HUMOUR PRACTICES AND EUROPEAN ATTITUDES TOWARD DEMOCRACY - DATA DOCUMENTATION

DELIAH

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Author(s)	Marcos Engelken-Jorge, Carmelo Moreno, Aitor Castañeda-Zumeta
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1   SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE DATABASE

This document outlines the scope and key features of the *Humour Practices and European Attitudes Toward Democracy* dataset[1], including the procedure followed for its production. The database collects and classifies relevant studies on humour practices, attitudes toward democracy, and modes of civic engagement in the six countries of the DELIAH consortium: Belgium, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and Spain.

More specifically, the dataset pursues two goals. First, it contributes to a subsequent meta-analysis of humour studies, democratic participation, and civic engagement in online and offline spaces across Europe, which will be carried out by the DELIAH consortium. Secondly, it serves as a collective resource for additional DELIAH project tasks, including the design of focus groups and surveys. More broadly, the dataset has also been designed to appeal to scholars outside of the DELIAH consortium who work at the intersection of humour and democracy.

2   DATA SOURCES AND INFORMATION COLLECTION PROCEDURE

2.1   Overview and Justification of the Information Collection Procedure

Systematic literature reviews follow well-defined search strategies that can be easily replicated, thus maximising reliability. They produce valid findings vis-à-vis narrowly defined research questions in areas of inquiry characterised by the use of a shared language and by similar publication practices, which limit the dispersion of studies across databases.

When these scoping conditions do not apply, researchers usually rely on so-called *narrative reviews*, which aim to ensure a comprehensive, and thus valid, discussion of the state of the art by collecting studies across repositories based on less structured search strategies. This comes at the cost of increasing the risk of biased samples of the literature.

Given the scope of the research question underlying D1.1—how contemporary humour practices are connected to different forms of democratic and civic engagement and to attitudes toward democracy—and its geographical scope (i.e., Belgium, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and Spain), which results in surveying research written in different languages and conforming to different scholarly practices, a narrative review strategy has been followed. However, elements typical of a systematic review have also been introduced to minimise potential biases in the resulting database.

More specifically, D1.1 is the result of a two-step information-gathering procedure. The first step consisted of a systematic retrieval of high-quality, internationally salient studies on humour and democracy in the six countries of the consortium, deploying pre-specified search strings. "High quality, internationally salient studies" are defined, more precisely, as articles, books, and book chapters indexed in Scopus and WoS, which are two internationally reputable databases.

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[1] Although *database* and *dataset* are sometimes used to refer to different applications given to sets of data, in this document both expressions are used interchangeably.

The second step consisted of ad hoc searches tailored to the specificities of each country. They took the form of further searches using ad hoc search strings, as well as searches in additional databases to identify relevant publications that do not appear in Scopus or WoS due to country- and discipline-specific practices. Ad hoc searches were also conducted for a limited number of studies that shed light on the historical background of certain humour practices in Europe.

2.2   Eligibility Criteria

In order to be added to the database, studies had to meet some criteria. First, they had to focus on humour practices in the six DELIAH countries *and* how they connect to forms of democratic participation, modes of civic engagement, or attitudes toward democracy. The latter expressions were construed broadly. More precisely, they refer to how humour practices are used, with what aims and with what effects, in the context of democratic politics, including how they (fail to) promote and channel political participation, as well as participation outside of, and not primarily aimed at, public institutions—such as the joining of a not-for-profit organisation—through which people address issues of public concern. Additionally, these concepts refer to how humour practices (fail to) influence people's attitudes towards democracy and its institutions, practices, and actors, including questions about who counts as a legitimate political actor or interlocutor. The latter is especially connected to issues of (e.g., gender andracial) equality, the inclusion of (e.g., sexual, religious, and cultural) diversity, and the (de)legitimation of specific forms of knowledge (e.g., climate change science). Finally, the database only includes studies of *contemporary* humour practices, which are defined as 21st century ones, except for a selected number of publications that clarify the historical background of humour practices in the countries of the DELIAH consortium. This temporal framework coincides approximately with the advent of web 2.0, which significantly altered the production, consumption, and dissemination of politically relevant humour practices.

Typical borderline cases were studies focusing on specific humour practices or products associated with particular individuals, usually artists or actors from the creative and cultural industries. In this respect, the database only includes research approaching these humour practices or products as deliberate efforts to engage in social criticism or to promote political ideas, research that presents them as representative of broader political phenomena, and research that assesses their political influence, however negligible.

As far as the form of the studies is concerned, the database primarily includes scientific articles, books, and book chapters. Exceptionally, other types of publications deemed of special interest have been included.
Following academic conventions, peer review has been taken as an indicator of high-quality research, but other criteria, such as the number of citations received and the prestige of a publisher, have also been taken into account, especially in the case of books and book chapters

2.3   Search Strings

The pre-specified search strings used for the first step of the information-collection procedure combined three sets of expressions. Each set was intended to capture one key concept. The pre-specified search strings resulted from an initial exploration and assessment of the number of results produced by all possible expressions associated with each concept, as well as their number of false positives.

Concepts:	Humour	Politics	DELIAH Country
Expressions used:	Humor*	Democra*	Belgium
	Humour*	Politic*	Belgian
	Comedy	"Civic engagement"	"Low countries"
	Comic	"Civic participation"	Flanders
	Joke*	"Group building"	Flemish
	Laughter	"Community building"	Wallonia
	Parody	"Social cohesion"	Walloon
	Ridicule*	"Social boundar*"	Estonia*
	Sarcas*	"Gender equality"	German*
	Satire	"Racial equality"	Netherlands
	Wit	"Social inclusion"	Dutch
	Wordplay*	"Climate change"	Slovak*
		Immigra*	Spain
		Multicultural*	Spanish

These expressions resulted in search strings like this one (used in Scopus to retrieve studies for the Spanish case):

TITLE-ABS-KEY (humor* OR humour* OR comedy OR comic OR joke* OR laughter OR parody OR ridicule* OR sarcas* OR satire OR wit OR wordplay*) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (democra* OR politic* OR "civic engagement" OR "civic participation" OR "group building" OR "community building" OR "social cohesion" OR "social boundar*" OR "gender equality" OR "racial equality" OR "social inclusion" OR "climate change" OR immigra* OR multicultural*) AND (TITLE-ABS-KEY (Spain OR Spanish))

The dataset includes studies published in English or in the official language(s) of the DELIAH country to which the studies refer. Depending on the language skills of the researchers conducting the searches, publications in additional languages have also been collected.

In the second step of the information-gathering procedure, ad hoc search strings were used.

2.4 Data Sources

In addition to Scopus and WoS, the following data sources were consulted. The decision on whether and which additional repositories to explore depended on their availability and an assessment of country-specific publication practices.

- For the case of Estonia: Estonian Research Information System, Google Scholar, JSTOR, EBSCO Discovery.
- Germany: ProQuest, Gemeinsamer Verbundkatalog, Göttinger Universitätskatalog.
- Slovakia: ProQuest, The Central Register of Publication Activity, The Central Library of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, The Slovak National Library, The Central and Eastern European Online Library, JSTOR, Sage Journals, Google Scholar.
- Spain: Dialnet plus, WorldCat Discovery, ProQuest.

3 CLASSIFICATION OF THE ENTRIES

The studies in the dataset are identified by the following metadata: document type (e.g., article, book or book chapter), authors of the study, title, journal or book title, year of publication, volume, page number or article number (depending on each journal's conventions), ISBN or ISSN, DOI, publisher, abstract, and keywords. For journals not organised into volumes, the issue number is provided instead.

To enhance the usefulness of the dataset for subsequent tasks of the DELIAH project, for external researchers, and for the meta-analysis of the literature, entries have been classified according to *(1)* the medium in which the analysed humour practices take place; *(2)* the attitudes toward democracy expressed by these practices; *(3)* the modes of civic engagement with which they are connected; *(4)* the countries in which they are located, *(5)* the issues they address; and *(6)* the social groups with which they are associated. The tags (or codes — these terms are used interchangeably in this document) are the result of an iterative coding process, which aimed to connect the entries to key concepts in the DELIAH project while ensuring the tags can be applied across countries. This explains, for example, the decision to use a broad tag such as "Ethnicity, migration and multiculturalism", which reflects the permeable boundaries between ethnic, migrant, and religious groups in some, though not all, DELIAH countries. The codes were applied using the information provided in the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the studies included in the database. In exceptional cases, particularly for comparative research and studies focusing on various socio-demographic groups, the main body of the documents was also consulted. The tags do not result in exhaustive typologies, nor are they mutually exclusive. Table 1 provides an overview of them.

3.1 Medium of Humour Practices

As there is no typology of humour practices that is consistently applied across studies, the entries in the database are classified according to the medium in which the humour practices analysed in them take place. The tag "Jokes" is the only exception, which has been introduced due to the relevance of this specific humour practice and the number of studies that focus on it. The codes are self-explanatory—hence, the remarks next to them are intended to qualify, not define, their meaning. These are the tags used:
- Face to face. The code includes theatre and (non-televised) stand-up comedy, among other humour practices. For the telling of jokes, even in face-to-face interaction, there is a specific tag.
- Jokes. This tag refers to studies of jokes, whether told in face-to-face settings or in other contexts.
- Music.
- Press, books and blogs. The term "press" refers to magazines and newspapers, be they online or offline. Humour in literature falls under this code.
- Radio and podcasts.
- Social media and memes. This code also includes humour practices in online forums.
- TV and cinema. This tag includes content streamed by streaming platforms.

Table 1: Overview of the Tags

Medium of humour practices	Attitudes toward democracy	Modes of civic engagement	Country coverage	Topic of Humour	Groups
Face to face	Civic humour	Attitudes	Belgium	Authoritarianism or democratic erosion	Age
Jokes	Harmful humour	Collective action	Comparative and transnational research	Climate-change	Area
Music		Digital activism	Estonia	Collective memory and historical events	Economic status
Press, books and blogs		Electoral participation and party politics	Germany	Covid-19	Education level
Radio and podcasts		Humorous counter-strategies	Netherlands	Democracy or democratisation	Gender
Social media and memes		Other forms of political participation	Slovakia	Economic issues	Partisanship
TV and cinema			Spain	Ethnicity, migration and multiculturalism	
				Gender issues	
				Other topics	
				Racial equality	
				Religion	

3.2   Attitudes Toward Democracy

Given that there is no typology of attitudes toward democracy that is consistently applied across studies, entries have been coded according to whether the humour practices analysed in them strengthen or undermine democracy:

- Civic humour. The code refers to humour which is intended to or which actually contributes to promoting democracy, to undermining support for an authoritarian regime or actor, to including some social groups, or to organising social relations in an egalitarian way.
- Harmful humour. The tag refers to humour which is intended to or which actually contributes to undermining democracy, to promoting an authoritarian regime or actor, to excluding some social groups or to organising social relations in a non-egalitarian way.

It should be emphasised that the application of these codes is based on how the information is presented in the studies, not on the DELIAH researchers' subjective assessments of humour practices.

3.3   Modes of Civic Engagement

The tags capture the modes of civic and political engagement with which humour practices are put in relation in a given study—be it because an author explores the link between a humour practice and a form of participation; because the practice is performed by a political actor to influence a specific mode of civic or political engagement (e.g., to mobilise electoral support); or because it happens in the context of a specific form of participation. The code "Attitudes", which does not strictly refer to forms of political or civic participation, has also been included in this group.

- Attitudes. This tag refers to (usually persistent) opinions, beliefs, and evaluations underpinning civic and political participation, such as generalised trust and party identification. It also includes political information and political knowledge.
- Collective action. The tag refers to participation in, or through, voluntary organisations or social movements, irrespective of whether this takes the form of joining one of them, collaborating with them, or participating in any of the events they organise, such as participating in a demonstration.
- Digital activism. The code can refer to two phenomena. First, it can refer to activities that are organised by non-state actors (including identifiable self-organising networks of individuals, such as users of specific online forums) that aim to achieve or prevent some form of social or political change and that take place in digital networks. Second, it can refer to persistent forms of individual-level political or social activism in digital networks.
- Electoral participation and party politics. In addition to research on humour connected to electoral participation or electoral campaigns, studies on humour practices by political parties or electoral candidates also receive this code, irrespective of whether these practices take place during electoral campaigns or outside them.
- Humorous counter-strategies. The tag refers to humour strategies that explicitly aim to confront anti-democratic rhetoric, hate speech, and discriminatory content.
- Other forms of political participation not captured by the tags in this group.

3.4   Country Coverage

These codes indicate the country or countries in which the humour practice analysed in a study is located. The tags are self-explanatory.

- Belgium.
- Comparative and transnational research. This code has been applied to studies focusing on more than one country or studies explicitly self-described as comparative research. Studies with a transnational perspective, which thus transcend, yet also blur, the boundaries between countries (such as research on humour practices by youtubers from different parts of the world) also receive this code.
- Estonia.
- Germany.
- Netherlands.
- Slovakia.
- Spain.

3.5   Topic of Humour

These codes capture some of the most frequent issues explicitly addressed by humour practices. Thus, the tags refer to the *content* of humour. They are (largely) self-explanatory.

- Authoritarianism or democratic erosion.
- Climate-change.
- Collective memory and historical events, including past and contemporary wars.
- Covid-19, including humour about policies and measures taken in relation to the pandemic.
- Democracy or democratisation.
- Economic issues, including their direct consequences (e.g., feelings of alienation, declining social services, etc.).
- Ethnicity, immigration and multiculturalism. This code also refers to humour about national groups in multicultural countries, including the dominant national group.
- Gender issues, including those associated with sexual orientation.
- Other topics of social justice not captured by the previous codes (such as humour about people with disabilities or obesity). Studies focusing on social justice in general have also been tagged as "Other topics".
- Racial equality.
- Religion, including humour about religious beliefs, believers, institutions, and authorities.

3.6   Groups

In the case of studies focusing on specific social groups, be it because they analyse their humour practices or how they react to some humour practices, the following codes capture some of the most frequent criteria used to define social groups:

- Age.
- Area of residence, including the urban vs rural divide or region of residence within a specific country.
- Economic status. This code can refer to the objective or subjective economic status as well as to such criteria as profession, personal income, and household income.
- Education level.

- Gender. The tag also refers to sexual orientation.
- Partisanship or ideology.