraq, Iran, the Balkans, Turkey (Kurds), Eritrea, among others. Individuals coming from outside Europe with extended family structures, were allowed to bring their clan members. This prompted the process of ethnic ghettoisation with similarly organised minorities. For many decades, the Swedish state, governed mainly by Social Democrats, did not respond to growing ghettoisation, although doubts were raised by the opposition, particularly by the right wing of the Swedish political spectrum. However, the pressure of the civil society, expressed via increasing support for parties requesting a revision of migration policy, changed the approach.[28]

Figure 1. Vulnerable areas in Sweden.

Source: Wikipedia.

In the case of the Republic of Ireland, populationally smaller than the Kingdom of Sweden, it is difficult to speak of ethnic ghettos, or neighbourhoods, inhabited mostly by so-called visual minorities. These areas are located in large cities and/or their suburbs (Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Wexford, Waterford, Galway, among others). They are inhabited by specific ethno-national groups and resemble a kind of ghetto with

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[27] Polismyndigheten, *Lägesbild över utsatta områden*, Stockholm 2023.

[28] M. Banaś, "Migrant Integration Policy…".

a relatively high turnover of residents who stay there periodically until they find another more attractive location.[29] This reflects the interplay of cultural identity, transience and the quest for better opportunities.

In Ireland, local communities, especially in small towns and rural areas, are characterised by reluctance and skepticism towards migrants, also refugees.[30] This is caused by perceived insecurity related to the domestic economy, housing crisis, energy and food price increase, health care system inefficiency and austerity measures employed by the Irish welfare state (e.g. reduction of the unemployment benefits).

A significant challenge for the authorities constitutes the housing problem and growing homelessness, affecting not only immigrants but also a fracture of the native population. This foster unfriendly, even hostile attitudes towards migrants (including refuges) in a society with a rich history of emigration. The Irish exodus is deeply rooted in the collective memory and commemorated in the public space in monuments, memorials and thematic routes reconstructing ways leading to Irish ports from which ships departed the so-called better world (USA, Canada, Australia).

The contemporary workforce shortage experienced by the Irish economy particularly in sectors delivering service made subsequent governments implement an open-door policy, attracting foreign workers. Being in practice for over two decades, this solution is now contested by some orthodox groups, who openly manifest their contestation and non-acceptance for liberal migration policies.

Similar problems, related to the revision of migration and integration policies are recognised in the United Kingdom. Ethnic enclaves, taking slightly different form as in Sweden and Ireland, retain nevertheless their specificity, determined by ethnicity, language, religion, spatial arrangement, and informal regulations organising the internal order.

The multicultural legacy of the UK, shaped by its historical colonisation practices, remains a lasting vestige. This legacy profoundly influences community thinking, shaping perceptions of cultural, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity. These diverse elements serve as an enduring emblem, woven into the fabric of the British society.

Although in the public discourse anti-immigrant statements do not gain traction and are generally regarded as populist and threating the democratic order, at the local or regional level they are occasionally present. This type of calls was for instance noticeable before the Brexit referendum. Supporters of leaving the European Union stressed the argument of the progressive reduction of member states' autonomy imposed by the EU parliament. One of the 'threats' was the too liberal immigration policy pursued in

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[29]   Own field research conducted in the Republic of Ireland in 2021-2023; data on demographic changes in Ireland can be found on: "Population and Migration Estimates, April 2023," *Central Statistics Office*, at https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2023/keyfindings/, 17 December 2023.

[30]   "Dublin Riot Highlights 'Far-Right' Agitation over Ireland Immigration," *France 24*, 25 November 2023, at https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20231125-dublin-riot-highlights-far-right-agitation-over-ireland-immigration, 17 December 2023. Also author's own observations – under several visits to Ireland in the years 2020-2024.

2015 by the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, with the slogan, 'Herzlich Willkommen', which encouraged immigrants, especially non-Europeans, to come to Germany and later to spread in other countries of the EU.[31]

The 'Herzlich Wilkommen' invitation contrasted with Merkel's statement, expressed at a meeting with CDU youth in 2010 in Potsdam, that Germany's *multi-kulti* policy had failed. The fiasco, however, originated in decisions made by previous governments over the past 40 years.[32] Merkel's statement indicated tightening of the rules enhancing integration, establishing effective mechanisms obliging newcomers to learn German, quickly acquire professional skills needed on the labor market, and reducing social programs supporting immigrants (including unemployment benefits). The declaration met public expectations, as reflected in the results of an opinion poll organised by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The survey indicated that 1/3 of the respondents felt that their country was 'overrun by foreigners,' caused by the generous welfare state.[33]

The question over the EU's migration and integration policy, was one of the major factors in the polarisation of votes in the 2016 British referendum. Supporters of Brexit won by a slight margin: 51.89% versus 48.11%.[34] This fairly balanced split appears to persist to the present day (2024), providing conditions that may result in political change caused by subtle changes in voters' mood. These, in turn, are shaped not only by events of national and international scale, but also by the way these events are described in media.

In the context of postmodern societies, the 'societies of the spectacle', as Guy Deborg said, attractive narratives catching viewers' attention, are composed by a significant input of entertainment. These kind of messages and narratives are typical components of infotainment often used in populistic discourses.[35]

THREE SHADES OF POPULISM

Benjamin Moffitt, in *The Global Rise of Populism*, identified six main drivers of populism: frustration, insufficient education, helplessness, perceived inequality, need for

[31] "Merkel wusste 2015, dass 'nicht täglich 10.000 kommen können,'" *Welt*, 30 October 2021, at https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article234744364/Fluechtlingskrise-Merkel-wusste-2015-dass-nicht-taeglich-10-000-kommen-koennen.html, 16 November 2023.

[32] "'Multikulti ist tot!,'" *DW*, 16 October 2010, at https://www.dw.com/de/merkel-erkl%C3%A4rt-multikulti-f%C3%BCr-gescheitert/a-6118143, 3 September 2023; "Has Multiculturalism Failed in Germany?," *BBC*, 18 October 2010, at https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-11562477/, 5 June 2023.

[33] "Merkel Says German Multicultural Society Has Failed," *BBC*, 17 October 2010, at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-11559451, 5 June 2023.

[34] "EU Referendum Results," *The Electoral Commission*, 30 June 2016, at https://web.archive.org/web/20160630063455/https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/find-information-by-subject/elections-and-referendums/upcoming-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/electorate-and-count-information, 7 June 2023.

[35] G. Deborg, *The Society of the Spectacle*, New York 1994.

a change, and anti-democratic liberalism.[36] These are the basic elements of the strategies pursued by populist-oriented political actors who, by drawing a simplistic, 'black and white' picture, reach for contrasting juxtapositions verbalised in oppositional phrases: 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', 'the voice of 'the silent' majority' versus 'the detached from reality minority', 'will of the people' versus 'will of the privileged', 'restoring order' versus 'chaos', 'draining the mad' versus 'mess', and 'anti-immigrant nativism' versus 'authoritarianism/totalitarianism'.[37]

When analysing populist discourse in the three countries, their socio-economic characteristics of recent years need to be taken into account. In the table below, figures for 2022 are presented, including the size of the population, the percentage of immigrants in the total population, the number of immigrants (including refugees) arriving in 2022, the major immigrant groups, GDP per capita, and the approximate annual cost of integrating of one newcomer.

Table 1: Country specifics: population, migrants, integration costs, GDP per capita, 2022.

Country	UK	Sweden	Ireland
Population	67 million	10.5 million	4.3 million
Migrants in the population	15% (9.5 million)	19% (2 million)	14% (769 thousand)
Immigrants* 2022 *Including refugees, **legal**	745,000	103,000	141,000
Main ethnic/national groups of migrants origin	India, Poland, Pakistan, Romania	Poland, India, Germany, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Eritrea	Poland, UK, Lithuania Romania, Latvia, Brazil, Spain, Italy, France, Germany
GDP per capita 2022	45,544 $	55,800 $	104,000 $
Costs of integration per person/per year (approximately)	50,000 euros	14,000 euros	25,000 euros

Sources: "Migrants in the UK: An Overview," *The Migration Observatory*, 9 August 2024, at https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-an-overview, 14 November 2023; "Why Is Immigration at Record Levels since Brexit?," *Sky News*, 7 December 2023, at https://news.sky.com/video/migration-rise-what-do-the-numbers-tell-us-13014552, 20 December 2023; "Migration in Sweden – Statistics & Facts," *Statista*, 10 July 2024, at https://www.statista.com/topics/7687/migration-and-integration-in-sweden,19 September 2024; "It's Costing You Billions," *Migration Watch UK*, 28 September 2022, at https://www.migrationwatchuk.org/news/2022/09/28/its-costing-you-billions/, 14 July 2024; Cunningham P., "Govt estimates Hosting Ukrainian Refugees Next Year Will Cost €2.5bn," *RTE News*, 29 March 2022, at https://www.rte.ie/news/2022/0329/1289013-cabinet/, 14 November 2023.

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[36]   B. Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism...*

[37]   P. Ostiguy, F. Panizza, B. Moffitt (eds), *Populism in Global Perspective: A Performative and Discursive Approach*, New York 2021.

Of the three countries, Sweden has the highest percentage of migrants (19%), which is a relatively high number for Europe generally. However, in this context, Sweden allocates the lowest amount of money for integration. The UK, on the other hand, as the most populous society allocates significant financial support to integration. Finances alone, however, are not enough, as they must be accompanied by political will, backed by the vote of the electorate. And this, as the Brexit referendum showed, is divided and susceptible to narratives carrying a manipulative charge. An example was provided by a series of statements given by Conservative party politicians, including Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, referring to the need to tighten immigration policy, and especially to stop the inflow of illegal migrants arriving on so-called small boats.[38] A complementing idea, strongly criticised by the Labor Party, was expressed in the Rwanda Bill, under which the British government proposed sending illegal migrants to reception centres in Rwanda, from where deportees would be further returned to their countries of origin.[39] Other demands included limiting legal immigration and, in the case of foreign students studying in Britain, granting residence permits exclusively to them, not to accompanying family members. In addition, the need of urgent modification of integration policies was stressed, making integration effective and less costly, meaning that a shortened integration process requires less money spent on supporting immigrants.

The above solutions, as the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak argued, stemmed from common sense, responsibility, sensitivity to the voice of voters, need to safeguard the national interest and as a clear 'deterrent' to potential illegal migrants. This stance was illustrated by speeches made by the prime minister himself and his closest aides during debates in the British parliament, among others.[40]

In Sweden, the anti-immigration discourse, which contributed to the victory of Sweden Democrats (SD, Sverigedemokrater), a party that back in the 1990s, was considered far-right and fascist, with which no one wanted to cooperate, is dominated by slogans referring to the protection of native culture, the preservation of order and security, the fight against rising crime and the ghettoisation fostering it. In addition, calls

[38]   R. Landberg, A. Wickham, "Sunak Says UK Making Progress against 'Small Boat' Migration," *Bloomberg*, 2 January 2024, at https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-01-01/sunak-says-uk-making-progress-against-small-boat-migration, 5 January 2024.

[39]   J. Lawless, "Rishi Sunak Faces a Revolt in the UK Parliament over His Immigration Policy," *PBS News*, 11 December 2023, at https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/rishi-sunak-faces-a-revolt-in-the-uk-parliament-over-his-immigration-policy, 6 February 2024.

[40]   Prime Minister's Office, R. Sunak, "PM's Remarks on Illegal Migration," *gov.uk*, 7 December 2023, at https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-remarks-on-illegal-migration-7-december-2023, 6 February 2024; S. Francis, "Rishi Sunak Pressured to Back Immigration Minister's Migration Plans," *BBC*, 29 September 2023, at https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-67568637, 7 February 2024; M. Honeycombe-Foster, "Rishi Sunak's in Crisis over Immigration: WTF Happens Next?," *Politico*, 11 December 2023, at https://www.politico.eu/article/british-pm-rishi-sunak-crisis-immigration-wtf-happens-next-rwanda-plan/, 8 February 2024; D. Casciani, "Rishi Sunak's Migration Plan Raises Big Questions," *BBC*, 13 December 2022, at https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-63965141, 8 February 2024; A. Wickham, "Bruised Sunak Survives Key Vote on His UK Immigration Policy," *Bloomberg News*, 17 January 2024, at https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-01-17/bruised-sunak-survives-key-vote-on-his-uk-immigration-policy, 8 February 2024.

to counter the emergence of a parallel society were expressed. In the populist narrative, members of the 'parallel' society do not identify with Swedish and Nordic values, which can consequently destabilise the state. The growing costs of integration policies, constantly modified to meet the challenges of reality, are burdening the budget of the state, which is still trying, albeit with difficulty, to realise the assumptions of the welfare state, as defined by the *folkhemmet* formula.[41] Eloquent in this context was the socio-political campaign conducted by SD in 2015, an example of which was seen by users of the Stockholm subway. Interestingly, the demands posted in the subway, which is used by nearly 400,000 people every day,[42] were in English. They were therefore aimed primarily at tourists or visitors to the Swedish capital, where, as in other major cities, begging is a big challenge. By addressing the problem in this way, the SD (in 2024, the second largest party in the Swedish parliament, *Riksdag*) was 'apologising for the mess' that the government, led by the Prime Minister Stefan Löfven (Social Democrats) could not handle.

Picture 1: Stockholm's Underground and SD slogans, 2015

Source: "Sweden: Anger Mounts over Anti-Begging Campaign," *BBC*, 4 August 2015, at https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-33775594, 8 February 2024.

Since then quite a few years have passed, and the anti-immigrant rhetoric has remained. Its tune has been changed and incorporated into the broader public discourse. The softened slogans typical of SD, began to be used by other parties as well, including the Moderate Coalition Party (M, Moderater Samlingspartiet). For the 2022 parliamentary elections, M walked with slogans relating to the state: 'Safer, Greener, Freer' (Säkrare, grönare, friare). They won 68 seats in *Riksdag* out of a possible 349, placing them behind the SD, which received 78 seats.[43] The Christian Democrats and Liberals,

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[41]   M. Banaś (ed.), "Ellen Key i szwedzki 'dom ludu' (folkhemmet)," in *Kobiety w polityce*, Kraków 2017, pp. 197-210.

[42]   "Stockholms Tunnelbana," *People*, at https://people.kth.se/~e95_lra/tunnelbana/gamla/huvud.html, 10 February 2024.

[43]   The other two parties co-forming the government led by Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson (M), are the Christian Democrats (KD) and the Liberals (L); More about the Swedish government: "Sveriges rege-

co-founders of the government, also had references in their pre-election campaigns to 'repairing', 'cleaning up', 'fighting crime' alongside 'supporting the vulnerable' and 'improving health care' (KD),[44] 'renewing Sweden', 'making Sweden safe', 'defending and promoting Swedish values, including language', 'a new liberal integration policy' much more demanding than the existing one (L).[45]

In Ireland, anti-immigration discourse, also directed against refugees from Ukraine, is dominated by slogans phrased somewhat differently, although their meaning is similar to those presented above. The leading themes relate to the housing problem, the inefficient health service, prolonged queues to doctors, the rising cost of living (generated primarily by electricity and rent prices), crowded kindergartens, the lack of immigration and integration policies, the lack of public consultations, regarding the admission of immigrants, including refugees and their spatial distribution, and the fear that 'little Ireland' will not accommodate so many arrivals. The latter two arguments in particular have been and continue to be (2024) raised among supporters of the Sinn Féin and Fianna Fáil parties (83% and 74% respectively). These voices are joined by voters of Fine Gael (70%).[46]

Criticism of the government's actions, including populist arguments, was also voiced by Ireland First and The Irish People, political parties with anti-immigration demands on their agendas. Similar arguments were put forward by The Farmers' Alliance, the nationalist Anti-Corruption Ireland, the Irish Freedom Party and House the Irish First.[47] The reason for the escalating anti-immigrant attitudes was that Ireland, over the course of several years, took in a significant number of immigrants, so that by the end of 2023 their number had reached 74,000 refugees, including 49,227 Ukrainians and 23,382 other asylum seekers.[48] Most of them were housed in public buildings. As tem-

ring," *Regeringskansliets*, at https://www.regeringen.se/sveriges-regering/, 7 July 2024.

[44] "Våra viktigaste frågor," *Kristdemokraterna Leksand*, at https://wp.kristdemokraterna.se/leksand/var--politik/vara-viktigaste-fragor/, 10 March 2024; Kristdemokraterna, *Hela Sverige ska fungera*, Stockholm 2022.

[45] Liberalerna, *Maktskifte för ett nytt Sverige: Liberalernas valmanifest 2022*, Stockholm 2022.

[46] M. Brennan, "Three Out of Four Think Ireland Has Taken Too Many Refugees," *Business Post*, 27 May 2023, at https://www.businesspost.ie/news/red-c-poll-three-out-of-four-think-ireland-has-taken-too-many-refugees/, 12 March 2024.

[47] S. McDermott, "Three New Anti-Immigrant Parties Have Registered to Stand in Irish Elections – But Who Are They?," *The Journal*, 29 January 2024, at https://www.thejournal.ie/ireland-anti-immigrant-far-right-parties-elections-2024-6281821-Jan2024/, 12 March 2024; R. Carroll, "There Is No Room': Anti-Immigration Protesters March in Dublin," *The Guardian*, 22 January 2023, at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/22/anti-immigration-protesters-march-dublin-ireland-refugees, 12 March 2024; "Ireland's Far-Right Groups Influenced by American Far-Right Extremists, New Report Finds," *Irish Central*, 22 August 2022, at https://www.irishcentral.com/news/ireland-far-right--hate-extremist-groups, 14 March 2024.

[48] "President Michael D Higgins Condemns Those 'Sowing Hate and Building Fear' around Refugees as Poll Shows 56pc Believe Ireland 'Took in Too Many,'" *Irish Independent*, 5 February 2023, at https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/politics/president-michael-d-higgins-condemns-those-sowing-hate-and-building-fear-around-refugees-as-poll-shows-56pc-believe-ireland-took-in-too-many/42328205.html, 14 March 2024.

porary accommodation abandoned factories were used, also offices quickly adapted to residential functions. Selected hotels hosted refugees whose stay was financed by the state funds. In some schools, closed for longer holiday breaks, refugees were accommodated which raised public concern about the proper use of the facilities.[49] Anthony Connaghan, Sinn Féin Councillor in Ballymun-Finglas, Dublin, pointed out that the public protest, sometimes even taking very radical forms (arson, criminal threats) was due to a lack of proper communication and information sent from the government.[50] This was exploited by far-right groups, including the National Party, which through manipulation generated narratives fostering resentment against refugees and migrants in general.

The leading themes in the populist argumentation observed in Sweden, Ireland and the UK, coincide. They differ only in the details, corresponding to the individual circumstances of the three countries. The table below summarises the main leitmotifs in the anti-migration discourse present in the three societies.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the presented material, allows to propose several conclusions:

1) growing resentment toward immigrants, including refugees, can be identified, including societies that until now have shown a relatively high level of openness to newcomers from other countries and cultures;

2) despite the ongoing war in Ukraine and rising international tensions, refugees are becoming the target of protest and sometimes even aggressive behavior, which may be a symptom of waning empathy towards groups in need of international protection; this in turn may be derived from a growing sense of insecurity among members of the host society, caused by the rising cost of living and the housing crisis, as well as an overburdened health care system;

3) well-established democracies such as Ireland, the UK and Sweden may serve as indicators of the social, political, cultural and economic trends for other European countries, especially from the east-central Europe, and for the European Union in the context of the global power shift.

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[49] P. McGarry, R. McGreevy, "Anti-Immigrant Rally in Finglas 'Totally Unrepresentative' of Community, Locals Say," *The Irish Times*, 2 February 2023, at https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/social-affairs/2023/02/02/anti-immigrant-rally-in-finglas-totally-unrepresentative-of-community-locals-say/, 12 March 2024; A. Blaney, "Woman Arrested after Protest over Temporary Refugee Stay in Drimnagh School," *Irish Independent*, 4 January 2023, at https://www.independent.ie/regionals/dublin/dublin-news/woman-arrested-after-protest-over-temporary-refugee-stay-in-drimnagh-school/42262726.html, 12 March 2024.

[50] P. McGarry, R. McGreevy, "Anti-Immigrant...".

Table 2: Main motives in the political discourse of three countries, 2020 – 2024.

UK	Sweden	Ireland
Too high number of immigrations over 20 years	Slow integration and non-integration of migrants	Housing & accommodation crisis (since 2015)
Rising reception costs	Rising costs of integration	Homelessness
Housing problem & rising living costs	Parallel societies	Ireland 'too small' to host more migrants/refugees
Low-skilled migrants affecting labor market & wages	Rising crime	Ignoring native voice & opinion (especially on the local level)
Need to grow native talents instead of importing	Protection of the Swedish/Nordic values	
Preventing the UK from facing de facto the EU problem (illegal migration)		No clear plans & strategies (migration policy)
		Overcrowded children's facilities
'One In – One out'* Zero net migration		Longer waiting time in health care system
		Unequal distribution of refugees across European countries

Source: author's analysis based on parliamentary debates and mainstream media coverage (BBC, Sky News, The Independent, The Guardian, STV, Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet, RTE, Irish Times); * Richard Tice on air BBC Radio 4, 24 November 2023.

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