

Newsletter

No. 2, July 2016

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Second year achievements

By the second year of COST Action IS1308, we have achieved a lot. In fact, in the progress review conducted by the Action Rapporteur it was concluded that: "This Cost Action has done everything it promised, and is even a bit ahead of schedule". In other words, we are making sufficient progress on the MoU objectives and deliverables.

The key objective of our action is to *produce up-to-date knowledge on mediated political populism via a coordinated, comparative and comprehensive scientific effort*. This objective is already partially achieved, by the establishment of this action and our strategic and proven recruitment of dedicated scholars into our network. Among the first outputs which help achieve this objective is the review of existing relevant material and literature, which in year two has resulted in our first action book. In this book, based on the effort of 60 dedicated academics, we offer reviews of current research and discussion of populist political communication in 24 countries. The three working groups have also provided a concluding chapter each, which provide an overview of the current state of affairs related to the processes of populist political communication including political actors, media and citizens. We have started to prepare meetings with stakeholders to disseminate the insight the book has provided.

In year two of the action we have also come a long way in defining an agenda and direction for future research. At the two main events of year two, first in Odense in August of 2015, then in Cracow in April of 2016, we have worked on research designs and methods to study the shortcomings identified in the literature. Based on this work, we have prepared templates for research which will be carried out in year three. We have however, already made a good start with integrating new research findings to produce coherent

knowledge and to revitalize research. In this regard, the input provided by the early stage researcher think tank, in continuing the work towards a special issue and proposing a pre-conference at the 2016 ICA meeting <http://www.icahdq.org/conf/2016/PopulismCFP.asp>, has been very valuable. New and interesting research findings were also presented and discussed at the Action Workshop in Cracow.

Due to organizational changes in COST, year two was reduced by two months. This had some implications for the amount of Short Term Scientific Missions which was completed in our second year, but we are confident that most of these missions will be carried out in year three instead.

Overall report from the Cracow meeting

The Cracow event on April 7-9, 2016 attracted more participants than ever. Over three very intense days 60 academics from 27 European countries discussed ongoing and future research on populist political communication at the new campus of the Jagiellonian University. Some of these participants were invited as experts to provide insight into the specific Polish context, and to discuss how the governing Law & Justice Party, identified as a populist party by some Polish scholars, recently had influenced Polish communication and media structure. In addition to the regular MC meeting and WG meetings, we also organized our first Action Workshop. The first part of this workshop was dedicated to the discussion of design and methods, which proved to be very useful and constructive for the later discussions in the working groups. The second half of the day was spent discussing ongoing research. In

this section, a total of 11 papers were presented, many authored by early career investigators. We are very grateful for all the hard work the local organizers Agnieszka Stępińska and Agnieszka Hess had put into preparing and running this event. We all felt extremely welcome.



5th COST meeting at Jagiellonian University in Cracow, April 2016

News from the Working Groups

Working Group 1

WG1 on Political Actors as Populist Communicators made excellent progress on the detailed codebook for all countries as well as collecting feedback on the collection of material and the coding instrument. This codebook in large parts adapted from the codebook developed by Sven Engesser, Frank Esser and Sina Blassnig. The general idea is to be able to compare the political actors strategies with their presence in the media, analysed by WG2. The content analysis will include Facebook-posts and Tweets from the official and national party accounts of all parties in the country that have an official Facebook- and Twitter-account and official national press releases from all parties in the country. The Cracow meeting Post-Cracow, the work on coordinating the content analyses and the set up for the coder training will be a top priority and the Prague meeting will be an important meeting to begin the concrete research. Some members of the WG1 aim to conduct a qualitative interview research; meeting actors to better understand their strategies.

Working Group 2

WG2 on The Media and Populism made excellent progress on the detailed codebook for all countries as well as collecting feedback on the collection of material and the coding instrument. The next step will be a meeting with Jesper about a potential WG1/WG2 cooperation and about potential solutions to the feasibility problems raised. We are confident to work out an arrangement that will make

Prague an even more productive meeting. We will keep you updated!

Working Group 3

WG3, Citizens and Populism, has spent the second year of the Action preparing a cross-country experiment. Following up on a brainstorm session in Odense, the WG split up into three task forces that designed a survey as well as stimuli, collected a list of country characteristics that could be used as contextual data in the analysis of the experimental data, and contacted survey companies for offers. An additional *task force* looked at the success of populist parties across Europe and linked that to several variables indicating a country's economic situation. In Cracow we had a very productive meeting in which we discussed the input of the task forces, and decided to move on with the data collection. Moreover, many of the countries participating in the COST action have indicated their willingness to take part in the experiment, even those that are not member of WG3. The summer of 2016 will be used to conduct pilot studies in two countries, and translate the survey experiment, after which the experiment will field by the end of the year.



Jörg Matthes illustrates the design of the experiment

Summary from presentations at the Cracow workshop

Best practice in comparative research

In this plenary presentation, Frank Esser discussed the opportunities and challenges of comparative communication research. He started off by explicating the foundations and basic logic of comparative research as well as its key scientific goals. With regard to practical research steps, he discussed the relevance of country selection,

confirmed the connection between populist attitudes and negative attitudes toward the media. But this cross-sectional and explorative study is not able to explain the causal direction of the relation, so that more research is needed to understand populist attitudes. Among the same line, Ondřej Cisař and Václav Štětka presented their study on “Dissatisfied citizens? Searching for determinants of electoral support for populist parties in the Czech Republic”. They’ve showed that there are three roads to political populism in the Czech Republic: illegitimacy, political dissatisfaction and alienation from politics. To conclude this panel, Christian Schemer presented his team methodological paper on “validation of a populist attitudes measure for public opinion surveys”, providing evidence of construct and convergent validity of a second-order model of populist attitudes that is made up of three subdimensions: anti-establishment attitudes, demand for unrestricted sovereignty of the people, and the belief in the homogeneity of the people. They also demonstrated that populist attitudes are best conceived as a multi-dimensional construct.

First Action book: *Populist Political Communication in Europe*



First Action book

Editors: Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann, Jesper Strömbäck & Claes de Vreese

The first book produced by this action will be published in the summer of 2016 as part of the series [Routledge Research in Communication Studies](#). Working with this book has helped us advance conceptual clarity in research on populist communication (our Action’s

second objective). Despite a great variety of definitions and definitional criteria in the literature on populism, we conclude that there seem to be a growing consensus that the communicative construction of “the people” should be regarded as the key component of populist messages, with anti-elitism and anti-outgroup stances serving as additional elements. An important contribution is therefore not only that we develop coherent definitions and theoretical conceptualizations of the structures and dynamics of populist political communication in Europe, but also that we have started to provide state of the art knowledge and understanding of the patterns and mechanisms of populist political communication in European societies. There is however, tremendous

variation in the type and nature of populist actors, as well as the role of the media. The preliminary evidence does suggest however, that media often are critical towards populist actors out of concern for democracy, but that populist actors per se do not seem to suffer from negative news coverage. One of the important contributions for academics is that the book clearly identifies current gaps in the research literature, perhaps particularly related to the effects of populist messages on citizens’ attitudes.

COST Training School in Bucharest

“Disentangling populism: Reception and effects of populist communication”



Credit photo: <https://unknownbucharest.com/the-romanian-athenaeum/>

On May 8-12, 2017, the Training School on “Disentangling populism: Reception and effects of populist communication” will be organized in Bucharest (Romania) by the National University of Political and Administrative Studies. As a part of the COST Action IS1308 *Populist Political Communication in Europe*, this Training School seeks to further advance theoretical and methodological knowledge in the field of populism research, particularly with respect to reception and effects of populism communication.

The Training School comprises 5-day long lectures and a workshop combined, which will give the participants the opportunity to attend talks on different topics relevant to populism research and to take part in an intensive workshop. Renowned scholars will deliver lectures on topics related to *the conceptualization of populist communication, populism and the media, effects of populist communication*.

The School targets mainly young researchers across Europe (PhD students, post-docs, Early Stage Researchers), interested in intensive training in populist-related topics and research methodologies.

Panel on populism at the 2016 ECPR Conference in Prague

Nicoleta Corbu and Agnieszka Hess, representing Romania and Poland in the COST Action, will co-chair a panel on "Populism and the Europeanization of Political Competition" at this year's ECPR Conference in Prague, as part of a Section called "What Europe? Researching Consequences of a Diverse Europeanization of National Public Spheres". The panel aims at answering challenging questions related to the topic of populist communication, such as: What makes populism appealing to Europeans and why? How are populist themes covered by the media? Do media support or hinder populism? Why have some of Europe's most renowned populist parties been more successful than others? The authors who will present papers come from Romania, Poland, Italy, Germany and Austria. Cristina Cremonesi, who has recently joined the COST Action and Elena Negrea-Busuioc, also a member of the COST team, will contribute papers to the panel.

Future meetings – date and place

Third year

WG meetings, Prague, 8-9 November 2016
MC and WG meetings/Action workshop, Paris, 23-25 March 2017

Fourth year

Training School, Bucharest, 8-12 May 2017
WG meetings, Sarajevo, Bosnia Herzegovina, Autumn 2017
MC and WG meetings/Action conference, Madrid, Spring 2018

Social media/contact

<https://twitter.com/populistcomm>
<https://www.facebook.com/populistcommunication>
<http://www.ntnu.edu/web/populistcommunication/contact>



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