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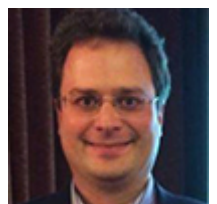
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The political economy of 'a country called Europe'

New mapping techniques open up the possibility of both a more informed policy-making and a greater sense of solidarity

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Can Europe be seen as one country? Or at least as an emerging 'entity of identity' made up of a growing number of smaller countries and regions? To what extent, in other words, can we start talking about the political economy of 'a country called Europe'?



After several years of severe economic crisis and austerity measures that have disproportionately and brutally [hit the most disadvantaged citizens](#) across the continent, accompanied by [a rise of extremist far right and populist parties](#), it may seem that a positive answer to these questions might be very unlikely.

Yet, despite the negative climate and the [political scapegoating of the European Union](#) in some of the countries most hit by the crisis and austerity measures, the fact is that, according to the most recent [Eurobarometer survey](#), 'most people are optimistic about the future of the EU in nearly all member states'

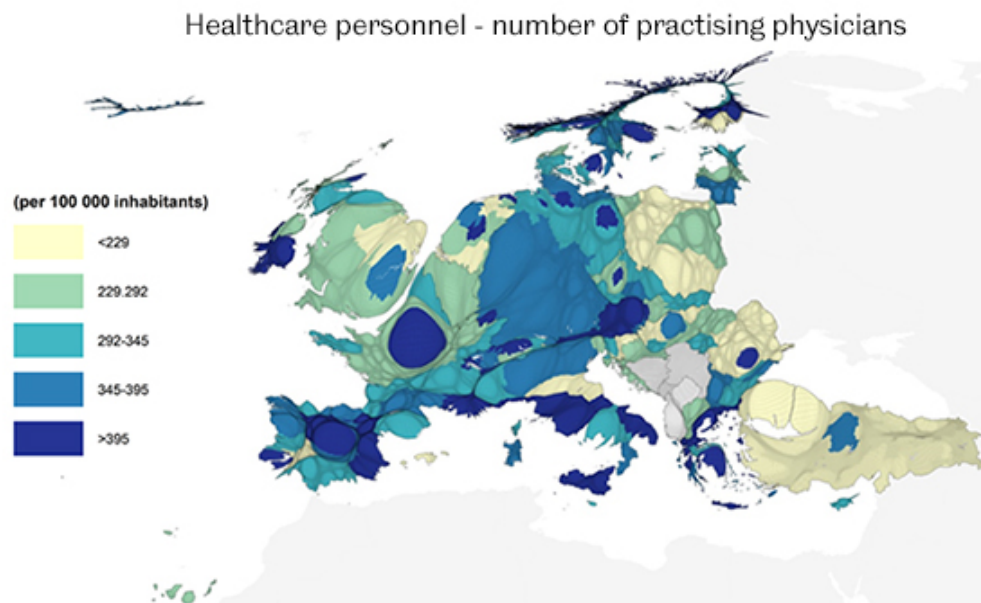
and, remarkably, 'close to two-thirds of Europeans feel that they are citizens of the EU'. This seems to be particularly the case amongst the rapidly increasing numbers of [Europeans who live, study and work in a member-state other than their country of birth](#).

There is undoubtedly a need for reform of the European Union and there are currently very important debates taking place regarding governance, democratic accountability and social cohesion, building on the [remarkable achievements](#) of the past seven decades. A notable example is a recently proposed [manifesto for a euro political union](#), calling for 'less Europe on issues on which member countries do very well on their own, and more Europe when union is essential'.

One novel way of contributing to these debates and of highlighting the benefits of policy-making at the European level is to consider European economy, culture, history *and* its human and physical geography as a single, large, land and population mass. This is the approach taken by myself and my fellow European geographers [Danny Dorling](#) and [Benjamin Hennig](#) in our recently published [Social Atlas of Europe](#).

Our project highlights the notion of Europe as a single entity by looking at its physical and population geography simultaneously, using state-of-the-art Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and new human cartography techniques that build on recent [award-winning research](#) and [innovative Worldmapping applications](#). The material and maps presented in our new atlas can then be used to inform evidence-based debates about policy-making at the European level.

I illustrate this here with a simple example taken from the *Health* chapter of the book, showing the relevance of our mapping to current debates about the political economy of Europe.



Caption: Number of practising physicians (per 100,000 inhabitants) by NUTS2 regions; source: [The Social Atlas of Europe](#), based on data from the [Eurostat Regional Yearbook 2013](#)

This is a map known as a Hennig Projection Gridded Cartogram, with the area drawn scaled proportionally to population but shaded by the total numbers of practising physicians per 100,000 population in each region (more information on the types of maps and the data and methods can be found in the introductory chapter and amongst other material available via the book's accompanying [web-site](#)). It is worth noting

that amongst the regions with the higher numbers we see countries heavily affected by recession and austerity, including Greece (which also the highest number of doctors per capita in Europe).

The map shown here can be used to inform debates regarding the planning of health services at the European level. For example, it enables us to understand better inequalities in health service provision across European regions and countries; at the same time, it allows us to make a case for a pan-European Health System which could involve the co-ordination of efforts and funding at the European level to arrange treatment and routine operations in countries and regions that have surplus medical staff. It's easy to see that this could have great benefits for the populations in countries with longer hospital waiting lists and at the same time support the local and national economies of those areas affected most by the crisis.

Another policy-relevant debate that can be informed by the use of the 'data geovisualisation' presented here is that surrounding [highly skilled migration](#) and ['brain drain' in Europe at times of crisis](#). In particular, it is interesting to note that highly qualified professionals (including medical staff) in the regions hit the hardest by the recession and massive government cuts have been [migrating over the past five years to regions with lower unemployment](#), mostly in the north and in countries like Germany. It can be argued that such movements of population not only help some regions and countries [overcome their skill shortages](#), but that they also further contribute to the formation and bolstering of European identity, both in the receiving countries as well as in the minds of the migrating population.

On the other hand, these movements can be seen as a [brain-drain for the originating regions](#) with further negative economic and social implications. In any case, it is very important to point out that the cost of educating highly qualified professionals like doctors was typically not covered by the receiving country, but rather by the tax-payers of those sending countries, like Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal, which made huge investments in their higher education systems in past decades. This is worth remembering when considering European solidarity! The point is simple but important: the investments in higher education (including medical schools) made by these countries in the past decades (and which have contributed to their high overall levels of government debt) are now benefiting the European Union as a whole via the migration of these highly skilled groups of individuals.

Indeed, there are many more examples of variables and themes that can be used to illustrate how mapping and conceptualising Europe as *one place* can inform relevant policy debates. Other examples might include [migration](#), [regional populations by age](#), [unemployment](#), [hospital beds](#) and [EU Spending](#).

Finally, in addition to the enrichment of the evidence base available to inform urban, regional, national *and* European policy simultaneously, we can plausibly hope that these new maps and cartograms of Europe may also enhance a sense of common identity, solidarity and belonging. By such means, perhaps we can slowly move away from a 'nation-state mentality' and towards [the idea of Europe as a country united in diversity](#) – in effect [a Europe of cities and regions rather than nation-states](#).

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