

## The Creation of Modern Denmark: A Figurational Analysis

Kaspersen, Lars Bo

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

GESIS - Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Kaspersen, L. B. (2020). The Creation of Modern Denmark: A Figurational Analysis. *Historical Social Research*, 45(1), 182-206. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.182-206>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

---

# The Creation of Modern Denmark – A Figural Analysis

*Lars Bo Kaspersen\**

---

**Abstract:** »Die Schaffung des modernen Dänemarks – Eine Figurationsanalyse«. This paper takes its point of departure from an observation made by Norbert Elias in his book *The Germans*. Many (smaller) European states were confronted by Germany in various wars and conflicts and states such as Denmark suffered defeats. Following from this, Elias poses the question as to how the Danish people came to terms with this reality-shock. This paper claims that the unintended consequence of the Danish defeat was the development of a new national habitus with a strong and particular form of nationalism. This nationalism not only tied the nation to the state but went much further by defining the nation as the people and the civil society. It became a deeply sedimented form of nationalism, which provided Denmark with a very strong social cohesion. The central argument concerns this strong Danish habitus linked to this form of nationalism. This paper argues that this habitus has become more problematic during the last 30 years in the era of globalisation. The strong Danish habitus generates resistance towards immigration, acceptance of refugees, the EU, and the internationalisation of education – just to mention some problematic areas. Consequently, Denmark, as a small open economy depending on multilateralism and internationalisation, has difficulties fully embracing globalisation.

**Keywords:** Norbert Elias, Danish habitus, war, the development of the Danish welfare state, "anti-globalisation" sentiments.

---

## 1. Introduction

---

Other European states have suffered heavy defeats in recent centuries, which have not only reduced their territory but at the same time shaken their pride to its foundations and called into question their identity as people and as states. Denmark, Sweden, even France, are examples [...] Denmark after the loss of Norway (1815) and Schleswig-Holstein (1864) – how did people on these occasions come to terms with the reality-shock?

In Denmark, besides the movement to restore the old, larger realm, there also gradually arose tendencies towards self-reflection. In accordance with the so-

---

\* Lars Bo Kaspersen, Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School, Solbjerg Plads, 2000 Frederiksberg, Denmark; lbk.mpp@cbs.dk.

cial structure of the country, they were geared amongst other things towards integrating into the smaller state the mass of the peasant population, who had stood outside the established strata as a for the most part still poor and uneducated class. Some Danes apparently recognized then that it was a social as well as national necessity to raise the living and educational standards of the people, thus giving a better chance of reducing the class gradient as well as of forming the consciousness of a common national destiny. Among other things, a network of rural people's high schools served this effort to bring about a national renewal after the defeat. It contributed to raising the level of knowledge and thus at the same time the standards of production and of living of the Danish peasantry. The gradual flourishing of Denmark after the defeats, and perhaps the survival of the country, certainly rested not least on this self-reflection and the related reforms. But one would probably not go astray if one supposed that, among all those endeavours, the insight that the defence of a country depends to a large extent on the well-being and feeling of belonging of all strata and in particular of the younger generations also played a part. (Elias 2013, 413f.)

This quotation is from the book *Studies on the Germans* by Norbert Elias. It came out in German in 1989 titled *Studien über die Deutschen: Machtkämpfe und Habitusentwicklung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. It was published exactly 50 years after his magnum opus and first book *On the Process of Civilisation* (2012 [1939]). However, 1989 was also the year when the communist regimes in Eastern Europe collapsed and the Cold War ended. Elias had already experienced the German Empire, the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, and the divided Germany. Now a new political order was developing, but he did not live long enough to follow the state formation processes within a new reunified Germany in 1991 and Germany as the key European great power in the 21st century. Elias had been able to follow changing European figurations and how different figurational dynamics with constantly changing ratios of power provided new and shifting conditions of existence for the different states and societies in Europe. Different figurations meant different types of interdependencies between states in the European figuration of states, but it also involved different interdependencies between state and population and between different social groups within the states. This “figurational gaze” was a distinct Eliasian quality and this “gaze” made him a superior sociologist. He was one of the very few 20th century sociologists who never fell into the “methodological nationalist trap.” He always insisted on analysing all aspects of social life by combining an “inter-state” perspective with an “intra-state” perspective (Elias 2009, 40).

Obviously, Elias was interested in the German state formation process and he returned to this topic many times during his life. He also insisted that the book (*Studies on the Germans*) was an exploratory, not a comprehensive, study. The German state formation processes were very difficult to grasp and, in particular, the Third Reich and the “breakdown of civilization” could seem to be incomprehensible. Of course, he had to dedicate hours of reflection to shining light on these problems.

Elias was far too sophisticated to regard the processes of German state formation, including the disastrous Nazi regime, as a “German problem” only. Any particular political and social order was not to be understood as an outcome of purposeful action. Particular states and political orders were the outcome of planned and unplanned processes: some were located within the particular state and society in question, and others in the figuration of states (intra-state processes – inter-state processes).

We tend to think that the people who have existed within the territory we today call Denmark have been involved in the development of the country: in other words, they have built it and they are responsible for the successful Denmark we see today. Seen in a figurational perspective, however, human development and state formation are much more complex processes. Thus, I shall make the claim that modern Denmark was not as such “created” by Danes (Kaspersen 2013). Denmark, as a territorial nation-state with a particular national habitus and, increasingly, with an extended set of welfare institutions developing gradually from the last three decades of the 19th century and throughout the 20th century, is an entity constituted, shaped, and formed in struggles with Prussia and the German Kaiserreich (and later Nazi Germany and then the USSR). The development of the German Empire had enormous consequences for Denmark because Prussia/Germany and Denmark were interdependent at many different levels (see below), including being situated next to each other in the European figuration of states (or more precisely survival units) (Kaspersen and Gabriel 2008). The character of the interdependency between the two countries did change but it did not decrease during the 19th century. However, the power ratio shifted significantly in favour of Germany. Therefore, Denmark’s development reflected largely some of the important changes in Germany.

This takes me to my second claim: the fact that Prussia went to war against Denmark in 1864 as a part of the German unification process generated a strong “we-feeling” and a new national habitus in Denmark (Korsgaard 2004). This “we-feeling” and habitus, I will suggest, became the hidden secret of Danish development from 1864 onwards.

My last claim concerns how the “we-feeling” and national habitus are coping with an interdependent and internationalised world in the early 21st century. I shall provide some examples that demonstrate how the particular “we-feeling” which used to be the hidden “driving-force” of the wealthy, double-democratic welfare Denmark, has become a major problem for the country.<sup>1</sup> It

---

<sup>1</sup> The double democratic Denmark refers to the development of the democratic structures from the late 19th century and onwards. In 1849, a liberal democratic constitution was introduced, but it went through several revisions, and only in 1920 was it genuinely democratic. Liberal democracy developed together with a strong associational democracy which gave people the possibility to organise in voluntary associations, and thus Denmark devel-

prevents it from fully embracing this internationalised world, which is the best possible condition of existence for a small open economy. Denmark has with zeal and eagerness supported any extension and strengthening of internationalisation, especially since the Second World War. But this has come to a halt.

The structure of the paper is as follows: first, I will provide some insight into the interdependency between Denmark and Prussia/the German Länder. Most often, we tend to forget how strong the ties are that we find between the two countries, among certain groups and classes, and between some influential and powerful people located in the two different territories. In the next section I will look at the European figuration of states from the 19th century to the present and some changes which took place in the second half of that century. These developments and events led to the rise of the nation in many parts of the continent. In the Danish case, the development of the nation-state was well under way by the first part of the 19th century, but its character changed dramatically after the Danish defeat by Prussia in 1864. The following section will present and describe some of the elements of the national habitus that developed in reaction to the defeat and the emergence of the major German nation-state south of the Danish border. Finally, I shall demonstrate how this habitus has worked as a major asset for Denmark for more than a century, but in recent years has turned out to be a constraining factor in the current phase of the global political economy. Like Elias, I want to stress that this is an explorative paper with the purpose of undertaking a preliminary examination of the emergence, development, and change of the Danish national habitus after the defeat in 1864. Much more research is needed!

---

## 2. Figurational Interdependency: Denmark and Germany

---

However far back we move in historic time, we can find interaction between different social groups in the areas which now comprise the Danish-German border regions. Gradually, during the first millennium, some forms of political organisations and of a frontier region began to develop. Various fortifications dating back to the 6th or 7th centuries have been discovered and when social groups begin to organise defences against others, we can posit an us/them-relationship (Kaspersen 2013). This, again, created “we-feelings” and distinct identities. Each group served the function of providing an identity for the neighbour. Various German survival units, including the Hanseatic League, developed strong economic ties to Denmark, and they played an important role for one another. Several times, they went to war – the first occasion being in

---

oped a strong democracy embedded in individual rights (liberal democracy), but stressing the voluntary and associational aspect. Individuals as well as collectivities had extended freedom.

the 13th century. Warfare between two parties bears witness to a strong interdependence.

This interdependence also showed itself in several other ways. Before the era of the nation-state, there were no clear linguistic and cultural lines of demarcation between Germany and Denmark. Thus, in Copenhagen in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, German was the language of the civil servants in the state administration, the language of the military, and even the language mostly used by craftsmen. During the 19th century, when the two major ideological movements – nationalism and liberalism – swept across the European continent, Denmark launched various initiatives to protect “Danishness” and began to nominate people for jobs who were Danish-speaking (Østergård 2015, 125ff.).

Denmark and Germany were also deeply politically intertwined. For many years the two duchies of Schleswig and Holstein belonged, in part or completely, either to Denmark or Germany, or were virtually independent, but obviously interdependent between the two states. The exception is that Schleswig had never been part of Germany before the Second Schleswig War of 1864. For many centuries, the King of Denmark was both a Danish Duke of Schleswig and a German Duke of Holstein and the Duke of Saxony. Essentially, Schleswig had either been integrated into Denmark or had been a Danish fief, and Holstein had been a German fief and once, long ago, a sovereign state. Both were, for several centuries, ruled by the kings of Denmark. In 1721, all of Schleswig was united into a single duchy under the King of Denmark, and the great powers of Europe confirmed through an international treaty that all future kings of Denmark should automatically become dukes of Schleswig and that, consequently, Schleswig would always follow the same line of succession as the chosen ruler in the Kingdom of Denmark (Gregersen 1981).

The German national awakening following the Napoleonic Wars led to a strong popular movement in Holstein and southern Schleswig for unification with a new Prussian-dominated Germany. However, this development was paralleled by an equally strong Danish national awakening in Denmark and Northern Schleswig. It called for the complete reintegration of Schleswig into the Kingdom of Denmark and demanded an end to discrimination against Danes in Schleswig. King Frederick VII of Denmark declared that he would grant Denmark a liberal constitution, and the immediate goal for the Danish national movement was to ensure that this constitution would not only give rights to all Danes, i.e., not only in the Kingdom of Denmark, but also to Danes (and Germans) living in Schleswig (Bjørn 1990). Furthermore, the Danes demanded protection for the Danish language in Schleswig, since the dominant language in almost a quarter of Schleswig had changed from Danish to German since the beginning of the 19th century.

A liberal constitution for Holstein was not seriously considered in Copenhagen since it was a well-known fact that the political élite of Holstein had been

far more conservative than Copenhagen. This proved to be the case, as the politicians of Holstein demanded that the Constitution of Denmark should be scrapped – not only in Schleswig but also in Denmark. They also demanded that Schleswig immediately follow Holstein and become a member of the German Confederation, and eventually a part of the new united Germany. These demands were rejected, and in 1848, the Germans of Holstein and Southern Schleswig rebelled. This was the beginning of the First Schleswig War (1848-51), which ended in a Danish victory that was interpreted in Denmark as a victory for the new Danish nation-state (Korsgaard 2004, 342). As we shall see in the next section, a new “we-feeling” was consolidated with this victory – a new perception of being Danish, replacing the patriotism which had developed in the last two decades of the 18th century and the first decade of the 19th century.

---

### 3. A New National Habitus 1815-1864: The Introduction of the Liberal Constitution and the Emergence of the National Liberal State (1848-49)

---

After the Peace of Kiel of 1814, Denmark ceded control over Norway. At the Congress of Vienna in 1814-1815, Denmark managed to preserve the Helstat (the composite state or unitary state) and Holstein remained Danish. Following these developments, Denmark had to adapt to a new territorial situation and embark on economic reconstruction. Politically, the first decades following the fall of Napoleon were a stable period for the country. As in the rest of Europe, there was a conservative reaction, which served to stabilise the absolute monarchy of King Frederik VI (Bjørn 1990, 107-29).

As the economy grew stronger, and with it the liberal bourgeoisie, there were growing demands for economic and political liberalisation. Liberal ideas gained ground along with notions of national self-determination and the key role of the nation. A few years later, the spread of these European ideas would become important for the processes of political change that were to prove so fateful for Denmark. Initially, however, Denmark managed to preserve its sovereignty and its territory after the civil war in Schleswig-Holstein and the subsequent confrontation with Prussia in 1848-1849. One of the consequences of the war was the introduction of the liberal constitution in 1849 (Bjørn 1990, 338-62).

Nationalism and ideas about liberal democracy had already found their advocates in Denmark in the early 1830s. At the time, the country was experiencing liberal trends and as a result, from May 1834 onwards, King Frederik VI, still an absolute monarch, had to establish consultative assemblies in the cities of Roskilde, Viborg, Schleswig, and Itzehoe. The demand for consultative

assemblies had first been raised in Holstein, which was a member of the German Confederation. This demand spread, resulting in the four assemblies across the whole realm. This compliance with demands from national-liberal circles in the country resembled situations seen in several other European countries (Skovgaard-Petersen 1985, 39-42). However, it was not until 1848 that a major clash occurred.

Prussia's military support for Schleswig-Holstein threatened the integrity of the Danish state. The Danish King was forced to give in to internal pressures from the national-liberal groups that wanted a liberal-parliamentarian constitution<sup>2</sup>; otherwise, he would not have been able to introduce conscription and thus maintain an adequate military force. The King introduced general conscription, which helped prevent Prussia from overrunning Denmark and allowed for Schleswig-Holstein to be forced into submission and the Helstat to be preserved. In return, the bourgeoisie and the new class of farmers gained the right to vote and stand in elections (Kaspersen 2004).

What influence did the constitution have on the development of state and society in Denmark? When Danes claim that the constitution is the legal basis for the introduction of democracy in Denmark, as they tend to do, it is a truth with modifications. Formally, the governance of the country did pass from the monarch to the government and the Rigsdag (the newly established bicameral parliament), but in practice, this change represented a very modest expansion of democracy if we consider the number of men eligible to vote. It is more accurate to say that the constitution provided the legal foundation for the emergence of a liberal society.

The actualisation of a (civil) society, in the sense of a free sphere that is separate from the state and where citizens can pursue their own interests, including owning property and doing business, came about with the Constitution of June 1849 and the Freedom of Trade Act of 1857. After this, on the one hand there was the state, a legal and political organisation that empowered the citizen who had rights and obligations and gave freedom to act in relation to family, society, and state. On the other, there was society, a free sphere in which individual and collective actors (interest organisations and other voluntary associations) were now free to pursue their interests. The sphere of society included both the market (the buying and selling of property and products) and civil society (voluntary associations).

The creation of the constitution can be seen as related to 1) a range of broader processes of Europeanisation, including ideological trends, shifts in the

---

<sup>2</sup> The national-liberals were mainly the intellectual elite and the rising bourgeoisie supported by the new and rising class of farmers. The intellectual élite used nationalism as an instrumentalist ideology to gain support for their constitutional proposal. Therefore, nationalism was mostly a top-down ideology.



balance of power among the states, and the emergence of a more confident national-liberal bourgeoisie; and 2) the war against Prussia of 1848-1849.

The problems with the duchies and Prussia in 1848-1849 became a pivotal factor in the development of the Danish state. External sovereignty was maintained, but the conflict and war led to a reorganisation of the state, where internal sovereignty took on a different character. The absolute powers of the king were reduced. The liberal constitution placed the individual at the centre and the Freedom of Trade Act liberated the individual from the medieval guild structures (Skovgaard-Petersen 1985, 74-94; 218-49; Bjørn 1990, 338-46). The liberal constitution was based on the idea of the autonomy of the individual where the individual and individualism take centre-stage and promote the position of the individual in the political process. At this time, political parties were not part of the system; rather, individuals voted for individuals to represent them in Parliament.

The idea of individualised democracy did not survive long, however. From the late 1860s, the various political interests were already starting to become more organised and party formations were beginning to appear (Hvidt 1990, 145-60; Rerup 1989, 163-77). This development towards specific interests became more and more organised, and this would later become a crucial feature in Danish political culture.

---

#### 4. German Unification and Danish Defeat – 1864 and its Consequences

---

Prussia and Chancellor Bismarck were the driving forces behind the unification of Germany; this process had a bloody course as it took three wars before the unified German state was established.

The Danish government's decision to incorporate Schleswig into the kingdom in 1863 gave Bismarck the welcome opportunity to persuade Austria to declare war on Denmark together with Prussia, and Denmark suffered a humiliating defeat in 1864.<sup>3</sup> It was a great shock to the Danes. Denmark was still one of the most militarised societies in Europe and in its self-perception, it was more than strong enough to defeat Prussia. This humiliating defeat undermined the we-image which grew out of the 1840s and 50s.

This defeat led to profound soul-searching and several domestic policy conflicts in which an internal struggle for sovereignty was also a struggle over how to govern in a new Europe (Rerup 1989, 149-55; Korsgaard 2015a). One im-

---

<sup>3</sup> To be more precise, it was not only a Prussian war. Austria held the leadership of the German Federation that led, in 1864, to Habsburg troops bearing their (quite substantial) share of the war effort.

portant consequence of the defeat was the acknowledgement that Germany had risen to become a great power and was a serious threat to Danish sovereignty and independence. After 1864 Prussia/Germany emerged as Denmark's principal enemy. This external threat led to conflicts and to the formation of alliances and initiatives internally in Denmark.

The German issue had several implications, including a constitutional amendment and defence policy. Germany's defeat of Denmark and the establishment of Germany as a great power led to a series of conflicts and debates about Danish defence during the last three or four decades of the 1800s. This issue was pivotal in the conflict between the Conservative Party (Højre; the conservatives, the landowners, officialdom, and the bourgeoisie) and the Liberal Party (Venstre; the farmers). The conflict between the two parties was intensified by the revision of the constitution in 1866, which made it more conservative. One chamber of Parliament (Landstinget) was strengthened, which enabled the conservative forces to block legislative initiatives from the other chamber (Folketinget). The Conservative Party held a majority in the Landstinget, while liberal groups held a majority in the Folketinget. The farmers and other groups saw the changes to the constitution as a weakening of the democratic foundation. The gap between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party was a major problem.

In the period of 1875-1894, the Conservative government, under Prime Minister J.B.S. Estrup, outmanoeuvred the opposition. Although the opposition held a majority in the Folketinget, Estrup managed to sidetrack them completely by using a set of provisional laws that made it possible to pass the state budget, the Finance Act, without the approval of the Liberal Party. The first act was passed in 1877 and, during the period of these provisional laws, 1877-1894, Estrup forced through the construction of a large fortification around Copenhagen (Tamm 1996).

It is important to point out that the conflict between the government and the opposition never led to an actual paralysis of the country. Behind this conflict was a common project, which generated a certain consensus: the national project (Hornemann Møller 1992, 62). Denmark's defeat in 1864, the loss of the Danish-speaking North Schleswig, and a general fear of the new and powerful German state led to a new form of popular nationalism – one that, unlike in the period leading up to the establishment of the constitution, was not just an instrument wielded by the political élite to promote their own interests. The new nationalism helped build a broader ideological and military mobilisation, which also served to reproduce the underlying national consensus. The defeat had contributed to the emergence of a small homogenous country in which one saw a congruence between territory (disregarding the North Atlantic islands), language, religion, history, and ethnicity (Korsgaard 2015a). This congruence supported the development of a strong “we-feeling” which became stronger and stronger from crisis to crisis (agricultural crisis in Europe in the 1880s,

World War One, the depression of the 1930s, the Second World War, and even during the Cold War).

Everyday institutions, however, were characterised by a policy of obstruction from the Liberal Party, which was too divided internally to bring about actual system change. Therefore, the more moderate part of the Liberal Party began to cooperate and negotiate with the Conservative administration. In 1891, they managed to pass a series of Social Acts of Parliament and, in 1894, the two parties reached an agreement that secured political stability.

The Social Acts that were passed in 1891-1892 also marked the beginning of a new period in the history of the Danish state. For the first time, welfare expenses began to appear on the state budget. This budget symbolises the transition to the social state (*Sozialstaat*), the precursor of the welfare state. Unlike Bismarck, Estrup and the Danish government did not intend to fix the problems that plagued the working class. Instead, their ambition was to assist the old and the poor in the rural districts, who were left behind when the younger generations moved to the cities. The Danish system was voluntary, and social and old-age benefits were available to anyone, including craftspeople and farm workers (Philip 1947).

The basis of the system was not a state intervention into the labour contract but financial subsidies and legal support for voluntary associations in civil society. This principle was called “helping people to help themselves” and applied to associations with members with an income equal to or less than a skilled worker. Thus, the associations for sickness insurance – the “sick-clubs” – would be recognized by the state and subsidized only if their rules and number of qualified members met the standard. The same held true for associations for unemployment insurance, the “unemployment clubs”, even if they were organized and run by the trade unions. (Bernild 2003, 2)

The above quote illustrates an important structural feature of the Danish welfare state: that of assistance aimed at supplementing people’s own efforts – in other words, help to enable people to help themselves. A number of welfare provisions were created and managed by voluntary associations, including health insurance societies (sick-clubs) and the union insurance system. The state subsidised these associations but the programmes were organised and managed by the associations themselves. Arguably, this principle of organisation formed the basis of a welfare state that was to become more social-liberal than social-democratic in its basic structure.

The character of the Danish state’s intervention strategy is remarkable. As mentioned above, it took the form of helping people to help themselves by supporting a series of initiatives, including voluntary associations such as sick-clubs and the union insurance system. The state chose to negotiate with the opposition via the voluntary associations. In relation to the goal of the state élite on the one hand, and the relatively strong and organised opposition on the other (the farmers were increasingly organised, for example in cooperatives,

“folk” high school associations, political parties, and gymnastics clubs), this strategy from the point of view of the state was the most plausible option.

A power strategy which includes negotiation and recognition of other interests increases the power of the state as well as civil society, as it gives the state better options for implementing and anchoring its initiatives and decisions through civil society. The organisations, associations, and companies that make up civil society gain increased recognition from the state and this, in turn, improves their ability to influence the state and the implementation process. This improves the legitimacy of state initiatives.

---

## 5. The Continuing Fear of Germany: External Threat and Internal Social Cohesion

---

Throughout the second half of the 1800s and the first decade of the 1900s, the relationship between Denmark and Germany remained tense. In 1879, Prussia/Germany had annexed all of Schleswig despite an agreement in the peace treaty of 1866 that the population of Northern Schleswig would be entitled to determine their own nationality in a referendum. During the 1890s and early 1900s, when the European balance of power was shifting, not least as a result of the new Germany’s growing industrial and military prowess, Denmark came under increasing pressure. Despite a declared policy of neutrality, the Germans were not convinced that Denmark would remain neutral in a confrontation between the great powers. The Germans did not want to see their navy hampered by Danish support for other powers, least of all Britain, in the event of war. Thus, Chief of the German General Staff, Helmuth von Moltke, stated that Germany would “put an end to Denmark” if the country were to ally with Britain (Rerup 1989, 304).

The threat from Denmark’s neighbour to the south was obvious, and this was a source of concern for Danish politicians. The government and most politicians were aware that an armed conflict with Germany was bound to result in defeat and misery. Peter Munch (1870-1948), the head of the new Social-Liberal Party (Det Radikale Venstre 1905), who later became Minister of Foreign Affairs, was a strong advocate for Denmark to avoid a military confrontation with Germany, in which defeat would be inevitable. Munch was convinced that a military confrontation with Germany would only cause Denmark to lose its sovereignty. According to him, therefore, Denmark should remain neutral and stay on the sidelines of any conflict between the great powers.

The policy of neutrality was by no means new – it had been applied since 1815 – but it now became a more prominent part of the government’s programme. This was because the government now included the Danish Social-Liberal Party and some minority governments could only muster a parliamen-

tary majority with support from the Social Democratic Party (Socialdemokratiet). The very explicit nature of the disarmament policy was new, however. Denmark had been one of Europe's most heavily militarised states well into the second half of the 1800s, but in the first half of the 1900s in particular, demilitarisation really began to gain momentum.

These new circumstances made Munch elaborate on an idea that stemmed from the national-liberal politician and, later, bishop D.G. Monrad (1822-1887) concerning the relationship between state and people (Karup Pedersen 1970, 423). Munch argued that the state and the people do not make up a unified entity. The state might be exposed to serious threats – in fact, it might even disappear temporarily – but the people would nevertheless still be able to continue as a people. Therefore, Munch argued that the only viable strategy to ensure Denmark's survival was to develop a people anchored in a strong national community and society – a people and a community that would withstand any external enemy. With reference to Poland and the fate of the Polish people, Munch argued that “the state may perish, but the people will endure”. If the people and the nation were to survive, however, there had to be a responsible government that was able to provide the necessary conditions for a strong national society and community to develop and thrive. The first prerequisite of this, according to Munch, was to reduce inequality and the substantial class differences in society:

The state and the people are not one. If the unlikely misfortune of being subjugated under a foreign state were to befall the Danish people, the people would nevertheless endure [...] And the people's life is stronger and more secure the more developed its spiritual and material culture is, and the less there remains of the class boundaries that split and divide a people into contending camps with different mindsets. (Munch 1905, 55; author's translation)

The efforts to strengthen Danish culture, the Danish “we-feeling,” and Danish self-esteem are an important instrument in Danish defense and the survival of the Danish people. Munch wrote in 1907:

However, it lies within our powers to ensure our existence as a people, as a nation. The means for achieving this lie in expanding our culture and building a feeling of fellowship in the Danish people by developing such conditions in society that people from all strata have a reason to embrace their country and their people with passionate devotion. Many have ridiculed the sentence, “It is with culture, not with weapons, that we shall defend ourselves.” This ridicule comes from people who have not grasped the meaning of this sentence. Of course, the meaning is not that the enemies will drop their arms out of respect for our culture. It goes without saying that no culture, however refined, can secure the continued existence of the state as a state. However, a free and peculiar culture permeating all tiers of the people can ensure that the people's national life will endure, even if the calamity should befall us that the state would be relegated to the will of foreign assailants claiming the brutal right of war and conquest. (Munch 1907, 107; author's translation)

These statements demonstrate Munch's understanding of the national and the international as closely linked aspects. Thus, to him, domestic policy was an important instrument in the struggle for Denmark's survival. Munch also considered social cohesion and the "we-feeling" as important elements in the state's struggle for survival. The goal was to safeguard Danish sovereignty, and the means were the development of internal cohesion and a strong "we-feeling" by establishing what we would now call welfare institutions. This is exactly what Elias points to in the quotation introducing this article. Among other things, this required a strong national healthcare system as well as institutions to ensure a minimum of social security in the form of pensions, poor relief, and housing. The endeavour should be "to achieve equal rights for all Danes, regardless what walk of life they were born into, to provide satisfactory economic conditions for all and equal influence on the governance of Danish society. [This will promote] the equity within our society that is the only firm basis for a true feeling of fellowship" (Munch 1907-1908, 549). In other words, the strong "we-feeling" is the strongest defence. Munch further pointed to a number of important tasks, including expanding the job base and preventing large net emigration by improving business and job opportunities in Denmark. In particular, he recommended that land be parcelled out from the large estates and transferred to smallholders and small-scale farmers, as that would provide many families with an income and enable them to earn a decent living. This in turn would offer more young people a future in the rural districts and reduce migration. In other words, Munch saw state intervention as necessary for providing adequate welfare services to the Danish population. International trade should be strengthened, and there was also a major national task in "cultivating the lowest walks of life, involving them in the common culture" (Munch, 1907-1908, 549). General education and enlightenment, educational institutions, and science were key instruments for realising Munch's vision.

This political vision allowed the Social-Liberal Party to connect with the Social Democratic Party. This link later proved quite durable. After the First World War, the alliance between the two parties became pivotal for the ongoing development of the welfare state throughout the 20th century. The first welfare policies and institutions were, in fact, established by Estrup and the Conservative Party with support from the Liberal Party. The ongoing expansion and consolidation of the welfare state, however, must be attributed to the alliance between the Social Democratic Party and the Social-Liberal Party. But while the welfare society as such was a goal for the Social Democratic Party – providing cradle-to-grave security for the working class – to Munch and the Social-Liberal Party, welfare institutions were merely the means to an end. Munch in particular was more interested in the survival and development of the state and the people than in specific class interests. His goal was to secure the continued existence of an autonomous and sovereign Danish people.

---

## 5. The Crucial Years: 1914–1919

---

Peter Munch's political vision was important, and so was the coalition between the Social Democratic Party and the Social-Liberal Party, which rested on a number of shared political ideas. Munch was far from the only politician or intellectual who viewed national unity and welfare services as necessities. This was a widely held view among the political élite. But a particular world-view does not necessarily produce a state and society characterised by stronger social cohesion or closer cooperation among the political parties, social organisations, and interest groups. In Denmark's case, the willingness to listen to one's opponents, to compromise, and to contribute to the development of a "consensualist" culture was more a product of necessity than of the Danes being a particularly benevolent people with strong social sensibilities. Tough choices and compromises require some sort of urgency or exception situation to provide the push towards solutions. The severity of the situation must be evident to the entire population before everyone is prepared to yield and accept that their own special interests do not take priority. This awareness emerged in Denmark in the years after its military defeat in 1864. The same was the case in connection with the agricultural crisis in the 1870s and 1880s and during the First World War.

As far as the First World War is concerned, it made no difference that Denmark maintained a neutral stance. As soon as the war broke out it was clear that the country was going to feel the constraints and pressures of the conflict along with everybody else. Danish exports were threatened by embargos and, because some shipping lanes were mined, the same constraints applied to the import of raw materials. The resulting shortages of raw materials and commodities in turn led to price increases, which were a particular burden to low-income groups. This development had the potential to lead to growing inequality and social tension. Therefore, the state and the government adopted a new strategy to address the problems: massive state intervention and regulation. This intervention, however, was based on a corporative structure with negotiations that involved key organisations in society representing the main population groups and economic interests (Vigen 1950, 440-69).

On 7 August 1914, just after the outbreak of the war, the Danish government, with unanimous support from Parliament, formed the Extraordinary Commission (Den Overordentlige Kommission) headed by Minister of Interior Affairs, Ove Rode. The strong support for the Commission indicated that the otherwise conflicting parties in Parliament had called a truce. Rode appointed representatives from all the major organisations, interest groups, and social classes in Denmark. Farmers, smallholders, industrialists, trade unions, ship owners, consumers, social democrats, liberals, and scientists were all represented (Vigen 1950, 444; Rasmussen 1965, 72). The Act of 7 August gave the minister and the Commission wide powers to intervene in, regulate, and control

affairs in society. The Commission established a regulatory system with far-reaching effects on all economic and social aspects, including pricing policy, supply policy, a comprehensive rationing system, and, to some extent, an income distribution policy.

As pointed out above, the state had already begun to intervene in society in 1891, and in the following years a number of Acts were passed that illustrated that it was no longer the “good old” liberal state, refraining from any form of intervention in the affairs of the family, market, and voluntary associations (Rasmussen 1965, 87). It was not until the First World War, however, that state intervention in society began to take place on such a large scale. The Extraordinary Commission carried out this extensive intervention, in most cases with considerable success. Denmark made it through the war without major injuries, tensions, or social conflicts.

It is important to understand the role that the First World War played in the process of state formation and societal development in Denmark. The state attempted to regulate society in pursuit of the common good and in an effort to accommodate all social classes. This was the first large-scale redistribution of income and welfare in Danish history. Crucial to this development were the means that the government and Parliament used to ensure support for a range of policy measures. Other states in Europe carried out similar state interventions, but in Denmark these measures were based on a highly corporative strategy, that is, the state negotiating with the organised interest groups. The state increased its powers, but so did many organisations representing the economic interests in society. By 1899, the state had already acknowledged and approved that the labour market was controlled and regulated by employers and employees. A few years earlier, the state had also accepted the presence and importance of other organisations representing the farmers, industry, and others. It was not until the First World War, however, that all these organisations and interest groups were offered a seat in commissions and committees established by the government or state institutions. That gave them considerable influence, and their participation in the political processes transformed these organisations into more stable and institutionalised entities. They became indispensable and jointly responsible for societal development in Denmark.

Thus, the First World War became a turning point for the political consensualism that was to characterise the political culture in Denmark for the rest of the 20th century. A consensualist political culture does not mean consensus or the absence of conflict. Rather, it suggests the presence of a political culture with widespread consensus among the competing parties about the premises for the unfolding of conflicts. In other words, certain institutions and procedures were established, not least during the First World War, that would provide a framework and an agreed set of rules for managing conflicts.



---

## 7. The Post-1864 Habitus and the Third Reich

---

As previously described, the events of 1864 led to an enduring mistrust of the unified Germany. The annexation of Schleswig by the Kaiserreich, the quest for colonies in Africa, the First World War, and the rise of the Nazi Party were developments leading to even more mistrust, fear, anxiety, and uncertainty for Denmark. This long chain of events reinforced the strong social cohesion as a central aspect of the Danish habitus. Denmark survived the First World War by declaring neutrality and by reorganising the relationship between state and society. Cooperation between classes and civil society groups brought the country through the crisis and it remained a sovereign state. When Hitler seized power, Denmark faced a new situation. The big neighbour was no longer a democratic country, but was moving towards totalitarianism. How did the Danes react to the rise of the Third Reich and the Second World War?

A strong element of the Danish national habitus was a willingness to solve problems by being pragmatic and inclusive. This happened after the 1864 defeat and during the First World War. The Danish parliament, government, state administration, and the majority of the population took the same attitude towards the new situation in Germany and later towards the German occupation. The vast majority of the population remained sensible and supported the centre-left and the centre-right, and only a small percentage supported the far right or the far-left. The clear goal was survival.

When the former party leader and Foreign Minister Peter Munch warned against the Kaiserreich in the first decade of the 20th century, he almost predicted that Denmark would disappear (temporarily) as a sovereign state due to Germany's expansion. However, as an outcome of intended and unintended processes, the Danish habitus continued to develop social cohesion, a strong societal nationalism, strong welfare institutions supported by the state, and a problem-solving political culture embedded in political consensualism. These habitus components became reinforced during the German occupation and led to the survival of the Danish people. When Germany was defeated in 1945, the Danish people were able to have their state back.

When Germany occupied Denmark on 9 April 1940, Denmark did not surrender. In a response to the German message about occupation, the Danish King replied that Denmark accepted the new conditions but he did not mention a surrender. Thus, the King and the government remained in power. There was a government reshuffle and all parties shared responsibilities. The state administration, the legal system, and judges continued to function and interest organisations were asked to take part in governing the country. In many respects, the governing "model" developed during the First World War was repeated.

The result was a constant negotiation policy between the Danish government and the Germans in charge of Denmark. Germany wanted resources and this led to tough negotiations. In addition, Hitler wanted political support and

consequently, it became more and more unacceptable for the majority of the Danish population to support the government. In 1943, the Danish government stepped back and the Germans took over, although the Danish state administration continued to function. The particular form of nationalism developing after 1864 and strong anti-Nazi German sentiments was a part of a habitus, which accepted the cooperation policy with the Germans as long as this policy had more advantages than disadvantages. Eventually, this post-1864 habitus had to react and a big nationwide strike in August 1943 forced the government to step back and the only legitimate government was the “Council of Liberty” consisting of prominent members of the Danish resistance movements. After the government had gone, no one could hold back the resistance movement intensifying its struggle against the Germans (Christensen et al. 2006).

---

## 8. 1864 and the Strong “We-Feeling”

---

When we analyse and discuss the development of the Danish national habitus and the particular we-identity related to this habitus, it is important to understand how exceptionally strong the ideological mobilisation became in the aftermath of the 1864 defeat. The development of political consensualism, the emergence and consolidation of the people organising and being organised in many different “interest organisations,” the development of welfare institutions as an outcome of bottom-up and top-down processes, a dual democracy (based upon a liberal democratic constitution and an associative democracy), and a congruence between national identity, territory, language, and the political-administrative institutions – all these components contributed to an exceptionally strong, encompassing “we-feeling” (Korsgaard 2015a). The Danish national habitus and the Danish we-identity developed in and through a large number of institutions and institutional practices. These institutions are the means to and the outcome of the practices many different actors are exercising and conducting all the time. These institutions become, in this context, ideological institutions, which contribute to the dissemination and consolidation of some specific ideologies. A number of voluntary associations within many parts of society were important. For example, many voluntary associations within sport, gymnastics, rifle shooting, evening schools, but also people’s “high schools,” the local parish churches, and cooperatives (grocery stores, farmers cooperatives, etc.). From the late 19th century onwards, trade unions, and employers’ associations played a particularly strong role in generating the we-identity (Kaspersen and Ottesen 2001).

Some institutions and institutional practices are intertwined, producing and reproducing the national habitus and the particular distinct Danish we-identity. The Danish habitus developing in the post-1864 years was distinctive in many respects. In the years immediately after the defeat, Denmark was divided as

well as unified. The defeat created a situation in which the population of the country was split into several groups with different opinions about the future strategy of Denmark. Broadly speaking, it is possible to identify two different positions, which both provide a potential future strategy for the country. The most powerful group within the figuration of actors fighting for the survival of Denmark was the conservative establishment consisting of the landed estate, the highest-ranking civil servants, and the wealthiest capitalists in the cities. They managed to push through a revision of the liberal constitution in 1866 limiting some democratic elements. Moreover, in the Rigsdag (Parliament) they managed to outmanoeuvre their main enemy – the large oppositional group consisting of a heterogeneous number of parties unified by liberalism and advocating the interests of the farmers and the peasant population. These two groups of society were in conflict about the constitution until 1901, when the “Left” succeeded in reintroducing and even extending the democratic constitutional rights (Rerup 1989, 149).

The constitutional conflict between the two groups ran parallel with other sets of disagreements. Thus, the two parties had very different views on how to solve the “Social Question” (i.e., how to help the increasing number of poor and old people in the countryside). Another conflict took place concerning the future defence of the country. With the emergence of a militaristic and nationalistic German Empire, Denmark’s geopolitical situation changed completely. Unlike the Left, the Conservatives wanted a new fortification protecting Copenhagen. Consequently, Denmark was struggling with internal conflicts at the same time as it was facing a new and strong enemy. What is significant about these internal conflicts and tensions is first and foremost that they never took the country into a major open crisis which Germany could have exploited. Despite the internal tensions, the defeat had generated a particular form of Danish nationalism which unified the whole country even with the many disagreements (Rerup 1989, 204).

It is also important to note that in the second half of the 19th century, in particular from 1864, a number of old and new institutions contributed to the dissemination and “interpellation” of a particular version of Danish nationalism which went deep into the Danish soul, but also that this form of nationalism and the many institutions developed a particular form of “political consensualism” which included certain ways to “solve” the conflicts.

In order to pinpoint the Danish “we-identity” we have to operate with a distinction between state nationalism and people’s nationalism or, to put it differently, nationalism from the top and nationalism from below. The state is linked to the nationalism which is introduced from the top of the country: intellectuals and the state élite use nationalism as an instrument to mobilise the country behind their aims. Nationalism from below is symbolically linked to civil society and it is disseminated through civil society institutions. When Denmark was defeated in 1864, the leading civil servants and urban intellectuals who

were involved in the introduction of the 1849 Constitution were made responsible for the defeat. They had developed a “state nationalism” and had cynically been able to use a top-down strategy in order to exploit nationalism as an instrument to achieve their own goals. This was replaced by a strong popular nationalism penetrating the whole country from below. The “People” were linked to civil society – not to the state. Civil society was perceived as the core of the nation. The state was still legitimate because it provided a structure and frame of the free market, spiritually as well economically (Korsgaard 2004, 342-43). Unlike in Germany, the connection between political power and the academic élite broke down in Denmark due to the events which led to the 1864 defeat. While the German academic élite reinforced the effort to legitimise the state as the core of the German nation, the Danish academics lost their legitimacy as the class in charge of the state (Korsgaard 2004, 344).

One of the important implications of the fall of the academic élite was a lack of willingness from the “People” to learn from the élite and the universities and to accept the “*Bildung*” (Education) proposed by the élite. Some alternative ideals of *Bildung* developed, inspired by the priest N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872) (Korsgaard 2015a). Enlightenment and *Bildung* had to come from the “People” itself (Korsgaard 2004, 345; 2015b). Already before 1864 a number of People’s high schools had been created. These were not high schools in the traditional sense. They were schools open for everybody to learn, develop and mature. There were no exams and they were not traditional academic schools. The teachers were recruited from practitioners as well as the “popular élite” in the countryside. The students were 18 years or older and, besides some ordinary school subjects, were taught Danish history, culture, and traditions. Music, singing and gymnastics were a part of the daily curriculum. It was also the place where the young generation could discuss new technologies and methods within agriculture. After 1864, the number of these schools increased and, together with many other new educational activities, Denmark rearmed in terms of “the enlightenment of the people” by the people and for the people. The goal was to educate the young generation without pushing them into a new class. In other words, these People’s high schools increased the knowledge and the spirit among the farmers – and they remained farmers the rest of their lives. The working class later repeated this when they started to organise and establish evening schools and People’s high schools for the working class. These bottom-up initiatives provided a strong educational foundation for the whole population and contributed to a rising self-consciousness and self-confidence (Korsgaard 2015b).

The development of these many bottom-up initiatives later supported by the state turned Denmark into a kind of dual democracy. The people were allocated rights and citizenship as individuals in the Constitution, and these were supplemented with democratic associational power. These democratic structures

were a part of the Danish identity and it was proudly celebrated and became a part of the “we-identity.”

This does not mean that Denmark was a conflict-free society. On the contrary, many different interests and different classes were fighting every day. The major difference between Denmark and some other countries when it came to disagreements was 1) procedures for conflicts and 2) solutions for big conflicts. I have previously mentioned the term “political consensualism.” This term is an attempt to describe a set of practices which followed (formal and informal) rules and gradually over the years developed into procedures for conflict resolution. The different interest groups in conflict accepted that if the disagreement deepened, they would follow certain procedures which eventually could stop the conflict. The best example here is the labour market. If an agreement could not be finalised and the conflict seemed to be continuing with major negative impacts on society, then in the last instance the two parties had to accept that the state would intervene and turn a proposal into law. However, none of the parties, including the state, liked such a solution. The second aspect – conflict solutions – was also a result of learning processes, the increasing strong “we-identity,” and the fact that Denmark is a small country. A certain practice developed gradually after 1864. When the Danish state and/or the Danish nation and people were facing a major crisis such as the 1864 defeat, the agricultural crisis in the 1880s, the First World War, the economic crisis in the 1930s, and World War Two, a crisis practice developed (Vigen 1950). As I demonstrated above, the practice was consolidated during the First World War (Kaspersen 2006). Denmark was facing a challenge and consequently, the government called for cooperation between all political parties and interest groups in the country. All the parties and interest groups had to learn to compromise and the strength of the political compromise was dependent on a “we-identity” which was in turn dependent on a decision that served the interests of the people.

---

## 9. The Danish National Habitus and the “We-Identity” Today – A Challenge?

---

The Danish habitus and the “we-identity” which developed as a reaction to the 1864 defeat proved to be an asset for Denmark throughout most of the 20th century. The ability to handle major crises, meet new challenges, and make decisions which the majority of the population find legitimate and acceptable have become a part of the Danish habitus. As often happens, it also becomes a story Danes love to hear and thus they tend to forget when things turn out differently. However, we can find many examples which have followed the pattern described in this paper. In other words, it is not a myth, although in recent years some of the patterns have changed.

Obviously, a national habitus is not a fixed essence. Culture and ideology are partly to be found in the shape of material objects, and partly they are a set of practices, so they are bound to change. Consequently, they are always in a certain sense “hybrids” since they constantly change by adopting new elements of other cultural practices. Thus, the Danish national habitus has also changed since 1864. Incremental as well as more radical changes can be detected during this long time span. There seems, however, to be some aspects of the Danish national habitus which still exist in the 21st century, and these turn out to be more of an obstacle for Denmark than the crisis-solving entity they used to constitute. It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into any detailed analysis about which elements of the Danish national habitus limit the country’s potential in a globalised world. In the following I shall just mention two important examples: the EU and immigration.

The development of the EU has always been a challenge to Denmark. Arguably, the establishment of the EU served the purpose of linking Germany and France together in order to avoid war in Europe. Denmark has never really perceived the EU as a peace project. It assumed that the EU was an economic project with the purpose of intensifying trade and economic integration. For a number of years, Denmark was reluctant to join the EU because membership could be seen as a transfer of parts of the people’s sovereignty. Eventually, it joined at the same time as the United Kingdom in 1973. Denmark had to follow Britain because Britain was its most important trading partner. The reluctant and ambiguous attitude to the EU continued and, surprisingly to the EU, the Danish people voted against the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. This no-vote was difficult to explain because Denmark seemed to be one of the countries which could benefit most from the new treaty. Europe was taken by surprise.

Why would a stable EU country such as Denmark vote against the progress of the European Community? In Denmark, a referendum was held and during the whole campaign all opinion polls predicted a victory for “Yes” to the Maastricht Treaty. The biggest parties and centre-right, as well as the centre-left, recommended a “Yes” vote, but it became a “No.” To provide a comprehensive explanation for the outcome of the referendum is not possible, but a part of these processes was related to the Danish national habitus. To make my claim simple but clear: the vote-No parties turned out to be a modern version of the strong movements which, approximately a century ago, generated the particular Danish national habitus in the aftermath of the 1864 defeat.<sup>4</sup> The people and the nation in civil society had re-emerged. This strong popular nationalism had been reproduced in the postwar years alongside a new strong commitment to “internationalisation.” In the first decades after 1945, the Danish habitus adapted to the new “world order” in which the Danish nation-state reinforced

---

<sup>4</sup> It is important to mention that not all no-voters can be categorised as representing the Danish national habitus anno 1875.

itself and maybe even peaked. The Danish welfare state was for Danish citizens and nobody questioned this assumption. From 1945 to the 1980s, in terms of language, ethnicity, history, and religion, Denmark was one of the most homogenous nation-states in the world, but embedded in a particular kind of nationalism. At the same time, the country supported all attempts to build a strong and open international society. This was not seen as a contradiction. On the contrary, the open international world and a world market was viewed as a precondition of the nation-state. The Danish post-1864 habitus had changed and adopted a version of “internationalisation.” The “national” was seen as interdependent with the commitment to the “international” society. The political consensualist culture contributed to this development of the habitus. The four dominant political parties found it necessary to argue for strong support to build a genuine international society based upon international organisations in order to link the states together and create a set of international law which could prevent conflicts and facilitate “a free, open world.” Besides building international laws, rules, and institutions to avoid conflicts, Denmark supported all attempts to create an open world market based upon liberal values. Such a strategy was important to a small open economy such as the Danish. Open access to markets and peace and stability were crucial and, therefore, the responsible Danish politicians decided to pursue internationalisation as a strategy. This went well until the 1990s. Mobilisation against the closer political integration of the EU was just the first sign that a problem was emerging. When various forms of EU law put pressure on the Danish “model,” more and more politicians turned to a form of EU scepticism. When Danes gradually realised that the Danish way of running the labour market was under threat, some resistance to the EU occurred. The habitus contains an element of national pride about Danish solutions and Danish institutions and often an unintended outcome of EU integration is an EU challenge to Danish practices and institutions. Another example concerns how EU law prohibits the member states from providing special conditions for their citizens. Thus, Denmark is not allowed to provide education without tuition fees for Danish citizens only. They have to provide equal access under the same conditions for all EU citizens. This is another example of how the EU either pushes Denmark into the same rules and structures as most other member states have adopted, or Denmark sticks to its own policies including paying for the education for other EU citizens.

Another issue exploded in the mid-1990s: the challenge from refugees, asylum seekers and labour migrants. From the 1960s onwards, guest workers came to Denmark and they stayed in the country. They subsequently unified with their families and in the 1980s, refugees came from Palestine and the Iraq-Iran war. In the 1990s, refugees mainly came from the former Yugoslavia and most recently from Syria. Moreover, migrant workers from the former eastern European countries came to Denmark to work as a consequence of free mobility within EU. This has caused severe problems for Denmark (as well as other

countries) because it turned out that some of the Danish population did not share the view that labour migrants from the EU were to the benefit of Denmark. Moreover, they did not welcome the increasingly “multi-cultural” society, especially not the group of people with an Islamic background. As the years have passed, even the established parties have accepted discrimination in social rights or a still tougher stance against refugees and immigrants. The once extreme right-wing xenophobic party, the Danish People’s Party, has today been accepted as an established centre-right party. Some parties are even suggesting that we must work for a change in international law because these laws are too constraining on domestic politics (i.e., we are “forced to take in refugees”).

Another implication of the reawakening of the popular nationalist national habitus has been a gradual change in legislation, which accepts some degree of discrimination between the inhabitants of Denmark. Certain social provisions are now dependent on a number of different criteria which in principle mean that equality in law is no longer the case. Also, in an attempt to fight gangs and other criminal groups, the character and size of sanctions used by the state depend on the police district dealing with the offenders. The famous universalistic welfare state – a child of the First and Second World Wars – and the rule of law are under pressure!

---

## 10. Conclusion

---

This explorative paper claims that the national habitus changed in 19th century Denmark from a top-down elite project to introduce the liberal democratic constitution to a bottom-up popular type of nationalism embedded in civil society as a reaction to the Danish defeat to Germany/Prussia in 1864.

I have tried to substantiate this claim by showing how this national habitus developed from the last decades of the 19th century up until the 1990s, and I have pinpointed some of the most important features of this habitus such as political consensualism, a strongly organised society in which the organised interest groups negotiate with the state about solutions to crises, and a distinctive welfare state based upon bottom-up initiatives supported by the state.

A second claim in the paper is that Denmark has benefitted from this habitus because, as a small open economy, the country was very vulnerable when new crises or challenges occurred. A strong social cohesion, an ability to act swiftly, and a set of institutionalised practices to provide political compromises and decisions have contributed to the survival of the country. These components have been unified in a particular Danish national habitus with a particular national identity and national pride identifying the nation with the people in (civil) society.

In the last 30-40 years, and especially after the end of the Cold War, the world has become more interdependent and this has led to many reactions from



local, regional, or national groups who feel insecure or more uncertainty concerning identity. My third claim is related to the rise again of the post-1864 habitus, which in recent years emerges as friction and therefore makes it more difficult to exploit the advantages of the EU and the world market based upon multilateralism.

The rapid turnaround from being the front-runners in an increasingly interdependent world to becoming neo-nationalistic and hesitant signifies how a deeply ingrained national habitus is coming back, although in a new version. However, it is mobilised by societal forces – and not by the political élite.

Paradoxically, now the class of conservative civil servants, academics, intellectuals, and the “business class” seems to be that part of Denmark which is most embracing globalisation and taking up the challenge from a changing new world. Again, this class is criticised for the “opening of the borders,” creating “the multi-cultural society,” and embracing globalisation.

In the long run, Denmark cannot embrace and exploit globalisation and, at the same, withdraw from the world around us. In other words, the Danish fairy-tale might not have a happy ending, but time will tell...

---

## References

---

- Bernild, Ole. 2003. *On the Development of the Welfare State: The case of Denmark*. Paper Presented at the 1st International Conference on Health, Humanity and Culture, October, Los Angeles, USA.
- Bjørn, Claus. 1990. *Fra reaktion til grundlov. Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal/Politiken.
- Christiansen, Claus B., Joachim Lund, Niels Wium Olesen, and Jakob Sørensen. 2006. *Danmark besat*. Copenhagen: Høst & Søn.
- Elias, Norbert. 1978. *What is Sociology?* New York: Columbia University Press.
- Elias, Norbert. 2006. *Early Writings*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.
- Elias, Norbert. 2009. *On Sociology and Humanities* (Essays III), vol. 16. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.
- Elias, Norbert. 2012 (1939). *On the Process of Civilization: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, vol. 3. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.
- Elias, Norbert. 2013. *Studies on the Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, vol. 11. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.
- Gregersen, Hans V. 1981. *Slesvig og Holsten indtil 1830*. Copenhagen: Politiken.
- Hall, John A., Ove Korsgaard, and Ove K. Pedersen, eds. 2015. *Building the nation. N.F.S. Grundtvig and Danish National Identity*. Copenhagen: Djøf Publishing.
- Hornemann Møller, Iver. 1992. *Den danske velfærdsstats tilblivelse*. Copenhagen: Samfundslitteratur.
- Hvidt, Kristian. 1990. *Det folkelige gennembrud og dets mænd*. Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie, vol. 11. Copenhagen: Gyldendal/Politiken.

- Karup Pedersen, Ole. 1970. *Udenrigsminister P. Munchs opfattelse af Danmarks stilling i international politik*. Copenhagen: Copenhagens Universitets Institut for Samtidshistorie og Statskundskab, Gads Forlag.
- Kaspersen, Lars B. and Laila Otteson. 2001. Associationalism for 150 Years and Still Alive and Kicking: Some Reflections on Danish Civil Society. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 4 (1): 105-130.
- Kaspersen, Lars B. 2004. How Denmark became Democratic. The impact of warfare and military reforms. *Acta Sociologica* 47 (1): 71-89.
- Kaspersen, Lars B. 2006. The Formation of the Danish Welfare State: Decisions in the state of exception. In *National Identity and Varieties of Capitalism*, ed. John A. Hall, John Campbell and Ove K. Pedersen, 99-132. Montreal: Montreal McGill University Press.
- Kaspersen, Lars B. 2013. *Denmark in the World*. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Publishers.
- Kaspersen, Lars B. and Norman Gabriel. 2008. The Importance of Survival Units for Norbert Elias' Figurational Perspective. *Sociological Review* 56 (3): 370-87.
- Korsgaard, Ove. 2004. *Kampen om Folket*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.
- Korsgaard, Ove. 2015a. How Grundtvig Became a Nation Builder. In *Building the nation. N.F.S. Grundtvig and Danish National Identity*, eds. Hall, John A., Ove Korsgaard, and Ove K. Pedersen, 192-209, Copenhagen: Djøf Publishing
- Korsgaard, Ove. 2015b. Grundtvig's Idea of a People's High School and Its Historical Influence. In *Building the nation. N.F.S. Grundtvig and Danish National Identity*, eds. Hall, John A., Ove Korsgaard, and Ove K. Pedersen, 315-330, Copenhagen: Djøf Publishing
- Munch, Peter. 1905. *Det ny Aarhundrede*. 2nd year, vol. 2, book 2. Copenhagen.
- Munch, Peter 1907. *Det ny Aarhundrede*. 4th year, vol. 2. Copenhagen.
- Munch, Peter. 1907-08. *Det ny Aarhundrede*. 5th year, vol. 2. Copenhagen.
- Philip, Kjeld. 1947. *Staten og fattigdommen*. Copenhagen: Jul. Gjellerups Forlag.
- Rasmussen, Erik. 1965. *Danmarks historie. Velfærdsstaten på vej 1913-1939*, vol. 13. Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag.
- Rerup, Lorenz. 1989. *Danmarks historie, vol. 6, Tiden 1864-1914*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.
- Skovgaard-Petersen, Vagn. 1985. *Danmarks historie*, vol. 5. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.
- Tamm, Ditlev. 1996. *Konseilspræsidenten*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.
- Vigen, Anders. 1950. Rigsdagen og erhvervsorganisationerne. In *Den Danske Rigsdag, Vol. III (Rigsdagen og folket)*. Udgivet af Statsministeriet og Rigsdagens Præsidium. Copenhagen: J.H. Schultz.
- Østergård, Uffe. 2015. The Nation as Event: The Dissolution of the Oldenburg Monarchy and Grundtvig's Nationalism. In *Building the nation. N.F.S. Grundtvig and Danish National Identity*, eds. Hall, John A., Ove Korsgaard, and Ove K. Pedersen, 110-133. Copenhagen: Djøf Publishing.

# Historical Social Research

## Historische Sozialforschung

### All articles published in HSR Special Issue 45 (2020) 1: Emotion, Authority, and National Character.

Helmut Kuzmics, Dieter Reicher & Jason Hughes

State, Emotion, Authority, and National Habitus. State-Related Problems of Our Time and Methodological Discourses in SocioSlogy and Historical Sociology.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.7-41](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.7-41)

Behrouz Alikhani

Processes of the State and Habitus Formation in Iran in the 19th and early 20th Centuries: The Socio- and Psychogenesis of the Constitutional Revolution in 1906.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.42-64](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.42-64)

Onur Kınlı & İrem Özgören Kınlı

Is Every Turk Born a Soldier? A Historical-Processual Analysis.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.65-86](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.65-86)

Gad Yair

The Uncanny: How Cultural Trauma Trumps Reason in German Israeli Scientific Collaborations.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.87-102](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.87-102)

Nicolas Demertzis & Hara Stratoudaki

Greek Nationalism as a Case of Political Religion: Rituals and Sentimentality.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.103-128](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.103-128)

Miklós Hadas

The Culture of Distrust. On the Hungarian National Habitus.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.129-152](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.129-152)

Marta Bucholc

Schengen and the Rosary: Catholic Religion and the Postcolonial Syndrome in Polish National Habitus.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.153-181](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.153-181)

Lars Bo Kaspersen

The Creation of Modern Denmark – A Figurational Analysis.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.182-206](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.182-206)

Dieter Reicher

Nationalistic German Gymnastic Movements and Modern Sports. Culture between Identity and Habitus.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.207-225](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.207-225)

Steven Loyal & Stephen Quilley

State Formation, Habitus, and National Character: Elias, Bourdieu, Polanyi, and Gellner and the Case of Asylum Seekers in Ireland.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.226-261](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.226-261)

Michael Dunning & Jason Hughes

Power, Habitus, and National Character: The Figurational Dynamics of Brexit.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.262-291](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.262-291)

Akira Ohira

The Sociological Analysis of Ekiden, Japan's Long-Distance Relay Road Race.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.292-308](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.292-308)

Stephen Mennell

Power, Individualism, and Collective Self Perception in the USA.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.309-329](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.1.309-329)

For further information on our journal, including tables of contents, article abstracts, and our extensive online archive, please visit <https://www.gesis.org/en/hsr>.