# Small is Beautiful?
## Identity and Placism in Europe

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### Introduction

For some decades, increasing European integration has occurred alongside enlargement inspired by a 'European Dream' of spreading peace, tolerance and human rights through developing a common set of values, currency, mobility and a social model. This dream was to a great extent shattered by first the financial crisis and then an immigration crisis. The re-emergence of nationalism as a threat to the European Dream means that an alternative vision of Europe has emerged. However, in addition to national identification, regional identification at a sub-national level appears to have grown. This contribution is going to discuss the examples of Russians in Latvia and Scottish regions to exemplify these trends. However, these identities have not necessarily displaced either national or European attachment, as analysis of the Eurobarometer illustrates. Rather, we could point to an increasing sense of the importance of place in people's sense of belonging, which seems to encompass all geographical scales.

The increasing recognition of localism in regional governance and in academic writing is also reflected in people's sense of identity in European countries (Roudometof 2019). Meaningful identities are constructed around local communities, giving rise to a sense of localism, which we might also describe as 'placism'. This sense of local place-making is encouraged by EU policies and funding such as LEADER and also by national governments, such as in the UK, that are keen for civil society to compensate for cuts in state spending. For example, if local communities organise their own 'litter picking' exercises, it makes it less obvious that the state has cut back on street cleaners. How does this fit with more general long-term tendencies? For decades, the supra-national governance of the European Union as a centrifugal force was seen as a way of eroding the nation state. The rise of various regionalisms could be said to be doing the same thing as a countervailing centripetal force. However, more recently, the rise of nationalism in Europe seems to contradict these tendencies with an increasingly recidivist emphasis on the nation state.

This chapter will examine these pressures with respect to two particular examples: Scotland within the UK and Russian minorities in Latvia. It will then consider more generally the role of place identity in Europe.

## The European Dream: The Rise of Post-National Europe

I have been teaching European Studies for two decades. A key question we perennially address is whether European governance might be replacing national governance and what implications this has for identities. One implication is that a new form of supra-national governance is emerging and, along with it, a new kind of post-national cosmopolitan identity. This formed part of the intellectual Zeitgeist of the late 1990s and early 2000s, as many social scientists rode the waves of Europhile optimism. Major social theorists devoted a lot of printed pages to analysing what this might mean both theoretically and empirically (Giddens 2007; Eder/Spohn 2005; Beck 2006). Gerard Delanty, for example, suggested that European identity could only be founded upon a sense of cosmopolitanism (Delanty 2000; 2009; 1995). And this cosmopolitanism was post-national.

More generally, Jurgen Habermas argued that 'constitutional patriotism' was a viable alternative to the dangerous nationalisms that had brought so much ruin to Europe (Habermas 2002). European integration helped to further this rational project of international co-operation based upon Enlightenment ideals. Many people found it convincing. For example, Jeremy Rifkin in his book 'The European Dream' argued that it was 'the most humane approach to capitalism ever invented', embodying a vision of peace, harmony and social solidarity (Rifkin 2004). One element of this dream was the redistribution of resources across different regions – from rich ones to poor ones – with the idea of raising the level of development for all. Another element was the emphasis on cross-border regionalism to help cement links between countries at a sub-national level as part of a project to create a 'Europe of the Regions'. An essential element for the consent to this European solidarity was the idea of European identity, something which was often promoted at a European level. For citizens to share the European Dream, they needed to identify with Europe and the EU project.

However, European identity proved elusive. It was only ever espoused by a minority of people and the idea of cosmopolitanism was a vague ideal pursued by social theorists rather than something embedded in popular consciousness. Neil Fligstein's analysis of the Eurobarometer suggested that in 2004 only 3.9 percent of people identified as European, and this has remained rather consistent ever since the Eurobarometer was introduced in 1973 (Fligstein 2008). Inclusion of the so-called 'Moreno question' in the Eurobarometer helped to boost this figure by allowing people to choose European alongside national identity. This meant that

people choosing 'mostly European' (European + own nationality) could be counted as 12.7 percent and 'sometimes European' (own nationality + European) was as high as 56 percent in answer to the question 'In the near future will you think of yourself as…?'. However, 87.3 percent saw themselves as having mostly a national identity (Fligstein 2008: 141).

Nevertheless, there are important national variations. The UK had a consistently low score for 'European' and a correspondingly high score for national identity, while Belgium, Germany, France, Italy and Luxembourg (seen as the core European countries) had lower national identity scores and higher European ones – although this was still a minority perspective. Being at the heart of Europe helped to make people more European, and these countries were among the founders of what later became the European Union. The UK had always been an outlier in this respect with a strong tradition of Euroscepticism.

The most pro-European parts of the population in all countries were young people, the highly educated, the highly mobile and those that spoke more than one European language (Fligstein 2008). Adrian Favell in his book 'Eurostars' suggested that EU mobility, multilingualism and the opening of professional opportunities were creating an elite strata of young cosmopolitan professionals who also married one another, hence cementing this 'post national' social layer based mainly in major cities such as Brussels, London and Paris (Favell 2008). In the natural course of generational replacement, it was believed that European would displace national identities – or at least rival them.

There was a growing realisation that many areas of national life involved cross-border liaisons requiring international mobilisation and regulation. As well as security issues (terrorism, organised crime), this included environmental issues such as pollution, global warming and food security. Migration issues also required co-operation across different countries, taking into account refugee flows, trafficking and uneven settlement. There was a realisation that the regulation of the global forces of capitalism needed to be addressed supra-nationally to avoid countries competing with each other in a race to the bottom. By introducing the regulation of working hours, maternity leave and childcare across the European Union, work standards could be maintained at a higher level than in much of the world, keeping the European Union countries as bastions of 'quality work', as explicated in the publications of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

This Enlightenment optimism reached its zenith in the Lisbon Treaty of 2000 when, at the start of a new millennium, the EU aimed to become 'the most competitive knowledge economy in the world' and further European integration appeared to be inevitable. Concern with the quality of work infused welfare models and the idea of the 'European Social Model' was born as a universal safety net to cover European populations. Those countries that had lacked a comprehensive welfare

state (such as Greece) started to introduce one, although there were variations in how this was done (Taylor-Gooby, Leruth et al. 2017). The EU set out its European Pillar for Social Rights as a framework for subsequent legislation in 2017, focusing mainly on working conditions and equal opportunities for women and childcare for the moment but also including more vaguely defined access to old age pensions, health care, decent housing, social protection, childcare support and a minimum income as a set of rights. The Lisbon Treaty itself has been modified to improve and streamline the European institutions.

One form of post-national integration was through the 'Cohesion funds', which aimed to redistribute funds towards more deprived regions and was one of the largest elements of EU funding. It took money from richer countries to support poorer ones on a regional basis according to a model of social cohesion introduced by Jacques Delors in the early 1990s.

Finally, an important aspect of European integration for some countries was the introduction of the Euro in 2001, which introduced a common currency alongside fiscal and other controls. These were monitored by the European Central Bank, which aimed to maintain the stability of the Euro across all the widely divergent economies of Europe. Despite the threats to the Euro over the years, the currency has remained strong. Euro coins represent the principle of 'Unity in Diversity' by being both internationally homogeneous and nationally various in terms of the pictures and logos found on them. Economic integration was balanced by cultural integration through introduction of a rousing European anthem, flag, cultural heritage data base,[1] an increasingly comprehensive central statistical agency (Eurostat) and educational exchange programmes such as ERASMUS, which soon become widely established.

These integrationist tendencies were especially reassuring for small member states, many of them in Eastern Europe. Their guarantee of security was to become part of a supra-national defence force (NATO) and the EU also took care of many onerous and expensive aspects of national sovereignty, such as embassies and delegations, trade negotiations, transport and cross-border relations, as well as relations with external powers.

The increasingly complicated accession process forced states hoping to become members to recognise the rights of national minorities within their borders. This was enshrined in the mantra of peace, tolerance and human rights which formed the guiding principles of both the EU and the Council of Europe – a larger and even more idealistic collaboration of European states that also included Russia.

Enlargement had been welcomed as a way of spreading the European social and economic model to Eastern European countries, forming a bulwark against the still threatening East (especially a newly resurgent Russia) and guaranteeing adherence

1 https://www.europeana.eu, 1 September 2019.

to democracy and a liberal market economy. This was seen as a contrast to the authoritarian and dysfunctional neighbouring countries such as Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, who seemed to be moving in a different direction. The aim was to make everybody in Europe more prosperous, as this also offered market opportunities for Germany, the UK and other exporting countries that would help to boost their economies. By taking on a raft of much poorer countries (and often vary small ones), the aim was to raise the level of all of them up to more 'European' standards. The 'cohesion funds' that redistributed wealth within the European Union were often spent first of all on infrastructure projects such as road building, but also on modernising state and welfare services. The trend continued with the accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 and then Croatia in 2015. Many other countries are still on the pre-accession waiting list, including Turkey, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia, so there is still a great appetite to join the EU. Furthermore, the policies and principles of the EU could be spread through normative encouragement and 'moral example' to a widening circle of countries such as those of North Africa and Eastern Europe via the European Neighbourhood Policies and the 'soft power' of science and cultural diplomacy (Whitman 2011).

Altogether then, the 'European Dream' of post-national integration seemed to be reflected in an inevitable process of consolidation around a work-based social market economy that drew elements from German, French and Scandinavian welfare states. With this extensive infrastructure in place, what remained was for European citizens to see themselves as European. But this did not seem to happen quite so easily. This dream was also reflected in real improvements in living standards and life satisfaction across European countries, with the poorer and newer states starting to converge with the rest (Mascherini 2018), widening the gulf between them and neighbouring countries that did not join the EU.

## Return of the Native: The Nationalist Backlash

The European Dream started to fracture after 2008, when the various cracks started to become canyons. The economic crisis, originating in the US, had drastic repercussions in Europe that led to the crisis of the Euro currency. Desperate attempts to shore up the Euro took place through the European Central Bank, but the fiscal crisis particularly affected some of the smaller and weaker economies such as Hungary, Greece and Ireland. The stronger economies who bailed them out were keen to impose fiscal austerity, resulting in substantial cuts to welfare and rising unemployment (Tsoukalis 2016). This threatened the dream of the 'European Social Model' along with the idea that a broad and well cushioned safety net would be spread universally across European countries. Now in some European countries, this net was snatched away again (Taylor-Gooby, Leruth et al. 2017). Altogether, the

European Dream of solidarity, cohesion and co-operation across European regions was under threat, as tax payers in wealthier European countries such as Germany and Britain resented paying for poorer ones.

Mobility of labour had been a key ambition of EU economic policy with the aim of balancing labour supply and demand within its borders. In the early years of the free movement of labour, there was disappointment in Brussels that more labour mobility had not occurred. Yet after the ten new accession countries joined the EU in 2004 and the UK, Sweden and Ireland opened their doors to them, there was a large influx of workers from the Baltic States and Poland, especially to Ireland and the UK. Other countries had restricted this mobility by means of a phased programme of gradual opening. The influx of so many East European workers, where there had been no previous migration system of traditions in place, took many in the UK by surprise, and the Labour Party under Tony Blair, whose liberal social policies had allowed this movement, later regretted it. The UK, also faced with strong fiscal austerity after bailing out the banks with vast sums of money known as 'quantitative easing', was not prepared for this influx.

Hardly had this crisis been mitigated when an immigration crisis hit the EU in 2015. The ranks of migrants trying to penetrate fortress Europe were joined by one million asylum seekers who turned up at the EU borders following the collapse of regimes in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq and Syria – where protracted civil war and failed states replaced authoritarian regimes. The arrival of these migrants, sometimes on boats across the Mediterranean, sometimes through well established trafficking routes through the Balkans, brought about the collapse of the already weak European system for refugees and asylum seekers.

The various Dublin Regulations were designed to delegate authority for processing asylum seekers according to a common convention and distribute the refugees around Europe on a principal of solidarity. However, the borderland countries of the EU were soon overwhelmed with the numbers of extra-EU migrants and were unable to process their applications, let alone support them while they waited. These were also, coincidentally, the poorer countries of the EU and those most hurt by the economic recession – countries such as Greece and Hungary. The asylum seekers themselves preferred to head for wealthier countries, so they were often in practice just ushered through. Then Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany, aware of the fact that asylum seekers were arriving in increasing numbers anyway, opened the doors to this new wave of refugees in a gesture of 'Wilkommenspolitik'. The result was an influx of one million asylum seekers into Germany. Accommodation prepared for them in other countries to spread the load remained empty. Although the numbers subsequently declined (partly due to better management of the external borders of the EU through agencies such as Frontex), it created a political crisis for Angela Merkel and other mainstream politicians.

These developments fuelled the popularity of anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim parties. But this was also a turn against the liberal globalised capitalism that the EU represented (albeit a 'social' version of it). Populist parties cried out for protection of jobs and living conditions for native workers, welfare chauvinism and increased protectionism.

Hence, history, rather than ending in a universal globalised liberalised market economy, as had been predicted by Francis Fukuyama (Fukuyama 1992), was rediscovered. Nationalism based on nativist sentiments came boiling to the surface everywhere, and nationalist parties were in the ascendancy in EU countries.

In Britain, this populist, anti-EU current of opinion helped the UK Independence Party (UKIP) to enjoy a surge in popularity. With pressure from UKIP, the Conservative Party tried to capture some of this popularity by offering a referendum on leaving the EU. Against the expectations of David Cameron, the Tory leadership and most experts, Britain voted to leave the EU on 23 June 2016. This miscalculation led to a seismic shift in British politics. The strident anti-EU rhetoric that haunted the referendum burst into mainstream politics, with politicians on all sides expressing extreme and uncompromising views in colourful language and even making blatantly false claims. The protracted withdrawal negotiations proved more difficult than many had expected, during which the divisions in the Conservative Party were ripped open rather than healed.

The call to leave was led by capricious and charismatic politicians such as Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage. There were demands to 'take back control' of national sovereignty as a way of controlling immigration, fishing rights and trade. Taking back control was seen as anti-EU but also borrowed anti-French and especially anti-German rhetoric in popular media. Calls for a revival of the 'Blitz spirit' and the use of swastikas in social media recalled victory in the Second World War (but of course only the British part of it), building on comic stereotypes of continentals popularised in comedies such as *Monty Python*, *Dad's Army* and *'Allo 'Allo*. One of the characteristics of the social media revolution is its ability to blend apparently contradictory images, memes and tropes in convenient sound bites to reinforce popular prejudices. The idea was promulgated that Britons would be better off if they didn't have to send a share of their national budget to be redistributed in Brussels (even though many British regions benefited from these funds, especially in leave-voting areas).

The referendum exposed fundamental divisions in British society as well. While young people, and especially students, had voted to remain in the EU, older people and those from traditional working class areas voted to leave (Clarke et al. 2017; Evans/Menon 2017). New divisions along generational and educational lines joined the more traditional ones of social class. These new divisions suggest that with the replacement of older cohorts with younger ones and the general spread of education, these anti-EU sentiments might fade, and an EU identity might strengthen

in the fullness of time (see our analysis in the next section). However, the people who espouse anti-EU sentiments were often the victims of globalisation, and could recall an imaginary past when the Second World War was seen as a glorious victory for England while Britannia ruled the waves through the British Empire (Dorling/Tomlinson 2019). The view of the Second World War as a catastrophe for European nations, especially Eastern Europe, which paid the highest price in terms of loss of life, was not accepted north of the English Channel. Rather, vitriolic social media flaming on these historical tropes stoked nationalist fires and an ascendant English nationalism was reborn out of them.

Frank Furedi, writing mainly about Hungary, suggested that two different historical narratives had emerged and were in conflict with one another (Furedi 2018). On the one side was the EU narrative of an Enlightenment, rationalist administration built on of the smoking ruins of a Europe destroyed by nationalism in the Second World War. The EU 'founding fathers' looked around them in 1945 and vowed to never let this happen again. Instead of being built on conquest, the new Europe was built out of treaties and negotiations, which were often slow-moving and obscure. These took a long time to implement and sometimes failed to be ratified, due to the problems of managing consensus among a large collection of countries. This trend was followed by post-War politicians, with France and Germany leading the way. For this EU narrative, history begins after the Second World War and continues through a series of deals and compromises often named after the places in which they were negotiated (the Schengen Treaty, the Lisbon Treaty and so on). It represents the march of progress through increasing co-operation, legal frameworks, integration and enlargement. This version of history, however, often fails to connect with people's emotions and primary loyalties.

The second narrative of history is represented by the more nationalist movements and refers back to an historical continuity with the past. This does connect with a visceral emotional sense of identity rooted in a particular national narrative. This reconnection with the past helps to provide a sense of anchoring and continuity, even when it celebrates selective national traditions. In Britain for example, the more glorious parts of history, such as the Elizabethan and Victorian ages, are taught in school and evoked in popular rhetoric. This is reinforced by a seemingly bottomless appetite for films, box sets and mini-series celebrating the Royal Family. Even more distant and mythical ideas of the past, such as that of King Arthur and so on, are also presented as popular tropes. These have a much more powerful appeal, because, in the words of Furedi 'On their own administratively created rules and procedures [for example by the EU] lack the moral resources to motivate and give meaning to human life, and the major questions about the meaning of existence are left unresolved.' (ibid.: 99). He points out that, for Eastern Europeans, history is of special significance in their nationalist movements against the former Communist regimes.

So the revival of nationalism has had a particularly powerful resonance in contemporary Europe. It is often counterposed to EU post-nationalist centralisation. But what about the regionalism encouraged at the other end of the 'place-making' spectrum. Where does it leave us?

It is clear by now that the creation of a Europe of the regions in the sense of cross-national coalitions of sub-regions was largely a failed project. Despite sponsorship of various cross-border co-operation projects, these alliances have not made deep impressions compared with more primordial ethnic and national identifications. Cross-national ties between ethnic minorities and kin states may have the potential to mobilise popular sentiments, but as we shall see, ethnic minorities are more keen to build identities around their own ethnically and culturally defined geographical areas. So in practice, place-making regionalism takes place mainly at a sub-national level.

Here we will look more closely at two examples: Latvia and Scotland. Although Latvia is strongly regionally and ethnically polarised, there are signs that this is decreasing. On the other hand, recent events have pushed Scotland in the direction of further regional differentiation from the other "nations" of the UK.

## Latvia: Weakening of Regional Identities?

Historically, Central and Eastern Europe comprised a patchwork of ethnic groups. After the First and Second World Wars, many of the borders were moved or crystallised, leaving some ethnic minorities in the 'wrong' country. While the Communist powers that dominated the region recognised some ethnic minorities in a formulaic way, they forcibly suppressed or assimilated others. The ending of Communism saw a resurgence of nationalism in the 1990s, as both nation states and ethnic minorities clamoured for recognition, leading to new conflicts, as in the former Yugoslavia, and new nation states, as in the breakup of Czechoslovakia.

Rogers Brubaker, in his seminal studies, characterised these tensions as ones between ethnic minorities, host states (where ethnic minorities were situated) and kin states, to which the ethnic minorities were related by language, ethnicity and culture (Brubaker 1996). The host states and kin states with nationalising tendencies tended to problematise the ethnic minorities. For the host state, they could be seen as a 'fifth column' of unreliable citizens with loyalties elsewhere, whilst for the kin state they could be seen as a wider group of citizens for aggrandising national political leaders. Some Hungarian leaders, for example, started to envisage a 'greater Hungary' and gave some citizenship rights to the Hungarian diaspora. Brubaker's studies focused mainly on the Hungarian population within Romania. However, his concepts can also be applied to the Baltic States. In Latvia, the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 also meant the end of Soviet occupation, as

ethnic Latvians saw it, enabling them to win their sovereignty after many decades of domination by foreign powers. However, this left many ethnic Russians still living within the borders of the new states, amounting to around one quarter of the population in Latvia and around one third in Estonia. To these small states with a large and threatening neighbour (now the Russian Federation), this was regarded as a potentially de-stabilising situation.

The ethnic Russians in Latvia are in fact comprised of a variety of nationalities sharing a common language and reflected in different waves of settlement. Some have been there for centuries as dissident 'Old Believers' from the Orthodox Church. Some arrived with the Soviet armies of occupation and then stayed on, and their backgrounds reflected the ethnic diversity of the former Soviet Union, including Ukrainians, Armenians, Georgians, Belarusians and so on. Others had arrived to staff the factories built by the Soviet Union, which was also keen to colonise the Baltic States with ethnic Russians. Still others had retired to the Baltic States, whose gentle climate and sandy, pine-fringed beaches lapped by the Baltic Sea were regarded as the Russian Riviera. For this reason, 'New Russians', rich with post-communist booty, bought and renovated villas in spa resorts such as Jūrmala or enjoyed holidays and honeymoons there. For Russians, the port of Riga was originally a Russian port. They did not see themselves as occupiers, but rather as having liberated this region from German occupation after the Second World War.

These different readings of history and identity lead to tension when Latvia and Estonia made their native languages the official ones and a condition of citizenship. While some Russians left at this time, most felt that this was their Baltic homeland, and many of the older population were unwilling or unable to learn a new language. They remained in Russian-speaking enclaves with their own news channels and media. However, gradual integration of ethnic minority populations is being achieved through the introduction of Latvian and Estonian as languages of education in schools, starting with primary schools. So children at least grow up bilingual.

The Accession of the Latvia firstly to the Council of Europe in 1995 and then to the European Union in 2004 forced the Latvian state to recognise national minorities. Indeed, this was a condition of membership of the EU. This meant that, in addition to the triadic tension between kin state, host state and ethnic minority, there was now a supra-national actor setting the rules – the European Union (Galbreath 2006). The recognition of non-Latvian speaking minorities was a problem in this respect, and a compromise was reached by according them the status of 'non-citizens' who nevertheless held various rights and responsibilities as members of the European Union. These non-citizens numbered 365,417 in 2019.

An unexpected effect of this enlargement was the spread of English as the lingua franca in European countries and the opening of opportunities to work in the UK and Ireland, two of the few countries to fully open their labour markets to new

EU migrants in 2004. The result was that large numbers of Latvians went to work abroad, especially in the UK, whose strong economy and higher wages (at the time) were attractive to Latvians struggling in a transition economy. As a result of this and of demographic changes, the population of Latvia has shrunk by one fifth since it joined the EU, according to the EU information news website POLITICO.[2] The dominant languages were no longer only Latvian and Russian, but for young people (who could mostly speak both these languages anyway), English offered a passport to travel.

Research carried out into ethnic minorities on the European borderlands between 2008 and 2011 as part of the European Framework Programme[3] investigated the situation of the Russian minority in Latvia. The research revealed generational differences, with the mental geography of younger Latvians being focused on the European Union rather than the Soviet Union, as was the case in earlier generations (Patsiurko & Wallace 2014). Joining the Euro currency in 2014 reinforced these tendencies. However, even the older generation of Latvians did not see themselves as wanting to join Russia. Rather, they sought recognition as Russian speakers within Latvia. Respondents in our surveys and interviews expressed a fierce loyalty to their Latvian region rather than to Russia, even when they felt alienated by the nationalising host state. The concentration of traditional Russian-speaking minorities around the Latvian region of Latgale was reinforced by the settlement patterns around the factories where they were brought to work, or religious centres where Orthodox rather than the dominant Protestant churches could be found. This reinforced the idea of Latvia as a multicultural state that also includes Poles, Belarusians and Germans, which was enshrined in the constitution, even if this was not always enthusiastically embraced by a country that had recently established its independence with an appeal to nationalist struggle.

The situation was helped by the fact that the Russian Federation did not actively promote the position of the Russian minority in the same way that Hungary and Poland did for theirs. The new newly resurgent Russian Federation, however, felt threatened by the growing westernisation of the Baltic States, especially when they joined NATO in 2002. There is evidence of a strategy to bombard receptive populations with cyber-attacks and fake news as a new kind of destabilising propaganda, for which the Russian-language media was particularly appropriate. For the Baltic nations, even the austerity that resulted from EU integration was an acceptable compromise for the guarantee of security vis-a-vis their big neighbour.

2 https://www.politico.eu/article/latvia-a-disappearing-nation-migration-population-decline/ (Sander 2018)

3 ENRI-East European National and Regional Identities on Europe's Borderlands Project number 217227. April 2008-September 2011. (clairewallace.info 2019)

Nevertheless, there was an uneasy reconciliation of Latvian and Russian populations. This is exemplified in the two different celebrations of the end of World War II that take place in Riga every year – one on March 16 to commemorate soldiers that fought in the Latvian Legion and one on May 9, the traditional day for Russians (Beitnere-La Galla 2016).

The EU has thus enabled the recognition of the Russian-speaking minorities in Latvia who have strong regional identification. The reforms carried out since independence, including schooling in Latvian, have helped to integrate at least the younger generations of Latvians into the Latvian state. Differences in language, religion and historical memory, however, mean that this is a partial integration, but it is one that has remained peaceful. The mantra of tolerance, peace and human rights has been implemented, albeit not without tension. However, the tensions have not erupted into hostility.

## The UK: Strengthening Regional Identities

On June 23, 2016, 51.9 percent of those voting in the UK-wide referendum opted to leave the European Union. This slight majority resulted in an effervescence of nationalist feeling. Analysis of voting patterns suggests that was older people, working class people, people with lower levels of education and poorer people who helped to tip the balance (Clarke et al. 2017). The vote was a response to unprecedented and unexpected EU immigration, globalisation and alienation from elite technocratic politics as represented by the EU (Evans & Menon 2017). This English nationalism was encouraged by populist parties such as UKIP. It was seen as a 'howl of protest' from marginalised groups.

There were strong regional differences in voting patterns. The majority of people in London, Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain in the European Union. The political differentiation between Scotland and England started to widen, as the majority party in Scotland, the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP), supported remain, and there are pressures for a second referendum on independence. By virtue of this vote, the United Kingdom became less united than ever. The independence referendum that had taken place in Scotland in 2014 had only been marginally rejected, and one of the arguments at the time was that an independent Scotland could not be part of the EU unless it had petitioned to re-join. Other countries faced with secessionist regions, such as Spain, were strongly opposed.

Ironically, the re-emergence of a specifically English nationalism was in part a response to the rise of Scottish nationalism some decades earlier. However, Scottish nationalism – at least in its present incarnation – attempts to be a civic and inclusive style of nationalism. It is championed by the SNP, which consistently holds the majority in the devolved Scottish Parliament and sends a significant number

of MPs to Westminster. One of the long-term aims of the SNP is independence. Hence, Brexit paves the way for the break-up of the United Kingdom, with the new Brexit deal granting Northern Ireland a special status that is more closely aligned with the Republic of Ireland and the Scots feeling that their needs have been consistently ignored.

This regionalisation of identities taking place within the UK disguises the fact that there are also strong place loyalties within Scotland. Our research into digital place-making took us to the Outer Hebrides, where a very strong sense of regional identity is reinforced by the relative isolation of small crofting communities and use of the Gaelic language. The strong sense of place was developed partly by the active role of the local historical associations, known as *comainn eachdraidh*, which form a central part of the community, with a large proportion of each community being members. Several of the *comainn eachdraidh* took over the old school houses in the centre of the village and converted them into museums, cafes, local shops and meeting places for young and old. The flowering of this kind of civil society encouraged a sense of place-making. The importance of a sense of history and ownership is sometimes extended to community buy-out of the land surrounding the hamlets, something that is enabled under Scottish law (Beel & Wallace 2018). The historical associations were evidence of the construction of a very strong sense of place identity.

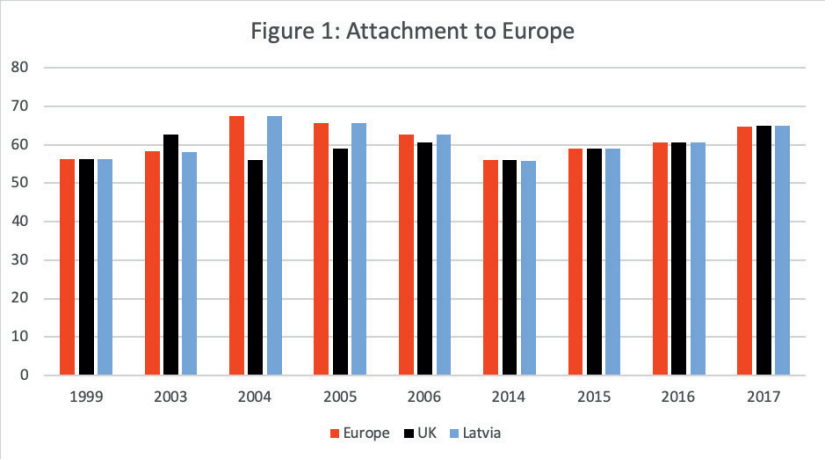
This regionalisation of identities at a sub-national level is clear in the different examples. But how generalisable is it?

## Changing Place Attachments in Europe

In order to answer this question, we can turn to the Eurobarometer, and for this purpose we shall analyse the 'attachment' question, since it has been repeated in every EB and we have a good time series. Here we compare Latvia, the UK and the EU average. Unfortunately, there are no separate figures for UK or Latvian regions when comparing this time series, so instead we have looked at 'attachment to town, country village' as the nearest proxy measure.

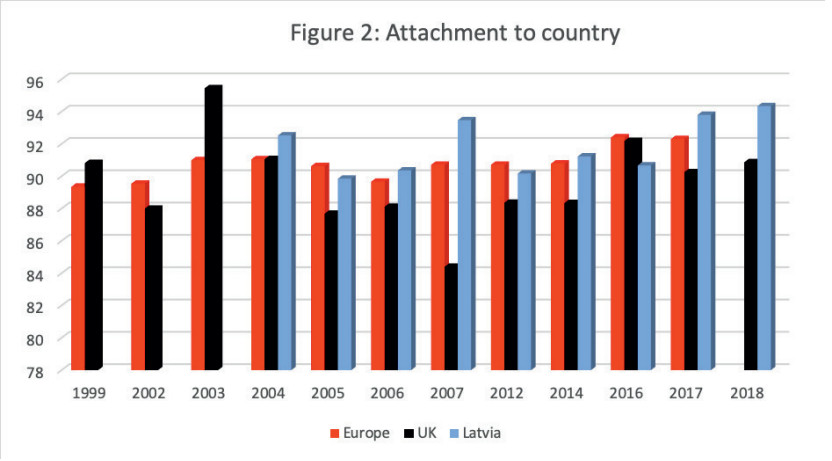
Figure 1 shows attachment to Europe. We can see that although attachment to Europe fell after 2006, following the financial crisis and the subsequent rise of anti-EU populist parties, there has been a steady increase in attachment since 2014. In the UK, attachment to Europe has in fact risen since the referendum – before that, people in the UK had little opinion about Europe. Indeed, attachment to Europe is the highest that it has ever been in the UK – at the very time that Britain is about to leave! This paradoxical finding needs to be seen in the context of the polarisation of public opinion within the UK, with anti-EU feeling also being strong among different subsets of population (Clarke et al. 2017).

*Figure 1: Attachment to Europe*




Source: European Commission/European Parliament (2019)

*Figure 2: Attachment to country*



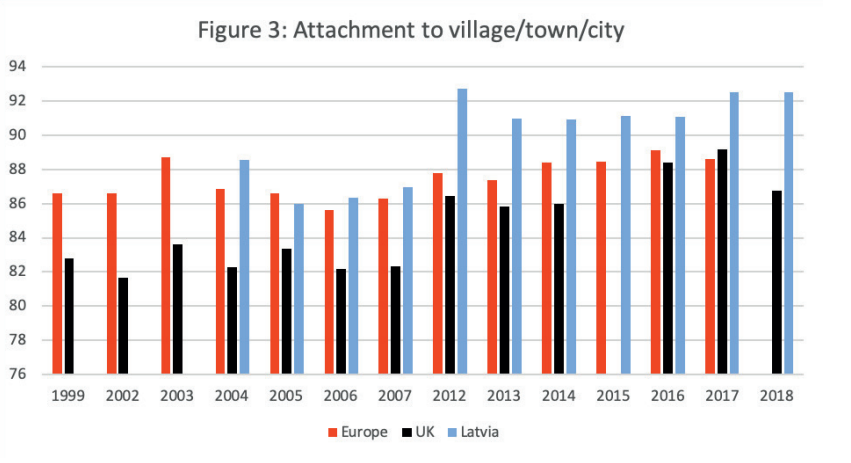

Source: European Commission/European Parliament (2019)

Figure 2 shows attachment to country among the populations of the EU, UK and Latvia. It is undoubtedly the case that the attachment to one's own country is the strongest of these place attachments, with more than 90 percent expressing

attachment to their country in 2018. However, while attachment to one's country is on the rise in Europe, it is down in the UK from just over 92 percent in 2016 at the time of the referendum to nearer 90 percent in 2017 and 2018. In 2007, there was an exceptionally low score for attachment to the UK. In Latvia there has also been a rise in attachment to country since 2012, rising to its highest point in 2017 and 2018.

Figure 3 shows another option: attachment to village, town or city as a proxy for regional identity. Here we see that this place identification has also been on the rise since the mid-2000s. Whilst there is a rise in Europe generally, there is a steady climb in the UK and a rather dramatic rise in regional attachment in Latvia. Does this reflect the resurgence of regionalism or a rise in place attachment as a source of identity more generally? It is difficult to verify either question from this data.

*Figure 3: Attachment to village/town/city*




Source: European Commission/European Parliament (2019)

## Conclusions: More Local, More National AND More European?

It could be that what we are seeing is a rise in 'localism' in tandem with globalisation, reinforcing the phenomenon of 'glocalisation' as identified by Roland Robertson (Robertson 2012). As people become more disembedded by globalisation, so local attachment or regional and ethnic identities become more important for them. However, this is not necessarily a primordial attachment. Savage and colleagues

have identified the importance of 'elective affinity' among incomers in terms of placement attachment to places of settlement rather than places of origin (Savage, Bagnall et al. 2005; Wallace/Vincent 2017). It is not clear from this data if there are ethnic, religious or cultural elements to this place attachment, but they may play some part. Research on local social relations and social networks and how they influence place attachment in the context of globalisation needs to be undertaken. There are calls for the idea of 'place' to be reintegrated into sociological studies, especially in understanding the role of new media and communications (Roudometof 2019).

There are a number of factors that might help to promote localised place attachments. First of all, social media has a strong local component in the form of Facebook groups and pages and buy, sell and swap-type sites. Hence, social media can help to reinforce a sense of place (Miller 2016). Secondly, while national media have been in decline, local media have often taken on a hyperlocal dimension, including stories, news and posts with purely local significance alongside local newsletters and events. Local social media have replaced village noticeboards for passing on information and events (Wallace/Townsend 2019; Wallace/Vincent 2017).

This corresponds with recent analysis carried out by the World Values Survey, which suggests that although vertical trust in political institutions has declined throughout Europe, horizontal trust of those around you, including both known and unknown people, people of the same nationality and other nationalities, and people of other religions, has in fact increased (Wallace/Haerpfer 2019). In fact, the world is becoming more rather than less tolerant despite the recent 'cultural backlash' of authoritarian populism (Norris/Inglehart 2019).

We might conclude that this ever more local focus in the development of 'placism' represents the rise of increasingly narrow regionalisms. However, this takes place within the general oversight of supra-national institutions such as the EU. The EU offers some guarantee of security for small states and regions that have been overrun by larger aggressive neighbours for many centuries.

The EU also provides a regulatory framework – for example for food, trade and research – that small states and regions would find difficult to accomplish alone. The larger structure of the EU is therefore the guarantor for the existence of smaller states and regions.

EU governance also secures the protection of national minorities such as Russians in Latvia from oppression by nationalising host states. This might not always be very successful, as the partial integration of Russian speakers in Latvia suggests. However, it can help to prevent the escalation of hostilities.

We might call this identification with geographical regions 'placism'. There is an increasing attachment to places large and small, but also an increased sense of localism. Therefore, it is not just small that is beautiful. Large can be beautiful,

too, by offering small nations and sub-regions security and affirmation. In fact, it is these larger configurations that make placism possible and give it a new impetus.

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