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The Social Construction of European Citizenship and Associated Social Rights

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Abstract

The concept of European Citizenship, the principle of freedom of movement and the allocation of social rights for EU migrant citizens are highly contested in Europe. Based on a thematic content analysis of print media in Britain, Germany and Sweden, this paper reveals some fundamental differences in the dominant social construction of European Citizenship and associated social rights across these different member states. While there are similarities between how European social rights are constructed in Germany and Sweden, British newspaper reporting fundamentally challenges the concept of EU Citizenship and associated social rights. The paper considers socio-economic, attitudinal and institutional explanations for the variation in the construction of European social citizenship. It argues that the British case may be explained by a unique combination of EU-scepticism, relatively high levels of concern with immigration and negative attitudes towards welfare (and welfare recipients), a combination not found in either Germany or Sweden.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Spending time studying in another EU Member State, using the European Health Insurance Card when in need of health treatment or retiring to warmer climes within the EU constitute real social benefits for the people of Europe. Core to all these benefits is the concept of EU Citizenship, which guarantees the right to freedom of movement and to reside in any other Member State as well as certain social rights. However, concepts are not a natural given, but their meaning is socially constructed. As highlighted in the work of Ian Hacking (1999) the perception of what constitutes 'reality' depends on dominant conceptualisations of facts and of the processes used to measure them (see also Berger and Luckmann, 1966). In the first section of our paper, we present development of the legal construction of the concept 'freedom of movement', EU Citizenship and associated social rights from a dominant integrationist perspective.

In the second section of the paper we aim to identify the dominant social construction of the concept of EU Citizenship and associated social rights at the nation-state level in Britain, Germany and Sweden through a thematic content analysis of printed news media. Newspaper reporting has previously been implicated as a powerful force in shaping the social construction of social problems and issues (Larsen, 2013; Larsen and Dejgaard, 2013; Conboy, 2002; 2006) including generating and reinforcing misconceptions about contentious social issues such as poverty (Gilens, 2000; Golding and Middleton, 2002; Baumberg *et al.*, 2012; Chase and Walker, 2014). By including a broad spectrum of newspapers in terms of political leaning as well as tabloid and broadsheet newspapers we capture the dominant debates around, and social construction, of the concepts within the three countries.[1] In the

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[1] In an ideal world we would have included more and other source material, such as TV reporting, twitter analysis, parliamentary debates, party manifestos etc. to ensure robust findings. However, we see this piece of

final section of the article we suggest some possible explanations as to why and how discordant social constructions may have emerged in the three countries analysed.

Legal background

The Treaty of Rome, signed by the initial six Member States in 1957, defined European integration as a *political project* with the aim of "an ever-closer union among the peoples of Europe". It was the hope of the founding fathers to overcome Europe's fragmentation and build an institutional framework that would promote peace on a Continent that had been devastated twice by war during the first half of the 20th Century.

Since its inception, European integration has aimed to achieve the *freedom of movement* between member states *of* goods, services, capital and workers and was always intended to be more than purely a trade bloc. From the very beginning of European integration the freedom of movement of workers and job seekers was embedded as an individual social right within the European Economic Community, the predecessor of the EU (Hantrais, 2007).

Yet, as the attractiveness of the European Community increased and it admitted new Member States, Denmark and the United Kingdom in the 1970s, and the Mediterranean Countries of Greece, Portugal and Spain in the 1980s, the European integration process did not make much progress in explicitly detailing the principles of freedom of movement and non-discrimination in its European and national legal frameworks. Instead, the main focus was on establishing a common market and any notion of a common European welfare state for a long time lagged far behind (Leibfried, 1991). Nevertheless, some significant progress was made through rulings of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in interpreting the principles of freedom of

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research more as an exploratory study trying to make sense of the matter, rather than to provide a comprehensive analysis with generalizable findings.

movement and non-discrimination for migrant workers and in highlighting the limits of national sovereignty in the realm of social policy. These rulings have enforced EC regulations and meant that nation states can no longer limit benefits to their 'own' citizens nor insist that benefits are consumed within their territory (Leibfried and Pierson, 1995; Pennings, 2012).

The end of the Cold War saw a rapid expansion of European integration through the expansion of EU membership to include Austria, Finland, Sweden and most Central and Eastern European countries. The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 provided a new institutional architecture which integrated the concept of *EU Citizenship* as a constituent element of the EU, a concept which was further embedded by the Lisbon Treaty and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in 2009. Article 15 of the Charter explicitly states: "Every citizen of the Union has the freedom to seek employment, to work, to exercise the right of establishment and to provide services in any Member State"; and article 34 stipulates, "Everyone residing and moving legally within the European Union is entitled to social security benefits and social advantages in accordance with Union law and national laws and practices. In order to combat social exclusion and poverty, the Union recognises and respects the right to social and housing assistance so as to ensure a decent existence for all those who lack sufficient resources, in accordance with the rules laid down by Union law and national laws and practices."

These clauses provide the context for various EU Regulations and Directives that regulate not only the exportability of social rights, but also EU citizens' access to social security benefits in the 'host' country (Pennings, 2012). The key piece of EU legislation in relation to the rights of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States is Directive 2004/38/EC (the Free Movement Directive). Replacing earlier regulations, two new EU social security regulations came into force in 2010

(Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 and No 987/2009). Based on the principles of freedom of movement and non-discrimination, these directives and regulations specify that the coordination of social security is no longer limited to economically active persons, but that EU Citizens also have access to special non-contributory social security benefits based on the same conditions as nationals, if they are habitually resident in a Member State. Member States have the right to withhold social assistance payments during the first three months after the arrival of a non-economically active EU migrant citizen (for an overview see European Commission 2013a). These legal arrangements, and the increased mobility of EU citizens, have significantly expanded the reach of Social Europe. Eigmüller (2013) argues that increasingly European citizens assert their social rights through the legal system, expanding EU social policy from below.

Unsurprisingly, the construction of social rights is regularly legally contested within the European Union. For example, a recent case referred to the ECJ relates to whether the flat-rate German unemployment benefit II (*Arbeitslosengeld II*) constitutes a special non-contributory social security or a social assistance benefit (Focus, 2013). Similarly, the UK is currently challenged by the European Commission at the ECJ for unilaterally imposing a 'right to reside' clause in determining the eligibility for a number of social benefits in addition to determining the habitual residence of EU migrants and thereby, according to the legal position of the Commission, discriminating against EU citizens (European Commission, 2013b).

Irrespective of the legal constructions of social rights and the potential building of solidarity at the European level in the future (Eigmüller, 2013), the interpretation of the concepts is open to contestation, especially in the political realm, "as [o]bjective conditions are seldom so compelling and so unambiguous that they set the policy agenda or dictate the appropriate

conceptualization" (Majone, 1989: 23f). To determine how EU Citizenship and associated rights are constructed in national contexts we analyse the social construction of EU Citizenship and associated social rights in Britain, Germany and Sweden. The three countries were selected as illustrative case studies of different types of welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990). In a second step of our analysis we consider possible explanations for these different constructions.

Methodology

To empirically analyse the construction of European social citizenship we carried out a thematic analysis of media content. Our approach follows in the footsteps of Larsen (2013: 92) who argues: "If the mass media merely reflected the social reality, then it would simply be a matter of the public being informed about the real conditions … However, as there are good reasons to believe that the mass media select and sometimes distort reality, …., it becomes interesting to analyse the media content …"

National electronic databases were used to identify relevant newspaper articles in each of the three countries during the period from 1992 (the year of the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht) through to the first months of 2014. In the UK, the Nexis database (a system providing electronic access to more than 20,000 global news sources) was used to generate a sample of articles from 10 national newspapers representing views from across the political spectrum including Right of centre (The Daily Express, The Sun, the Daily Mail and the Daily Telegraph); Left of centre (The Daily Mirror, The Guardian and The Observer); and those adopting a more neutral political stance (The Times, The Independent and The Financial Times, the latter specifically focusing on economic and business news and

targeting an international as well as domestic audience). In Germany, the major national publications analysed included the tabloid Bild-Zeitung and the following broadsheets: the liberal Süddeutshe Zeitung (SZ); the conservative Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ); and die tageszeitung (taz) and which has its roots in the social movements. In Sweden the Retriver database (the Swedish version of Nexis) was used to search the six major national and regional newspapers: the morning newspapers Dagens Nyheter (DN) and Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), the tabloids Aftonbladet (Aft) and Expressen (Ex), and the regional newspapers Göteborgsposten (GT) and Sydsvenskan (Syd). All but two of the Swedish major newspapers state themselves to be liberal, the other two are liberal conservative (SvD) and social democratic (Aft)[2].

The thematic content analysis (Berger 2012; Fariclough 2003) was then conducted by native speakers of each language. Samples for analysis (Appendix 1) were generated through searches using equivalent terms in combination. No distinctions were made between different types of articles (i.e. editorials, letters to editors etc.). 'EU Citizen'; and 'EU migrant' were combined with the following additional search terms: 'rights'; 'social protection' (and/or 'social welfare'; 'benefits' etc.); 'housing'; 'health care'; and 'education'. In Germany and Sweden all articles identified through the search were included in the analysis. In the UK the number of articles identified far exceeded those in other countries and for this reason, every other article (50%) was included in the thematic content analysis. Individual articles were coded using a standardised check list of sub themes including: the target focus of the article; the type of language/phrases used; the tone and value position of the author with respect to the subject matter (pro, against or neutral). Suggested topics in the check list included (but were not limited to) immigration; the cost of providing services to migrant citizens; the perceived

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[2] Newspaper articles cited in this paper can all be accessed in full via the electronic databases listed in the text, using a search on the name of newspaper, date and topic of the article.

impact of free movement and or EU Citizen rights on the rights and access to services for national citizens or their communities; issues of perceived fraud/abuse in relation to social rights; any suggested policy correction/change at national level; and reflections on the impact of EU policy as a whole. These national level analyses formed the basis of a comparative analysis across the three countries. In a second step of our analysis, we explored possible explanations for the different constructions of European Citizenship and associated social rights. We consider socio-economic, attitudinal and institutional explanations and conclude that a combination of the latter two seem to shed light on the British case.

The nature of the debate

The British media, with few exceptions, portrays a strong adversarial positioning of Britain in relation to the European Union and its institutional structures in Brussels. This antagonism escalates over time. The media portrays a steady growth in Euroscepticism among core groups of MPs (mainly Conservative) who repeatedly lobby for the repatriation of political, economic and social powers from Europe, greater autonomy over controls on immigration and what the leader of Fresh Start (a group of anti-European Conservative back benchers) Andrea Leadsom MP has defined as 'a radically different relationship with the EU, one which properly serves Britain's interests' (Daily Mail, 10.07.2012). At the same time, the right of centre media repeatedly refers to the 'Eurocrats' in Brussels and the 'Diktats' that they engineer. This stance is typified by James Delingpole, Political Editor in the *Daily Express,* who recently described EU leaders as 'a cabal of democratically unaccountable busybodies trying to justify their pointless existence by engendering unity through taxation, regulation and bureaucratic paralysis' (Daily Express, 31.05.2013). Importantly, the Daily Express in the last three years has dominated the media debate on Europe and has dedicated more copy to its

(anti) European position than any other newspaper (as measured by the number of relevant articles).

Perhaps more importantly in the UK is the stance taken by sections of the media, and in particular the Daily Express, to deliberately hijack public opinion on the EU and to publicly champion what it terms a 'crusade' to get Britain out of Europe (The Express, 21.12.2013). In November 2013, the paper delivered a petition signed by 150,000 of its readers to Downing Street calling for the government to 'defy Brussels' and retain labour market restrictions beyond 01 January 2014, the point at which people from Romania and Bulgaria could move freely to Britain to work and live (Daily Express, 28.11.2013). In the same vein, The *Daily Express* has given substantial media voice to the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) which champions a restricted immigration agenda, and the newspaper is openly supported for its stance by backbench Eurosceptic politicians, indicative of how in Britain media and political pressure and opinion are intrinsically symbiotic.

Attempts are made to counter this negativity by those newspapers who take a more measured or neutral stance towards Europe, such as The Financial Times, the Independent and The Guardian. These publications frequently report on the fact that British political and public opinion about Europe often conflicts with the stance of the EC and on the fact that EC officials are critical of the quality of the debate. Newspapers adopting a more neutral or positive stance towards Europe, however, have less coverage on Europe and reach fewer readers, for instance the Financial Times has a daily readership of some 88,000 in the UK compared to The Daily Express' circulation of more than half a million.

More specifically, the discourse around social rights for EU citizens was fairly muted in the UK until around 2003 during the run up to the expansion of Europe in 2004. From 1992-2003, searches combining 'EU Citizen' and 'rights' did not generate any articles at all until

1994 and from then on, only an average of 30-40 articles appeared each year until 2004 when the number rose rapidly (to 163). Importantly, the term 'EU migrant' did not appear in media discourse in the UK until 2004, but has rapidly increased in use since that time (by the end of 2013 'EU migrant' produced almost as many hits as the term 'EU citizen').

In Germany the debate is markedly different. Germany is a founding member of the European integration project and the entire political establishment supports further European integration and only recently has a more Euro-sceptic party (*Alternative für Deutschland; Alternative for Germany*) been founded. Although our analysis shows an increase in media reporting on EU citizens and the entitlement to social rights in the run-up to the extension of free movement to Romanians and Bulgarians in January 2014, much of the reporting is focused on court cases relating to the entitlement of EU citizens to the non-contributory unemployment benefit II (so-called Hartz IV). Various State Courts for Social Affairs (*Landessozialgerichte*) have come to different legal assessments and the Federal Court for Social Affairs (*Bundessozialgericht*) has now referred the case to the ECJ (SZ, 13.12.2013). The principle of freedom of movement for EU citizens is not questioned; moreover, it is understood to be a positive element of EU integration.

Sweden, in turn, became a member of the EU in 1995 and today the political establishment is overall pro-European (with the exception of the more recent Swedish Democrat party), as is the media. Throughout the studied period there is a remarkable consensus across Swedish newspapers on EU-citizenship and social rights: all articles on these issues are written in a neutral or positive tone and the principle of freedom of movement is strongly supported. The number of articles peak around 2004 at the time of the eastward EU enlargement when a debate on 'social tourism' emerged. Since around 2012 there has been another small upswing in the number of articles, reflecting a growing concern with the situation of 'poor' EU-

citizens as well as reports on the perceived restrictive and anti-European politics in the UK and to some extent also in other European member states.

Perceived impact of free movement on immigration: the numbers game

Media treatment of the numbers of people migrating within the EU and the perceived advantages and disadvantages of free movement for the receiving countries emerged as important themes in terms of understanding the dominant political discourse about social rights in each of the countries.

Net migration, or the number of people arriving in any member state each year minus those who leave the country to set up lives elsewhere, has proved a highly contentious political terrain for decades in the UK. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the principle of free movement is represented in the British anti- European media as an increasing threat. Although EU migration did not figure prominently within the manifestos of the major political parties, with the exception of UKIP, at the 2010 general election, reducing net migration has become an ever more important political issue and currently constitutes a 'political imperative' for the major parties. It is a particular bone of contention in the run up to the next general election in 2015 as the current Conservative and Liberal Democratic coalition Government is repeatedly hounded for not recognising the impact of free movement from the 27 other EU member states when it made a 'promise' to reduce net migration to the 'tens of thousands' threshold.

Much media discourse is given to the negative impact of Europe on efforts to reduce migration to the UK and more effectively control Britain's borders. The expansion of the EU in 2004 to include Eastern European countries and the subsequent removal of restrictions to citizens from Bulgaria and Romania in January 2014 have been accompanied by extensive

media reporting of the risks and dangers that such expansion brings to Britain. The media constantly blames the former Labour government for its 'open door' policy at the time of EU expansion in 2004, when it chose not to introduce transitional controls on movement to the UK as did most other countries in Europe, including Germany. The sense of overwhelming numbers of people coming to the UK is repeatedly conjured through language such as the 'surge', 'swamp', 'tide', 'influx' or the 'open floodgates' (Daily Express, 0.09.13) of EU migration. The use of such 'water metaphors' for immigration in the media have been noted elsewhere (Migration Observatory, 2013, p.17). Alison Little in the *Daily Express* (14.10.13) went further to describe how 'the wave of benefit migrants has become a tsunami of economic refugees fleeing the Eurozone crisis'.

Even though Germany recruited foreign workers through guest worker programmes during the post-WWII boom, (conservative) politicians maintained for a long time that Germany was not a country of immigration. This attitude changed over the past two decades and increasingly migration is portrayed as something positive, especially as Germany is facing a shortage of skilled workers due to demographic change (taz, 17.05.2000). Nevertheless, it has to be highlighted that Germany made full use of the maximum period allowed for limiting the freedom of movement and the right to reside for citizens of Central and Eastern European accession countries, and pushed for the incorporation of the clause that every EU citizen needed to be self-sufficient in the first months after taking up residence in a different EU member state (SZ, 14.06.1997). This may partly explain why EU citizens coming to work in Germany are in general portrayed to be an asset for the economy (FAZ, 21.01.2014). Much of the media reporting is related to the practicalities in single cases of EU citizens or legal reviews of decisions by administrative authorities (taz, 13.05.1998). In stark contrast to the UK, the debate is not dominated by policy statements or political populism of politicians to limit the number of EU migrants or their access to social benefits.

In Sweden, issues to do with immigration have generally been characterised by broad political consensus. The success of the far-right anti-immigrant party (the Sweden Democrats) in recent years has been met by a cordon sanitaire from the other political parties. In neither of the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargement phases did Sweden impose restrictions on the movement of Central and Eastern European citizens. It should be noted though, that in comparison to other countries which did not impose restrictions in 2004 (UK and Ireland), Sweden experienced much less immigration. However, even prior to the 2004 expansion the Swedish media made the case that large-scale migration was unlikely (e.g. DN, 04.07. 2001; Exp, 25.03. 2003; DN, 05.04. 2004). With the accession of Bulgaria and Romania there was hardly any accompanying media debate on whether transition rules should be considered (e.g. Syd, 10.05. 2006). On the contrary, the Swedish media has portrayed EU migration as having a positive impact on the national economy and welfare system – supplying needed labour (and tax payers) (e.g. GT, 16.01. 2003; GT, 29.04. 2004; Syd, 29.05. 2006) and improving the quality of national and European welfare systems by exposing national healthcare to competition (e.g. DN, 22.05.2000; SvD, 23.08. 2001; SvD, 07.04. 2009). In recent years, however, this picture has become more problematic as the profile of EU-citizens have shifted from 'workers' to 'poor'.

Perceived impact on national citizens

The exercise of social rights by European citizens vis a vis the rights of national citizens is a dominant narrative pattern in the British media which again stands in sharp contrast to how such rights are treated in the German and Swedish media. In Britain, the rights of 'EU migrants' are repeatedly presented as usurping those of British citizens and posing a threat to 'our rights'; 'our jobs'; 'our benefits' (Daily Express, 25.04.2011). Such sentiments are

typified by a statement by a UKIP Member of the European Parliament, Gerard Batten, quoted as saying 'our membership of the EU means that we are essentially inviting every parasite in the EU to come and take advantage of our housing and benefits system' (Daily Express, 12.09.2012).

The juxtaposition of money spent to enable 'Polish' women to fly home to have their babies (paid for by 'British tax payers') under the European Health Insurance scheme and the lack of money available in the NHS for life saving cancer treatment for a British person (Daily Express, 09.04.2010); the row over Polish workers exporting child benefit to children back home while middle class families are no longer eligible to the benefit (The Guardian, 09.01.2014; The Daily Telegraph, 05.10.2010); or, even more contentious, the removal of benefits from a British soldier injured in Afghanistan and the 'free for all' benefits for those who have 'just arrived and have paid in nothing' (The Sun, 28.08.2012)are frequent types of narrative presented in the media. These are often used to illustrate the 'injustices' and 'unfairness' meted out by the 'EU' or 'Brussels', and are typified by the much reported case of Britain's imposition of the 'right to reside' test (widely heralded as an attempt to 'protect abuse of the benefits system') being contested in the ECJ (e.g. Daily Telegraph, 12.10.2010). These dominant discourses tend to drown out more reasoned debates such as those put forward by the EU Commissioners Laszlo Andor and Viviane Reding who have repeatedly cautioned against politicians using the debate on Europe as short-term 'tactical or political opportunism' (The Times, 01.11.2012) and have repeatedly stressed that EU law adequately provides safeguards against so called 'benefit tourism', a logic largely ignored by national politicians. Likewise, at a national level, the Liberal Democrat party leader Nick Clegg is among the few politicians who are vocal about the advantages of EU immigration including its role in sustaining core services such as the NHS (The Financial Times, 08.03.2014; Daily

Express, 01.11.2013) and has repeatedly stated that he will block attempts to curb EU migration (The Times, 23.12.2013).

More generally, the perceived 'abuse' of the benefits system (in particular exporting child benefit payments to children not living in the UK and access to benefits without paying contributions) by people from other European countries is a recurrent theme in the media and typified by a piece by Christopher Leake in the Mail on Sunday entitled, 'British taxpayers to fork out millions more in benefits to EU migrants' (07. 03.2010). The media is replete with references to 'benefit tourism' posing a major risk to the economy and finger pointing at the European Commission for stymieing efforts by the British government to impose controls on such abuses (e.g. Daily Mail, 80.09.2011; Daily Star, 13.12.2011; The Sun, 28.09.2010; Daily Express, 30.09.2011).

In Germany EU citizens are generally not portrayed as a threat or seen as limiting the benefits and services available to German nationals. Ever since the reform of the unemployment compensation system in 2005, articles about potential 'social tourism' of EU citizens into the German system of social support have appeared in various media outlets. Often the situation of 'poor' Bulgarians and Romanians, belonging to the Roma community, was problematized (SZ, 20.03.2013). However, the number of reports was quite limited, until the Christian Social Union, i.e. the Bavarian sister party of the Christian Democratic Party of Chancellor Angela Merkel, started a debate surrounding fraud at the end of 2013. It was argued that 'benefit cheats' among EU citizens should be expelled and not given the right to re-entry for a limited time period. The tabloid Bild also jumped onto the bandwagon by 'submitting' an 'extra-parliamentary question' to the government about the costs of 'poverty migration' from

Romania and Bulgaria (Bild, 31.12.2013). Nevertheless, the debate has once again receded.[3] Media reports regularly include neutral reporting of the social rights of EU citizens, either as emigrants to other Member States or immigrants coming to Germany (SZ, 14.05.2003; SZ, 01.07.2012; FAZ, 07.01.2014).

Also in Sweden we do not see significant representation in the media of a conflict in the exercise of social rights by Swedish nationals compared to EU-citizens. The peak in the number of articles in Sweden in 2004 reflects the social democratic government's proposed transition rules for Eastern European countries to alleviate the risk of 'social tourism'. However, the large number of articles mainly reflects strong opposition expressed in media against the proposal. Although there was also some more neutral media coverage (GT, 22.11.2003; Syd, 05.12.2003) the media tended to ridicule Prime Minister Göran Persson for his unreasonable worry over 'social tourism' (GT, 16.01.2003; SvD, 26.03.2004; GT, 29.04.2004; Syd, 27.07. 2004), and accused him of flirting with xenophobic forces (Exp, 29.04.2004). The proposal also elicited critiques of the Swedish social system and Swedes' own tendency to live off of benefits (Syd, 21.04.2004; Aft, 05.09.2004), and the social tourism debate has since died down. In the past couple of years, the media focus has moved from EU-citizens as workers towards the increased presence of 'poor' EU-citizens – primarily the Roma from Romania and Bulgaria but also increasingly other Eastern and Southern Europeans (e.g. DN, 06.03. 2011; Aft, 12.07. 2013; DN, 10.01. 2013). This change has shifted the debate from highlighting the national benefits of EU-migration towards identifying collective European problems which need addressing (GT, 20.02.2012), and calls for the

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[3] Subsequently the government established a committee of Permanent Secretaries of various ministries to look into the matter. This committee has issued an interim report, specifying possible limited national measures to restrict the freedom of movement and reentry of EU citizens, who committed fraud; at the same time the interim report specifies various supporting measures for cities having to cope with increased demand on their services due to a high level of immigration by EU citizens, partially funded through the European Social Fund, (BMI/BMAS 2014)

fundamental social rights of all EU-citizens to be expanded beyond emergency health care to include other elementary rights such as 'food and shelter' (GT, 20.02.2012; GT, 31.08.2013).

In addition to the perceived threats of EU citizenship to the economy, welfare and health systems, sections of the British media conjure up Europe as a hazard to the fabric of British society. Around 2010 there was a surge in media reporting about urban and rural areas where people, having previously arrived from Europe, had lost their jobs and housing and had begun to 'squat' in small towns. Under the strap line 'Britain's migrant squatter shambles', one article in the Daily Express (11.08.2010) described Peterborough in Cambridgeshire as 'a city under siege by jobless gangs'. The report went on to discuss the impact on local schools, housing, health care and the fact that police services were 'stretched to breaking point': Newspapers repeatedly highlight that central government continues to ignore the concerns of local communities and politicians about the day to day impact of 'uncontrolled' EU migration (Daily Express, 05.12.2012).

Moreover, the nature of this threat to British identity is repeatedly couched in terms which have strong xenophobic and racist overtones, the debate often targeted at 'Eastern Europeans' and in particular the 'Roma' who are frequently depicted as 'beggars', ' thieves', 'criminals' and 'scroungers'.

The strength of such xenophobia and how it carries across to the political debate is exemplified by an article in the Guardian (06.01.2014) reporting how Nigel Farage, leader of UKIP, claimed to agree with the following sentiments of Enoch Powell's 1968 '*Rivers of Blood Speech',* because, he said, it reflected the tensions that can occur with a 'large influx of people into an area':

> *"the indigenous population found themselves made strangers in their own country,*
>
> *their wives unable to obtain hospital beds in childbirth, their children unable to*

> *obtain school places, their homes and neighbourhoods changed beyond*
>
> *recognition"*

The discourses relating to social problems and needs associated with concentrations of EU migrants are very different in Germany and Sweden. In Germany migration of EU citizens from lower income member states is concentrated in a few cities; hence it is no surprise that the living conditions in those areas have been subject to media reporting. Although some of the reporting has negative connotations, many articles characterise the conditions as a social problem requiring support; cities affected by a high level of EU migration should not be left to their own, but receive additional funds from the *Länder* or Federal governments (for instance FAZ, 02.02.2010; 28.04.2012; 01.03.2013; 08.12.2013; taz, 14.07.2011). In Sweden, the issue of 'poor', 'jobless' and 'begging' EU-citizens and their adverse living conditions has become the most salient media topic over the past three years. Shelters overfilled with EU-migrants and new 'tent camps' inhabited by Central and Southern Europeans are frequent topics depicted as social issues that require collective European solutions. Nevertheless, the rights of these EU-migrants do overall remain unchallenged (e.g. GT, 20.02. 2012; GT, 31.08. 2012; Aft, 12.07. 2013; DN, 10.01. 2013).[4]

Comparing Social Constructions

This analysis reveals markedly different constructions of the project of European Integration in the British, German and Swedish national press and significant disparities in how the concept of European Citizenship and associated social rights is understood. In Britain the

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[4] This finding is in line with Larsen (2013: 151), who states: "There is also a Scandinavian tendency to present positive stories about poor migrants."

concept of EU Citizenship and associated social rights is fundamentally challenged in the dominant social construction. Although there has been some variance in the frequency of reporting on matters of EU citizenship and social rights in all three countries over time, differences between the countries are relatively robust. Whilst we have witnessed a significant increase in reporting in Germany in the run-up to the opening of the borders for Rumanians and Bulgarians in January 2014, Britain has witnessed an upsurge of negative reporting, which fundamentally challenges the concept of freedom of movement and social rights for EU citizens since 2010. In Germany and Sweden the concepts of EU Citizenship and freedom of movement as such are not in question. In Germany the primary focus of the debate and contestation is on the legal interpretation of social rights for 'inactive' EU citizens – in other words are 'inactive' EU citizens under EU regulation eligible for the means-tested unemployment benefit (*Arbeitslosengeld II)* or not.[5] It is not questioned whether working EU citizens receiving a low wage are entitled to in-work benefits to lift the household income to the social assistance level or whether EU citizens should have access to or whether they are exploiting the healthcare system. In Sweden the primary focus is not the access to social rights but rather the principle of freedom of movement, which the media overwhelmingly supports. EU citizens' social rights are not questioned, rather their existence seem to be taken for granted. Although begging EU-citizens have become one of the biggest political issues in Sweden, the media discourse does not contest that this non-active group of migrants should have rights although it is recognised a pressing social issue. These depiction clearly reflect the close to unanimous liberal political position of that the major Swedish newspapers.

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[5] In EU jargon the question is, does this benefit constitute a 'non-contributory social security benefit' or a social assistance benefit.

Making Sense of the different constructions of EU citizenship

In the following section we explore potential explanations that might help us to make sense of these different constructions. In doing so, we connect to socio-economic, behaviouralist and institutional approaches. We hypothesise that the construction of EU Citizenship and associated rights might be associated with a combination of the level of migration, public opinion and domestic welfare state institutions.

A question of 'real' numbers?

The ubiquitous and unparalleled concerns about the impact of European free movement and its negative impact on social policy and services, as reflected in the British media, might be 'justified' if the UK has experienced significantly more immigration from other EU-countries than Germany or Sweden. Although the proportions of EU migrant citizens relative to the national population have increased in all three countries, EU citizens continue to constitute a relatively small proportion and overall differences between the three countries seem rather marginal (*Figure 1*).[6] The British media's heavy focus on European and particular Eastern European immigration is also unwarranted, since the majority of immigration into the UK is from outside the EU (cf. Migration Observatory, 2013). It is however plausible that people do not distinguish between EU migrant citizens and other immigrants, and hence we should consider possible differences between the countries in total levels of immigration. Both Germany and Sweden have relatively larger foreign-born populations than Britain (*Figure 1*). Nor do EU migrants make up a significantly larger proportion of the foreign population in the

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[6] We acknowledge that EU migrants do not settle evenly in Britain, Germany and Sweden, but that we find regional 'concentrations' of EU citizens, which are partially driven by the availability of jobs. These regional 'concentrations' can lead to pressure on services, especially in the very unbalanced British economy, with its concentration in London and the Southeast.

UK. Given these numbers, *actual* overall levels of immigration seem implausible as a core, or even sole, explanatory factor for the negative social construction of EU citizenship and associated rights in the UK, compared to the two other countries.
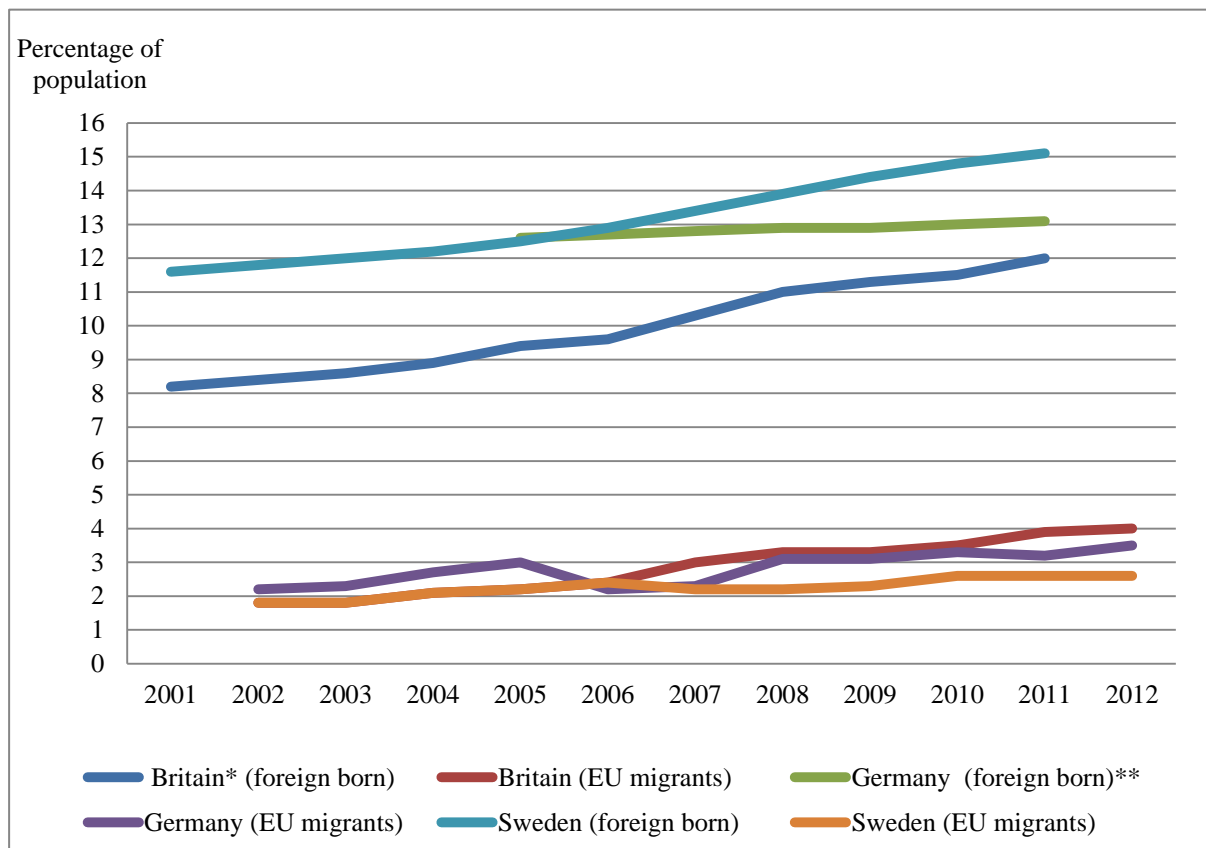

Figure 1: Proportion of EU migrants (2003-2012), and foreign-born population (2003-2012), in the total population

Source: Foreign-born population: OECD 2013; EU migration: European Labour Force Survey (ICF-GHK and Milieu Ltd (2013) (* 2002-2005 are estimates for the UK; ** German data only available from 2005)

A matter of public opinion?

Although the relationship between media reporting and public opinion is inconclusive, it is theoretically plausible that the media at least partially reflects public opinion, which by no

means excludes that the media can also have an agenda setting function. Taking account of available opinion survey data on Europe, the British public does appear more anxious about immigration than their Swedish and German counterparts. The 2008 European Value Survey (EVS) asks respondents to evaluate the statement "In the future the proportion of immigrants will become a threat to society". Among British respondents 25.8 per cent gave it a value of 1 (on a scale of 1-10 with 1 indicating the strongest degree of agreement). In Germany and Sweden the corresponding proportions were 13 and 12.7 per cent, respectively. Furthermore, in the UK 30 per cent of respondents fully agreed with the statement "there are too many immigrants in Britain", whereas in Germany and Sweden 19 and 15 per cent of the respondents agreed with the statement. The statement, "A country's cultural life is undermined by immigrants", prompted a similar pattern of responses: UK 17.7 per cent; Germany 10.7 per cent and Sweden, 6.7 per cent (EVS, 2008). In terms of the political salience of immigration more generally, *Figure 3* (below) shows how in response to the question, "what are the two most important issues facing your country at the moment", the British public show significantly greater concern about immigration than their German or Swedish counterparts.
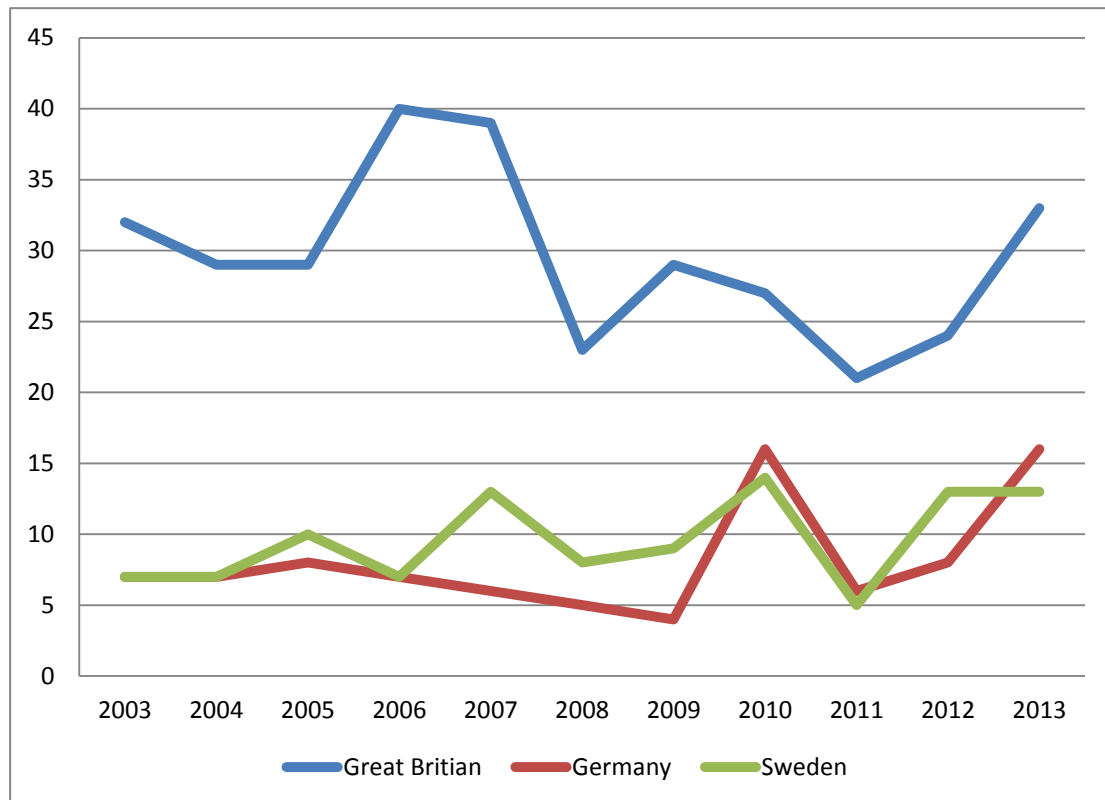
Figure 3: Salience of 'immigration' (Proportion of respondents identifying immigration as one of the two most important issues facing the country)

Source: Eurobarometer

The higher anxiety towards immigrants and high salience of migration on the political agenda in Britain do not seem to be a reflection of recent increases in immigration, as 'real' numbers of migration are not an indication of public perceptions and attitudes towards the matter. A recent article in the Financial Times (29.01.2014) highlighted a history of dissonance between rhetoric and reality concerning immigration in Britain. It pointed out that even back in 1978, 70 per cent of the British public thought that the UK was in danger of 'being swamped' by other countries (a time when net migration was zero) and how people in Britain greatly exaggerate the scale of immigration, currently believing that one in three people in the country are migrants (when the reality is one in seven) and over estimating the number of 'migrants' claiming benefits by a factor of six.

In addition to attitudes to immigration, the social construction of European Citizenship might be rooted in different collective attitudes towards national and European identities. Eurobarometer surveys consistently demonstrate that people in Britain are more likely than people in Sweden or Germany to see themselves as *only* British, rather than British *and* European (*Figures* 4 and 5). The percentage of people seeing themselves only as 'British' was almost the same in 2013 as it was in 1995, whereas in Sweden the decline of national vis a vis European identity has been quite steady over this same period and in Germany people have consistently demonstrated a stronger European identity than the other two countries. Other research also suggests that people in Germany are supportive of the ideas encompassed within European integration more generally and that they adhere to notions of equal access to social, economic and political rights for EU citizens from other countries living and working in their country (Gerhards and Lengfeld, 2013).

Furthermore, in the last European Value Survey (2008) British respondents indicated that they were significantly more afraid of losing their national identity as a consequence of EU membership than respondents in Germany and Sweden. In 2008 36.6 per cent of the British respondents answered that they are 'very much afraid', in comparison to 11.2 per cent in Germany and 15 per cent in Sweden (EVS 2008, Q73B). In other words, the British public feels less European than the German or Swedish public and, unlike the other two countries, believe that their national identity is fundamentally threatened by European integration. Such Europhobia has previously been associated with negative attitudes towards immigration (Vrees and Boomgarden, 2006b).
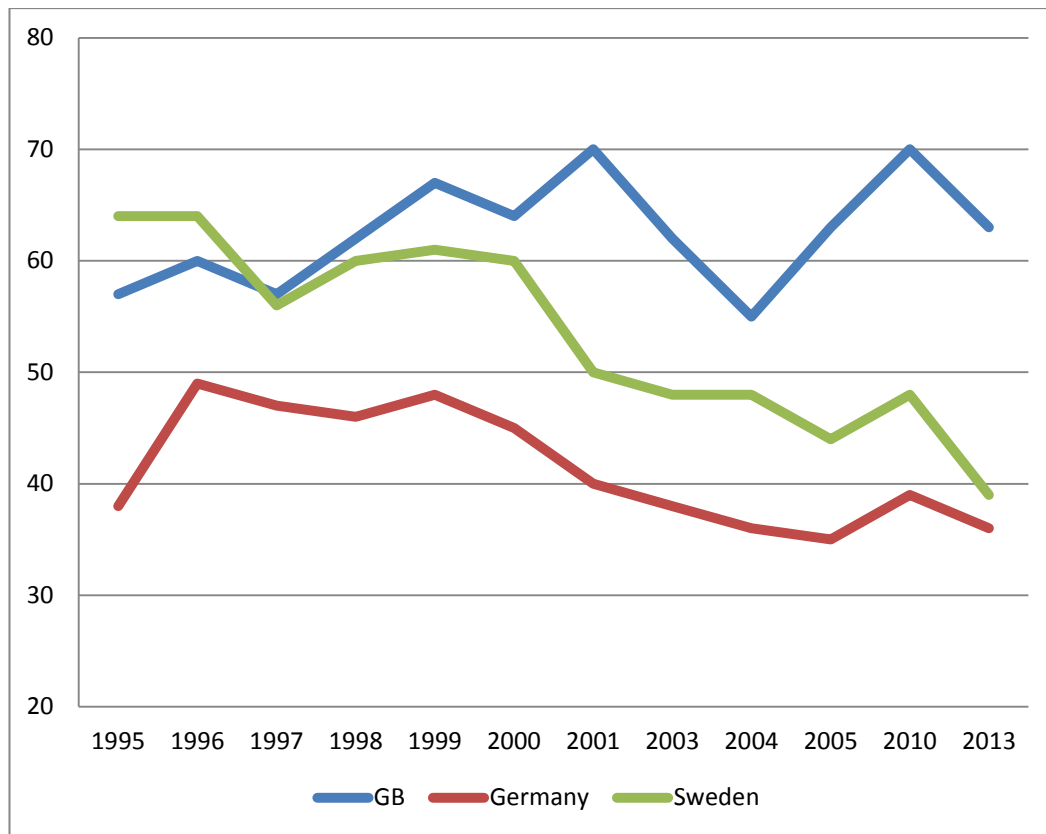
Figure 4: Percentage of respondents who identify themselves as 'only Nationals'

Note: In years where the question was asked both in the spring and fall wave of the *Eurobarometer*, only the fall barometer has been included.

Source: Eurobarometer

The differences in public opinion between Britain and the two other countries are quite stark, which might partially contribute to the dominant social construction among the British print media of EU citizenship and freedom of movement in the UK. In other words, the 'British' construction of EU migration and citizenship would seem 'foreign', if presented in the German or Swedish media, as in these countries the anxiety about immigration and the consequences of EU integration are much lower and citizens are much more likely to identify as Europeans. Moreover, public opinion in Britain might have served as a fertile ground for the most recent media and political campaigns.
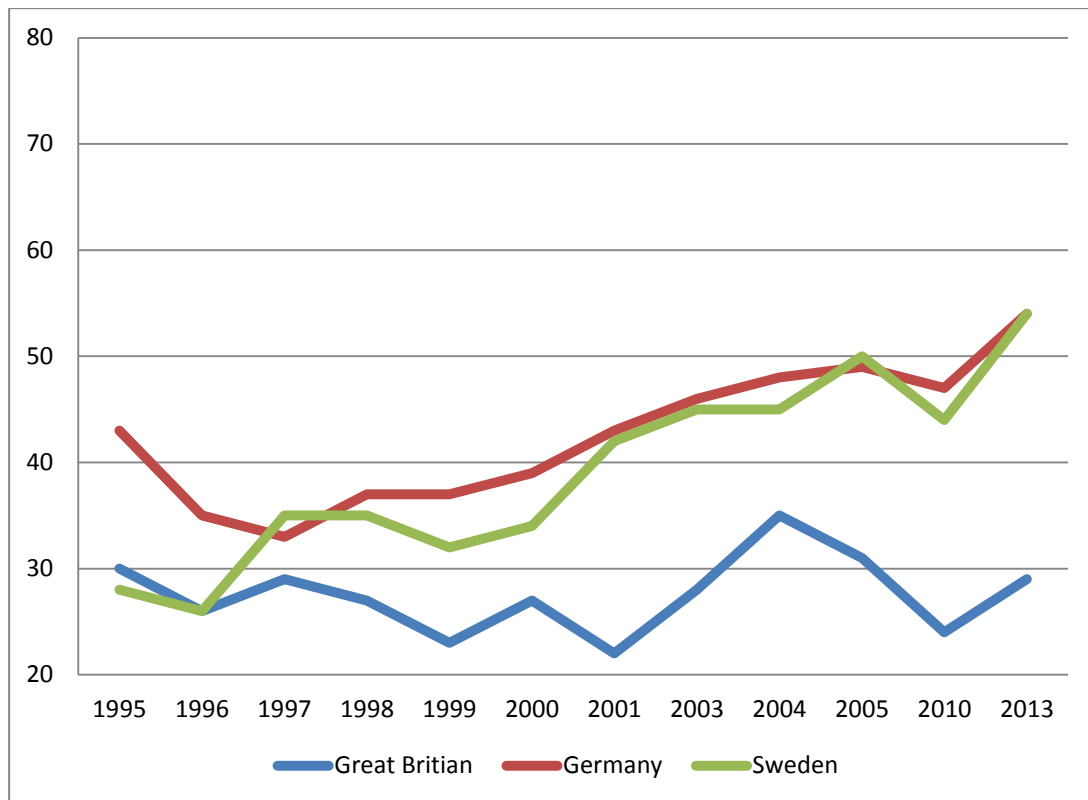
Figure 5: Percentage of respondents who identify themselves as 'Nationals and Europeans'

Note: In years where the question was asked both in the spring and fall wave of the *Eurobarometer*, only the fall barometer has been included.

Source: Eurobarometer

A matter of (welfare) institutions?

In addition to the differences in attitudes towards the EU and immigration, dominant media and political discourses surrounding people in receipt of welfare in general are also likely to be important, particularly so in Britain where there is a firmly entrenched narrative pattern that 'generous' welfare benefits incentivise immigration to the UK. The classic theoretical argument is that different welfare systems produce rather different public debates and perceptions of welfare recipients as a consequence of the degree of selectiveness of welfare (e.g. Larsen, 2006, 2013; Crepaz and Damron, 2009; Rothstein, 1998; Titmuss, 1974).

Liberal welfare states are assumed to create negative stereotypes and polarised debates around the 'deserving and undeserving' (Walker, 2014), whereas social democratic welfare states are expected to generate debates less likely to draw lines between the well-adjusted majority and the less well-adjusted and create more positive depictions. In a recent article, Larsen and Dejgaard (2013) argue that such 'regime effects' are visible in how national media depicts the poor and welfare recipients. Comparing tabloids in Denmark, Sweden and the UK they illustrate how the media's depiction of welfare clients is "harsh" in liberal regimes and "soft" in social-democratic regimes.

Even more in line with the institutional argument is attitudinal research which has shown that those who favour welfare benefits targeted towards the most needy (residual) over more general (universal) provision place the highest restrictions on welfare for immigrants (Van Oorschot and Reeskens 2012). If institutions do indeed structure welfare preferences, then this would suggest that selective welfare states may impact on the degree to which nationals are in favour of immigrants' social rights. Van Oorschot and Reesken (2012) also show that the 'merit'-principle seems to hold across countries with different levels of ethnic diversity. In other words, welfare recipients who have 'earned' their social rights gain legitimacy through the idea of reciprocity, newly arrived immigrants by implication becoming perceived as the least deserving welfare recipients (Van Oorschot, 2006). In a system such as Germany's therefore, where access to unemployment and pension benefits as well as healthcare is mainly based on social insurance contributions, there is limited scope to suggest that those who receive benefits are 'scrounging', whilst the converse is true in a classic liberal welfare state such as Britain.

Previous research in Britain on media portrayals of welfare recipients certainly confirms the 'harsh' depictions suggested in this analysis (Chase and Walker, 2014; Walker *et al.*, 2013;

Baumberg *et al.*, 2013; Jones, 2012). And, as our analysis furthermore shows, the British media conveys a strong notion that, in keeping with welfare magnet theory (Peterson and Rom, 1990), Britain has built itself a welfare system which in and of itself incentivises immigration (a contention that has been empirically contested, e.g. Skupknik, 2013).[7] Given such accepted 'truths', it stands to reason that curbing the consequent influx of migrants should take political precedence over ensuring that EU citizens have equal and fair access to their social rights. This unfounded concept of 'welfare tourism' directly influences policy responses across the political spectrum and, as noted earlier, has led the British government into a legal battle with the European Commission and has reportedly undermined the exercise of social rights of some 67 per cent of EU citizens in the UK (ICF GHK, 2013).

This same preoccupation with the notions of benefit tourism is not evident from the political and media discourses in either Germany or Sweden. Instead the discourse in both these countries leans towards recognising the gains made from EU free movement rather than the losses incurred and where issues of 'abuse' of social rights emerge in the media, they are more likely to be linked to individual cases rather than to any generalised paranoia about collective movement for the purposes of 'abuse'.

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[7] Irrespective of how the design of the welfare state might impact the construction of deservingness, we need to highlight that non-active EU citizens migrating to another member state only have the right of residence for more than three months on condition that they have sufficient resources for themselves and their family members so as not to become a burden on the social assistance system of the host Member State, as well as on the condition that they have comprehensive sickness insurance. At times it is argued that the non-contribution based social security system in the UK makes access for EU migrants very easy and leads to excessive cost burdens, compared to other member states. However, based on estimates the costs to the NHS by non-active EU migrants were between 0.7 and 1.1 per cent of total expenditure (IFC GHK, 2013: 94). Furthermore, it must also be highlighted that considering all unemployment benefits (not only the JSA), the UK is the only EU Member State where there are less beneficiaries among EU migrants (1 per cent) than among nationals (4 per cent) (ibid.: 174)

Conclusion

Our analysis has shown that the dominant social construction of EU citizenship and associated social rights in Britain differs significantly from the dominant integrationist legal interpretation of these concepts as well as from the dominant social constructions in Germany and Sweden. This 'deviant' British construction might be explained by elements of each of the possible explanations outlined above. In a nutshell: the specifics of how EU citizenship and social rights are politically constructed in the UK appear to stem from a combination of EU-scepticism, high levels of concern with immigration and negative attitudes to welfare (and welfare recipients) a permutation not found in the other two countries examined. Moreover, the ability of the Daily Express in the UK to harness and arguably magnify anti-European, anti-immigrant and anti-welfare sentiments undoubtedly may reinforce public opinion and function as a feedback loop impacting on the social construction of EU Citizenship.

Our work provides further evidence for the ways in which social rights are social constructions shaped by different traditions and social, political and economic influences, as argued by Dean (2002). The phenomenon emerging here is that EU Citizenship and its associated social rights are differently interpreted and defined in Britain compared to Germany and Sweden and are therefore in political and social terms ontologically different entities. The dominant 'interpretative patterns' (Gerhards, 1995) concerning European Citizenship have had distinctly contrasting trajectories in Britain compared to the other two countries. We have suggested a combination of factors which may explain these differences yet arguably a more fundamental question is left hanging. This question concerns the implications of these distinct constructions of citizenship and social rights for the project of European integration as a whole and, given these differences, whether and how a collective understanding of European social citizenship or solidarity is truly viable.

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APPENDIX 1: *Sample of articles for thematic analysis for each country*

Year	Britain		Germany		Sweden	
Main search term	EU citizen	EU migrant	EU citizen	EU migrant	EU citizen	EU migrant
1992	0	0	0	0	0	0
1993	1	0	0	0	0	0
1994	18	0	2	0	4	0
1995	26	1	3	1	6	0
1996	21	1	2	0	3	0
1997	19	0	3	1	6	0
1998	15	0	6	2	4	0
1999	22	0	1	1	12	0
2000	33	0	3	0	18	0
2001	41	0	1	1	19	0
2002	36	1	1	1	14	0
2003	49	1	2	0	33	0
2004	92	13	8	1	145	0
2005	45	0	8	4	19	0
2006	111	30	2	2	19	0
2007	114	17	5	7	15	0
2008	100	12	5	0	13	0
2009	70	8	9	4	13	0
2010	214	19	14	2	13	0
2011	103	24	15	1	11	0
2012	121	45	21	10	27	6
2013	275	255	52	15	46	23
2014	64	86	26	12	3	3

* Searches to generate samples were made separately for the equivalent word for of EU-citizen and EU-migrant (in combination with the search terms that indicate social rights). It should be noted that this generated many duplications of articles and hence the numbers presented in the table are not the absolute number.