



NICOLAUS COPERNICUS
UNIVERSITY
IN TORUŃ

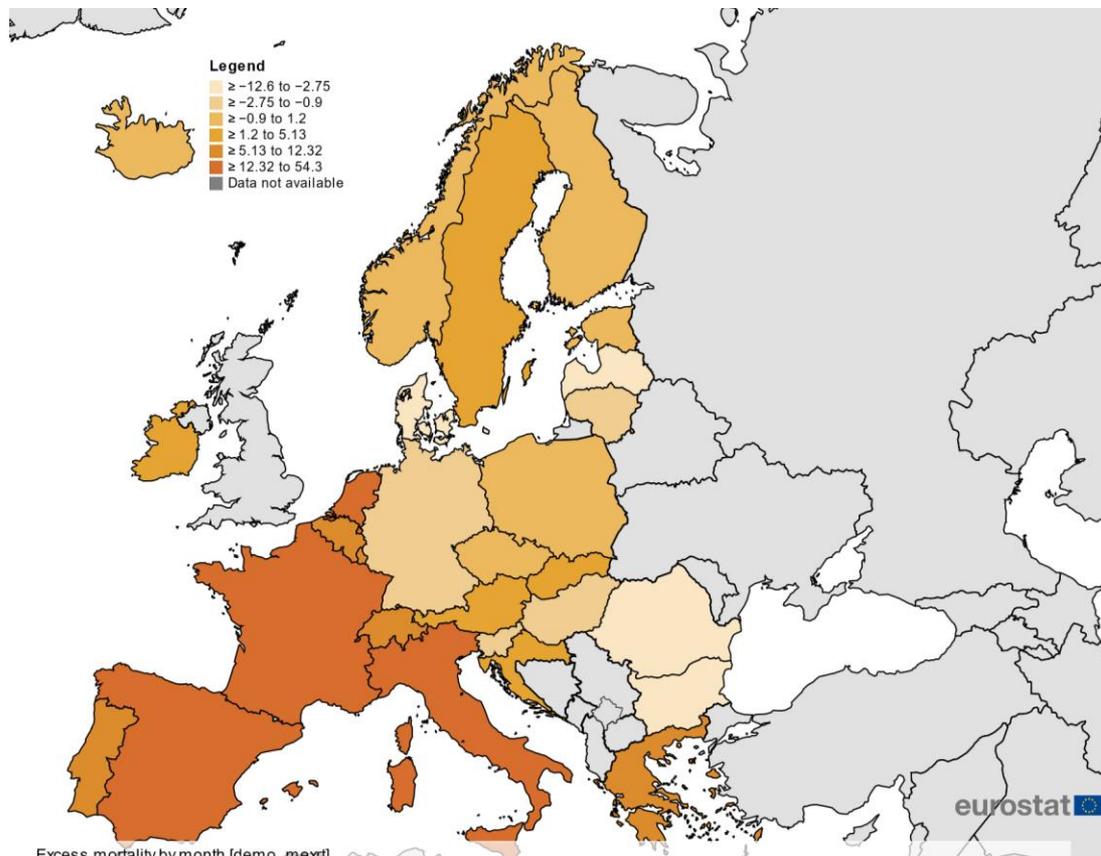
Never give up applying 😊

Adam Izdebski

2025-07-17



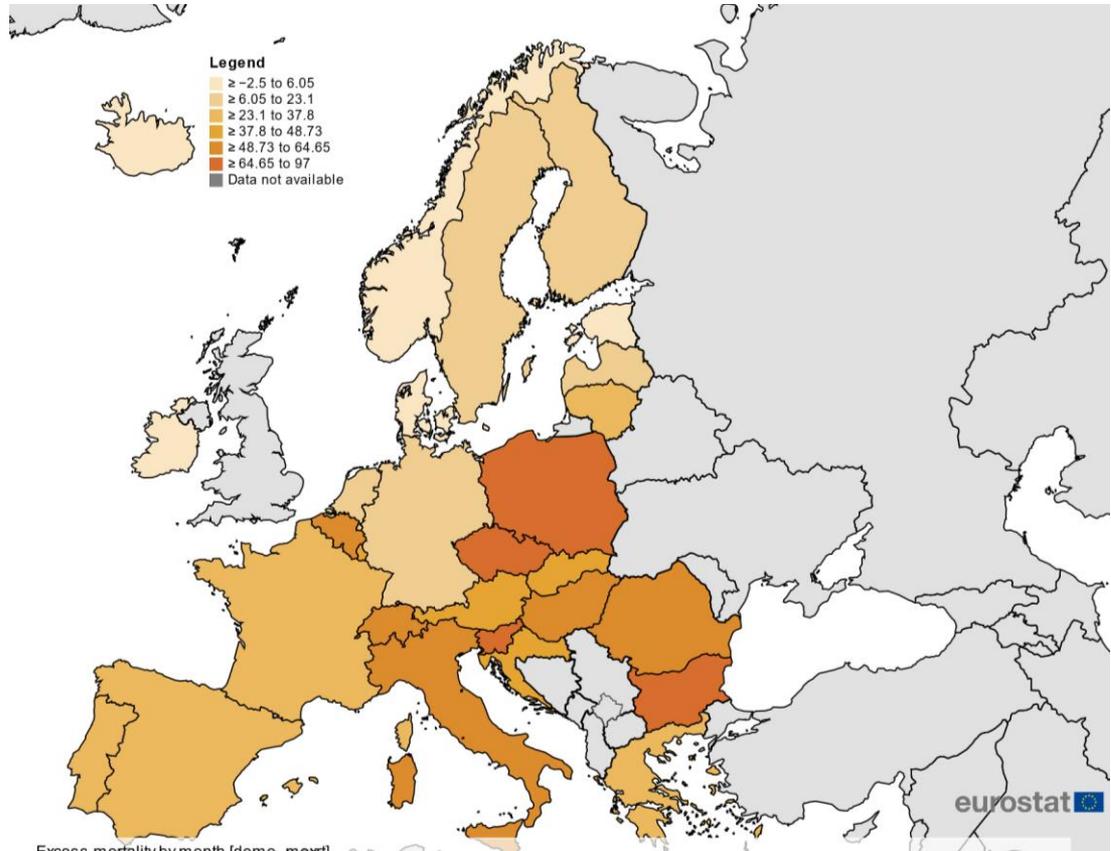
Excess mortality in Europe March 2020 1st COVID wave



Excess mortality in Europe

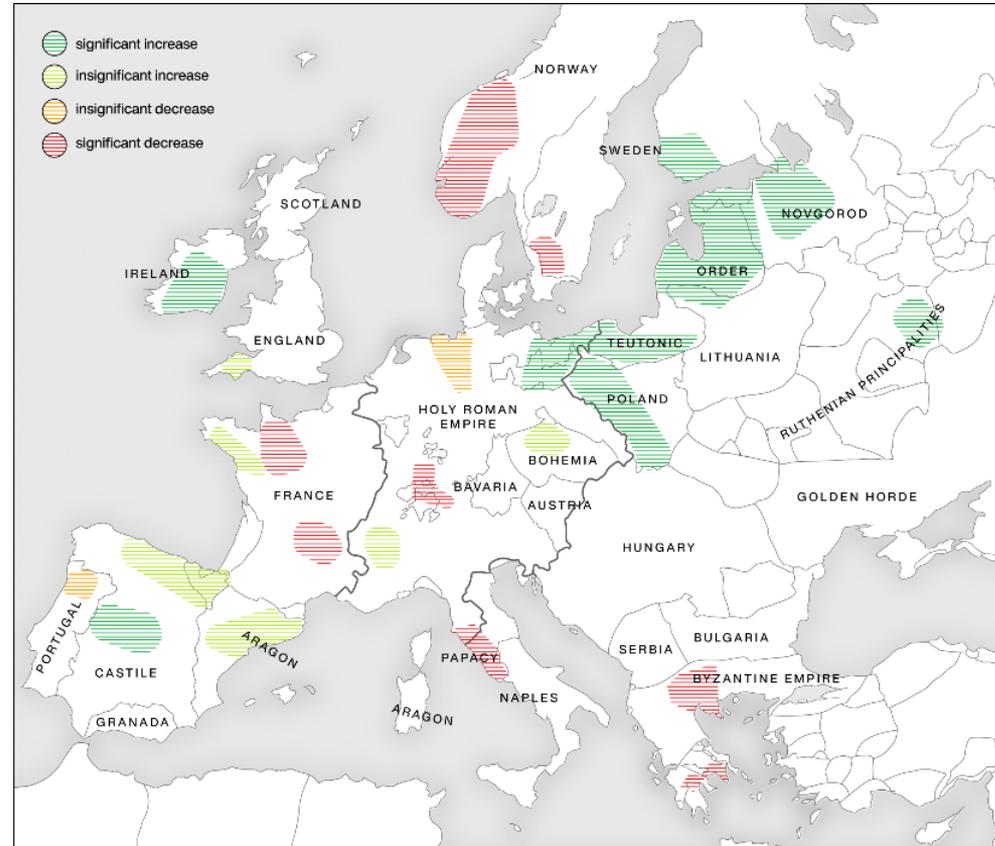
November 2020

2nd COVID wave



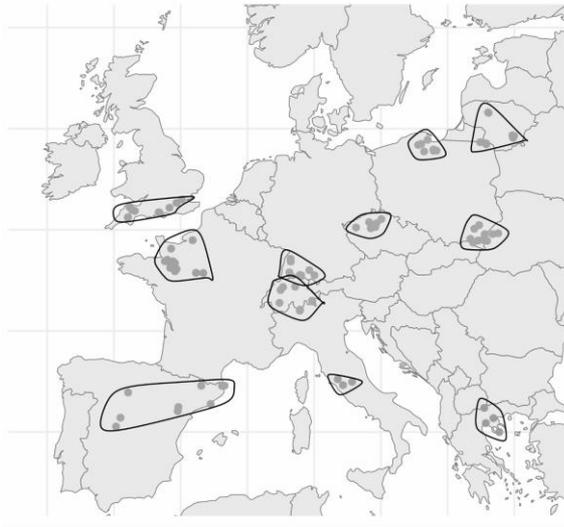
Black Death mortality in Europe 1346-1351

1st PLAGUE wave

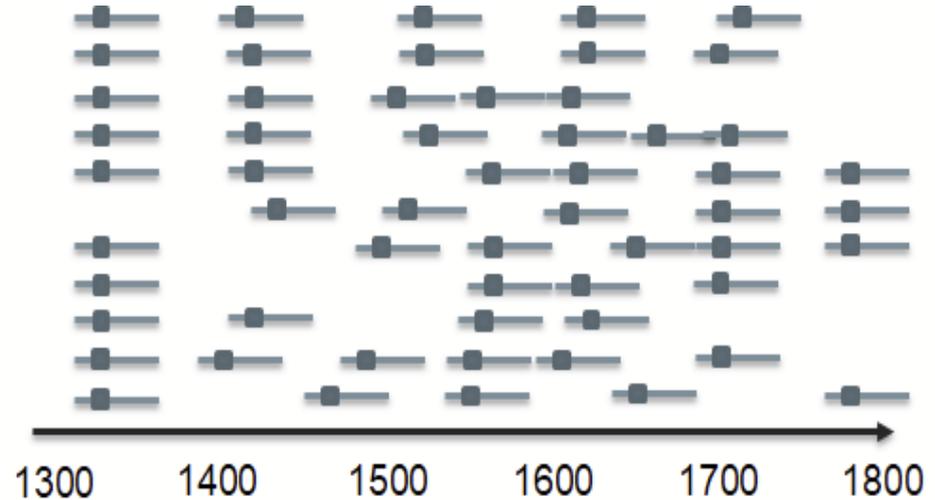


Regional outbreaks – the natural experiments of history

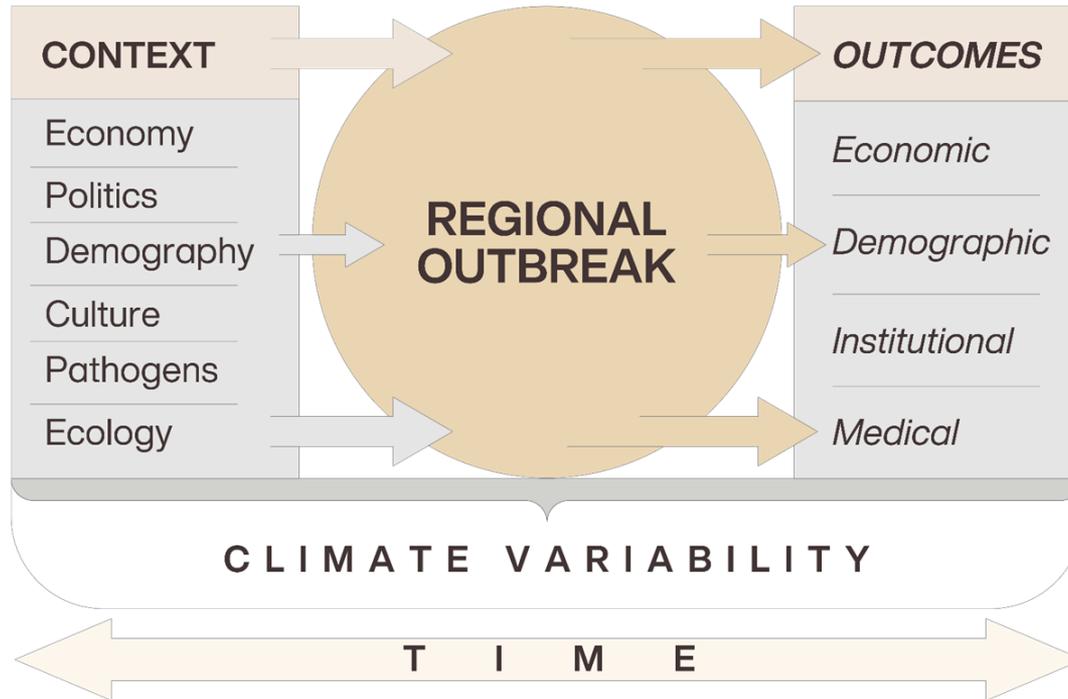
11 European Regions



56 Outbreaks (10 yrs before, 40 yrs after)



EUROpest: the theoretical model





Adam Izdebski
paleoecology
history



Tim Newfield
epidemiology
history



Alexander Herbig
pathogens
genomics



Elena Xoplaki
modelling
paleoclimate





My career path

- ⦿ Historian who became biologist and earth scientist (also started as a psychologist)
- ⦿ Alternating between Poland and abroad (UK, Germany, USA):
Research/study stays: 2007/2008 Oxford – 2011/2012 Berlin – 2015 Princeton University – 2017/2018 Princeton IAS
Work abroad: Max Planck 2018-2025
- ⦿ Leading interdisciplinary research networks and groups from early on (already into it as a student in „koło naukowe”, then Collegium Invisibile etc etc.)
- ⦿ Trying to be done quickly with career milestones (habilitation, professorship, etc.)

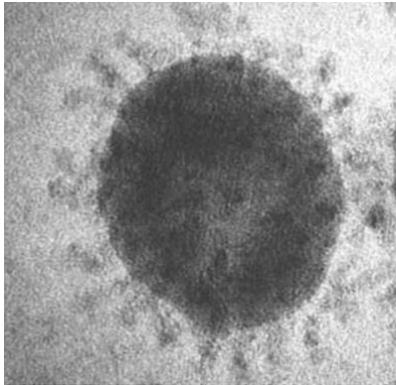


My ERC story

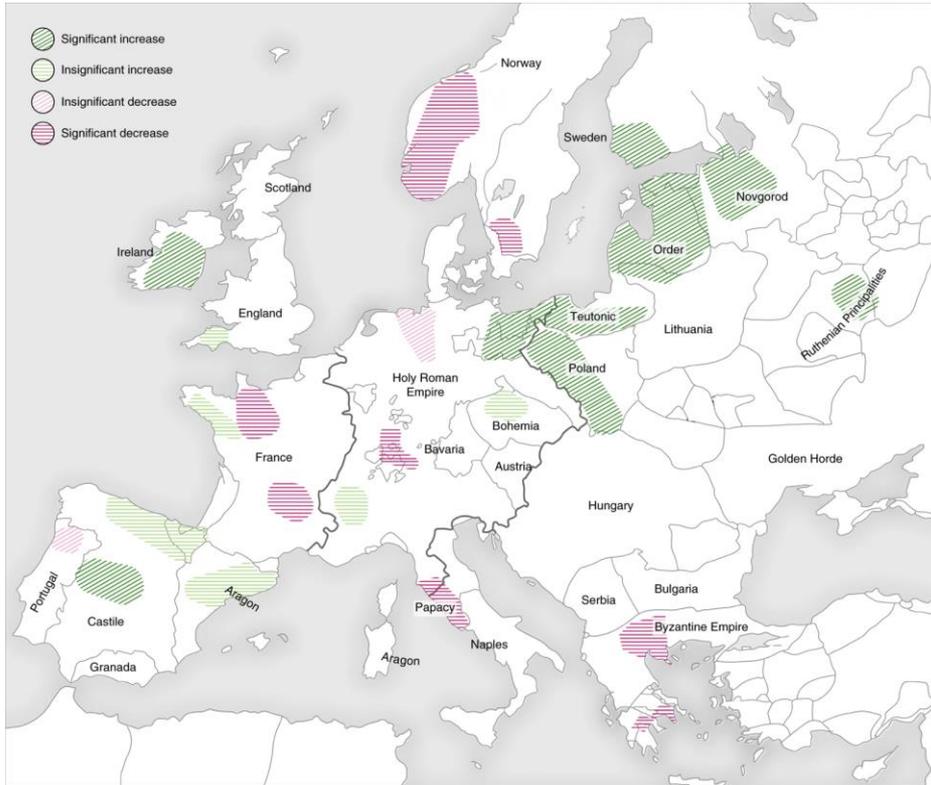
- ⦿ Started in 2009 by supporting (co-writing) joint application of 2 senior scientists from my then PhD institution
- ⦿ 3 Starting Grant applications 2014 (Stage 1), 2016 (Stage 2), 2017 (Stage 1) (same application, improved version each year) (tried also DFG, VW, AvH)
- ⦿ Starting Grant proposal got finally funded as Max Planck Independent Group and carried out 2018-2025 in much enlarged version
- ⦿ 1 Consolidator Grant application (new proposal) in 2020
- ⦿ 3 Synergy Grant applications (new pr.) 2021 (St. 2), 2022 (St. 1), 2023 (funded)



The story of our Synergy Grant



nature ecology & evolution



Led by Izdebski & Newfield in 2022

Long-term demographic impact of the Black Death across Europe

THE EUROpest QUESTION:

WHY DID ONE PATHOGEN PRODUCE DIFFERENT OUTCOMES?

Welcome to HistoGenes!

**INTEGRATING GENETIC, ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON
EASTERN CENTRAL EUROPE**

400-900 AD

[read more...](#)

This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 856453.



European Research Council
Established by the European Commission



First application (November 2021)

- ④ 4 men, lead authors of the Nature EcoEvo paper
- ④ Idea emerged after paper acceptance (spring) proposal writing Sep-Oct (full time)
- ④ Strongly historical, with strong paleoecological component and some forays into climate & aDNA, so building very closely on the paper and its methodology
- ④ Got as far as Stage 2 (i.e., Part B2 sent to external experts)
- ④ Received very encouraging and constructive comments from the reviewers



Second application

- ⊙ Extended leadership – 5 men and 1 woman, now including a climate scientist and a geneticist
- ⊙ Selected 4 out of 6 to be PIs (2 PIs from 2021 became formal project partners)
- ⊙ Proposal sharper, streamlined, theoretically mature – my best application ever!
- ⊙ Research plan more detailed and interdisciplinary
- ⊙ Rejected in Stage 1 (based on Part B1, which actually was 90% same as 2021)...
- ⊙ Most comments highly positive, ca 40% very negative and not useful for revision



Third application

- ⦿ Resubmission of exactly the same proposal as in 2022
- ⦿ Hoping for the panel to be at least 50% the same people as in 2021, so should appreciate our revisions and still remember (and like) us
- ⦿ Change of one PI (from a Polish to a Canadian US-based person...)
- ⦿ Invited to the interview – which was a very positive, fun experience



If it is so hard, why care?

- ⦿ Indeed not the only option for great research and let us not make it into a fetish
- ⦿ Scale of funding and collaboration – huge enabler
- ⦿ Eastern perspective: competitive in terms of recruitment with Western Europe
- ⦿ Recognised international trademark (like Ivy League or Max Planck)
- ⦿ Hence a door-opener for more international opportunities
- ⦿ Negotiation leverage at national and home institution level