

POPULIST DISCOURSE AND DEMOCRACY **POPULISMUS**

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
'POPULISM AND DEMOCRACY'
26-28 JUNE 2015**

BACKGROUND PAPER

In preparation for the international conference organized within the framework of POPULISMUS (*Populism and Democracy*, Thessaloniki, 26-28 June 2015), the POPULISMUS research team has drafted a background paper summarizing the principal thematic axes of the research conducted, outlining its methodology and implementation, presenting a selection of the main findings up to this stage and raising questions to be further explored and debated at the conference in order to facilitate future research.



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INTRODUCTION

Operating on a plurality of levels (conceptual, theoretical, methodological, analytical), the POPULISMUS research project aims at the global comparative mapping of populist discourse in a bid to critically reassess the category of ‘populism’ and to develop an approach capable of reorienting the empirical analysis of populist politics. Building on the theoretical tradition established by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe – the so-called ‘Essex School’ of discourse analysis – POPULISMUS adopts a discursive methodological framework in order to: (1) explore the multiple expressions of populist politics, (2) highlight the need to study the antagonism between populism and anti-populism and (3) assess the effects this has on the quality of democracy.

In order to address the multiple challenges involved in this complex endeavour, POPULISMUS has orchestrated a dense web of activities aimed at the conceptual, analytical and interpretative enhancement of our capacity to investigate populist discourse and its relation to democracy. The full development and completion of the project has been envisaged in four stages. A preparatory stage (Work-Package 1) functioned as a crucial springboard for the project, since it allowed POPULISMUS researchers to: (1) survey existing approaches to populism, as they are presented in the relevant international literature, tracing both lacunae and promising insights in need of further development, (2) establish a genealogy of populist discourse, from its historical origins up until today, registering the multiplicity of its political expressions and articulations, (3) develop research skills on discourse analysis and other techniques and articulate a preliminary methodological strategy for the analysis of populist discourse with reference to the conceptual and theoretical arsenal of the ‘Essex School’, its potential extension and enrichment. Last but not least, a crucial part of WP1 involved the organization of a three-day international methodological workshop with the participation of international and Greek speakers (incl. figures central within the Essex School paradigm like Chantal Mouffe and Jason Glynos) that specialize on the project’s field of study (11-13 July 2014).

Within the scope of Work-Package 2, members of the research team visited a number of countries considered hotspots of populist politics (Venezuela and Argentina in Latin America; the US; France, the Netherlands, Spain and Greece in Europe) in order to advance our knowledge through the accumulation of discursive materials and historical information as well as through a series of interviews and research meetings with local informants (mainly experts but also activists). The data gathered during field research have then been processed and analyzed in dialogue with the bibliographical review of WP1. In the third stage of the project, Work-Package 3, the methodology of discourse analysis, which has been developed within WP1, as well as other associated methods and techniques, have been applied in the analysis of textual and interview materials as well as other linguistic and non-linguistic data, within a comparative and historical interpretative matrix. In particular, the team has drafted three thematic studies: (1) *Contemporary left-wing populism in Latin America*, (2) *Extreme right-wing populism in Europe*, (3) *Populism and anti-populism in times of crisis: Challenges for democracy*. These thematic studies (WP3) will broaden our knowledge on the phenomenon in question, advance the analytical scope of our approach, and, last but not least, demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of the discourse-analytical model, allowing for necessary revisions.

Running parallel to the three aforementioned research stages, Work-Package 4 aims at articulating our final research conclusions into a series of publications. Here, special emphasis is also placed on the dissemination of the final conclusions and overall research findings through: (1) the organization of an international conference on populism and democracy to take place in Thessaloniki between 26-28 June 2015, (2) the official launching of the online Observatory now elevated into a fully functional interactive platform, and, (3) the completion, presentation at the conference and final submission for publication of the scientific papers/articles produced by the research team.

WP	Duration	Activities
1	Months 1 to 6	Bibliographical research & methodological orientation
2	Months 5 to 9	Interviews & data collection in the field – Global mapping of populist discourses
3	Months 10 to 17	Thematic studies: Analysis and interpretation
4	Months 1 to 18	Dissemination activities, drawing of conclusions, preparation of publications

In order to facilitate the proceedings of the international conference, the research team has prepared this background paper summarizing the principal thematic axes of the research conducted, outlining its methodology and implementation, presenting a selection of the main findings up to this stage and raising questions to be further explored and debated at the conference in order to facilitate future research. The paper, in which bibliographical references have been kept to a minimum, will become available through the POPULISMUS Observatory and will be circulated in advance to conference speakers and participants.

I. THEMATIC AXES & SCOPE OF POPULISMUS: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, CONCEPTUAL & THEORETICAL INSIGHTS

The bibliographical survey conducted in the first stage of the POPULISMUS project – encompassing both the available literature on the history of populism as well as on the theories advanced to explain it – has highlighted a series of difficulties in employing a slippery and unstable concept such as ‘populism’, difficulties that emerge simultaneously at the levels of symbolic and historical variability, antagonistic representation and comparative application.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY (deliverable 1.1)	
1.	HISTORY OF POPULISM(S)
1.1.	Narodniki: Russian populism and the ‘turn to the people’
1.2.	The American People’s Party and its ‘descendants’: Populism in the capitalist spotlight
1.3.	Latin America: Old and new populisms in the semi-periphery
1.4.	Contemporary European far right, nationalism, differential racism, right-wing radicalism, right-wing populism: Aspects of a complex phenomenon
1.5.	The Greek case: Populism in post-authoritarian Greece
2.	THEORIES OF POPULISM
2.1.	The social bases of populism: Transitional context, form of organisation, class structure, movement profile
2.2.	From social base to ideology: Populism and nationalism
2.3.	The degree zero of ideology: Populism as political style
2.4.	From ideology and style to discourse; from the social bases to political logic: The contribution of Ernesto Laclau
2.5.	The denial of theory: Margaret Canovan’s phenomenological typology and its contemporary revival(s)

Up to now, the lack of a sufficiently flexible yet rigorous theoretical and conceptual framework and the neglect of the need for a comparative and genealogical registering of historical populism(s) has largely resulted in the production of isolated case-studies employing diverse theoretical perspectives and methodologies and thus forestalling the emergence of a comprehensive mapping and interpretation of populist politics at the global level. Responding to this challenge, POPULISMUS seeks to develop an innovative hermeneutics of populism able to

document, organize and interpret in a comprehensive and rigorous way this complex and expanding body of empirical material. In order to effectively deal with such problems it is important to define ‘populism’ using criteria able to capture the variability peculiar to this phenomenon. Which could these criteria be? And how can they be identified? Given the failure of purely phenomenological approaches denying the importance of theory (see deliverable 1.1, section 2.5), these are questions only a true theory of populism can answer: employing a discursive *methodological* framework (Essex School), the POPULISMUS research team has aimed from the beginning at the articulation of such a theory, adopting a *minimal criteria* approach.

METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION (deliverable 1.2)	
1.	HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE ‘PEOPLE’ AND POPULISM
2.	STATE OF THE ART: LIMITS, IMPASSES, CRITIQUE
2.1.	Analytical limitations
2.1.1.	Example: pathologies of euro-centrism
	<i>Conceptual reductionism</i>
	<i>Geographical isolationism</i>
2.1.2.	The comparative dimension: conceptual implications
2.2.	Theoretical impasses
2.2.1.	Substantive/normative orientations
	<i>Example: Paul Taggart and the populist ‘heartland’</i>
2.2.2.	The reluctant turn to a formal/structural approach
	<i>Kirk Hawkins: from rational choice theory to discourse</i>
	<i>Old and new ‘mainstream’</i>
3.	DISCOURSE THEORY, POLITICAL ANALYSIS AND POPULIST DISCOURSE
3.1.	The Essex School
3.1.1.	Discourse analysis and the Essex School
3.1.2.	Conceptual apparatus: discourse, articulation, nodal points, empty signifiers
3.1.3.	Discursive logics: equivalence & difference
3.2.	The discursive analysis of populism
3.2.1.	Minimal criteria: equivalential structure and the location of ‘the people’
3.2.2.	Analytical implications
	<i>Example: Nationalism, the extreme right and populism</i>
	<i>Crisis, populism and Laclau’s dislocation</i>
	<i>Cleavage theory and the populist/anti-populist divide</i>
3.3.	The limits of formalism?
	<i>The danger of ‘degreeism’</i>
	<i>Affect, emotion and discourse</i>
	<i>Verticality/horizontality & multitude/people</i>
3.4.	Implications for democracy

Who is populist?

Focusing on the discursive plane, the inquiry orchestrated by POPULISMUS is firmly located within the field of representation in both its meanings: as symbolic/discursive as well as political representation. Within this broad framework, it focuses on representations claiming to express popular interests, identities and demands and, especially, on the complex and antagonistic language games developed around such claims: games involving recognition and idealization, rejection and demonization. Both these attitudes can take a variety of forms as the history of populist politics reveals. Recognition can proceed from an emancipatory embrace of egalitarian

demands, but idealization can also stem from a reduction of the popular to the ethnic core of the nation. Likewise, rejection can involve distrust of the particular ways in which popular demands are formulated and of the agents (movements, parties or leaders) putting them forward or a deeper rejection of popular sovereignty itself as the foundation of democracy. As a result, both populist and anti-populist discourses can acquire progressive and regressive, democratic and anti-democratic forms.

At any rate, drawing energy from deep social divisions, by the splitting of every social configuration into part and whole and the dialectics of inclusion/exclusion it enacts, these games invariably result in the division of political space into distinct (political and intellectual) camps, one ostensibly populist and the other anti-populist. In this sense, no discursive inquiry can proceed without registering the importance of the dialectic between identity and difference, without studying anti-populism together with populism. In fact, to the extent that pejorative uses of the term have predominated in recent decades – while in the past, movements and parties like the American populists have called themselves like that (see deliverable 1.1, section 1.2) – populism is often a construction of anti-populist discourse. So who is populist after all?

Utilizing the innovative work of Ernesto Laclau, POPULISMUS has employed a rigorous yet flexible method of identifying populist discourses and distinguishing them from non-populist ones. It has thus attempted to remedy methodological deficiencies, arguing in favour of a ‘minimal criteria’ approach. In particular, these should include: (1) prominent references to ‘the people’ (or equivalent signifiers, e.g. the ‘underdog’) and the ‘popular will’ and to the need to truly represent it, (2) an antagonistic perception of the socio-political terrain as divided between ‘the people’/the underdog and ‘the elites’/the establishment.

What kind of populist?

Having registered the risks entailed in any normative approach (see deliverable 1.2, section 2.2.1), POPULISMUS starts from the symbolic reality of political struggles, from the uses of the ‘people’ and ‘populism’ in public discourse. It has activated a series of filters capturing and documenting such uses (from qualitative interviews to press clipping collection and twitter tracking tools) and inquiring into the historically variable discursive representation of social and political division and the political stakes involved in it. What are the particular signifiers used to express the two poles opposing each other? (for example: people, underdog, class, multitude, etc. and, on the other side, establishment, elite, ruling class, etc.) What types of (democratic) representation is preferred by the discourses involved in such oppositions: elitist, participatory, plebiscitary, direct? What forms of political organization are prioritized by the defenders of the popular pole (vertical, horizontal) and what is the preference of those defending the role of the elites (technocratic, administrative)? How is it possible to account for the ups and downs in the choreography and the uneven intensity of these language games? Is this choreography overdetermined by social and political crises?

It becomes obvious that this line of research breaks with the short-sighted euro-centrism identifying populism with the extreme right (see deliverable 1.1, sections 1.4 & 2.2) and embraces arguments positing the existence of both left-wing and right-wing, inclusionary and exclusionary populism(s). On a first level then, POPULISMUS was designed as one of the first international research projects placing emphasis on the study of left-wing, inclusionary populisms in a comparative and cross-regional perspective, especially highlighting its new European manifestations. On a second level, however, it invested in the development of a methodological framework able to provide adequate criteria to distinguish populism from ideologies, discourses and movements that include references to the people in political projects that are predominantly nationalist, racist, authoritarian, etc.

How deeply populist?

At any rate, however, the question of the architectonics of discursive articulation cannot exhaust our inquiry into the hegemonic appeal and political function of populist and anti-populist discourses. In fact, especially in

Laclau's late work (2005a, 2005b), the Essex School has made a genuine effort to take into account the force of discursive identification on top of its form. This force, which operates at a predominantly passionate, somatic, affective level, aims at investing discourse with an intensity establishing long-term and salient attachments, and can be discussed in terms of the role of charisma, the value of leadership, as well as the differential investment of distinct political projects.

Such uneven investment is visible in the long-term popular attachment enjoyed by particular populist leaders (the case of Peron is revealing; see deliverable 1.1, section 1.3) but is clearly not shared by all of them. It may also underpin the long-term hegemony of certain 'populisms in power' while restricting others to a short-term success while in opposition. At any rate, how is emotion and affectivity to be thoroughly articulated with a discursive logic? And how is this articulation to guide the empirical political analysis of populist phenomena? How can one evaluate Laclau's orientation in articulating the two up to now and what new theoretical resources can assist this process? What will be the results of this articulation in terms of establishing the status of the affective dimension in populist identification? Last but not least, what role does this orientation ascribe to the leader as a physical person and, most importantly, to her/his name? Here, additional help can be provided by innovative explanations of charisma such as the one put forward by the social anthropologist James Scott.

Populism, anti-populism and democracy

By placing populism at the centre of any politics of (democratic) representation, by disputing the exclusive euro-centric link between populism and the extreme right, POPULISMUS was bound to take very seriously the crucial question put forward by Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser (2012): should populism be considered as a *threat* or as a *corrective* to democracy? Or maybe as both? And under which conditions? Furthermore, what if what is at stake here is the antagonism between different conceptions of democracy (radical/participatory vs. elitist)? Especially in times of crisis, when ruling elites fail to deal with economic frustration and social dislocation, allowing thus the crisis to develop into a crisis of representation, calls for a radicalization of democracy are often heard only to be denounced as 'populist'. And yet, if popular sovereignty and representation have been the victims of the post-democratic, technocratic transformation of liberal democracies in an age of advanced globalization (see Crouch 2004, Mouffe 2013), isn't populism symptomatic of the need for a new type of democratization?

II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

POPULISMUS has vowed to operationalize the minimal criteria and the relevant conceptual apparatus put forward by the Essex School in order to utilize them in the comparative analysis of a series of populist phenomena. It energized a research design involving an extension of the methodological scope of the Essex School articulating it, among others, with qualitative research methods, computer-assisted textual analysis and even experimenting with survey techniques, in order to increase its intra-disciplinary as well as its inter-disciplinary appeal and acceptance, corroborate its premises, validate its conclusions, and engage with any required additions and amendments. It becomes obvious that such methodological hybridization moves beyond all existing disciplinary and theoretical cross-fertilizations between discourse theory and other traditions (from semiotics and deconstruction to post-analytical philosophy and psychoanalysis).

As already stated, from a methodological point of view, the Essex School highlights the importance of ascertaining whether a given discursive practice under examination is: (1) articulated around the nodal point 'the people' or other (non-populist or anti-populist) nodal points, and, (2) to what extent the representation of society it offers is predominantly antagonistic, dividing society into two main blocs along equivalential lines: the establishment, the power block versus the underdog, 'the people' (in opposition to dominant political discourses asserting the continuity of the social fabric and prioritizing non-antagonistic technocratic solutions). The units, the building blocks, utilized in the articulatory practices constructing political discourses and identities constitute

the ‘data’ collected and analyzed. These include but are not limited to: ‘speeches, reports, manifestos, historical events, interviews, policies, ideas, even organizations and institutions’ (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000: 4). Starting from the analysis of available textual material, POPULISMUS has extended this list to encompass the findings of qualitative research (especially semi-structured interviews with experts and activists), corpora produced through computer-assisted text analysis methods and, last but not least, survey questionnaires, something that has not been much practiced within the Essex School literature.

POPULISMUS is thus set to advance further the cross-fertilization between the Essex School, qualitative techniques and corpus-based approaches as well as other orientations within this field, something that is anticipated to enhance our conceptual apparatus, enrich our research tools as well as help us develop web-based procedures related to the development of a user-friendly interactive Observatory open to registered researchers of populism. Last but not least, by establishing a much-needed *triangulation*, such cross-fertilization is set to strengthen the validation of our findings. The first results of this endeavour will be presented at the POPULISMUS international conference.

Qualitative research focusing on expert interviews

Members of the research team engaged in a series of research visits aimed at collecting data and conducting interviews and research meetings on the subject of populism and its effects on democracy. A fuller knowledge of the situation on the ground in areas considered epicentres of populist mobilizations was thus established. To accomplish this objective, POPULISMUS researchers have conducted 50 semi-structured in depth expert interviews in Spain (3), the Netherlands (11), Greece (3), France (3), Belgium (2), USA (10), Venezuela (6), and Argentina (12), combining three different types of expert interview:

- *Exploratory expert interview*, during which the researcher is at the phase of preliminary research and orientation within a field that might be recent or lacking relevant literature (e.g. the interviews with Spanish academics about the PODEMOS party).
- *Systematizing expert interview*, during which one aims at a systematic and very specific drawing of information concerning a specific subject on which an expert is considered an ‘authority’ (e.g. the interviews with populism experts like Dick Pels, Gerrit Voerman and Tjitske Akkerman in the Netherlands).
- *Theory-generating expert interview*. With this type of interview we insert a reflexive element in our methodology, since the ‘expert’ per se is regarded now as a subject of research, with the researcher focusing on the specific systems of interpretation and analysis that he/she utilizes (e.g. the interviews with the philosophers Jacques Rancière in France and Simon Critchley in the US) (Bogner & Menz 2009: 46-47, 72-73).

This method was combined with 36 semi-structured in depth interviews with politicians and activists involved in populist movements, the analysis of documents collected in the field as well as participant observation in political and party offices, research institutes, museums, faculties of higher education as well as archives.

Last but not least, some of the expert interviews have undergone further editing, in collaboration with the interviewees, and amended versions of them have been made available to the public through the POPULISMUS Observatory (see *POPULISMUS Interventions* series), with the aim to share with the broader research community the new information, hypotheses and insights that were produced through this process (see Critchley 2015, Voerman 2015).

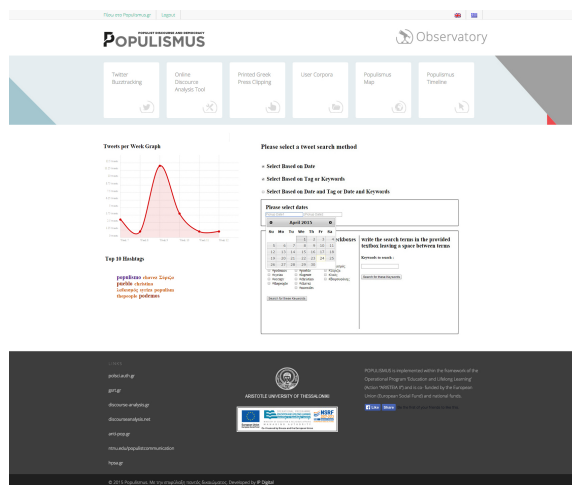
RESEARCH VISITS: INTERVIEWS				
Country	Date	Expert Interviews	Activist Interviews	Total
Spain	15-21/09/2014	3	7	10
Netherlands	22-28/09/2014	11	3	14
Greece	30/9-2/10/2014 & 15-18/12/2014	3	7	10
France	11-17/10/2014	5	6	11
USA	15-24/10/2014	10	4	14
Venezuela	17-26/10/2014	6	5	11
Argentina	18-27/10/2014	12	4	16
Total		50	36	86

Corpus based computer assisted text analysis

In the last few years, it has been proposed that corpus driven lexicometric procedures can also greatly assist in enriching the methodological scope of the Essex School; thus, in his thoughtful analysis of francophonie, Georg Glasze has argued that such methods could provide the Essex School with a more rigorous methodology (Glasze 2007: 663-4). Hence, in developing its interactive internet-based Observatory of populist discourse, POPULISMUS purports to explore a series of computer-assisted text analysis methods that may be of use in this field. Two such tools are currently being developed and will be presented at the official launching of the Observatory during the international conference:

- *Web-based tweets collection and analysis tool with embodied Twitter API*

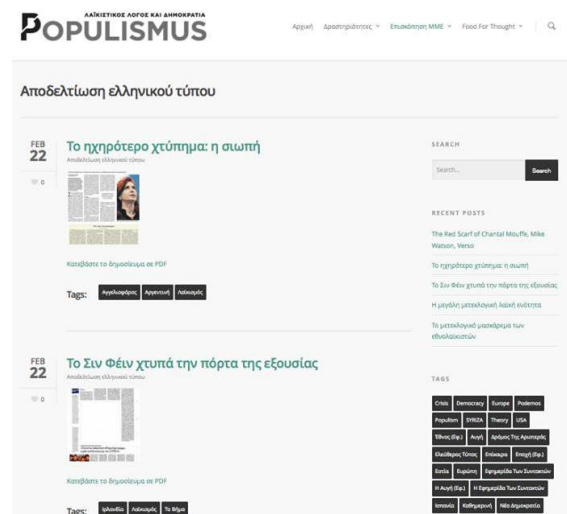
This tool has been designed, within the scope of the POPULISMUS web-based Observatory, in order to collect tweets from all over the world, selecting only those which contain specific keywords according to a keyword list (associated with ‘populism’ and ‘democracy’). The list contains words from three different languages as we decided to gather tweets in English, Spanish and Greek only. When a tweet contains a specific keyword it is saved in our database automatically. The Twitter API allows us to open a streaming channel and gather all the available tweets in real time. All tweets are saved temporarily in a database and then each one is parsed and if it contains a matched keyword then in it is stored permanently. A researcher may select to present tweets by date, by a list of predefined tags or both. Furthermore, the user can download all of them in a simple text file. We also provide a tag cloud which displays the top-15 tags gathered and a graph which shows the number of tweets for the weeks chosen.



- *Web-based text analysis tool*

With the text analysis tool we provide the user an application allowing her/him to view how words and phrases are used in their own text files. The user can enter her/his simple text file by uploading it to the website and then the application runs text analysis and concordancing procedures. These texts may be a sum of tweets which the user downloaded previously from the Twitter API or any other text files (corpus). After uploading the text file, the user has to include specific keywords (single words or phrases) in which s/he is interested (for example 'populism', 'the people'). The output takes many different forms. The most simple output is a list of phrases or sentences, which include the specific keywords given by the user. The user gets a list of phrases or sentences with the search word or phrase centered. This allows someone to look for patterns, such as whether the word usually or frequently comes at the beginning of a sentence or whether it is followed by certain words, like prepositions. In addition, a word counter is in operation, which presents all the different words contained in a text file and their frequencies.

More specifically, in the framework of the POPULISMUS Project we are also monitoring the Greek printed media, collecting automatically all the articles containing certain keywords relative to populism. Then, with the use of an OCR program we are producing a plain text document for the articles of every day, automatically importing the articles into a corpus, which can be analyzed with the use of our text analysis tool.



Quantitative methods focusing on candidate surveys

It is true that the theoretical and methodological output of the Essex School has not been thus far tested through quantitative measures of analysis. Thus, combining the Essex School conceptual toolkit with quantitative methods, and especially ones that are based on surveys, constitutes a timely priority as well as a considerable challenge. In particular, in a bid to enrich the work published in the available quantitative populism literature with insights from a predominantly discursive approach inspired by the Essex School, we have constructed in collaboration with Associate Professor Ioannis Andreadis (School of Political Sciences, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) an index using statements which (1) are constructed around the nodal point 'the people', and (2) reflect a perception/representation of society as divided between two hostile camps: the people against the elite. Our first research question was the following: can we use this theoretically informed battery and the resulting populism index to discriminate between populist and non-populist parties? A second one followed: Can we use these and additional survey items to discriminate between left-wing and right-wing populism? By employing such quantitative means, we purport to further consolidate certain theses on two levels: (1) regarding the

distinctive character of populist and non-populist parties, and (2) regarding the sharp (?) difference between populist parties of the Left and the Right.

The recent elections in Greece on 25 January 2015 has provided an opportunity to include the battery in the questionnaire of the Greek Candidate Study 2015 which targets a substantial group of party candidates and gives the opportunity to collect a large N sample that is adequate for most statistical methods. More specifically, the first invitations to participate in the surveys were sent on 16 February 2015 to a first group of candidate MPs and on 18 February 2015 to a second group. A few days later, on 27 February 2015, the first reminder was sent to the candidate MPs of both groups. The findings up to now comprise the results of a preliminary analysis of the data collected until 8 April 2014. The data collection effort continues (e.g. a second reminder was sent on the 19th of April 2015). The figures based on the final dataset may be slightly different and will, at any rate, be presented during the POPULISMUS international conference (Thessaloniki, 26-28 June 2015).

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Qualitative interviews

Within the preceding theoretical, conceptual and methodological framework, qualitative interviews were organized around topics reflecting the thematic axes and orientation of POPULISMUS. Principal interview themes included the following: populism and ‘the people’ (people vs. populism or people with populism?); contents and uses of populism (appeals/interpellations, populism/anti-populism, populism and democracy in crisis); right-wing vs. left-wing populism (discursive architectonics: how populist is right-wing populism?); people, nation, class; affect/emotions and populist investment; people/multitude and horizontality/verticality. These themes were researched through a series of individual questions such as the following that were addressed to expert and activist informants in a variety of international contexts:

- Is populism in your linguistic/cultural context a negatively charged term which is used to fight or criticize certain political positions or is it mainly a descriptive-analytical term that identifies a political practice and discourse which can have both negative and positive implications?
- How is the appeal to the ‘people’ related to populism?
- Does populism involve a particular way of addressing the people (i.e. distorting and/or hijacking its genuine desires and aspirations) or is it possible that any evocation of and appeal to the people can be deemed populist?
- What is the place and the meaning of the people in your political discourse/ in X political discourse?
- Would you speak about a discursive clash or even a cleavage between populism and anti-populism in your political context? How is this constituted and by whom (political actors, media, etc.).
- How is populism and/or popular appeals related to democracy in X context?
- Does it endanger or enhance democracy (i.e. participation, inclusion, representation, etc.)?
- Can populism help promote freedom and equality or is it fundamentally a hierarchical, top-down form of political activity, organized around an autocratic leader who guides the people?
- Is X populism an effect of political/social/economic crisis? How do you understand populism, crisis and their relationship in X context?
- Can populism help to restore or enhance contemporary democracies which are beset with various kinds of social, political and economic crises? Is it a pathological symptom of such crises or a constructive and positive reaction of the citizens to these crises?
- Is populism a characteristic of right-wing politics or can there also be a left-wing populism?
- Is populism a reactionary or a progressive phenomenon?
- What is the place of appeals to the people within right-wing populism? Are they central or peripheral/secondary? If right-wing populism prioritizes the nation or race, then is it legitimate to

characterize it as primarily populist?

- Which are the main political opponents identified by your/ X political discourse? The ‘establishment’ and/or other social groups or nations?
- Are there any strong collective emotions and affects involved in and mobilized by populist politics?
- Are emotions and their mobilization an important, legitimate and productive aspect of democratic politics?
- What is the role of the leader and the emotions s/he mobilizes, or the worship of the leader, in X political discourse/form of (populist) politics? Is it crucial, positive, negative? What kind of emotions does s/he stimulate or appeal to?
- Can we describe and analyze contemporary social movements such as the global justice movement or the Indignados and the Occupy in 2011-12 as forms of populism? (taking into account that they strive to be ‘horizontal’, i.e. anti-hierarchical and espouse direct democracy)
- Is it possible to dispense with any form of political representation in contemporary democracies? If not, which forms of representation would you consider to be more democratic?
- Which type of political agent and structure –the people, the multitude, the working class or something else– can effectively fight for and establish better forms of democratic politics today, with more justice and equal rights for all?

Corpus based computer assisted text analysis

Through consistent Greek printed media monitoring, the POPULISMUS Project has obtained and stored more than 15.000 articles, published from 01/06/2014 onwards, containing the keywords ‘populism’ and ‘people’ (in combination with additional keywords like ‘Europe’, ‘crisis’, ‘democracy’, etc.). From this stock, this discursive reservoir, we have produced various corpora, containing randomly selected articles from different newspapers, in order to submit them to computer assisted lexicometric analysis. The digital tools for this process were mainly developed within the framework of the project and are currently incorporated into its web-based Observatory. A lexicometric approach is considered compatible with the POPULISMUS theoretical frame, and especially with discourse theory drawing on the Essex School of discourse analysis, as it brackets the supposed intentions behind its articulation, while it considers meaning as formed by the relations established between lexical elements (Glasze 2007: 663). Thus, we have used techniques like *frequency analysis* and the *analysis of co-occurrences* on selected lexical elements, including ‘populism’ and ‘people’, (Glasze 2007: 664) in a bid to identify the specific characteristics of populist and anti-populist discourse in Greek printed media. Here, working hypotheses and the related questions addressed have included the followings:

- Frequent use of the negatively-inflected word ‘populism’ by a certain media may indicate a tendency towards an anti-populist stand, while frequent use of the word ‘people’ may indicate a tendency towards adopting a populist stand. Consequently, the comparison between the relative frequencies of the two words in different media may rank them within a continuum between populism and anti-populism.
- Which words usually accompany ‘populism’ and ‘the people’ in populist/anti-populist discourse? Is the word ‘populism’ always negatively charged?
- Which are the most frequent metaphors that accompany the use of ‘populism’?
- Are nation-related words more frequent in populist or anti-populist discourse?
- Are democracy-related words more frequent in populist or anti-populist discourse?
- Are migration-related words more frequent in populist or anti-populist discourse and how are they articulated respectively (negatively/positively)?
- Which are the most frequent words that may serve as nodal points/empty signifiers in populist/anti-populist discourses?

Quantitative candidate survey

For the candidate study mentioned above we have used 6 items that were included in the battery proposed to the Cooperative Congressional Elections Studies (see Hawkins & Riding 2010, Hawkins, Riding & Mudde 2012) plus 2 additional items developed within the POPULISMUS project. The only item that had to be changed because it was not suitable for candidates was the question: ‘I would rather be represented by a citizen than by a specialized politician’ that was changed to ‘People can be better represented by a citizen than by a specialized politician’. The questions were included as 5-point Likert items using the following coding:

- 1: Strongly disagree,
- 2: Disagree,
- 3: Neither agree nor disagree,
- 4: Agree,
- 5: Strongly agree.

The battery of the eight items was thus formulated as follows:

POP1	The politicians in parliament need to follow the will of the people.
POP2	The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions.
POP3	The political differences between the elite and the people are larger than the differences among the people.
POP4	People can be better represented by a citizen than by a specialized politician.
POP5	Elected officials talk too much and take too little action.
POP6	What people call ‘compromise’ in politics is really just selling out on one’s principles.
POP7	Popular demands are today ignored in favour of what benefits the establishment.
POP8	Political forces representing the people should adopt a more confrontational attitude in order to make their voice heard and influence decision-making.

IV. RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION AND FINDINGS: SOME SNAPSHOTS

It would be, of course, impossible to present all the findings of POPULISMUS across the full bundle of its activities in such a short background paper. It is possible, however, to provide some indicative snapshots by selecting particular aspects of the research conducted. Needless to say, a detailed account will be presented and debated in the international conference to assess the added value of the scientific inquiry implemented within the project, facilitate the validation of results, and develop, on this basis, new orientations for further research.

At this stage, the research team is concluding three thematic studies focusing on the areas of concern and summarizing its findings. At the same time, the preparation of the Observatory and the utilization of the tools it will be offering to support our analyses as well as the cross-fertilization between quantitative survey methods and the Essex School are entering a crucial stage (triangulation). The final forms of the three thematic studies as well as of the pilot studies drawing on corpus based discourse analysis and on our candidate survey will be presented at the June conference. In what follows we are articulating some of the preliminary conclusions available. Following the debate in the conference, the research team will rearticulate the thematic studies into academic articles to be submitted to international academic journals.

THEMATIC STUDIES/ACADEMIC ARTICLES	
1	Contemporary left-wing populism in Latin America
2	Right-wing populism in Europe
3	Populism and anti-populism in conditions of crisis

Qualitative research: preliminary conclusions

CONTEMPORARY LATIN AMERICA: REALLY EXISTING POPULISM IN CRISIS

Against the background of traditional Latin American populisms (see deliverable 1.1, section 1.3), contemporary populism(s) in the region are crucial in demonstrating that: (1) the global populist canon differs substantially from the euro-centric paradigm identifying populism with the extreme right, (2) it is possible to witness, apart from oppositional populist movements, populist governments and leaders, who have remained electorally hegemonic for extremely long periods, (3) such left-wing populism(s) have charted a long and noteworthy trajectory, but are currently facing a crisis that may signify their end or, at least, their radical transformation.

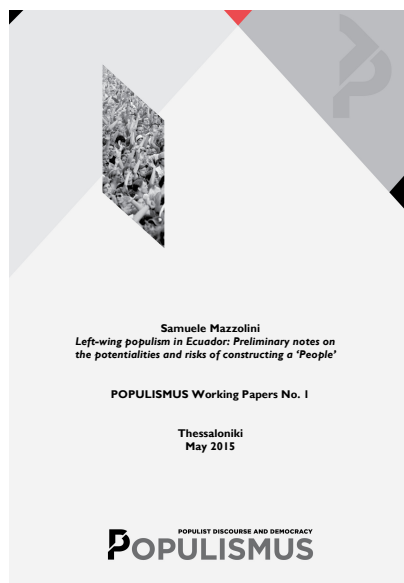
The case of Venezuela, for example, provided an opportunity to evaluate the conditions for a successful identification between ‘the people’ and ‘the leader’ in populist politics. Designating the ambiguities and the problems of a leader-centric model, several questions were also raised regarding participatory democracy and political economy. Interviews provided us with enough information to determine some typical qualities of ‘chavista populism’, such as: (1) the non-mediated relation between the leader and the people, (2) the insufficient institutionalization of this relation, (3) the integration of citizens and groups through vertical relations of patronage and (4) the affectively invested religious dimension informing the worship of the leader.

Drawing on our interviews and an extensive literature, we thus construed chavista populism as an inherently *contradictory* and *heterogeneous, many-sided* phenomenon, which constitutes a *transitory* process in response to the post-democratic closure of established liberal democracy. On the one hand, Chávez’s leadership catalyzed the formation of a new popular front among diverse social forces, which included the plebeian majority of poor and coloured Venezuelan people. This bloc of forces established a new hegemony that promoted popular participation in decision-making and empowered autonomous social movements from below. Chávez’ government addressed social exclusion through a variety of social programs and engaged in the creation of multiple institutions of popular democratic participation, culminating in the project of a ‘communal state’ made up of self-governed ‘*comunas*’. On the other hand, Chávez strove to concentrate power in his hands, suppressing pluralism and opposition even within his own camp. His economic policies perpetuated the ‘rentier state’, an economy dependent on the oil rent. Democratic participation and social mobilization in the chavista movement was heterogeneous and largely directed and controlled from above.

We conclude that chavista populism is a site of tension and contention, whose final outcome is open and will be decided through ongoing political struggles. Accordingly, chavista populism is a *process* which seems to contain both promises and dangers for contemporary democracy. Our argument takes issue, also, with a common doxa in the analysis of contemporary populism which draws a stark division between populism and pluralism, by bringing out the wide internal diversity of the chavista camp. To this end, we take note of a new important shift in the study of populism, which pursues an ethnographic, field research of populist politics as a social movement and engages with grassroots mobilization rather than focussing exclusively on the figure of the leader (see Sitrin & Azzellini 2014, Ciccariello-Maher 2013).

It is worth mentioning, at this point, that in parallel with its original research, the POPULISMUS team is aiming to build an active network of both younger and established scholars, who are moving within a research paradigm compatible with the discursive theory of populism the team proposes. In this context, we have initiated a *Working Papers* series, designed to advance academic exchange regarding contemporary populist phenomena around the world. The first working paper in our series, authored by Samuele Mazzolini (University of Essex) and focusing on Ecuador, was published very recently and relates very much to the aforementioned conclusions from our field research in Venezuela: it offers a critical review of Rafael Correa’s discourse and how the initially progressive and emancipatory project that he led has been showing, after eight years, some alarming quasi-authoritarian tendencies, displaying a growing intolerance towards any form of political dissent and overly

empowering the position of the leader (Mazzolini 2015).



Our research in Argentina also confirmed the hypothesis of a ‘really existing populism’, defined as such by the following features: (1) it succeeded in occupying state power and (2) functioned as the unique alternative for the organization of a society in transition determining its collective imaginary for a long period (2003-2015). The kirchnerite populist hegemony would be inconceivable without the deep economic crisis that preceded it leading to the Argentinian default. This crisis – soon to be elevated into a crisis of representation – gave the opportunity to Left-wing peronism to invest in the recognition of popular demands for dignity and equality by excluded social strata or even by the petty and middle bourgeoisie that suffered the financial, political and psychosocial impact of crisis and bankruptcy (Biglieri & Perello 2007). If the willingness to represent such demands against oligarchic trends and neoliberalism and the significant results of a pragmatic economic policy must occupy a central place in accounting for the discursive articulation of contemporary Argentinian populism and in evaluating its political effectiveness, it is clear that this project is currently also in crisis; with Nestor Kirchner long deceased and Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner legally excluded from being a presidential candidate in the October 2015 elections, the project is, ironically, facing itself a crisis of representation.

The latest wave of Argentinian populism is particularly interesting for a critical understanding of contemporary populism in three other respects. First, it offers a further illustration of ‘double hermeneutics’ in A. Giddens’ sense – the Spanish PODEMOS being the other major instance today. Political life in Argentina and, more specifically, peronism provided an archetype for Laclau’s theorization of populism, which in turn influenced not only the study of populism in Argentine academia but political leaders themselves, most notably the late Nestor Kirchner and his wife and successor, who entertained a close relationship with Laclau. As a result, in Argentina the theory of populism has become an active political force, which intervenes in populist politics, triggering in turn reformulations of populist theory in a reflexive feedback loop. A similar reflexive interaction between the theory and the praxis of contemporary populism can be traced in Evo Morales’ politics in Bolivia, mainly through the intermediation of his vice-president A. G. Linera, who is a political philosopher.

Second, the semantics of populist discourse in present-day Argentina are marked out by a set of distinctive traits. For example, there is a close association between popular/populist and national or nationalist interpellations in Argentina, making it an important case study for the critical analysis of national-populism, in a way, however, that is very different from the far right European model to the extent that the national moment is situated in the context of anti-colonial traditions. Finally, Kirchners’ populist discourse places a strong accent on

social, political and economic rights, which must be understood in terms of post-dictatorship conditions and the institutional embodiments of Argentinian populism.

EUROPE I: THE FAR RIGHT MODEL UNDER THREAT

Moving now from Latin America to Europe, our research on the field has revealed that the euro-centric model is once more under threat to the extent that alternative types of populism have emerged in both France and the Netherlands, two emblematic cases of the traditional euro-centric identification of populism with the extreme right (for a detailed account of this line of argumentation see deliverable 1.1, section 1.4).

Indeed, findings from our research in the Netherlands attest to Pim Fortuyn's and Pim Fortuyn List's populist features (back in the early 2000s), while at the same time draw attention to its rather under-investigated peculiar 'civic nationalism' (see also Akkerman 2005), which might have been the actual core element of its project. At the same time, the co-existence of the elements of nativism or nationalism, liberal values and progressivism (in specific policy areas, such as gender equality and gay rights) partly question the classification of the party as extreme-right. As far as Geert Wilders (and his party, PVV) is concerned – Fortuyn's most successful successor – it has been observed that nationalism, xenophobia and anti-islamism are clearly the elements overdetermining his discourse, whereas populism is evaluated as less important. In addition to that, POPULISMUS researchers mapped the Dutch Socialist Party's (SP) populist features at the left of the political spectrum; a party that takes over the representation of (lower and middle) popular strata opposing the political establishment and the elites that support neoliberal deregulation politics. In this context, in order to provide a comprehensive account of the populist landscape in the Netherlands one must seriously engage in a comparison between its right-wing (exclusionary) versions and the main left-wing (inclusionary) version as currently expressed by PVV and SP, respectively. Such a quasi-ideal type comparison might indeed be useful in other cases too within Europe and beyond.

POPULISM IN THE NETHERLANDS TODAY	
Right-wing populism / PVV	Left-wing populism / SP
(1) Emphasis on the element of exclusion of allogeneic groups, mainly Islam/Muslims.	(1) Emphasis on inclusion in terms of equal participation, enjoyment of social welfare and state protection.
(2) Appeals to 'the people' on the basis of its national-cultural particularity. Immigrants that do not embrace the native culture are excluded.	(2) Appeals to 'the people' on the basis of its socio-economic characteristics. Immigrants are not excluded on the basis of cultural or other differences.
(3) Absolute leader-centric party logic and loose party organization. The leader is regarded as the unique member of the party.	(3) Significantly developed party organization, that can delimit and control, to a certain extent, the role of the leader.
(4) Adoption of basic free market principles instead of taxation and state expenditure. Social welfare is targeted almost exclusively to native people (welfare chauvinism).	(4) Positions in favour of strict market regulation and generous taxation in support of state expenditure aiming at redistribution. In favour of universal welfare.
(5) Strong presence of conspiracy theory elements in the construction of the 'enemy' (supposed imminent danger of 'islamisation' of Dutch society and Europe; see notions of 'Eurabia', 'Netherlandistan', etc.).	(5) Socio-political stakes and the 'enemy' presented in a strictly ideologico-political framework with latent elements of a Marxist analysis ('neoliberal elites/the rich vs. common people/productive forces')

In France as well we have traced the simultaneous development of two antagonistic political projects, both broadly designated as populist: *Front de Gauche* (Front of the Left), under Jean-Luc Mélenchon's leadership, and *Front National* (National Front) currently led by Marine Le Pen. Our findings highlight a variety of their

features, including their respective relation to the nation and social class, as well as their limits and contradictions. Taking into account the particular social conditions as well as the trajectory of the movements in France, we have also attempted to explain the crisis of the former and the recent success of the latter.

When comparing the two, one could draw the conclusion that even though the points of departure are clearly very different, these two populist political projects share certain points of convergence. For a start, the Left identifies the concept of ‘the people’ with the lower social strata and dominated social classes, whereas the Right identifies ‘the people’ with the nation. The Left *a priori* includes immigrants and foreigners within the (popular) political community it claims to represent, whereas the Right excludes substantial parts of these populations. However, this difference becomes less apparent as the Left also appeals to an undivided (French) people, while the FN seems to continuously soften its anti-immigration arguments (in this sense, the FN increasingly seems to move closer to the global populist canon and its ‘populist’ aspect becomes more and more central in opposition to other far-right movements and parties). Moreover, as far as the understanding of popular sovereignty and democracy are concerned in organizational terms (concerning participation, the role of trade unions and movements etc.), the Left places emphasis on a participatory model whereas the Right adopts a traditional conception of ‘the people’ as political and electoral body, aiming, however, at the empowerment of its intervention, mostly through referenda.

Furthermore, according to FN discourse, the French people is confronted with transnational elites, EU bureaucracy or the US; the enemy of the people is mainly located outside the country. Inside France, FN suggests a corporatist model of interclass cooperation. FdG, on the other hand, opposes French capital and underlines the significance of class struggle. Nevertheless, Mélenchon recently argued that the old contradiction between capital and labour is overdetermined today by the contradiction between the ‘people’ and the ‘oligarchy’. If one takes into consideration the fact that he also frequently refers to the *French* people and to a transnational oligarchy, as well as his ambiguous attitude towards French imperialism, the distance with FN’s traditional populism may be diminishing. Nevertheless, the crucial difference between these two populisms still seems to lie on their attitude towards class struggle. FN populism seems unable to incorporate class struggle; this inability seems to constitute its internal limit. Correspondingly, the internal limit in FdG populism may be found in its ambiguous relation with French identity.

Based on the aforementioned convergences, some of the experts we have interviewed argued that to the extent that the FdG populist project competes with an already established populist force it will always take the second place, i.e. this ‘niche’ is already occupied by the FN. However, other informants have suggested that the success of the FN and the failure of FdG can only be explained by the current social and political conjuncture in France, more specifically by the recent defeats and the retreat of labour and social movements, the disappointment from the left governments of PS – with which FdG is still perceived as associated – and the abstention of workers and lower social strata from politics. In the sphere of ideological struggles, this conjuncture is marked by a tendency for the return to national values and identity issues, a privileged field for FN discourse. In this context, we may reasonably assume that the aforementioned internal limits of FN may remain obscure and largely non-threatening, while the limits of FdG discourse seem to be severely blocking its development and hegemonic appeal.

EUROPE II: IDENTIFYING NEW POPULISM(S) IN THE EUROPEAN SOUTH AND IN THE US

POPULISMUS has especially targeted political contexts in which new movements and parties have been emerging that have been classified as ‘populist’ by journalists and academics, in order to test this preliminary classification. Research of anti-austerity protests in Spain (the 15 M movement) has traced the emergence of a clear dichotomization of the political space around an agent that speaks in the name of the many, the society and the majority, against the few, the elites, the ‘establishment’. In Spanish language, the signifiers of the mobilizations’ collective identity are all equivalent to ‘the people’ [*la gente, los de abajo, la ciudadanía*], while the principal demands concern the defense of real democracy; a democracy where the people will be exercising

its sovereignty over political and financial elites, while government policies will be serving majority needs. Lack of leadership and of representation structures and institutional involvement are considered as 15 M's differential features, when compared to other versions of populism. As documented by our research, dispersed demands that acquired public presence through these mobilizations have since 2014 been channelled towards PODEMOS. Indeed the discourse of PODEMOS has established an equivalential chain among a plurality of such social struggles around the quasi-empty signifier of democracy [*democracia*]. However, one can distinguish leading personalities, such as Pablo Iglesias, that also function as 'empty signifiers' and identification objects for larger groups of voters, pointing to the recognition of PODEMOS as a collective representative. All in all, and using the minimal criteria put forward by the Essex School, PODEMOS seems to be consolidating the presence of an important left-wing (inclusionary) populist pole in post-crisis Spain.

The Greek case of SYRIZA also shows that the 'proto-populism' of certain social movements like the Spanish and the Greek Indignados – unified around slogans, emotions and demands opposing the hegemonic political bloc – was gradually transformed into party populism engaging with representation and representative institutions at a much deeper level. The emergence of massive social resistance to dominant crisis management policies (Memorandum) as well as the social mobilizations of 2011 operated as the necessary conditions for the success of a previously marginal left-wing party, SYRIZA, which culminated in the victory in the January 2015 elections and the formation of a coalition government. According to our findings, the party's turn to full-blown populist politics was initiated just before the crisis (2009-2010) and populism was mainly conceptualized in terms of drawing dividing lines. If SYRIZA can be designated as populist then this surely follows from the central role reserved for 'the people' within its discourse as well as from the fact that it divides the social space into two opposing camps: '*them*' (the 'establishment') and '*us*' ('the people'), power and the underdog, the elite (domestic and European) and the non-privileged, those 'up' and the others 'down'. SYRIZA, in other words, interpellates a (political) subject tightly bound to collective action and a project of (partial) self-emancipation through a linkage established in terms of a shared lack/frustration attributed to the action of a clearly delimited adversary, both external and internal. This is a process of creation that clearly relies on the dichotomization of social and political space and on privileging the signifier 'the people' as the proper name of this emerging collective subjectivity (this argument is fully developed in Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014).

Our interviews with SYRIZA members and party officials as well as extensive discourse analysis of party documents and speeches conducted by members of the POPULISMUS research team have also revealed the strategic preconditions of its full-blown populist turn. Populism as a broad appeal to the vast majority of 'the people', against a perceived 'elite' or 'political establishment', appeared as quasi-necessary for SYRIZA in conditions of a deep crisis of representation and legitimation. Having highlighted such a crisis in its analysis, and responding to the collapse of the centre-left PASOK following the movement of the 'Greek squares' in 2011, SYRIZA moved aggressively to occupy the empty political space and represent/re-incorporate impoverished and marginalised social strata that were keen to support alternatives to austerity. In this sense – that is in terms of both political opportunity structure and articulating a politics of recognition/exclusion – the successful populist strategy of SYRIZA presents evident similarities with the case of chavismo, kirchnerismo and also PODEMOS (in the latter case, of course, it remains to be seen if the party will eventually capitalize on its dynamic in the forthcoming national elections). Another element of SYRIZA's discourse that was further clarified through the interviews is the content of its interpellation of 'the people', which moves close to the European Radical Left canon, understanding it as a quasi-universalist and pluralistic subject, defined in mainly socio-economic terms; almost anybody could fit into this category, except for the 'elite', the super-rich, the neo-Nazis. Moreover, tensions were revealed within the party, with several members supporting the actual empowerment of 'the people' with direct-democratic means (i.e. referenda) and others understanding the empowerment of the people in terms of a better, more genuine representation. Last but not least, the increasing reliance on SYRIZA's leadership due to the exceptional circumstances in the country is identified by some of its members/party officials as a problem that should be balanced through furthering and deepening collective democratic processes within the party.

The Occupy movement in the US also fulfils our minimal criteria for the definition of populism. We have observed in textual materials that the movement is articulated around a nodal reference to ‘the people’, which is expressed, in a metonymic mode, as the ‘99%’. Several informants pointed out that ‘99%’, as an interpellation and physical presence, includes a heterogeneous group of subjects, social classes and nationalities. However, this group managed to create horizontal bonds of cooperation against the ‘1%’ that includes US financial elites and the super-rich. Both names here function as ‘empty signifiers’, while the collective subject that emerges from the movement is articulated around a radical antagonism within US society; an antagonism that was expressed even physically wherever protesters confronted Wall Street bankers.

Arguably the role of affective investment has been crucial in leader-centric Latin American populisms – with the worship of Chavez being the most extreme example. However, feelings like indignation have also played a significant role in protest movements that underpinned contemporary European populisms. The central role of emotions has been confirmed in the case of the Occupy movement as well, where processes of emotional investment in forms of joint opposition and common goals, of discontent as well as of belonging, seem to have influenced the joint actions and the identifications of the protesters. The popular slogan ‘all our grievances are connected’ articulates clearly this emotional dimension of proto-populist equivalential links. The feelings of anger and rejection fuelled, on the one hand, a variety of protests and, on the other, a feeling of collective empowerment, expressed in meetings of thousands of people, in their cooperation in working groups and organized assemblies. As one informant stressed, the challenge for this mobilization was the joint orientation against speculative mechanisms and in favour of creating the conditions for collective decision-making, immediate action, etc.

And yet, contrary to the Greek and Spanish case, OWS did not seem to lead to a re-alignment of the US political system or at least to clearly observable changes in the political landscape and gradually withdrew from the public sphere. On the other hand, as several informants stress, its dynamism was (partly) absorbed and capitalized by certain key political figures of the Democrats, with Barack Obama, for example, building part his re-election campaign on basic themes of the protests, mainly inequality; a discourse analysis of Obama’s State of the Union addresses seems to corroborate this claim. Another key figure here is the mayor of New York, Bill de Blasio, whom, according to an informant, ‘run an Occupy campaign, talking about “two cities”, about [the contrast between] “the rich” and “the poor”, about inequality’. Last, but not least Elisabeth Warren, Senator from Massachusetts and prominent member of the Democrats, is often regarded as an ‘institutional continuation’ of the OWS, figuring now as maybe the most vocal critic of socio-economic inequalities in the US society.

Regarding the terms of the movement’s articulation and organization, significant importance is attributed to its loose web organization and its strict anti-institutional and anti-party positions. However, activists and scholars strongly believe that web organization and horizontality are not enough. Interestingly, they take as an example PODEMOS in Spain and SYRIZA in Greece as important examples highlighting the cooperation of horizontal and plural movements, such as the Spanish and Greek Indignados, with institutions of vertical and hegemonic intervention in state institutions. However, the prospects of a similar development in the US are considered rather unlikely due to the character of the political system, that does not favour newcomers. In any case, reflection on Occupy’s ‘successes’ and ‘failures’, almost necessarily touches upon the issue of leadership, hierarchies and engagement with institutions.

The case of contemporary Spain is particularly telling in this respect and the POPULISMUS research has dwelled on it. The massive *Indignados* (‘15 M’) movement of 2011 left a strong imprint on political culture, diffusing its sharp critique of the status quo, projecting lay people as the sovereign agent in democratic politics and disseminating aspirations to popular participation. The movement failed, however, to effectively change the balance of power, to gain leverage on government and to initiate a new democratic institutionality on sustainable terms. Institutions have remained largely impervious to the demands for popular sovereignty, for a downward redistribution of wealth and for the protection of welfare rights and political liberties. As a result, from 2012 onwards, there was a collective search for new vehicles of political representation that would overcome the

fragmentation and the political impotence of the multitudes, organizing them and gaining access to power.

By ‘occupying representation’ such political agencies could facilitate social mobilizations, making the state apparatus amenable to their influence and halting repressive policies. The opportunity could open up then to renew democracy in ways that address the institutional grounds of the elitist deviations, promoting rule by citizens and crafting enhanced forms of political representation. This was the diagnosis and the agenda endorsed by several citizens’ initiatives in 2014, such as PAH, GANEMOS and PODEMOS, which opted for hybrid schemes of action and structure in order to both uphold grassroots mobilization and, at the same time, pursue centralized co-ordination, electoral politics and institutional intervention, achieving strategic coherence, efficiency, majoritarian support and inroads into electoral politics and institutions. A two-tier politics of this sort, welding together horizontalism and verticalism, or autonomy and hegemony, in a conflictual bind, is arguably a pertinent strategy for renewing democracy in the present critical context. It seems, though, that political organizations like PODEMOS will be able to redeem their democratic promises – enhanced social control, transparency and participation in democratic governance – as long as they maintain a constructive balance between these two political logics, avoiding the reassertion of centralized leadership and the suppression of pluralism which are typical of the more authoritarian trends in the populist tradition.

DEMOCRACY, CRISIS AND POPULISM

Our research findings have shed new light on the ambivalent relationship between populism and democracy. Periods and perceptions of crisis often constitute the hinge, the connection mechanism between the two. Not only are populist mobilizations more likely in response to economic crises that have been elevated into crises of representative democracy; inclusionary types of populism can also serve as means of democratic renewal. All this is consistent with recent developments in the bibliography pointing to the inherent link between crises of representation and populism. Indeed, as Kenneth Roberts has stressed, populism can be regarded as ‘a specific type of response to crises of political representation, which can themselves take a number of different forms’ (Roberts 2015: 141). Benjamin Moffitt goes a step further and recognises ‘crisis’ as ‘an essential core feature of populism’ (Moffitt 2014: 211), which has a crucial performative aspect. In this context, ‘crisis can be thought of as an external trigger as well as an internal feature of populism’ (Moffitt 2014: 211), while ‘if we do not have the performance of crisis, we do not have populism’ (Moffitt 2014: 190). And yet, this is never the end of the story to the extent that crises are currently the new global normal leading into a continuous loop between anti-populist forces advancing neoliberal and/or technocratic solutions and a variety of populist responses ranging from the new inclusionary forms of Latin American and European populism to the well-documented exclusionary hybrids of the far right.

Indeed in many of the contexts studied, economic and social dislocations (from Argentina’s default in the early 2000s to the Greek debt crisis within the last few years) have triggered a crisis of representation that served as the springboard for a populist politicization. In Greece, for example, the financial crisis and its neoliberal management, which resulted in a wider intensification of social dislocations, has intensified the indignation and discontent for the dominant regime of democratic representation (two party system) that was established during the political changeover, after the fall of the Greek Junta (1974). The story is more or less known. Within the context of the global economic crisis, Greece’s debt and deficit were overnight declared unsustainable and draconian austerity measures were demanded by the EU, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund in return for a bailout agreement. During this period, GDP contracted by 20% (between 2008 and 2012) and unemployment soared to 27% with youth unemployment reaching 60%. It was obviously impossible for the ensuing frustration, anger and despair to leave party identification and the political process untouched. The parties affected included those entrusted by the *troika* to implement tough austerity policies. Against this background, the Greek radical left, SYRIZA, led by its young political leader, Alexis Tsipras, managed to appeal to and mobilize a noteworthy part of the voters. Initially, in May 2012, Tsipras’s SYRIZA coalition received 16,78% of the vote more than tripling its power. These numbers would rise even

more in the elections of June 2012, in which SYRIZA got 26,89% of the vote continuing its upward dynamic. This dynamic culminated in the victory of 25 January 2015, with SYRIZA securing 36,34% of the vote and an almost 8% lead from the second New Democracy (see table 1).

Table 1: Greek elections: October 2009, May 2012, June 2012, January 2015

Parties	25 January 2015 (%)	17 June 2012 (%)	6 May 2012 (%)	7 October 2009 (%)
SYRIZA	36,34	26,89	16,78	4,60
New Democracy	27,81	29,66	18,85	33,47
Golden Dawn	6,28	6,92	6,97	0,29
Potami (The River)	6,05	-	-	-
KKE	5,47	4,50	8,48	7,54
Independent Greeks	4,75	7,51	10,61	-
PASOK	4,68	12,28	13,18	43,92
LAOS	1,03	1,58	2,90	5,63
Democratic Left	0,48	6,26	6,11	-
Other (i.e. parties below 3%)	8,62	7,00	19,00	4,50

Source: Ministry of Interior (<http://ekloges.ypes.gr/>)

Moving to Spain, in addition to revealing and substantiating the populist features of anti-austerity movements and of the emerging party of PODEMOS, our research has also confirmed the close affinity between financial crisis, the crisis of the existing representative system (post-democratic consensus) and the emergence of populist politics that aspire to a new collective politicization, to regaining real power with the support of the social majority and to economic policies that serve the needs and the interests of the many. Similarly, we have already seen how the articulation of a hegemonic kirchnerite populism in Argentina would be inconceivable without the preceding financial/political crisis and its effective economic and symbolic administration.

The vicissitudes of liberal democracy and the crisis of representation in Venezuela, which was exacerbated in the 1980's culminating in the *Caracazo* popular insurrection in 1989, parallels similar developments in Western Europe – more recently, the European South – as well as in other Latin American countries. In Venezuela, a relatively stable and functional liberal democratic regime was installed in 1958, and a two-party system crystallized over time. The regime was consolidated in the 1970s, enjoying high rates of development and a relative affluence thanks to the oil rent. However, in the 1980s a financial crisis set in, and the government was forced to implement austerity policies in exchange for IMF aid, severely hitting the lower social strata and steepening inequalities. The two ruling parties converged thus on the same, neoliberal austerity policies, and towards the end of the 1980s the established liberal-democratic regime had become overly corrupt, elitist, exclusionary and unresponsive to popular demands. Rising discontent with the closure of the political system, its inefficiency and the deepening socio-economic crisis could find no outlet and discharge within political institutions. In 1989 it burst out in a spontaneous mass revolt of poor people from the 'barrios' and working-class districts, which was bloodily repressed. Wide-ranging social disaffection and pressure failed, however, to produce any substantial changes for popular majorities. The demand for effective political representation was acutely felt but remained unmet. Chávez' populism was a response to this demand and the crisis of legitimacy besetting the established liberal regime in conditions of deep economic crisis. Thus, in 1998, Chávez ran for president as a charismatic leader who was committed to vindicate the will of popular majorities, to address social needs, to dismantle the corrupt and oligarchic political system, and to constitute an enhanced, social and participatory democracy that will empower the people, include the excluded and respond to their

claims.

Now, contradicting euro-centric conventional wisdom, our research has shown that populist movements often entail a democratic inclusionary potential. For example, the populism of PODEMOS and SYRIZA is marked by a clear democratic orientation that demands substantial democratization, the deepening of popular participation and real citizen empowerment as well as social rights and justice on quasi-universal and inclusionary terms. Similar patterns can be observed in contemporary Latin America. For example, it is obvious that kirchnerismo has enjoyed such a long electoral hegemony in this country because it managed to consolidate egalitarian and redistributive reforms reversing the neoliberal 'Washington consensus'. Interviews taken in Venezuela also converge on a positive evaluation of 'chavista populism', bringing us to the conclusion that populist politics can show progressive and inclusionary social effectiveness. Informants argued that the discursive, symbolic and emotional recognition of lower classes was absolutely substantial and resulted in the real empowerment of popular political and social action. Social and political incorporation was deeply rooted in the political system and became hegemonic, as the state – even the right-wing opposition – was then obliged to become accountable to the social majority.

And yet, the ensuing political landscape following what Laclau would call a populist rupture, even when serving redistributive policies and enhancing democratic participation, involves a particular type of democratization, is premised on a particular model of democracy: one prioritizing its participatory over its liberal constituent, placing emphasis on antagonism over consensus and often cultivating a political culture in which the constitutive *impurity* of the political, of political antagonism, dominates the purity of liberal principles, where, that is, concrete differences are often neglected or instrumentalized as they become overdetermined by the political and thus contingent drawing of equivalential frontiers. Notice, for example, how a consistent populist culture has marked political developments in Argentina (from Peron to Kirchner) and in Greece (from Papandreou to Tsipras). The establishment of such a populist political culture in Venezuela is also of great interest. Indeed, as pointed out by Kirk Hawkins in his Venezuela entry for the virtual global map currently prepared for the POPULISMUS Observatory, 'populism has remained largely unabated since Chavez's death. Not only has his successor, Nicolas Maduro, proven equally outspoken against perceived enemies of the movement's socialist project, but his main opponent, Henrique Capriles of the party Primero Justicia, has assumed an equally strident discourse that claims to embody the will of the Venezuelan people against a corrupt Chavista regime. Both discourses were strongly manifest in the 2013 by-election to fill the presidency'.

Such an over-politicized political culture is often seen as contributing to the vibrancy of democratic representation. Disputing neoliberal and technocratic positions that undermined popular participation during the 1990s – presenting it more like a problem and less like the democratic foundation for decision-making – Argentinian informants thus agreed on the positive effects of the politicization effected under the Kirchner hegemony. Indeed they argued that the intensive politicization that appeared again in Argentinian society after Nestor Kirchner's victory, has functioned more as a source of solutions for social problems than as a problem in itself. Moreover, they employed several examples in order to show that the return of political mobilization is usually beneficial for the poor, the weak, the repressed, the dominated. Emphasis was placed on the fact that politicization involved mostly young people and led to the formation of strong collective identifications, visible in organizations like *La Campora*. Indeed, the belief in the effectiveness of political mobilization and its capability in bringing changes oriented towards social justice constitutes a fundamental feature of populism in Argentina and Latin America in general.

There is also, however, a downside to the sedimentation of this type of populist politics. Venezuelan informants pointed to a series of negative aspects, such as the construction of an autocratic leadership, its transformation into an authoritative power, state integration of social movements that as a result lost their autonomy, the fact that social expenditure and wealth redistribution were not institutionalized as permanent features of state policy, excessive centralization and militarism, and, finally, the introduction of measures and institutions that failed to take into account existing conditions and could not survive financial and political crisis.

In that sense, the legacy of chavismo remains extremely ambivalent to the extent that it constituted a form of democratic government that diverges markedly from the liberal, representative, republican model. In this model of governance one can distinguish a mixture of contradictory political forms, ranging from direct participation to quasi-authoritarianism. For example, chavismo divided society in a way excluding its political opponents such as financial and political elites of the former two-party system as well as the middle socioeconomic strata of European origin; it thus restricted liberal representative democracy as well as respect of minority rights and pluralism. At the same time, as far as participatory democracy is concerned, it introduced a new political elite as the main decision-making agents. The state was severely expanded and popular participation was eventually reduced to bureaucratic procedures.

Quantitative research: a pilot study

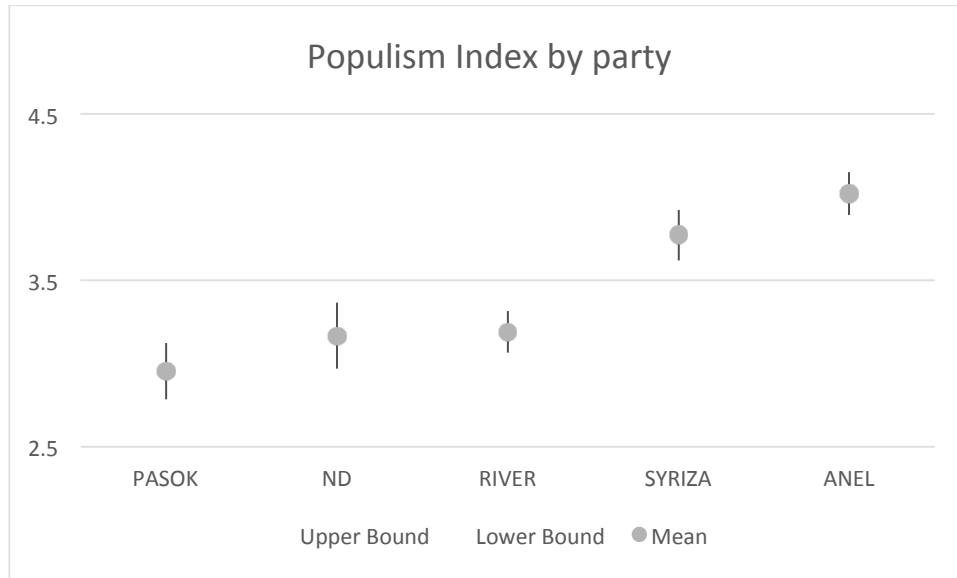
As far as our theoretically informed quantitative pilot study is concerned, preliminary conclusions – based on 318 completed questionnaires – are extremely encouraging. Before summarizing some of the first results it is important to note that a verification procedure has been followed in order to make sure that the eight items we have used are closely related to each other. It was important to test the internal consistency of the items mainly for two reasons. The first reason is that there are two new items (developed by the POPULISMUS project) that have not been tested before. The second reason is that the remaining six items have only been tested on voters so far. This is the first time these items are used on candidates, thus we needed to check if the reliability of the scale remains intact among the candidates. Cronbach's alpha for the eight items included in the Greek Candidate Study gets the value of 0.814, suggesting that the eight items have relatively high internal consistency (for most social science research studies a value of .70 or higher is considered acceptable.).

Research results (see table 2 and diagram 1) have shown that PASOK, ND and RIVER – parties generally assumed to be non-populist, something also consistent with our discursive framework – score below 3.5 while the candidates of both SYRIZA and ANEL – parties generally assumed to be populist, something also consistent with our discursive framework – score over 3.5. As their 95% confidence intervals indicate, SYRIZA and ANEL candidates do not differ significantly on the populism index and they form a common group with regard to this index. Similarly PASOK, ND and RIVER candidates do not differ significantly on the same index and they form a second group. But between the two groups there are significant statistical differences, with the second group (the candidates of PASOK, ND and RIVER) scoring significantly lower on this scale.

Table 2. Populism Index by political party

Party	Mean	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
PASOK	2.95	2.78	3.13
ND	3.17	2.97	3.36
RIVER	3.19	3.06	3.31
SYRIZA	3.77	3.62	3.92
ANEL	4.02	3.89	4.15
Total	3.44	3.37	3.52

Diagram 1. Populism Index



Having demonstrated that a minimal criteria approach drawing on the Essex School can contribute to the creation of a reliable index distinguishing populist from non-populist party profiles, we have then proceeded to see whether it is also possible to distinguish between left-wing and right-wing populism. In order to explore the similarities and differences between right-wing and left-wing populism on the supply side in Greece we have run a factor analysis with the aforementioned eight populism items and a series of questions that have been used in the Greek Voting Advice Application HelpMeVote 2015 and were included in the Greek Candidate Study 2015. The factor reflects the GAL (Green, Alternative, Libertarian) vs TAN (Traditional, Authoritarian, Nationalist) dimension (Hooghe, Marks & Wilson 2002). This factor is based on socio-cultural issues. Positive loadings appear for the items that promote the ideas of security and national identity, the exclusion of immigrants and other groups such as homosexuals. Negative scores appear for pro-immigrant statements and items promoting personal freedom rights. After saving the factor scores for each candidate, in the next table we present the positions of the candidates per political party on this factor.

Table 3 shows that there is a chasm separating SYRIZA and ANEL with regard to their attitudes toward issues such as crime and immigration. The scores of SYRIZA and ANEL candidates on the Green-Alternative-Libertarian (GAL) vs Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist (TAN) factor are -1.358 and 0.776 respectively, providing additional support to the ideas that right-wing populism is exclusionary and identity-focused, while left-wing populism is more inclusionary and potentially pluralist.

Table 3. Factor scores by political party

Party	Mean	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
SYRIZA	-1.358	-1.628	-1.087
PASOK	-0.325	-0.575	-0.075

RIVER	-0.140	-0.279	-0.001
ND	0.635	0.429	0.842
ANEL	0.776	0.576	0.977

To summarize, in our pilot study we have used candidates' responses on a battery of populist attitudes items and we have created an index of populist attitudes for each respondent. We have demonstrated that this index can be used to discriminate between populist and non-populist parties. More specifically our findings show that the candidates of the parties that have been categorized as populist using discourse analysis (in dialogue with the 'new mainstream' in populism studies) score significantly higher than the candidates of the mainstream parties, usually designated as non-populist or anti-populist.

Our second task was to investigate if we can use these and additional survey items to discriminate between left-wing and right-wing populism. Using the relevant data we have shown that right-wing populism is exclusionary and identity-focused, while left-wing populism is more inclusive and pluralist. Indeed inclusivist and pluralist attitudes are stronger on the left of the political spectrum than on the right, and thus affinities are bigger with regard to positioning on the ideologico-political spectrum (Left-Right) and not with regard to a populist or non-populist profile (e.g. ANEL appear closer to the mainstream right or centre-right ND, and SYRIZA closer to the centre or centre-left, PASOK and RIVER).

To sum up, what this pilot study shows is that there is indeed open ground for the mutual cross-fertilization of qualitative discursive methods and quantitative techniques like surveys in the study of populism. Based on a definition that understands populism through the isolation of 'minimal criteria' we were able to formulate corresponding questions to test our hypotheses on the supply-side, enriching and re-focusing mainstream orientations. The pilot study has generated feedback that can lead to further investigations on the discursive level, adding a reflexive element in our research strategy. Indeed, it is anticipated that the presentation of its final version during the international conference by Ioannis Andreadis and members of the POPULISMUS team will further corroborate this optimistic conclusion.

V. CONFERENCE AIMS: POINTS OF CONTENTION AND DEBATE

In this last section of our conference background paper we will be drawing on the research implemented up to now and on our preliminary findings in order to highlight some of the points of contention emerging and requiring further research. The list is by no means exclusive and serves merely to facilitate discussion in the conference to the benefit of finalizing our final deliverables (articles to be submitted to international scientific journals) and of debate on populism and democracy at large.

Concepts and definitions

MINIMAL CRITERIA: WHERE TO DRAW THE LINE?

The POPULISMUS team shares a preference for a minimal criteria approach with many other researchers of populist politics internationally (e.g. Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2012, Van Kessel 2015). In important international research meetings and conferences in which we have participated (including the Team Populism May 2015 London conference and the workshop on left-wing populism co-organized by POPULISMUS and Queen Mary University of London in February 2015) a broad consensus emerged on the need for such a minimal criteria approach. What still remains a point of contention, however, is whether the two criteria put forward by the Essex School – and accepted in one form or the other by influential researchers like Margaret Canovan as well as Cas Mudde & Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser (Canovan 1999, Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2012) – are, in principle, enough or whether additional ones are needed. In some of the aforementioned definitions an additional

dimension is encountered that has to do with the alleged purity with which populism invests the people and the corruption attributed to the elites it opposes, thus introducing a moral aspect to the identification of populist discourse along a good/evil axis. Hence definitions of populism like the one provided by Cas Mudde (2007; see also Mudde & Kaltwasser 2012) that over-stress the importance of a moralist signification of the antagonism between ‘the people’ and the ‘elite’, where the former is perceived as ‘good’ or ‘pure’ and the latter is regarded as ‘corrupt’ and ‘evil’.

What is more, definitions like the one given by Mudde (right now probably the most widely utilized in the comparative study of populism; see, for example, De la Torre 2015), maintain that ‘the people’ of populism is always perceived as ‘homogeneous’, since populism is regarded as the inverse of pluralism. In our view, however, to arrive at a truly minimal and operational definition of populism one would have to bracket the significance of moral investment and idealization. The reason for such bracketing is that, although traced in certain populist phenomena (for example, chavismo), attributions of purity and idealization – probably remnants of a religious imagery re-emerging in secular form – can be also encountered in a variety of discourses articulated around very different nodal points. De la Torre is right to point out that such narratives of redemption epitomize ‘the saga of the people, the proletariat, the indigenous, or the nation’ (De la Torre 2015: 10). It is thus difficult to see how this criterion could help in the differential identification of populist discourses. In addition, for many influential critical political theorists, the turn to moralistic discourse, ‘the displacement of politics by morality’, constitutes a defining characteristic of anti-populist consensual politics positioned beyond left and right; here moral condemnation is revealed as a neoliberal strategy of exorcising the populist challenge (Mouffe 2002: 1, 14). If this is indeed the case then, once more, this criterion cannot form part of a minimal definition of populism.

At best, such criteria could be useful in determining the degree of populist identification and may also be useful in studying particular types of populism, i.e. religious populism. On the other hand, this may not conclude the debate on a minimal criteria approach. A productive way forward – corroborated by the research conducted within the framework of POPULISMUS –, charting the steps in differential identification following our two minimal criteria (comprising the central position of the ‘people’ in discursive architectonics as well as the dichotomic antagonistic representation of the socio-political terrain as split between a popular and an elite camp) would be to inquire into how exactly, in each case, the people and the elite are articulated/illustrated (Who is the people? Who is the elite?). This could arguably function as an additional indication, not only in distinguishing populist from non-populist discourses/movements/parties (in which ‘the people’ does not function as an empty signifier, but refers to a signified like ‘race’ or ‘nation’ in far right discourse or ‘working class’ in communist discursive articulations), but also left-wing/inclusionary from right-wing/exclusionary ones.

This issue was discussed during the lecture given by Cas Mudde within the framework of the POPULISMUS Lectures series (23 March 2015) and will be revisited during the international conference.

POPULISMUS LECTURES SERIES (2014-5)			
Date	Speaker	University	Title
16 December 2014	Juan Pablo Ferrero	Bath (UK)	Democracy and Populism in Contemporary Latin America
12 March 2015	Nebojša Blanuša	Zagreb (Croatia)	The Conspiratorial Thinking in Populist Reason
23 March 2015	Cas Mudde	Georgia (USA)	Populism: An Ideational Approach
2 April 2015	Dario Azzellini	Johannes Kepler (Austria)	Venezuela and the Latin American Context: Revolutionary Populism?
3 June 2015	John McCormick	Chicago (USA)	Democracy in Crisis and the Populist Challenge

A NEW POPULISM/ANTI-POPULISM CLEAVAGE: FOR AND AGAINST

The existence or not of an emerging discursive cleavage between populism and anti-populism has preoccupied the POPULISMUS team. Research findings reveal an ambivalent picture. In some cases public debate has been redrawn in terms of such a frontier, which has started overdetermining all other social and political antagonisms. For example, in Greece, such a discursive dichotomy has run parallel to the emerging ‘memorandum vs. anti-memorandum’ cleavage. In fact, SYRIZA attempted to hegemonize this antagonistic representation in order to emerge as a collective representative of the ‘anti-memorandum’ and ‘popular’ pole, in opposition to the political system and the elites that have been supporting pro-memorandum policies. The coalition with the right-wing nationalist-populist party Independent Greeks (ANEL) in order to form a government after the January 2015 Greek general elections has to be interpreted within this particular framework. At any rate, it is too soon to determine whether such oppositions will acquire the salience allowing us to characterize them as cleavages.

In other cases, the traditional cleavage between Left and Right seems to have overdetermined the opposition between left-wing and right-wing populism. For example, it has been recently argued that what actually shapes the behaviour of right-wing or left-wing populists in parliamentary politics is their ideologico-political commitments, and not ‘populism’ per se. In an extensive comparative study of the parliamentary behaviour of the Dutch Socialist Party and the Party for Freedom, which stand as examples of left-wing and right-wing populist parties respectively, Simon Otjes and Tom Louwerse have shown that their choices were predominantly dictated by their left-wing or right-wing ideology and not so much by their ‘populism’ (Otjes and Louwerse 2013: 16). The PVV voted in a much more similar way to the mainstream centre-right VVD, while SP’s behaviour was closer to the Labour Party and the Green Left. The most significant issues where these differences played out was immigrant rights. One could observe until very recently a similar pattern within the Greek political system, concerning especially SYRIZA and ANEL. In this case, the notion of ‘the people’ as articulated by ANEL, seems very closely linked, if not identified with, the Greek nation; the ‘people’ seems to refer mostly to the native ones, those born and raised in Greece by Greek parents. In the case of SYRIZA, the notion of the people practically refers to anybody that has chosen to live in Greece and wants to be a member of its society, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, etc. Still, such contradicting conceptions of ‘the people’ cannot be conceived as absolute and stable, since specific political circumstances and alliances might disturb or even change them.

All in all, further research will be needed to reach consistent conclusions on this crucial issue.

DISCURSIVE ARCHITECTONICS: BEYOND ‘THE PEOPLE’ AS NODAL POINT?

In the past, members of the POPULISMUS team have criticized the way in which certain parts of Ernesto Laclau’s work gave the impression that by stressing the formal dimension of an equivalential antagonism they downplayed the place of the signifier ‘the people’ in populist discursive articulations (Stavrakakis 2004). And yet, our research in Spain has shown that very often populist discourses – like the one articulated by PODEMOS – place emphasis on signifiers different from the assumed populist signifier par excellence – in Spanish, *el pueblo*. What is used in its place are functional equivalents like *la gente*, etc. The same can apply to the designation of the ‘enemy of the people’: PODEMOS attack *la casta*, but in many contexts there is a variety of signifiers that can be utilized: in English, for example, the establishment, the elite, the 1%, etc. It is important thus to take into account in every case the cultural and historical background that entrusts the task of representing the poles of social division, of politicizing an uneven distribution of resources, status, rights etc. to different signifiers. Here, in the modern political tradition, signifiers related to ‘the popular’ are likely to be prioritized, but this is not always the case. And yet, once more, where exactly is one to draw the line?

Analytical challenges

NATIONAL-POPULISM: RESISTING REDUCTION, REGISTERING ARTICULATION

As we have just seen, the POPULISMUS project places special emphasis on the varying significations of the ‘people’ and the ‘elite’, or ‘the people’ and its ‘other(s)’. Apart from being an important conceptual issue, this is also a crucial analytical challenge, not only when it comes to distinguishing between populist and non-populist discourses, but also when what is at stake is the juxtaposition of inclusionary and exclusionary populisms. For example, when studying the recent Greek experience one immediately realizes that the content of SYRIZA’s discourse, regarding who the ‘people’ are, could not be furthest from the populist right and extreme-right rhetoric of other parties, which are often described as populist as well (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014: 135). In particular, in opposition to SYRIZA’s inclusionary orientation, the Independent Greeks (ANEL), a populist and nationalist right-wing party (currently SYRIZA’s government coalition partner), understand the people as the ‘Greek people’, as a predominantly national people. In addition, and although, in their view – and like SYRIZA – the Greek people need to be actively empowered, on the other hand, however, even within their own party, they adopt a very vertical and leader-centric organizational strategy which does not seem to leave enough room for open, pluralist processes.

Moving to the extreme-right, one finds Golden Dawn, which also portrays ‘the people’ as a ‘national people’; actually a racially pure and ethnic people, very close to a Greek version of Aryanism. The crucial difference here is that there is practically no element of popular emancipation or democracy at all. All decisions have to obey extremely hierarchical channels and are effectively controlled by the absolute authority of the leader along the lines of the *Führerprinzip*. In this sense, and although Golden Dawn is sometimes referred to as a populist party, it would be a category mistake to designate Golden Dawn, a para-military organization/party with clear Nazi-like characteristics, as predominantly ‘populist’: any references to the ‘people’ within its discourse remains peripheral, ultimately reduced to a nativist and racist conception of the nation, which functions as the nodal point of its discursive articulation. This would be consistent with recent research in other European countries that have reached similar conclusions (Caiani & Della Porta 2011; also see deliverable 1.2, section 3.2.2).

It becomes clear that extreme caution must be exercised when far right nationalist or racist movements and parties are associated with populism. At best, the association could be restricted to the imitation of a populist style (deliverable 1.1, section 2.3). At worst, it results from conceptual confusion. Nevertheless, this does not preclude the possibility of coalitions between populist and nationalist discursive ensembles. The recent Greek government is a good case in point. And yet, should such developments be interpreted from a point of view reducing populism to nationalism or rather from a perspective allowing us to think of the varying articulations emerging from political antagonism?

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP & VERTICALISM: LACLAU’S ACHILES’ HILL?

We have seen how in certain populist mobilizations the role of the leader can lead to the creation of a personality cult; this is not something restricted to traditional populisms (the case of Peron comes to mind), but also present in contemporary forms like chavismo. A turn towards strengthening the role of the leader is even observable in parties that started as agents of an increased horizontality in political action, like PODEMOS in Spain. The effects of verticalism and bureaucratization became evident in early 2015, and may have taken their toll on PODEMOS’ popularity, which has stagnated and fallen since then. Horizontalism, pluralism, civic participation and close interaction with social mobilization had surrounded PODEMOS with an aura of novelty, which set this organisation apart from the ‘old’ political system, its parties, its corruption and its decay. When the novelty and the attendant distinctiveness wore off, PODEMOS started losing its competitive edge, triggering calls for a re-opening of the party and prompting initiatives in this direction, which may have borne fruit in the recent regional elections (May 2015). In the populism literature this is often seen as a defining characteristic of populism and Laclau’s work has often been accused of reproducing this trend, highlighting the role of leadership and

prioritizing verticality over horizontality.

According to our research, however, and despite appearances to the contrary, such personalism is not an obvious implication of Laclau's theory. Laclau has indeed argued that 'the symbolic unification of the group around an individuality ... is inherent to the formation of a "people"' (Laclau 2005a: 100). But he clarified that 'symbolic unification' does not amount necessarily to sovereign rule by an individual as in the thought of Thomas Hobbes: 'The difference between that situation and the one we are discussing is that Hobbes is talking about actual ruling, while we are talking about constituting a signifying totality, and the latter does not lead automatically to the former. Nelson Mandela's role as the symbol of the nation was compatible with a great deal of pluralism within his movement' (Laclau 2005a: 100). In effect, the conception of hegemony in the radical democratic project which Laclau and Mouffe fleshed out in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* champions a conflictual pluralism that contests the prevalence of any single political logic, including that of hegemony and unification, and pleads for a constructive synthesis among multiple, conflicting logics, especially between autonomy and hegemony, or horizontalism and verticalism (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 181-190). This is also stressed in Laclau's last published work:

[T]he horizontal dimension of autonomy will be incapable, left to itself, of bringing about long-term historical change if it is not complemented by the vertical dimension of 'hegemony' –that is, a radical transformation of the state. Autonomy left to itself leads, sooner or later, to the exhaustion and the dispersion of the movements of protest. But hegemony not accompanied by mass action at the level of civil society leads to a bureaucratism that will be easily colonized by the corporative power of the forces of the status quo. To advance both in the directions of autonomy and hegemony is the real challenge to those who aim for a democratic future [...] (Laclau 2014: 9).

Further research will be, however, needed in order to determine whether the balance struck in Laclau's work between horizontality and verticality or between physical leadership and symbolic overdetermination – of the function of what psychoanalysis would call 'the Name-of-the-Father' – is sufficient in both theoretical and analytical terms.

POPULISM IN EXTRAORDINARY SITUATIONS: THE ROLE OF CHARISMA

What if, for example, the charismatic embodiment in a leader, leading to a passage from horizontalism to verticalism, becomes unavoidable in extraordinary situations? The case of Argentina is relevant in this respect and shows how in such conjunctures the intervention of the leader may be crucial:

[...] it is common to find a celebration of the piqueteros, the movement of impoverished, mainly unemployed workers who in the end of the 1990s began to organize road-blocking pickets to protest against the neo-liberal policies of President Carlos Menem. ... Post-operaist theorists see in the piqueteros a paradigmatic example of the political expression of the Multitude and present their refusal to collaborate with political parties as a model for the strategy of desertion. But they do not seem to realize that what the movement of the piqueteros shows is precisely the limits of such a strategy. To be sure, they played a role in bringing down a president (de la Rúa), but when the time came to offer an alternative, their refusal to participate in the elections rendered them unable to influence the further course of events. If it had not been for the fact that Nestor Kirchner won the elections and began to implement progressive measures to restore the Argentinian economy and improve the conditions of the poor, the outcome of the popular protests could have been completely different (Mouffe 2013: 76).

Obviously, this is not to say, that all such struggles are bound, sooner or later, to acquire a hegemonic form; usually, however, when that fails to happen – as in the case of the Occupy movement in the US – this is likely to set limits to the future prospects of such movements. Chantal Mouffe makes clear that her critique of

horizontalism does not, of course, imply that such practices are unimportant. She does accept that a variety of extra-parliamentary struggles and the multiple political forms they can acquire are valuable for enriching democracy: ‘Not only can they raise important questions and bring to the fore issues that are neglected, they can also lead to the emergence of new subjectivities and provide a terrain for the cultivation of different social relations’ (Mouffe 2013: 126, also see Stavrakakis 2014). However, these practices cannot provide a substitute for representative institutions.

Especially in such extraordinary situations, the link between the leader and ‘the people’ h/she claims to represent is often discussed under the rubric of charisma. Is such a concept, however, compatible with the discursive perspective adopted by POPULISMUS? Can it enrich our analyses of populist phenomena or is it merely trapping them within personalist and often mystifying accounts? Our preliminary conclusions seem to corroborate one of the main hypotheses set out in our methodological orientation, namely that a conceptualization of charisma along discursive lines, like the one put forward by the social anthropologist James Scott, can be of much use in this respect. For example, it can provide crucial insights in understanding the way discursive mechanisms produce *temporary* charismatic links not only while populist movements are in opposition but also when they get in power. For example, how can one explain the surge in popularity enjoyed by Alexis Tsipras and the SYRIZA government during the first months after the January 2015 elections? In Scott’s overall schema, every social order or political institution (the European edifice, for example), every process of domination, ‘generates a hegemonic public conduct and backstage discourse consisting of what cannot be spoken in the face of power’ (Scott 1990: xii). Thus both a public and a hidden transcript emerge: ‘If subordinate discourse in the presence of the dominant is a public transcript, I shall use the term *hidden transcript* to characterize discourse that takes place “offstage”, beyond direct observation by powerholders’ (Scott 1990: 4). Under relatively normal conditions, these hidden transcripts are rarely enacted. And yet, sometimes, when conditions enter the realm of the extraordinary, they storm the stage shifting the coordinates of a situation. Hence, charisma is not a quality possessed by someone; it has less to do with ‘personal magnetism’ and more with a socially produced reciprocity. Such a reciprocity is established when something hidden (foreclosed by the power bloc) – the predicament, the grievances as well as the demands of a subordinate group – suddenly becomes sayable, creating thus a temporary charismatic bond between this subordinate group and the agent openly voicing the ‘hidden transcript’. Surely, the Eurozone austerity dogma and its reliance on the need for everybody to reproduce its ‘success story’ qualifies as such a ‘public transcript’. And suddenly a new government appears that breaks this *cordon sanitaire* and pledges to represent the voice of the previously excluded people, the ‘hidden transcript’. Not surprisingly, ‘Tsipras’ Strategy Gives Greeks a Voice’ was the title of a recent article uploaded at the *Deutsche Welle* website. A series of opinion polls have also captured the broader socio-political dynamics involved here. Under this light, it seems of prime importance to further assess the compatibility of Scott’s theory of charisma with the perspective adopted by POPULISMUS and the wider significance of this cross-fertilization in terms of providing a non-personalized account of charisma in populist mobilization.

ACADEMIC DISCOURSE AND POLITICS: THE RISKS OF DOUBLE HERMENEUTICS

It is well-documented that in the debates around populism, political theorists and analysts are not and cannot be neutral and detached observers. What we have here, in other words, is a case of what Giddens has called a *double hermeneutic* – in the social sciences, scientific inquiry not only needs to take into account the meaning that social actors ascribe to their actions and the social world at large; in addition, ‘[t]he “findings” of the social sciences very often enter constitutively into the world they describe’ (Giddens 1987: 20). Populism presents us with one such instance to the extent that some of the euro-centric pathologies characteristic of research on populism have transformed the whole European public sphere and the uses of ‘populism’ not only in academia but also in politics. For example, Annie Collovald (2004; also see deliverable 1.1, section 1.4) has shown how academic work has been instrumental in associating the extreme right in France with populism. Within the framework of the research activities of POPULISMUS, we have traced the anti-populist matrix of academic discourse back to the work of Richard Hofstadter. Indeed, the year 1955 marks in the US the publication of a

very influential book, Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform*, which includes his famous attack on American Populism of the 1890s, a chapter characteristically entitled 'The Folklore of Populism' (Hofstadter 1955; also see deliverable 1.1, section 1.2). This text is emblematic of a revisionist turn in American historiography of the populist movement. Before its publication most accounts of so-called 'progressive' historians had praised American Populism as a progressive democratic mass movement that expressed the interests and grievances of many strata of the population (mostly over-indebted farmers and over-exploited workers) suffering in an era of aggressive capitalist modernization. In Hofstadter's account, however, the populist imaginary is denounced as backward-looking, provincialist and nativist, even as conspiratorial, irrational and anti-semitic. A lot of stereotypes plaguing debates around populism emanate from Hofstadter's work – including the so-called 'theory of extremes', that is to say the equation of right-wing and left-wing populism based on the connections he draws between the People's Party of the 1890s and McCarthyism. No matter whether withdrawn by Hofstadter himself following an avalanche of academic criticism (Collins 1989), these stereotypes still dominate public discussion and need to be seriously highlighted and discussed.

Yet, what about the inverse situation? For example, our research in Argentina has demonstrated that academic work on populism, in fact the contributions by Laclau and Mouffe, have been directly embraced by the populist governments of the Kirchners as well as by other similar governments in Latin America. In fact, what we are currently witnessing is a two-way movement to the extent that Chantal Mouffe has herself reciprocated these gestures; in addition, the same scenario is now played out in the European field. It is not a coincidence that the German party *Die Linke* has just endorsed in programmatic documents drafted by its leaders, Kipping & Riexinger, the turn towards 'left-wing populism'. At the same time, PODEMOS have also been openly adopting a 'populist' strategy with one of their most prominent leaders co-authoring a relevant book with Chantal Mouffe (Errejon & Mouffe 2015). Needless to say, given the irreducible complexity, ambivalence and impurity of populist politics, the emerging theoretico-political model of *populist democracy* is not the only one put forward by theorists promoting alternative types of democratization to the elitist, post-democratic model currently dominating the field. Thus, in his text published in the POPULISMUS *Interventions* series, Etienne Balibar has been moving beyond both populism and anti-populism in order to formulate an alternative pan-European and democratic counter-populism (Balibar 2015), while in his lecture in the POPULISMUS Lectures series (3 June 2015), John McCormick will be drawing on Machiavelli to identify institutional arrangements empowering citizens in more direct ways that, while often attached to populist movements, need to transcend them.

Construir pueblo

Hegemonía y radicalización de la democracia

Íñigo Errejón
Chantal Mouffe



Icaria ♣ Más Madera en profundidad

At any rate, how should reflexive research on populism deal with the challenge of double hermeneutics? Is this to be seen as an unavoidable 'contamination' between academia and politics, even as indicative of the duty of 'public intellectuals' to take sides? Does it endanger the reflexivity and relative impartiality of scientific inquiry? How can the risks be minimized? All these are open questions to be debated in our international conference.

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