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## Socialisation or self-interest?

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Sørensen, Jens Fyhn Lykke; Svendsen, Gunnar Lind Haase

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**Authors:** Jens Fyhn Lykke Sørensen & Gunnar Lind Haase Svendsen

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# **Socialisation or Self-interest? Explaining Public Attitudes towards Government Support for Rural Areas**

**Jens Fyhn Lykke Sørensen**

Danish Centre for Rural Research  
University of Southern Denmark, Esbjerg, Denmark  
[jls@sam.sdu.dk](mailto:jls@sam.sdu.dk)

**Gunnar Lind Haase Svendsen**

Danish Centre for Rural Research  
University of Southern Denmark, Esbjerg, Denmark  
[glhs@sam.sdu.dk](mailto:glhs@sam.sdu.dk)

## **Abstract**

Since the Second World War, rural areas in developed countries have witnessed a steady population decline. In Europe, this development has led to political initiatives to revitalise rural areas through the extensive EU Rural Development Policy containing rather substantial funding. However, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the public's opinion on government support for rural areas. Based on a national survey, this paper investigates this question in a Danish context. The paper contains two main results. First, it indicates that the large majority of the Danish population favours government support to rural areas. Second, examining the impact of self-interest and socialisation on attitudes towards government support for rural areas, it finds that only self-interest plays a role.

**Keywords:** Danish survey, public attitudes, government support to rural areas, socialisation, self-interest

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## **1.0 Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. Firstly, we want to examine whether the Danish population is pro government support for rural areas, thus confirming or disconfirming the favourable attitudes towards government support for rural areas found in previous studies (European Commission, 2007, 2008, 2010; McAlister, 2009; Molnar & Wu, 1989; Willits & Luloff, 1995; Wimberley, Thomson, & Lobao, 2002). Secondly, we want to explore what determines people's attitudes to government support to rural areas, including current residential location, childhood residential location, and other background variables such as education, income, gender and age. The paper is based on a national survey that the authors undertook in Denmark in 2011. In this survey, the general public was asked about its view on whether financial government support to peripheral rural areas in Denmark ought to be increased.

Our main contribution is to examine whether attitudes towards government support to rural areas are impacted by whether respondents' current and/or childhood residential location is in rural or urban areas. In this context, we want to test the explanatory power of two simple theories.

The first theory represents a sociological perspective, in which attitudes can be explained as a result of *socialisation* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This implies the assumption that people tend to conform due to social coercion, and that norms, attitudes and behaviour are adopted from primarily the family. In our paper, this ‘socialisation hypothesis’ will be tested by examining whether a respondent’s *childhood residence* is the most significant determinant of his or her attitudes. Thus, for example, a respondent who was born in the countryside but currently lives in the city could be expected to, due to his or her socialisation, have more positive attitudes than a respondent born in the city and currently living in the city.

In contrast, the second theory represents an economic, rational choice perspective. Here attitudes are explained as a result of *rent-seeking* (Olson, 1965), assuming that people act out of sheer self-interest rather than being driven by inculcated norms and beliefs early in life. We will test this ‘self-interest hypothesis’ by investigating whether it is the current residential location rather than the childhood residential location that determines attitudes towards public support for rural areas. In our case, we will argue that, for example, being born in a rural area, still living there and holding very positive attitudes to governmental support to rural areas would indicate a selfish motive, namely ‘lobbying’ for own profits (economic rents) at the cost of the urban population. Likewise, moving from your childhood village to the city and then ‘lobbying’ for the new group you have become a member of (urban dwellers) by being sceptical towards governmental support to rural areas would indicate that you have a selfish, economic motive.

The ‘socialisation hypothesis’ and the ‘self-interest hypothesis’ have not been tested in a thorough and systematic way in previous research. Hence, reports containing Eurobarometer results do not incorporate childhood location (European Commission, 2007, 2008, 2010), and the impact of rural or urban location could not be fully investigated by Willits & Luloff (1995), as their U.S. sample only included urban respondents. Moreover, Molnar & Wu (1989) restricted their study of attitudes towards government support to U.S. farmers.

The rest of the article is organized as follows. The second section contains a brief review of the present state of affairs in Danish rural areas and on government support schemes directed towards rural areas. The third section contains a literature review. The fourth section presents data and methods. The fifth section contains empirical results. Finally, the sixth section is a summary and discussion of the results.

## **2.0 Rural Development and Rural Government Support Programmes**

Similar to what has been the case in most countries, rural areas in Denmark have faced a number of growing problems in recent years. These problems include depopulation, ageing, loss of work places, reduced access to public services, a decaying housing stock, and a number of social problems (Gottschalk, Ærø, & Rasmussen, 2007; Jensen, 2010; Svendsen, 2006; Svendsen, 2013; Sørensen, 2012; Sørensen, 2013; Winther & Svendsen, 2012). Depopulation has been rather substantial. From 2000 to 2014, the population in peripheral municipalities declined by 6.3%, while the population in so-called rural districts, defined as places or villages with less

than 200 inhabitants, declined by 12.0%. These reductions should be seen in contrast to a 5.6% increase nationwide during this period.<sup>1</sup>

The development in Denmark mirrors a general trend in contemporary Europe, where the highest population growth in urban regions in 2010 took place in the Scandinavian countries (Eurostat, 2012). It is also a global trend. According to the United Nations, only 13% of the world's population lived in cities with over 750.000 inhabitants in 1900 (United Nations, 2006). In 1950, this share had increased to 29%, while in 2009 the share of inhabitants in larger cities was about 50% (United Nations, 2010).

The development in the European Union has led to several political initiatives to revitalise rural areas in Europe. The main instrument has been subsidies to rural dwellers from the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), in particular to farmers but, to an increasing degree, also to other rural dwellers.<sup>2</sup> Overall, the total CAP expenditure has increased from about 12 billion euros in 1980 to 60 billion in 2013 (Boulanger, Philippidis, & Vinyes, 2013, p. 3). The CAP share of the EU budget has however decreased from 56% in 1984 to about one third in 2013 (Boulanger, Philippidis, & Vinyes, 2013, p. 3).

In 2000, the scope of the CAP was widened to include rural development. The CAP was divided into two pillars. Pillar I provides production support, and Pillar II provides support for rural development. The budget of Pillar I is funded by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and goes primarily to direct payment to farmers and to regulate and support agricultural markets. In 2013, it was 44 billion euros. The budget of Pillar II is funded by The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the aim of which is to implement EU's Rural Development Policy, including subsidies to farmers and non-farmers (see e.g. Eurostat, 2014, p. 27). In 2013, the budget was 13 billion euros (Boulanger, Philippidis, & Vinyes, 2013).

The above figures indicate that EU support to rural districts within Europe is quite substantial. In Denmark, this support is supplemented by significant national support as well. Apart from co-financing EU rural development projects with up to 55%, this support consists in, for example, a Rural District Fund (3.0 million euros per year), two funds for demolition and renewal of buildings (3.7 million euros per year) and a fund to (mostly rural) municipalities that suffer from particularly severe social problems (55.9 million euros in 2014) (Danish Ministry of Urban, Housing and Rural Affairs, 2014; Danish Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior, 2013). One may also mention an Employment Fund to (mostly rural) municipalities with many unemployed (201.2 million euros per year), which is partially financed by money from taxation of firms in rich municipalities (Danish Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior, 2013).

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<sup>1</sup> Own calculations based on publicly available, online data delivered by Statistics Denmark ([www.StatBank.dk](http://www.StatBank.dk)).

<sup>2</sup> On the rationale behind economic support to rural areas within the EU, one reads in Eurostat Regional Yearbook 2014: "More than one third of the EU's budget is devoted to cohesion policy, which aims to remove economic, social and territorial disparities across the EU, for example, by helping restructure declining industrial areas or diversify rural areas. In doing so, EU regional policy seeks to make regions more competitive, fostering economic growth and creating new jobs. The EU's regional policy is an investment policy supporting job creation, competitiveness, economic growth, and creating new jobs. The EU's regional policy is an investment policy supporting job creation, competitiveness, economic growth, improved quality of life and sustainable development" (Eurostat, 2014, p. 118).

The most important regulation, however, is the annual transfer of money from rich, urban municipalities to poor, rural municipalities, termed the municipal equalization regulation instrument (*Den kommunale udligning*). This regulation was implemented in 1969, and in year 2013 it secured a transfer of 53.7 million euros from rich to poor municipalities (Danish Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior, 2013; Lange, 2012). The core of this redistributive regulation is that municipalities with a structural deficit will receive financial support of 58% of this deficit, while municipalities with a structural surplus must pay 58% of this surplus to this regulation scheme (Danish Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior, 2013, p. 3).

### 3.0 Literature Review

Several scholars have taken interest in the issue of rural development and how to fund it most effectively (e.g. Barke & Newton, 1997; Dax, Strahl, Kirwan, & Maye, 2016; High & Nemes, 2007; Shortall, 2008; Thuesen, 2010; Ward & McNicholas, 1998). However, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the public's opinion on government support for rural areas. Do common citizens want to maintain and/or develop rural areas, including spend tax money for public support? Or do they ascribe to a laissez-faire policy, which ultimately may lead to a dismantling of rural communities?

While there has been related research dealing with the level of goodwill for rural areas in the eyes of ordinary citizens (e.g. Cockfield & Botterill, 2012; Willits, Bealer, & Timbers, 1990; Willits & Luloff, 1995; W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2002), only little research has been done on the extent to which the general public favours government support for rural areas. Willits & Luloff (1995) report quite favourable attitudes towards government support for rural areas among a U.S. sample of urban residents. Furthermore, a number of Eurobarometer surveys have shown a rather favourable public opinion towards EU's public support for rural areas via the CAP (European Commission, 2007, 2008, 2010). Apart from that, a strand of research has focussed on public attitudes towards government support specifically given to farmers (McAlister, 2009; Molnar & Wu, 1989; Wimberley, Thomson, & Lobao, 2002).

The study of Willits & Luloff (1995) is based on a survey among urban citizens in Pennsylvania, USA ( $n = 1,524$ ). Among other things, the study investigates the priority respondents "would give to each of ten activities for improving rural economies" (Willits & Luloff, 1995, p. 456), choosing between "not a priority", "low priority", "medium priority" and "high priority". On average, the ten development options were given "medium priority" by 31.9% and "high priority" by 40.3% of the respondents. According to a principal components analysis, the answers fell into three clusters: "Promoting traditional extractive industries" within agriculture, forestry and mining, "promoting business and industry", and "promoting rural tourism" (Willits & Luloff, 1995, p. 456). A multiple correlation analysis showed, for example, that women and older respondents had more favourable attitudes towards "promoting traditional extractive industries", while those with more education and more income had less favourable attitudes towards "promoting traditional extractive industries". The multiple correlation analysis showed no support for the 'socialisation hypothesis', in that neither parental rural residence nor childhood rural residence of the respondent had a significant impact on the three attitude clusters.

Three Eurobarometer surveys have investigated EU citizens' attitudes towards EU's public support for rural areas. Specifically, the following

question regarding the CAP funds allocated to agriculture and rural development was posed in three special Eurobarometer rounds in 2006, 2007 and 2009: “The European Union budget for agriculture and rural development represents around 40% of the total European Union budget. Do you think that this proportion is insufficient, adequate or too high?” In the three surveys, the respondents answered this question in more or less the same way. In 2006, 2007 and 2009, the proportion of respondents that answered adequate (or “about right” which was the corresponding category name in 2006) was 45%, 43% and 46%, the proportion that answered insufficient was 15%, 16% and 17%, and the proportion that answered too high was 16% 17% and 17%, respectively (European Commission, 2007, 2008, 2010). More interestingly, the EU reports that present the findings of the 2006 and 2007 surveys break down the answers by socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, that is, by gender, education, and self-reported urbanisation (rural village, small/mid-sized town, large town). In both surveys, men are more likely than women to state that the CAP allocation is too high (20% vs. 12% in 2006 and 20% vs. 14% in 2007). Respondents with the longest education are more likely than respondents with the shortest education to state that the CAP allocation is too high (22% vs. 12% in 2006 and 22% vs. 13% in 2007). Finally, in both surveys, respondents from rural areas (19% in 2006 and 20% in 2007) are more likely to state that the CAP allocation is insufficient compared to respondents from small or medium-sized towns (14% in both 2006 and 2007) and respondents from large towns (13% in 2006 and 14% in 2007). The latter evidence thus supports the ‘self-interest hypothesis’.

Molnar & Wu (1989) investigated attitudes towards government support to agricultural producers based on a survey of U.S. civilian households within the continental United States ( $n = 3,229$ ). Overall, respondents showed quite favourable attitudes towards government support to agriculture, as the scale variable measuring support for government involvement had a mean score of around 60 on a scale from 0 (lowest support) to 100 (highest support). Interestingly, respondents who had grown up on a farm were found to be less favourable towards government involvement in agriculture, while those with more social ties to farmers were found to be more favourable. Therefore, the paper both finds evidence that speaks against and in favour of the ‘socialisation hypothesis’. The paper does not investigate the effect of whether the respondents lived in rural or urban areas. However, respondents living on a farm and respondents having a farm income were not found to have more favourable attitudes towards government support to agriculture than other respondents, and this evidence speaks against the ‘self-interest hypothesis’. In general, the paper finds that those with more education and more income were less favourable towards government support to agriculture. The large support for government intervention in the agricultural sector is primarily ascribed to what the authors call agrarianism, that is, a widespread agrarian sentiment in the sampled population at large. This agrarian sentiment involves the attitude that agriculture is a basic and valuable occupation and that farming is seen as a good way of life.

Finally, two other research papers report overall favourable attitudes towards public support to farmers, while not containing evidence that allows us to evaluate the ‘socialisation hypothesis’ and the ‘self-interest hypothesis’. The first paper is based on a national opinion poll ( $n = 1,200$ ) carried out in Australia in 2009. The poll included the question “Do you think farmers should receive more, less or the same amount of financial assistance from the government?”, and the response categories “much more”, “more”, “remain

same”, “less”, and “much less” were ticked by 28%, 33%, 26%, 2% and 1% of the respondents, respectively (McAllister, 2009). The second paper is by Wimberley, Thomson, & Lobao (2002) who report the results from a national survey conducted in 1992 in the U.S. on public perceptions towards government involvement in farming. Again, the survey showed quite favourable attitudes, especially with regards to government support for smaller family-owned farms. For example, 62% of the respondents disagreed with the following statement: “The government should not be involved in agriculture at all”. However, 1 out of 5 respondents had the opinion that government should not be involved in agriculture at all.

To conclude, previous research reports favourable attitudes towards government support to rural areas and conflicting evidence with regards to the ‘socialisation hypothesis’ and the ‘self-interest hypothesis’ as ways to explain differences in attitudes.

## **4.0 Data and Methods**

### ***4.1 The Danish Rural-Urban Survey***

Our study is based on questionnaire data from the Danish Rural-Urban Survey (DRUS) 2011. The questionnaire was designed by the authors with the purpose of collecting information about rural and urban dwellers on a wide number of issues related to their living conditions, aspirations, values, and attitudes. The collection of data was done among Danish respondents aged 18 and above who were randomly selected within four geographical strata based on a rural district classification. Ninety-eight Danish municipalities are classified into four groups depending on the degree to which they contain rural areas. The four groups are: Peripheral municipalities, rural municipalities, intermediate municipalities, and urban municipalities. The rural district classification is based on 14 indicators outlined by Kristensen, Kjeldsen, & Dalsgaard (2006) and was used by various ministries in their biennial surveys on Danish rural districts in 2009 and 2011 (Danish Ministry of Welfare and Danish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, 2009; Danish Ministry of the Interior and Health and Danish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, 2011). The purpose of the stratified sampling design was to secure a reasonable number of responses from rural dwellers.

The practical collection of questionnaires was handled by a professional institute using telephone-based interviews that were conducted from 1 November 2011 to 26 January 2012. 2,000 responses were collected: 496 from peripheral municipalities, 522 from rural municipalities, 491 from intermediate municipalities and 491 from urban municipalities. Prior to the data collection, the professional institute acquired representative extracts from Statistics Denmark in September 2011, covering each of the four strata separately. The entire sample is thus not representative of the entire country, but representative within each stratum. Compared to the entire country, respondents from peripheral municipalities are overrepresented, and respondents from urban municipalities are underrepresented. By comparing the number of respondents in each municipality group with the total population numbers (people aged 18 and above) in the four municipality groups at the time of data extraction, the institute calculated the following sample weights (weights shown in brackets): Peripheral municipalities (0.36), rural municipalities (1.06), intermediate municipalities (0.63), and urban municipalities (1.95). To make proportions and means, for example,



representative for the entire country, the weighted sample has to be used by applying the above weights to the four municipality groups.

As mentioned, our aim is to examine attitudes of common citizens towards government support for the development of rural areas, as well as what determines these attitudes. To examine this, the following variables from DRUS were used: One variable that measures the attitude towards government support for rural issues, one residential location variable and five socio-economic control variables.

#### ***4.2 Measuring Attitudes towards Government Support for Rural Areas***

The DRUS contains the following questionnaire item that will be used for measuring people's attitudes to public support to rural areas in Denmark: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Peripheral rural areas in Denmark ought to have more economic support from the public sector." The respondents were given four options: 1 = fully disagree; 2 = partly disagree; 3 = partly agree; 4 = fully agree.

#### ***4.3 Current and Past Residential Location***

To be able to test the 'socialisation hypothesis' and the 'self-interest hypothesis', we created a geographical variable that contains information about current as well as childhood residence. This geographical variable was constructed by combining the following two questionnaire items in the DRUS that both had five response options: (a) "Which of the following types of places describes best the place you live today?", and (b) "Which of the following types of places describes best the place where you grew up?". Rural areas were defined to include the two response options "in the countryside" and "village", and urban areas were defined to include the three other response options, that is, "small town", "medium-sized town" and "large city". Our geographical variable is thus measured on a 4-point scale: (a) *current rural, origin rural* (presently living in a rural area and having grown up in a rural area), (b) *current rural, origin urban* (presently living in a rural area and having grown up in an urban area), (c) *current urban, origin rural* (presently living in an urban area and having grown up in a rural area), and (d) *current urban, origin urban* (presently living in an urban area and having grown up in an urban area).

#### ***4.4. Statistical Analysis and Control Variables***

We carried out multiple regressions employing the government support question as the dependent variable. Because the dependent variable is ordinally scaled, multiple ordered logit estimations were used (see e.g. Wooldridge, 2002, Chapter 15). Based on the findings of previous studies, we included the following independent variables in the model: Female, age (6-category age variable), education (6-category variable going from primary school to long-term higher education), employment status (4-category variable: wage earner, self-employed, unemployed, outside workforce), gross yearly income per head of household (4-category variable from "less than DKK200,000" to "DKK400,000 or more"), and residential location (4-category variable: "current rural, origin rural", "current rural, origin urban", "current urban, origin rural", "current urban, origin urban").

To check whether multicollinearity constitutes a problem, we performed a variance inflation factor (VIF) multicollinearity test using linear regression

(based on the regressions in Table 2). The VIFs for single independent variables were found to range from 1.03 to 1.86. The common rule of thumb is that multicollinearity is present if the VIF of a single variable exceeds 10 (Gujarati, 2003, p. 362). Thus, multicollinearity does not constitute a problem in the analyses. Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics (n = 1,360)*

	Mean	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.
Economic support for peripheral rural areas	3.12	0.87	1	4
Current rural, origin rural	0.22	0.41	0	1
Current rural, origin urban	0.12	0.33	0	1
Current urban, origin rural	0.25	0.43	0	1
Current urban, origin urban	0.41	0.49	0	1
Female	0.51	0.50	0	1
Age 18-39 years	0.08	0.26	0	1
Age 30-39 years	0.14	0.34	0	1
Age 40-49 years	0.21	0.41	0	1
Age 50-59 years	0.23	0.42	0	1
Age 60-69 years	0.21	0.41	0	1
Age 70 or older	0.13	0.34	0	1
Primary school	0.12	0.32	0	1
Secondary school	0.04	0.18	0	1
Vocational education	0.33	0.47	0	1
Short-term higher education	0.11	0.31	0	1
Medium-term higher education	0.28	0.45	0	1
Long-term higher education	0.13	0.34	0	1
Wage earner	0.57	0.50	0	1
Self-employed	0.06	0.24	0	1
Unemployed	0.03	0.16	0	1
Outside workforce	0.34	0.48	0	1
Income: < DKK200,000	0.25	0.43	0	1
Income: DKK200,000-299,999	0.23	0.42	0	1
Income: DKK300,000-399,999	0.27	0.44	0	1
Income: DKK400,000 or more	0.24	0.43	0	1

## 5.0 Results

In the overall sample, 6% fully disagreed, 13% partly disagreed, 42% partly agreed and 39% fully agreed that peripheral rural areas in Denmark ought to have more economic support from the public sector. Using the weighted sample, the figures were 8%, 14%, 44% and 34%, respectively. This result suggests that the Danish population is quite favourably disposed towards government support for rural areas. The evidence thereby confirms the favourable attitudes towards public support for rural areas that were found in previous studies and surveys.

Table 2 shows the regression results. The most interesting result is the result for residential location. As can be seen, current residential location has an impact on attitudes towards government support for rural areas, whereas childhood residential location has not. Urban respondents are less in favour of increased

economic support for peripheral rural areas than rural respondents, regardless of childhood residential location. The result for residential location therefore supports the ‘self-interest hypothesis’ and rejects the ‘socialisation hypothesis’. There is no statistically significant difference between the coefficients for “current urban, origin rural” and “current urban, origin urban” ( $\chi^2 = 0.23, p = 0.63$ ). The lack of impact from childhood residential location is also shown by the fact that respondents who currently live in rural areas have the same level of favourable attitude, regardless of whether they grew up in a rural or urban area.

Table 2. *Ordered Logit Regression Relating Residential Location and Socio-demographic Variables to the Acceptance of Increased Economic Support to Peripheral Rural Areas in Denmark*

	Coefficient	z
<i>Residential location</i>		
Current rural, origin rural (Reference)		
Current rural, origin urban	0.14	0.76
Current urban, origin rural	-0.35*	-2.30
Current urban, origin urban	-0.41**	-2.97
<i>Socio-demographics<sup>a</sup></i>		
Female	-0.02	-0.17
Age	0.08*	2.06
Long-term higher education	-0.55***	-3.55
<i>Employment status</i>		
Wage earner (Reference)		
Self-employed	-0.30	-1.39
Unemployed	0.14	0.40
Outside workforce	-0.12	-0.86
Income	-0.12*	-2.16
Pseudo $R^2$ (McFadden)	0.02	
Number of observations	1360	

\* Significant at 0.05; \*\* significant at 0.01; \*\*\* significant at 0.001.

<sup>a</sup> The following socio-demographic variables were measured in this way: Age (1 = 18-29, 2 = 30-39, 3 = 40-49, 4 = 50-59, 5 = 60-69, 6 = 70+); long-term higher education (1 = long-term higher education, 0 = medium-term higher education, 0 = short-term higher education, 0 = vocational education, 0 = secondary school, 0 = primary school); income (1 = <DKK200,000, 2 = DKK200,000-299,999, 3 = DKK300,000-399,999, 4 = DKK400,000 or more).

As for other results, Table 2 shows that older respondents have more favourable attitudes towards government support for rural areas than younger respondents. On the other hand, those with a long-term higher education and those with more income have less favourable attitudes towards government support for rural areas. These findings corroborate the findings of previous studies.

## 6.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to investigate public attitudes to government support for the development of rural areas generally, as well as the determinants for these attitudes more specifically. Given that a lot of public money is being spent on the development of rural areas in Denmark and in

the EU, this seems to be a relevant question. So far, only a few studies have shed light on this question.

Using one proxy of government support from a Danish population survey carried out in 2011, the evidence revealed favourable attitudes towards government support for rural areas among the Danish population at large. Thus, a quite large share of the respondents either partly or fully agreed that *peripheral rural areas in Denmark ought to have more economic support from the public sector* (81% in the non-weighted sample). The results thus indicate that a large share of the population wishes an effort to be made in order to maintain and develop Danish rural areas. Our finding confirms the positive attitudes towards government support for rural areas that were found in previous literature (European Commission, 2007, 2008, 2010; McAlister, 2009; Molnar & Wu, 1989; Willits & Luloff, 1995; Wimberley, Thomson, & Lobao, 2002).

The main objective of this paper was to test the ‘self-interest hypothesis’ and the ‘socialisation hypothesis’. The first hypothesis suggests that people’s attitudes towards governments support for rural areas are guided by whether the government support will benefit themselves. Thus, rural dwellers were expected to be more positive towards rural government support than urban dwellers, as both parties to some extent could be expected to answer on the basis of self-interest, namely ‘lobbying’ for own profits (economic rents). The second hypothesis suggests that people’s attitudes towards government support are determined by where they grew up, assuming that favourable attitudes to a given type of area are formed in people’s childhood. Childhood experience, where norms, attitudes and behaviour are inculcated by the close family and others (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) was thus expected to influence attitudes in adolescence. Finding that urban dwellers, regardless of whether they had grown up in a rural or urban area, were less likely to favour government support for rural areas than rural dwellers, regardless of whether they had grown up in a rural or urban area, we were able to accept the ‘self-interest hypothesis’ and reject the ‘socialisation hypothesis’.

Finally, as we found less favourable attitudes towards government support for rural areas among respondents with more education and more income and among respondents who reside in urban areas, we might expect that the public’s favourable opinion on government support for rural areas—at national as well as at EU level—will slightly decline in the future if urbanization continues and populations get more educated.

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