

Iceland and the European Union after the 2008 Economic Crisis: Friends, Foes, and Fish

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The 2008 collapse of the global financial market set off a series of cascading fiscal crises across North America and Europe. While there is considerable scholarship on the economic causes and impact of the 2008 global financial crisis, there has been comparably less work on its political and social ramifications in Europe. In particular, there is a continuing need to understand the extent to which the financial crisis posed and continues to pose critical challenges to Europe as a normative project, and by extension, how the financial crisis played out as part of cultural and functionalist debates around European integration.

This paper examines the rise and fall of pan-Europeanism and Euro-skepticism in Iceland, one of the nations most profoundly affected by the financial crisis. Our particular interest is in understanding how the financial crisis altered the political discursive field in Iceland in ways that had implications for the outcomes of Iceland's campaign to join the European Union.

Drawing on interviews with politicians, activists, and media personalities conducted between 2012 and 2014, as well as analysis of newspaper and social media coverage of the EU accession campaign, we examine the role and relative importance of pan-European and Euro-skeptic ideas in popular and political framings of the financial crisis, with particular attention to how these ideas played out in understandings of the causes of the crisis and of economic recovery. We situate this paper within the debates around functionalist and cultural arguments for European integration.