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*Published in:*  
Journal of European Public Policy

*DOI:*  
[10.1080/13501763.2016.1216152](https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2016.1216152)

*Publication date:*  
2017

*Document Version*  
Peer reviewed version

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Lynggaard, K. (2017). Exploring the emotional appeal of green and social Europe myths among pan-European Union organizations. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 24(10), 1409-1429.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2016.1216152>

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# **Exploring the emotional appeal of green and social Europe myths among pan-European Union organisations**

Kennet Lynggaard

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to advance European integration research by exploring the emotional appeal of political myths in day-to-day European Union politics with a special focus on the reception and reproduction of myths among pan-European Union non-governmental organisations. I investigate myths associated with ‘EUROPE 2020: a European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’, adopted in early 2010. What makes Europe 2020 especially interesting here is that it draws upon and feeds into a number of myths about European integration including ‘green Europe’ and ‘social Europe’. The paper argues that: (1) pan-European Union non-governmental organisations are receptive to political myths, including in the short term; (2) pan-European Union non-governmental organisations contribute to the reproduction of myths, especially already-institutionalised myths and myths that resonate with their sectoral activities; and (3) pan-European Union non-governmental organisations strategically use political myths to justify policy positions and continually mobilise desires around utopian ideals to secure organisational survival.

**KEY WORDS**      Europe 2020; green Europe; NGOs; political emotions; political myths; social Europe.

## **I. Introduction**

This paper explores the reception and reproduction of political myths by pan-European Union non-governmental organisations (pan-EU NGOs) in the processes of European integration. The point of departure is that the emotional appeal of political myths is crucial to an understanding of both how the European Union (EU) becomes constituted as a political reality and of how the integration process itself occurs (Manners 2014; McNamara 2015). Earlier studies of political myths have been almost exclusively associated with EU identity politics and legitimacy. This reflects how collective European myths are fundamental to our understanding of issues such as European social solidarity, citizens' feelings of belonging to the EU, and political advocacy for and resistance to European integration. While certainly related to such issues, the specific focus in this paper is on the role of political myths in meso-level political processes. Moreover, the paper moves beyond the typical focus on the production and usage of political myths in the narrow circles of EU institutional actors by paying distinct attention to the reception and reproduction of political myths among pan-EU NGOs.

For this purpose I explore myths associated with Europe 2020 ('EUROPE 2020: a European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth', European Commission 2010), which was adopted in early 2010. The significance and potential of the Europe 2020 strategy for the EU's political economy is clear. For my purposes, however, it is not so much the impact – or possibly lack thereof – of the stated strategy objectives that is of interest. What make Europe 2020 especially useful for this study is that it draws upon and feeds into a number of myths about European integration. More specifically, the strategy draws on the core political myths of what have been termed 'green Europe' (Lenschow and Sprungk 2010) and 'social Europe' (Rovisco 2010). See also Lynggaard, Manners and Sjøby 2014: 3). Europe 2020 draws on past myths and in doing so, arguably, creates expectations about the future of European integration. In that sense it represents a view on 'past futures' holding that, '[t]he processes in which collective memories are constructed are about the

horizons of future expectations as much as about past experiences' (Stråth 2005: 260). To be sure, myths about European integration are not thought of as anything less than real, or as being in opposition to political rationality. Rather, the study of political myth is closely associated with the study of political discourse and narratives, but additionally concerned with their appeal to the political emotions on which political rationality depends, an issue I will return to below.

While the Europe 2020 strategy in itself creates expectations about the future trajectory of European integration, both in general and, quite specifically, through strategy targets, the implications of Europe 2020 very much depend on how it is received by societal actors. Europe 2020 was formulated as a response to the 2008 financial and economic crisis. The initiative can be viewed as accommodating to critiques of what, by some, were seen as the one-sided EU austerity policies at the time. Launching Europe 2020 the European Commission president Barroso recognised that:

*The condition for success [of Europe 2020] is a real ownership by European leaders and institutions. Our new agenda requires a coordinated European response, including with social partners and civil society. If we act together, then we can fight back and come out of the crisis stronger. We have the new tools and the new ambition. Now we need to make it happen.* (European Commission 2010: 4).

My focus here is on to what extent this ownership has in fact materialised among pan-EU NGOs, and, specifically, on the role of political myths in the reception and reproduction of the strategy. In the exploration of how pan-EU NGOs outside EU institutions receive and feed into myths about European integration, I put special focus on members of the social policy coalition known as the Platform of the European Social NGOs (Social Platform), the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and Businesseurope (until early 2007 the 'Union of Industrial and Employer's Confederations of Europe' [UNICE]). They all enjoy

institutionalised access to EU decision making, are some of the largest Brussels-based NGOs and together their activities cover a broad spectrum of policy issues. Furthermore, the paper develops a three-step research design for the study of the emotional appeal of political myths. The first step views Europe 2020 as representative of *a set of institutionalised narratives* in order to identify how pan-EU NGOs receive concepts and conceptions associated with the strategy, with a special emphasis on the green and social Europe. The second step sets up a design for the study of the *emotional appeal* of political discourse associated with green and social Europe narratives, thus qualifying some such to be classed as political myths, and the third step allows for the investigation of *the reproduction and usage of myths* among pan-EU NGOs. To be sure, I will not be mapping the content of green and social Europe discourses or narratives in their entirety. I assume their existence in some form or other (I return to why these are credible assumptions). Doing so I refer to narrative discourse as I set out to explore, first, emotions as a key element of political myths and, second, the role of political myths among pan-EU NGOs.

The paper argues that: (1) pan-EU NGOs are indeed receptive to political myths about social and green Europe, also in short-term day-to-day politics; (2) pan-EU NGOs – except for *BusinessEurope* – contribute to their reproduction, especially already-institutionalised myths and those myths particularly relevant for their sectoral activities and in this process; (3) pan-EU NGOs strategically use political myths not only to justify policy positions, but also to continually mobilise desire around utopian ideals securing organisational survival, again with the exception of *BusinessEurope*.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: section II establishes a conceptual framework for ‘the politics of myths in European integration’; section III outlines ‘research design, techniques and data’, followed by an empirical analysis in section IV. Conclusions are made in the final section V.

## **II. The politics of myths in European integration**

Myths are first and foremost associated with EU identity politics and political legitimacy. In the broadest sense myths are shared ideas supplying citizens with a sense of ‘origin, continuity, historical memories, collective remembrance, common heritage and tradition, as well as a common destiny’ (Obradovic 1996: 196). Such myths – which may be termed ‘foundational myths’ (Della Sala 2010: 6) – are the carriers of social solidarity and crucial for popular support to political institutions and their output. Views on the existence of foundational myths in Europe range from those arguing not only for their absence, but also their near impossibility due, amongst other things, to the indistinctiveness of Europe as a geographical and cultural unity (Obradovic 1996); to those arguing that the successful construction of European integration as a rational, non-political and inevitable process is one such myth, and a powerful one, at the heart of Europe (Hansen and Williams 1999). This type of discussion and literature is as relevant as ever. However, what it lacks, and for that matter what it allows for, is a view on the role of myths in more mundane day-to-day EU politics.

In order to explore the reception and reproduction of myths in EU politics I anchor my approach in discursive institutionalism. This was especially chosen as it allows me to link the more marginal political myths research agenda with the broader institutional literature supplying conceptualisations of short-term, ‘day-to-day’ institutional politics, while at the same time permitting me to connect such processes to medium- and long-term EU politics. Discursive institutionalism highlights the transformative power of discourse as essential in understanding the politics of change. Especially important are communicative discourse – directed at the public with the aim of legitimising policy and institutional choice – and coordinative discourse – aimed at establishing ideational agreement among political elites (Schmidt 2008). Political myths most clearly play a role, perhaps even a key

role, in communicating and legitimising EU policy and institutional choices. However, my focus and argument is that political myths are also crucial to understanding coordination among political elites.

From the viewpoint of discursive institutionalism, political myths provide order by establishing rules for who we are and what is acceptable in political life as opposed to who are we not and what is not acceptable. In that sense, political myths affect the inclusion/exclusion of actors and ideas in political life. While political myths are a type of discourse, they are not equivalent to political discourse. Chiara Bottici (2007: 116–130) is especially helpful in carving out the area of application of political myth as compared to the closely associated concepts of discourse and narrative. Political myths stand out for their narrative form which, like discourse, connects events, establishes causal relations and assigns roles. But in addition myth simplifies by means of plot: first setting the scene, then building up to a climax and concluding with a resolution (see also Hannes-Magnusson and Wiener 2010: 34–35). At the same time, political myths are not equivalent to narratives in that they provide significance to a societal group by addressing their social and political conditions. That is, a political myth is *more than* a meaning system (like a discourse) presented as a plot (like a narrative); a political myth must *also* be of importance for someone. I view emotions as a maker of this importance.

This leads us to the focus highlighted here, namely: the emotional appeal of myth in politics. Emotional appeal is commonly acknowledged as a distinct feature of political myths (Lieberman and Gray 2007: 378; Hannes-Magnusson and Wiener 2010: 35), yet it is also a feature that remains underexplored conceptually and even more so empirically. To commence this work I look to political psychology for inspiration. Political emotions can, from this perspective, be viewed as guided by two types of emotional systems: the disposition system and the surveillance system (Marcus 2003). Whereas appeals to the former activate already internalised behaviour without much thought, the latter appeals to reflection and possibly strategic behaviour by warning us of ‘unusual and/or

threatening circumstances’ (ibid: 203). Marcus argues that emotion: *‘is intimately involved not only in habits, prejudices, and other instances of reliance of learned behavior but in the recruitment of reason and the full display of cognitive activities’* (Marcus 2003: 204). This means that emotion is neither something that should – or indeed can – be eliminated from political decision making, nor should political emotions be conceived as opposite to political reason or rationality. The two are interrelated and political rationality depends on political emotion. Furthermore the emotional appeal of myth not only allows for routine political activity, but also for swift evaluation and reactions by political agents to political challenges (Marcus 2000: 222).

Taken together, it is the narrative form and the emotional appeal of myths which makes myths particularly powerful discourses in politics. In the words of Zaiotti, *‘[M]yths can reinforce existing institutions and the position of some members of the community, but also sanction social segmentation and political hierarchies, and even embolden oppositional groups’* (2011: 542). This also means that challenging the basis of a political myth is not a trivial matter, but potentially a highly determinative political act. Against this background I argue that, at the heart of the study of the role of myth in politics are two mechanisms highlighting respectively: (1) myths as code, and (2) myths as conduct.

### ***Myths as code***

Myths as code highlights their discursive structural features, which can be described in terms of subject matter and structural firmness, or level of institutionalisation. In terms of subject matter, a *‘political myth is the work on a common narrative that grants significance to the political conditions and experiences of a social group’* (Bottici and Challand 2013: 92). Furthermore, myth in politics *‘arises out of a narrative because it (a) coagulates and reproduces significance, (b) is shared by a given group, and (c) can address the specifically political conditions in which a given group lives’*



(Bottici and Challand 2013: 92). The nature of political myths makes detecting their historical origins inconceivable. A myth is, rather, continuously reconstructed; if not, the myth ceases to exist. Highlighting the continuous reconstruction of myths is especially important when the focus is on short- to medium-term decision making. Acknowledging this, I follow Bottici and Challand's suggestion that – analytically – the 'reconstruction of myths can be seen as consisting of three elements: production, reception and reproduction' (2013: 90).

I also expect that the structural firmness, or level of institutionalisation, of myths matters for their impact on politics. It has been shown how the emergence as well as survival of the green Europe myth depends on the continued production of environmental legislation, trust among citizens in high levels of environmental performance and efficient implementation in the EU, to which can be added the perception that the EU exercises global leadership in climate and environmental policy (Lenschow and Sprungk 2010). Similarly, the social Europe myth is grounded in the idea of a 'European social model', which is typically constituted by a mixture of liberal and social democratic values, where economic growth and competitiveness go hand in hand with socially just labour market policies and institutions. Social Europe is illustrated in phrases such as 'social dialogue', 'flexicurity', and 'gender equality' (Rovisco 2010: 252; Macrae 2010). While social Europe and green Europe probably vary as to the processes of their emergence and the degrees of their institutionalisation in EU politics, both mythical constructions are constitutive parts of the EU as a political reality (Manners 2014). What we know close to nothing about is how political myths are received and reproduced in more mundane, day-to-day EU politics.

If we view institutions as authorised and sanctioned discourse, then the institutionalisation of myths progresses through actors' authorisations and the establishment of some sort of sanctions (see Lynggaard 2006). Authorisations and sanctions can range from being instituted by EU law to more informal political mechanisms setting out boundaries between relevant and legitimate political issues

and actors and those that are not in EU politics. Myths may also to be institutionalised among larger or smaller groups of actors. Whereas foundational myths about, for example, ‘nation’ and ‘state’ concern the largest groups, we may expect that functional myths such as social Europe and green Europe concern smaller and more specialised groupings; European functional myths being ‘a “brand attribute” of Europe, a particular feature that distinguishes Europe from other political entities and that adds to a common identity’ (Lenschow and Sprungk 2010: 136). Functional myths are neither more nor less real than foundational myths, but they tend to draw on specific historical events and people. Functional myths are, then, located between the more grand and elusive Europe-wide foundational myths and specific policy ideas. It has been argued that the weakness of European – as compared to national – foundational myths highlights the importance of European functional myths (Della Sala 2010). While it may be so, it suffices here to acknowledge some type of relationship between the two, but for the time being I am more concerned with the latter.

### ***Myths as conduct***

Myths as conduct highlight agency, which can be described in terms of the usage of mythical constructs in politics. Della Sala (2010: 6) suggests that political myths ‘are political instruments that may or may not be successful in their appeal’. Although the historical point of creation of political myths may well be blurred or abstract, it by no means follows that political myths cannot be used strategically by political actors. But how can we know if and when decision makers invoke myths strategically as opposed to merely reiterating already institutionalised and internalised myths without much reflection and purpose? In other words, how can we distinguish ‘myths as conduct’ from ‘myths as code’?

Assuming a mutually constitutive relation between structure and agency essentially makes this an analytical decision, yet not a random one (for further discussion of strategic usage of discourse, see Lynggaard 2013). First, the time dimension is of particular importance. While decision makers are likely to become less reflective and strategic over the course of time of the development and possible institutionalisation of political myths, a more sudden articulation of ‘new’, or previously downplayed, myths suggests a more reflective and strategic choice. Second, decision making elites are arguably more likely to be strategic and considered users of myths. Decision making elites are – perhaps often acutely – aware of the presence of alternative nation state myths. Decision making elites are faced with the task of articulating European integration myths as part of the production of EU political authority, while at the same time avoiding intruding on longstanding and sensitive national myths. An example of the high stakes involved when failing to be sensitive to state-level political myths is the French and Dutch rejection of the ‘Constitution for Europe’ at their 2005 referenda which, according to Manners (2011: 244–245; 252 ff.; also McNamara 2015: 142–143; 162–166), was ‘too federal’ and bore too much resemblance to the establishment of a statehood to pass a popular vote. This trap is, however, typically avoided, particularly in day-to-day politics. As argued by McNamara (2015): *‘The labels, mental maps, and narratives generated by EU policies are often deracinated, purged of their associations with the powers of the nation state and instead standardized into seemingly unobjectionable blandness’* (McNamara 2015: 3). In other words, in their production of European myths, decision makers tend to be highly aware of the emotional appeal of national myths about, for example, state sovereignty and national identity, suggesting at the very least some level of strategic reflection. Thirdly, myths associated with specified courses of action and possibly presented as necessary to them would certainly suggest that such are invoked strategically. Finally, the extent to which decision makers invoke different myths for consumption in different types of fora – e.g., more or less private/public or domestic/international ones – indicates strategic reflection.

### III. Research design, techniques and data

My study of political myths proceeds through a three-step research design. The research draws on basic comparative research techniques and document analysis, which combine qualitative readings and quantitative indicators. The first step views Europe 2020 as representative of *a set of narratives* in order to identify how pan-EU NGOs receive the concepts and understandings associated with the strategy, with a special emphasis on green and social Europe. The assumption is that Commission strategy forms part of an ongoing and long-term reproduction of Europe integration narratives. In other words, for the purpose of my investigation I assume the existence of (more or less) institutionalised green and social Europe narratives. Based on this assumption, the empirical investigation is directed at the short- to medium-term reception of narratives among pan-EU NGOs using key terms of green and social Europe as indicative hereof. At this point we do not actually know if the green and social Europe narratives are just that, or if they qualify as political myths.

Hence, the job of the second step is to examine the *emotional appeals* associated with green and social Europe qualifying them as political myths. It is notoriously difficult to measure political emotions. Some of the techniques used in political psychology are: actors' emotional self-reporting, experimental research, and interpretation of facial and other physical expressions. For my purposes, however, I am not so much concerned with the deeper sentiment and structure of political emotions, but rather emotional appeal as a characteristic of political myths. I rely on admittedly less sophisticated, but readily available and nevertheless useful techniques. I pay attention to those lines of argument associated with green and social Europe that exhibit high usage of emotional language. It is clearly problematic to assume any particular term to be generically emotional, which rather depends on both the linguistic and social context of its usage. It is also worth noting that the language

of EU political elites in day-to-day politics is fairly subtle – e.g., as opposed to the language associated with political aggression and violence (see Matsumoto *et al.* 2013). Rather than relying exclusively on a qualitative, ‘words-in-context’ discourse analysis, however, we arrive here at a point where past methods call out to be supplemented by both comparative analysis and quantitative indicators (see Wueest and Fossati 2015).

Given this background, I use the attachment of issues such as ‘justice’ and ‘democracy’ to green and social Europe as indicative of political emotional appeals. An almost endless number of wordings and terms can be deemed to evoke emotion depending on the context. However, democracy and justice are surely terms, perhaps more than any others, which at least potentially invoke emotion in politics (Edelman 1977: 49–50). They are terms that are used to embrace the foundation of almost all political systems, but are also used for the purpose of delegitimising political processes or positions by labelling them as undemocratic or unjust. Clearly, invoking this type of language is not necessarily meant to express a fundamental distrust with a political system, but it is nonetheless illustrative of something being at stake. The systematic occurrence of political emotional appeals in the context of green and social Europe is taken as an indicator of the mythical nature of these narrative discourses.

The third and final step of the research design *investigates the reproduction* of green and social Europe myths by pan-EU NGOs. The reproduction of political myths is, by definition, always characterised by both continuity and change. Of particular interest here, in order to assess their usage of political myth in day-to-day politics, is whether and how pan-EU NGOs contribute to change when reproducing green and social Europe.

The Europe 2020 strategy is used as a touchstone to identify myths in use, but I move beyond this document, both in time and in types of data. The analysis not only covers the process of elaboration, adoption and implementation of Europe 2020, but encompasses roughly the period 2000–2014. I compiled archives of documents of the four pan-EU NGOs so as to allow for temporal comparisons

of individual NGOs and across NGOs. The selected pan-EU NGOs all enjoy institutionalised access to EU decision making, are some of the largest Brussels-based NGOs and together their activities cover a broad spectrum of policy issues. While this is believed to serve the purposes of this study well, it worth noting the omission of NGOs less institutionalised in, and possibly more critical of, EU politics. The data material consists of documents published by the EEB, the Social Platform, ETUC and Businessseurope. Table 1 provides an overview of the documents considered.

**Table 1. Types of and total number of consulted documents.**

<b>Sources</b>	<b>Type of document</b>	<b>N° of documents per source</b>
<b>EEB</b>	Biannual Memorandums 2005–2014, each approx. 40–70 pp.	N= 20
<b>Social Platform</b>	Annual Reports 2002–2012, each approx. 20–40 pp. (except briefer 2008–2010 report). Work Programmes 2002–2012, each approx. 15–25 pp.	N=23
<b>ETUC</b>	Annual Resolutions 2000–2013, each approx. 100–200 pp.	N=13
<b>Businessseurope</b>	Biannual Economic Outlooks 1999–2014, each approx. 10–30 pp.	N=32

The document archives associated with each NGO are not straightforwardly comparable, particularly in quantitative terms, because, amongst other inconsistencies, some variation exists in the scope of the documents (in terms of the numbers of pages and word counts) both within and across the archives. Yet, the scope of each source is typically fairly similar over time with a few exceptions, where a few additional documents have been included to compensate, for example, for very brief annual reports. While quantitative comparisons across NGO archives should be treated with caution, patterns will be identified and compared over time.

## **IV. Analysis**

### ***Production of Europe 2020***

The Commission published the Europe 2020 communication in March 2010. Crucially, the strategy associates both social Europe and green Europe with economic growth. Europe 2020 sets out three strategic priorities, namely: ‘smart growth’ emphasising ‘knowledge and innovation’ as key to boosting the European economy; ‘sustainable growth’ involving ‘a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy’ and; ‘inclusive growth’ aiming at ‘a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion’, all to be realised by 2020 by means of specified initiatives and targets (targets are typically measured in absolute figures and/or in percentages compared to a default position). Opinions clearly vary among EU institutional actors and member states on specific initiatives and targets, especially those related to spending issues and the strategy governance architecture (European Parliament 2009; Taylor 2010; Brand 2011). Still the adoption of the strategy was a surprisingly placid process with little opposition to the overall priorities, which have all been recognised and established as a common frame of reference by the EU member state governments and the European Parliament (Lundvall and Lorenz 2012: 334; Warleigh-Lack 2010: 306).

My concern here is not whether the production of Europe 2020 represents a sterile continuation of more or less institutionalised European myths (for an overview, see Manners 2014: 7), or if the strategy possibly reflects a change in discourse towards a ‘rehabilitation, or even reinforcement, of neoliberalism’ as argued by De Ville and Orbie (2014: 150). Rather the focus here is on the extent to which and how green and social myths associated with Europe 2020 are received and reproduced among pan-EU NGOs. Are green and social European myths equally impactful among pan-EU

NGOs? Are the myths of green and social Europe reproduced in continuation of their representation in Europe 2020 or do pan-EU NGOs have an independent role in the production of European integration myths? These are the questions I turn to now by examining green and social Europe, before moving on to the analysis of associated emotional political appeals.

### ***Reception of green and social Europe: sectoral and institutional resonance***

Europe 2020 was met with a wealth of activity among pan-EU NGOs including numerous publications, conferences, hearings and seminars. We saw the establishment of pan-EU NGO networks especially aimed at influencing the formulation and implementation of Europe 2020. The ‘Spring Alliance’ formed in 2009 by the EEB, the Social Platform, ETUC and European Confederation NGO for Relief and Development. They received immediate attention from the Barroso Commission (European Environmental Bureau 2009c: 1–2; Zeitlin 2010: 262) among others through their first of so far two collective ‘Manifestos’ (Spring Alliance 2009; 2014). ‘The EU Semester Alliance’ was established in 2014 with similar aims and includes an even greater number of civil society NGOs.

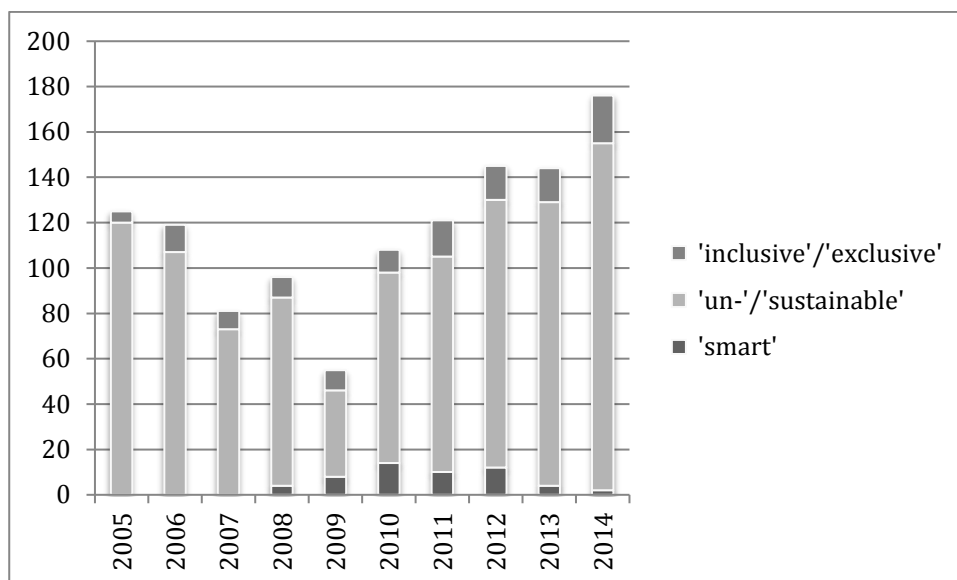
Europe 2020 gave a strong boost to key issues promoted by pan-EU NGOs. This becomes apparent if we view Europe 2020 as a representation of a set of institutionalised narratives. ‘Ecological modernisation’ (Hajer 1995) is probably the most prominent conceptualisation of how, and the extent to which, discourse on ‘green Europe’ has entered and shaped institutional and policy choices at the EU and national levels, especially since the mid-1980s. A substantial literature has similarly investigated ‘social Europe’ discourse, often viewed through the lenses of the rise of neoliberal discourse in EU politics and the challenge this poses to the ‘European Social Model’ (Atkinson and Davoudi 2000; Ferrera 2014; Kahn-Nisser 2013). As narratives, green and social Europe have both



been suffering in the face of a strong economic Europe narrative ingrained in core European institutions and policies. Still, green and social Europe narratives have experienced heydays and are possibly both on the rise again, or are at least forming platforms anew, allowing for critiques of the direction of European integration in the context of austerity and climate change (Manners and Murray 2016: 191–195). This permits us to view Europe 2020 as *an instance* of a long-term and still ongoing institutionalisation of green and social Europe, both as discourses and as narratives, and to turn our empirical attention to what we know much less about: the short- to medium-term reception and reproduction of green and social Europe.

Figures 1–4 are simple word counts of references to the terms ‘smart’, ‘un-/sustainable’ and ‘inclusive’/‘exclusive’ by the EEB, the Social Platform, ETUC and BusinessEurope in the period 2005–2012/2014. This is used as a quantitative indicator of the reception of Europe 2020 narrative discourses as reflected in the three key objectives of Europe 2020: smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The indicators should be treated with some caution because, among other reasons, ‘un-/sustainable’ and ‘inclusive’/‘exclusive’ are clearly not straightforward indicators of, respectively, green and social Europe. For example, ‘sustainable’ may well be used to characterise societal and economic developments, or the status of fiscal policies. ‘Smart growth’ emphasising ‘innovation’ and ‘knowledge’ as key to consolidating the European economy is, as we shall see, close to absent in pan-EU NGO discourse. This, however, does make ‘smart growth’ discourse useful as a baseline for comparisons with green and social Europe.

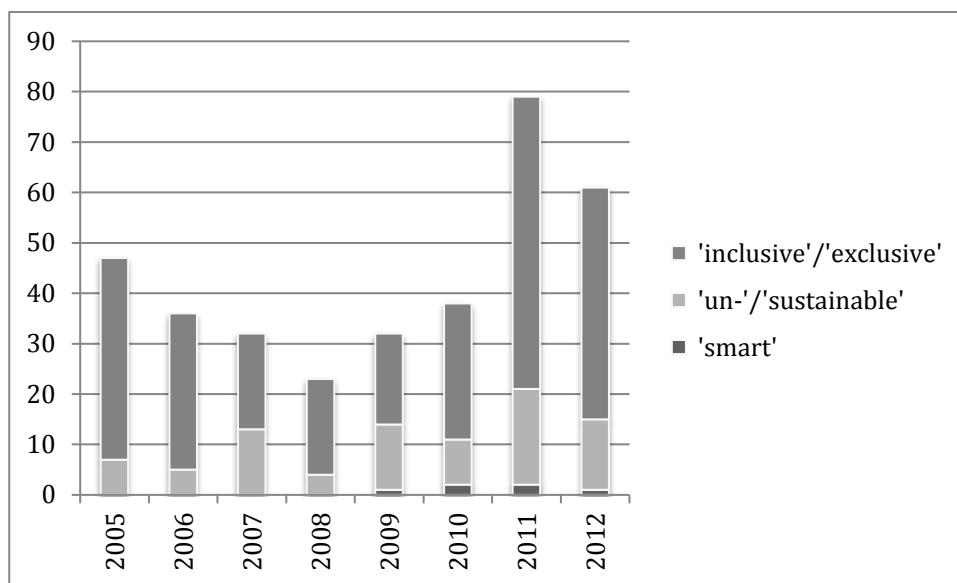
**Figure 1. EEB references to ‘smart’, ‘un-/sustainable’ and ‘inclusive’/ ‘exclusive’ 2005–2014.**



Source: European Environmental Bureau Biannual Memorandums 2005–2014.

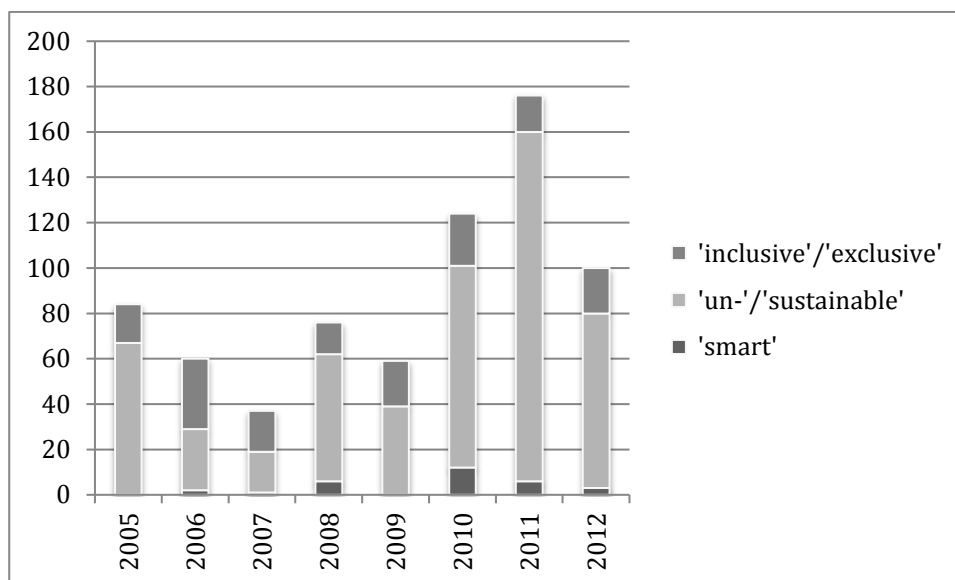
\* Searches were conducted on the terms 'smart\*', 'inclusi\*' and 'exclusi\*', 'sustainab\*' and 'unsustainab\*' so to capture all forms and their negations.

**Figure 2. Social Platform references to 'smart', 'un-/sustainable' and 'inclusive'/'exclusive' 2005–2012.**



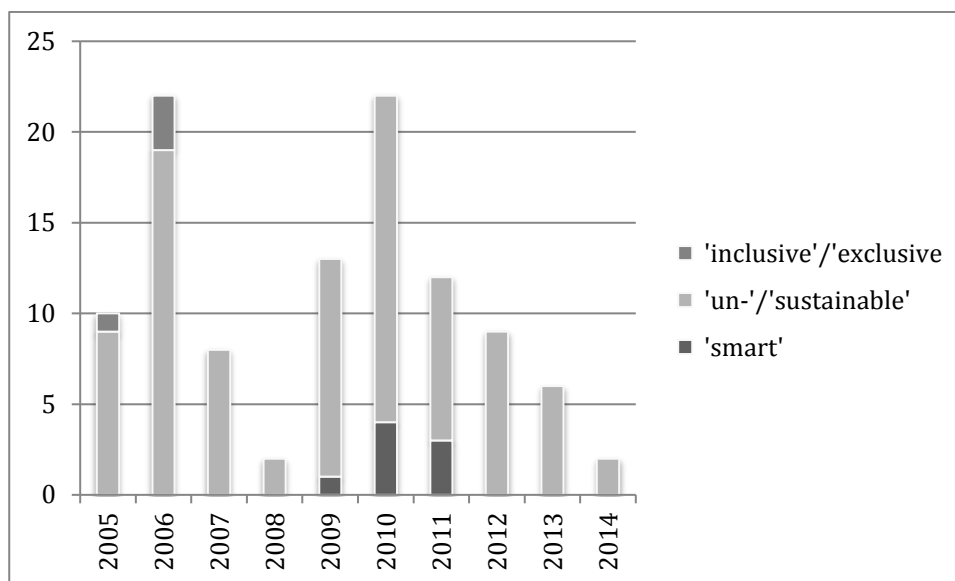
Source: Platform of European Social NGOs Annual Reports 2005–2012 & Platform of European Social NGOs Work Programmes 2005–2012.

**Figure 3. ETUC references to 'smart', 'un-/sustainable' and 'inclusive'/'exclusive' 2005–2012.**



Source: European Trade Union Confederation Annual Resolutions 2005–2012.

**Figure 4. Businesseurope references to 'smart', 'un-/sustainable' and 'inclusive'/'exclusive' 2005–2014.**



Source: Businesseurope Biannual Economic Outlooks 2005–2014.

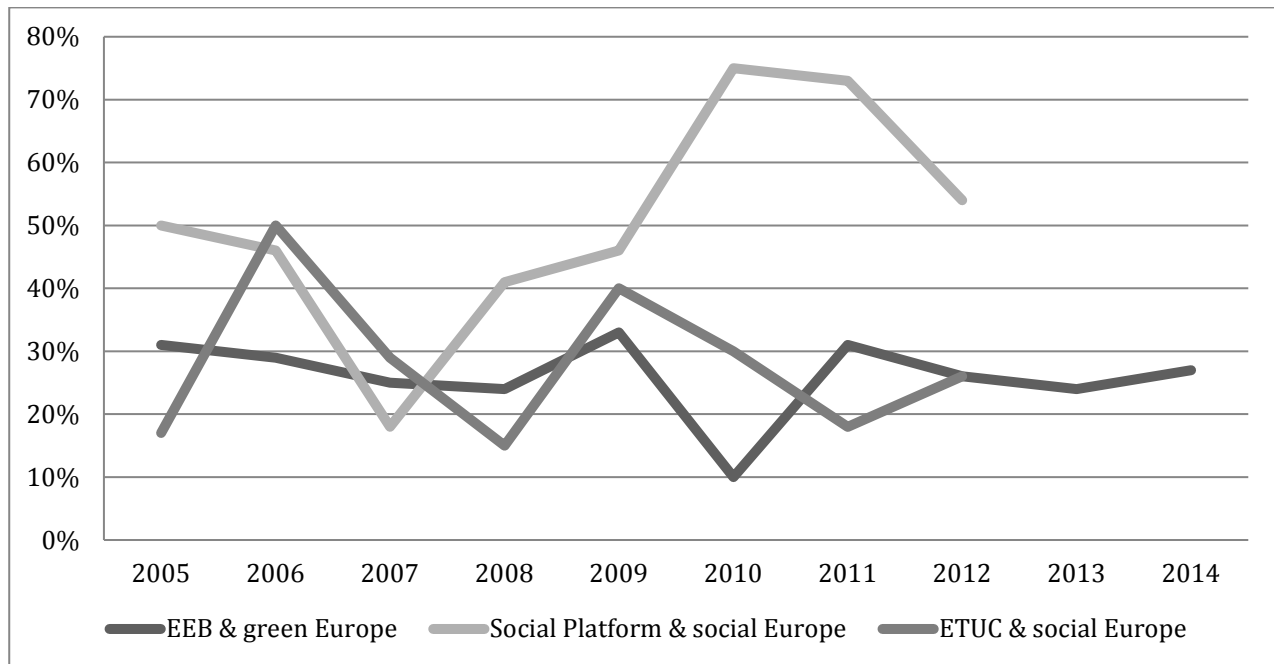
Thus, with some caution, we may make a few observations and interpretations. First, it appears that pan-EU NGOs are not only relating to the Europe 2020 in general terms; Europe 2020 is also boosting green and social Europe narrative discourse in the short term. This is illustrated by, across

the board, a decrease in the total number of references from 2005 to 2007 (except from *Businessseurope*, where 2006 stands out with a high total number of references), followed by a fairly steep increase in the total number of references from 2009 to 2010, or in the case of the Social Platform from 2010 to 2011. Second, Europe 2020 has boosted green and social Europe among pan-EU NGOs, which are particularly receptive to discourse concerning their sectoral activities. Most apparent is the Social Platforms' high number of references to 'inclusive'/'exclusive', whilst the EEB also, unsurprisingly, has a particular emphasis on 'un-/sustainability'. Third, pan-EU NGOs are most receptive to already institutionalised narrative discourse and, although not unresponsive, they are much less receptive to issues outside of the existing terminology, issues which also recede more quickly. 'Un-/sustainable' thus receives the largest number of references by a large margin when compared to 'inclusive'/'exclusive', except from the Social Platform, where this is reversed. References to 'smart' growth are very limited, peaking around 2010/11 among all pan-EU NGOs. Searches on the terms 'knowledge' and 'innovation', which are viewed as key to 'smart growth', confirm that this is the least referred-to issue over time and the objective that pan-EU NGOs are the least receptive to.

Turning to indications of emotional appeals, Figure 5 shows that, when evoking political emotion by means of reference to justice and democracy, roughly 20–30 per cent of the times the EEB does so in the context of green Europe (with the exception of 2010, when it is down to 10 per cent). Similarly, when the ETUC evokes political emotion it is roughly 20–40 per cent of the time associated with social Europe (2006 standing out, when it is up to 50 per cent). When the Social Platform appeals to political emotions it is attached to social Europe roughly 40–70 per cent of the time (bar 2007, when it is down to 20 per cent). *Bussinesseurope* does not invoke political emotion as it is measured here. Rather *Businessseurope* associates 'sustainable growth' to structural reform and austerity measures (in fact more than 40 per cent of all mentions by *Businessseurope* of 'un-/sustainability'

2005–2014 appear within a distance of five or fewer words from the phrases: ‘public finances’, ‘public debts’, ‘fiscal policies’ and ‘stability’).

**Figure 5. Emotional appeals to Green and Social Europe as share of total emotional appeals by pan-EU NGOs.**



\* Searches were made on occurrences of ‘democra\* OR justice\*’ as an indicator of total number political emotional appeals in each set of sources per year.

\*\* Political emotional appeals occurring within a five-word distance of ‘ustainab\* OR unsustainab\* OR green\* OR environment\*’, or ‘inclusi\* OR exclusi\* OR social\*’ is used as an in indicator of appeals respectively to green and social Europe.

\*\*\* The number of emotional appeals/number of which associated with green or social Europe: EEB 384/104; Social Platform 179/81; ETUC 178/52.

Firstly the data suggests – I believe – that political emotional appeals are attached to green and social Europe with significant regularity, analytically qualifying both as political myths. Especially when compared to the virtual absence of similar types of links between political emotional appeals and a Europe characterised by ‘smart growth’, ‘innovation’ and ‘knowledge’. A typical expression of the emotional dimension of the green Europe myth, but with reference to the past 25 years of trade

regulations across the Atlantic, is found in the context of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) where the EEB argues that this:

*not only threatens to weaken critical consumer and environmental safeguards, but at its core conflicts with the democratic principle that those living with the results of regulatory standards – citizens of our countries – should be able to set those standards through the democratic process, even when doing so results in divergent standards that businesses may find inconvenient* (European Environmental Bureau 2014b: 12–13).

The myth of social Europe is at the very core of the Social Platform, which was formed with and still has the objective to ‘promote social justice and participatory democracy’ (repeatedly stated in annual reports and work programmes – e.g., Platform of European Social NGOs 2005a: 6; 2005b: 18; 2008b: 11; 2011a: 5). For instance, not without a measure of sarcasm, the Social Platform claims in the context of Europe 2020 that:

*The EU is back once again to the growth and jobs agenda that was not successful in the past. The reason – growth at any cost is not what people want, they want an inclusive growth based on solidarity and social justice* (Platform of European Social NGOs 2011a: 1).

ETUC, similarly, conceives itself as a promoter of social justice, which is most prominently associated with labour market policies (European Trade Union Confederation 2002: 14, 60; 2004: 9; 2009: 51, 60; 2010: 100).

The reception of political myths clearly also has a sectoral aspect illustrated by the near absence of emotional appeals to social Europe by the EEB and to green Europe by the Social Platform and ETUC. The latter is particularly telling in that although green Europe is, by quite some distance, the most frequently referred to narrative discourse by ETUC, its association with political emotions is sporadic (the high point of its share of total emotional appeals is less than 10 per cent). Thus, while pan-EU

NGOs may draw on both green and social Europe when invoking political emotions, and thus contributing to the reproduction of political myths, this is almost exclusively the myth associated with the particular NGO's principal area of work.

### ***Reproduction of green and social Europe: desire and self-blockage***

What Kølvråa – drawing on Laclau and Žižek – calls ‘the utopian dimension of myths’ is especially helpful in understanding the process of mythical reproduction (2016: 176–178). The utopian elements embedded in political myths essentially present us with a paradox. Political communities are on the one hand mobilised by political myths and driven by the desire to realise utopian societal ideals. On the other hand, realising utopian ideals is typically not only disappointing, the process also deprives the community of its identity and key driving force: collective desire. For that reason the survival of any political community depends on ‘self-blockage’ by means of continuously fabricating obstructions and adversities delaying the realisation of utopia (Kølvråa 2016: 177). Engaging in even minor reformulation of utopian ideals may well be not only time-consuming, but also an endeavour involving a high level of risk and uncertainty about the attractiveness of the adjusted ideals. Political communities are more likely to restate already institutionalised organisational ideals to uphold collective desires. This is also what seems to appear among pan-EU NGOs.

The EEB contends that sustainable development objectives serve both European competitiveness and job creation, but at the same time refuses to treat sustainability and growth on a par with each other (e.g., European Environmental Bureau 2007: 7; 2010b: 8–9; 2012a: 9). In that sense, the EEB most clearly plays an independent role in green Europe myth-making, not by dissociating growth objectives from sustainability, but by continuously demoting the former to being a consequence of the latter. The EEB appears to engage in EU environmental politics on the terms set out by

‘ecological modernisation’, that is clearly accepting that the pursuit of green objectives is not the enemy of technological innovation and economic growth (Baker 2007). However, contributing to green Europe myth-making, the EEB goes a step further by restating the utopia holding that sustainability is a non-reducible societal ideal, and by doing so arguably securing their own survival. The Social Platform has been struggling with internal ideational division among their members over the years (Cullen 2010), but as a collective they view inclusive growth as a response to existing, but failed, EU macro-economic policies. While the Social Platform distance themselves from the ‘growth and jobs agenda’, they are ready to associate societal and labour market inclusiveness with growth (e.g. Platform of European Social NGOs 2011a: 2). Like the EEB, the Social Platform is keen to tap into institutionalised political myths, yet at the same time they envision a social Europe which cannot be – and has not in the past been – realised by growth objectives, but must be driven by political and economic solidarity. ETUC highlights the links between, and need for, investment in public services on the one hand and, on the other hand, the defence of the ‘European social model’ and the promotion of sustainability (e.g., European Trade Union Confederation 2010: 16). At the same time, ETUC’s mythical reproductions are possibly the most in line with Europe 2020.

## **V. Conclusions**

This paper has advanced a three step research design for the study of the emotional appeal of political myths; with the first step viewing our instance – Europe 2020 – as a set of institutionalised narratives; the second step setting up a design for the study of the emotional appeal of political narrative discourse; and a third step allowing for the investigation of the reproduction and usage of myths among pan-EU NGOs. I have argued that: (1) pan-EU NGOs are indeed receptive to political myths, including in the short term; (2) pan-EU NGOs contribute to the reproduction of myths, especially



already institutionalised myths and those myths that resonate with their sectoral activities; and that in this process (3) pan-EU NGOs strategically use political myths not only to justify their policy positions, but also to continually mobilise desire around their organisations' utopian ideals.

It is especially surprising that political initiatives like Europe 2020 appear to have immediate impacts by boosting political myths. Pan-EU NGOs appear to react immediately, but also in their reproduction of (mythical) substance, strategically using political myths to justify their policy positions (with the exception of *Businessseurope*). We do not know whether self-blockage as a means of organisational survival is the outcome of an institutionalised practice, a strategic choice or, perhaps most likely, a combination of the two. This is probably not an issue easily settled. The need for the EEB, Social Platform and ETUC to restate the utopian dimension of green and social Europe myths may well be enforced in the wake of major Commission initiatives such as Europe 2020. Using the logic of the desires associated with utopian ideals, arguably *Businessseurope* does not possess the same need to reproduce a utopia if we agree that they are possibly the most favoured by a current liberal economic political discourse of the NGOs studied here. This is not to suggest that *Businessseurope* is operating within their utopian ideal, but rather to suggest that *Businessseurope* is not *as* driven by the need to reproduce political myths and contribute to changes in circumstances. Future research needs to look into this in more detail, possibly by drawing on other sources of data including speeches by key actors and elite interviews. The implications of the study of political myths, not only as key to understanding support for political institutions, but also as having a role to play in short- to medium term politics are potentially significant. Alongside interest and ideas, the study of political myths essentially introduces political emotions as both constitutive for European integration and as a strategic resource in day-to-day politics.

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#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:**

This work is kindly supported by the Danish Council for Independent Research under Collaborative Research Project Grant No. 12-125297. I would like to thank members of the collaborative research project Ian Manners, Christine Søby and Maryna Onishchenko.

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Words: 7973