

Article

# Young Europeans: A New Political Generation?

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**Abstract:** Young people in Europe are often described as apolitical non-participants in the civic culture of their own states and the European Union (EU). Using empirical data based on group discussions (n = 324) in 29 European states (104 locations; 2000 young people aged between 11 and 19), this paper challenges this, and suggests that many young people have distinct political views and are motivated to participate in both political discussions and traditional and non-traditional forms of participation. They are particularly interested in a range of current issues, largely around human rights, migration and (anti-)nationalism, and the article illustrates this with examples from a range of countries. Human rights issues raised concerned their perception of contemporary injustices, which were constructed as European values and formed a significant element in their self-identification as Europeans, and a general unwillingness to be identified with ‘the nation’. This broad pan-European analysis suggests that young people see themselves in many ways as a politically distinct cohort, a generation with different political values than those of their parents and grandparents.

**Keywords:** young people; political participation; human rights; migration; nationalism; participative democracy; generational change

## 1. Introduction

The narrative that that young people are increasingly uninterested in politics is widespread {xe “politics: young people’s lack of interest”} [1–3], although there are some alternative analyses (such as Ekström [4], Ross and Dooly [5] and Kiisel et al. [6]). Hahn suggested that many studies of political socialization construct young people as passive recipients of political messages from the social environment [7] (p. 20): her study of citizenship education programmes in the UK, Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands and the USA concluded that political culture and educational ethos interact to limit the extent to which educational programmes contribute to the construction of political identity. Resistance to political and social education is sometimes associated with a denial that young people can understand sophisticated political concepts (Maitles [8]). Carrington and Troyna [9], Claire and Holden [10] and Cowan and Maitles [11] all report on teacher {xe “teachers: avoiding controversial issues” \t “See also school ”} and institutional resistance to introducing anything seen as controversial in educational settings. This paper is a study of the social construction of political identity, rather than of ‘political socialization’: the methodology described assumes that young people have agency in their active construction of the political, rather than being the passive recipients of some ‘socialization’ process. It also suggests that many of these young people construct themselves as a generationally distinct cohort from their elders: more inclined to a cosmopolitan world-view, particularly with an emphasis on what they see as distinctively European values of rights and equalities, and less inclined to identify with their ‘nation’.

The literature on young people’s ‘democratic deficit’ {xe “democratic deficit”} has developed particularly over the last two decades (for example, Oelkers [12], Christodoulou et al. [13], Hendriks [14]; Frank et al. [15]). There have been concerns in the European Union (EU), where the European

Parliamentary elections participation has often been lower than the national election vote (Avbelj [16]; Mitchell [17]; European Parliament [18]. Calenda and Meijer [19] suggest that younger people are less interested in politics, not because of their age, but as a cohort effect: 'older generations now were more active as youngsters than young people are today,' and this 'can be attributed to a changing attitude towards politics . . . related to a more individualistic, and even hedonistic, attitude' [19] (p. 879). Forbrig points out that 'many lament a dramatic decline in the political involvement of younger generations, and decreasing levels of youth participation in elections, political parties and traditional social organizations are seen to provide ample evidence of this' [20] (p. 7).

These claims are largely predicated on particular styles of political participation, and it can be argued that such 'traditional' political activity {xe "young people: political-non-traditional activism"} as voting is not the only possible way of participation, and indeed is rooted in an outdated conception of what constitutes a civic culture. Much commentary is based on a concept of civic culture in which most citizens were expected to quietly endorse the political system, occasionally selecting between parties with broadly similar policies. The classic exposition by Almond and Verba [21] described a passive acceptance of existing political {xe "politics: traditional forms of engagement"} systems and structures, with a very few more actively involved in political roles. Manning [22] points out that the 'discourse of youth apathy typically draws upon quantitative methodologies and orthodox hegemonic notions of politics {xe "politics: traditional forms of engagement"} . . . [which] privileges institutionalized politics and holds the activities of political parties and electoral politics at its core' [22] (p. 2). Academic analyses of young people's political awareness at the time of Almond and Verba tended to focus on how well civic institutions and symbols were recognized in questionnaires: the presidency, the flag, national days, and buildings such as parliament (Greenstein et al. [23], Jackson [24]). Such narratives of young people's apathy hold that these narrow and regulatory models of political activity *are* politics, and that lack of participation in this traditional electoral model is indicative of lack of knowledge and interest in the political. Henn et al. have called this 'conventional political science' [25] (p. 170): they argue that including wider forms of political participation in studies of young people's participation would show much greater evidence of activity [26]. This analysis suggests that many of the cohort studied show a distinctly different awareness of their political engagement—their sense of attachment to the political entities of the nation and state is less robust—and that this reflects their perception of changes in demography (increased diversity), changes in the geo-political (globalization, a post-cold war environment, and the extension of the European Union), and changes in news media consumption.

Norris [27] also argues that older forms of political and social engagement are being replaced: 'political participation is evolving in terms of the 'who' (the agencies and the collective organizations), 'what' (the repertoires of actions commonly used for political expression) and 'where' (the targets that participants seek to influence)' [27] (p. 4). Traditional electoral participation and political party membership is being supplanted by informal political and social participation through demonstrations, political activism around single issues, petitions, greater participation at the micro level, and young people in particular are involved in these activities [28].

This paper adds to these challenges to the assumptions of apathy and low participation, through analysis of some of the data gathered in a large qualitative one-person study made by the author of how young people were constructing their social and political identities in a number of European countries. This larger study, reported more fully elsewhere [29,30] examined identity construction in terms of identification with a country and with Europe, and the methodology is outlined in the following section. Young people (aged between 11 and 20) took part in small group conversations ( $n = 6$ ) that were very largely non-directive, and which showed that many of them expressed interest and concerns about political issues, and sometimes frustration at a lack of fora in which these could be discussed. This age range was selected partly because it was the first generation of teenagers to be born after the fall of the Berlin Wall (the eldest, in the earliest conversations, were born in 1990), and partly for opportunistic reasons of access through educational establishments. There were

also sometimes accounts of attempts at political actions around these issues of concern. Issues that were often raised included perceptions of injustice around human rights, migration and refugee policies, and concerns at the rise of nationalist parties. Particularly, there was frequently a sense of a generational difference from the views of (sometimes) their parents' and (often) their grandparents' views around human rights and the growth of the European Union.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Social constructions are made in social contexts, and are inevitably not fixed essentialist beliefs, but contingent on the social lens used in interactions with others [31–33]. The ways in which individuals and groups identify with an entity such as a country or a state, or with something as potentially nebulous as 'Europe', will be expressed in very different ways in a lengthy conversation than it will be in response to a questionnaire that presents pre-defined categories. Nuances and ambiguities that are context-dependent will lead to considerably less precise and clear-cut data which, I would argue, are more representative of the way that most people approach political issues and controversies. The overall research {xe "discussion group: as a methodology"} strategy outlined here was to use group conversations to elicit from the group a series of potential lenses, and to invite members to discuss their identities in these contexts. These elicited several different constructions from the same group: but the interest was not simply in what these different identities were; although they were of some significance, they were necessarily transient, and were not precisely reproducible. The whole range of contingencies surrounding any social encounter cannot be controlled or fully noted. Of more enduring significance is to understand the range of variables and resources used to make differing constructions, and how the individual and group make apparently dissonant or even conflicting constructions compatible.

An added complication in working with young people in education is that they very often anticipate questions to be closed. Teachers (and many other adults) tend to use questions to test or assess young people's knowledge (Alexander [34], Hogden and Webb [35]), rather than to elicit ideas. Therefore, they expect a question to have a 'correct' answer that they are supposed to supply, and often feel obliged to find a 'right' response.

Group conversations have been developed in German social science research over the past 20 years (Bohnsack [36], Loos and Schäffer [37]): The *gruppendifkussionsverfahren* [group discussion method] has been described as 'an open interview, intended to let respondents develop a topic in their own language, in their symbolic system and their relevant framework', so that analysis 'can avoid projecting into single utterances meanings that are not appropriate . . . [we] learn more if this statement is put into a narrative context by the respondent . . . in his/her own language' (Bohnsack [36] (p. 21), translated by Scheunpflug et al. [38]). This is less structured and more open than traditional focus group techniques. Scheunpflug et al. describe it as a method 'in which respondents can set the structures and contents of the conversation by themselves,' thus exploring 'knowledge stocks that are not located on the surface of conscious and clear explicable attitudes and values, but which are beneath the surface' [38] (p. 10). Wagener refers to this as 'conjunctive knowledge . . . implicit, action-guiding knowledge . . . based and acquired in fundamental experiences . . . that groups of individuals share with each other' [39] (p. 92). My method was thus to provide narrative-generating stimuli to initiate discussion: I would begin by exploring immanent issues—the topics, accounts and language that the group members use in their narratives—and only later move to ask exmanent questions—my own agenda of themes, thus giving them the opportunity to develop structures that seem relevant to them.

The conversations {xe "discussion groups: strategies"} were varied in focus and emphasis, and my questions changed in response, and in their wording, in order to maintain the mode as conversational rather than interrogatory. While I had areas that I wanted to explore, I did not refer to this in the discussions, or stick to a particular sequence. Therefore responses cannot be numerically analyzed, nor be easily presented in a tabular form: I can describe apparently significant trends, but not assert, for example, that "67 percent said that political values were a significant area of interest"—and

even had I put an identical question to every one of them, the statistic would still be meaningless. But the conversations were not structureless: I had my 'instruments of construction' (Bourdieu et al. [40] (p. 248). I asked them initially to each describe their identity, and from this usually elicited what country/countries they felt they identified with; and would then ask what they saw as the positive and less positive aspects of those countries' societies. Did they think the views they expressed would be different from those of people in other parts of the country, or those of a different age? Europe was often mentioned in this: I would then ask if they 'at some times, in some ways, also felt that they were European?' Towards the end of each conversation, I often asked whether they thought possible Russian membership of the European Union was desirable or not; and ask if, and with whom, they discussed the issues we had been talking about (Family? Friends? Teachers in school?).

I would assure each group that there are no right answers, and that any response would be accepted and valued, that disagreement was possible. My objective was to establish an empowering rapport, so that discussion was, to a substantial extent, directed and paced by group members.

My strategies to initiate discussions (see "discussion groups: strategies") that produced this kind of dialogue were as follows:

- not to introduce leading terms, such as nation or state, but to use words such as 'country';
- to only use terms such as nation, state, Balkan, or Nordic when they themselves had introduced them;
- questions to be transparently open (if someone said they were French, I might respond 'What makes you French?');
- to accept all responses as valid (nodding, saying how interesting the response was);
- to maintain direct eye contact with each speaker (showing I was following them);
- to often construct questions as responses to what they had said (so it appeared that the group was determining the agenda);
- to asking as few questions as possible (leaving space for disagreement, supplementary comments);
- not directly asking an individual to respond (not everyone replied to each question: this was a discussion, not a sequential interview);
- to ask for elaborations, explanations and examples; and
- to loop the conversation back to earlier comments, when appropriate.

These strategies (see "discussion groups: overview of responses") were not always wholly successful, but nearly every group sustained a conversation for more than 30 min (the average was 45 min), and many could have lasted 90 min or more. Most young people (about 95 percent) made more than a minimal contribution: two thirds could be described as fully participative for the entire session.

Where possible we sat in a circle around a table. I introduced myself as a professor from London who was visiting about 30 European countries to talk with groups of young people, such as themselves, about their ideas. I was very grateful to them for giving their time. I introduced my colleague, from a university in the town or city, who would interpret when needed. At this point we established which language we would use: in about two thirds of the cases we used predominantly English (very often wholly so), and in less than a sixth we used only the local language, with everything translated. My colleague was able, where necessary, to translate words, sentences or phrases in either direction.

All conversations were recorded and transcribed in full. Pseudonyms have been given to all participants which reflect the country from which their real first name was drawn and their gender.

This was a one-person study, which I began when I semi-retired in 2010. I had previously been researching citizenship education in Europe, partly through coordinating an Erasmus Academic Network in this area to 2008, which (see "Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe") linked academics across Europe who shared an interest in issues of young people's identities and sense of citizenship. Members of this network became important supporters and enablers in carrying out this project, but I also used the Network for European Citizenship Education (see "Network for European

Citizenship Education”) (NECE, organized by the German *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*) and the British Council {xe “British Council”}. A Jean Monnet professorship supported my travel expenses for the period 2010–2012, and thereafter I was self-funded.

My first phase of fieldwork {xe “fieldwork: range of countries”} (2010–2012) covered the countries that had joined the European Union after 2004 (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus (including the northern part of the island), Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia) and the candidate countries at that time (Iceland, Croatia, Macedonia and Turkey) [29]. A second phase {xe “fieldwork: dates”} (2014–2016) added many of the pre-2004 European Union members (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden) and two non-EU members (Norway and Switzerland). I did not include Greece, because I thought that the particular relationship with the European Union over the entire period would be too distracting; nor the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland (to be treated together because of the border issue), intending to do this after the 2016 referendum. In these 29 states, I organized 324 group discussions, each lasting an average length of 45 min.

I visited at least two places in every country {xe “fieldwork: range of locations”} (with the exception of Luxembourg). In the larger countries I visited more, and at least four locations in every country with a population greater than 10 million: I covered 70 percent of the 75 mainland Level 2 NUTS regions (‘Nomenclature of National Territorial Units for Statistics’) of these countries. Much empirical social science research has been criticized for drawing subjects from a very narrow base: one estimate is that 80 percent of the non-USA studies are drawn from psychology undergraduates in the capital city (Arnett [41]), and that many such studies are extrapolated to be representative of the country’s inhabitants in general (Rozin [42]). Gosling et al. [43] found that, in a sample of social science research articles, the subjects were 85 percent undergraduate students and 71 percent female. RoCHAT points out that:

In academia, *a priori* claims of universality sell better than diversity, which complicates rather than simplifies matters. Universality claims get more attention because they are cleaner and sharper, encompassing control and predictive power . . . [with] greater impact and appeal. This tends to relegate diversity to noise rather than as a primary object of study. [44] (p. 107)

My study was *intentionally* noisy, reflecting the diversity of the populations of these countries: hence my emphasis on different locations, and an avoidance of an overemphasis on the capital city. Within the constraints that the population being sampled was of young residents of these European countries (largely industrialized, democratic and comparatively affluent), my recruitment process was designed to avoid the pitfalls analyzed by Henrich et al. [45]. The sample was not representative, in the sense that the clusters were drawn from schools (the most efficient way of accessing groups of young people of approximately the same age), but was intended to cover the possibilities of regional variation and of the size of settlement (Pichler [46]). The 104 locations visited correspond to the rank-size distribution of European settlements; ranging from three settlements of less than 1000 to 10 of over 1 million (Doxiadis [47]). In each location, I asked a different colleague to identify one school or college in a middle-class or professional area, and another in a more working-class area. In each school I was usually able to recruit two groups of six students, one in the 12–15 age range, one 15–18. I specified that I wanted to include young residents of each country (not just citizens) and an appropriate representation of significant minority groups.

{xe “fieldwork: recruitment of subjects”} Most groups were of between five and eight participants; over 95 percent were between 12 and 18 years old; and 56 percent were female (including one person transitioning to female). There were minority-origin young people in many discussion groups: {xe “Sinti” \t “See Roma”} by country of origin, 77 percent had parents and grandparents from the country they were living in: of the remainder, 7.4 percent had at least one parent/grandparent from another European Union country, 8.4 percent from a European country not in the European Union, and 7.4 percent from outside Europe. By father’s occupation, 52 percent were ‘middle class’, 43 percent ‘working class’, and 5 percent unknown. This was, and never could have been, a strictly statistically

representative sample of young people, but was a range of potential views across each country: from different regions, social backgrounds and cultural groups.

Ethical approval was given by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee of my former institution (London Metropolitan University), and were (for the first phase) based on the British Educational Research Association's Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research [48] or (for the second phase) on the subsequent set of guidelines [49]. Consent was obtained {xe "fieldwork: ethical considerations"} from school principals, and written consent from the young people's parents (all of those under 16, and older in some countries) and the young people themselves. Letters to parents, in the national language, explained that I was 'making a small study of young people's ideas . . . about how they feel as part of their community, region and country', and gave details of my local colleague for further information, and specifying that they could withdraw from the study at any stage.

This study was not intended to collect quantitative data, nor to be the basis of definitive statements about 'what young people thought'. The numbers of young people recruited, and the numbers of discussion groups, are different in different countries, and are not proportionate to the populations of the countries involved. Smaller countries had disproportionately more groups. In order to be able to say anything meaningful about an individual country, there is a necessary slew in the sampling. I used different colleagues within each country to recruit schools for each location; I used different networks to identify colleagues who might help. Clearly, my networks may include, to an extent, like-minded individuals, but not to the extent that there would be sufficient bias to make the sample of locations and schools very significantly unrepresentative. I had to depend on schools and colleges to be gatekeepers in the recruiting of individual young people, asking them to include a representation of the school's population in terms of minorities.

My analysis {xe "analytic approach: identification of themes"} of the data was partly grounded in the data itself in an iterative, inductive and comparative process (Glaser and Straus [50], Charmaz and Belgrave [51]), but also drew extensively on earlier literature, including some country-specific literature, which were combined into a meta analysis (Rabiee [52] (p. 657). These major themes were of values and issues, and the distinction between cultural and civic components of identity (drawing on Anderson [31]; Brubaker [53]; Bruter [54]; Joppke [55]); diversities and migration (Decimo and Gribaldo [56], Kertzer [57]); and generational difference (Lutz et al. [58]; Miller-Idris [59]; Fulbrook [60]). I also examined continuities and contingent resources, regional variation within Europe and nations and hierarchies of location. These are more fully described in a more substantial work [30].

Qualitative research carried out by a lone individual raises issues of subjectivity {xe "subjectivity: of the researcher"} and interpretation: I argue that the interpretation offered is consistent, simply because it has been carried out by a singular objectivity. But a study of identities will need to be understood in the context of the researcher's own identity (Chadderton [61]). Clearly, any research process—any social interaction—is asymmetrical {xe "discussion groups: asymmetrical nature"}, and my presence, my appearance, my identity-as-presumed by the people I talk with will all affect the nature of the responses I obtained, and the manner in which they were given, This may be particularly true in respect of my age, my citizenship and my ethnicity. I was clearly much older than my subjects, and was aware that when they talked of their grandparent's generation they would see me as in some way being part of that. My position as a UK citizen was another possible factor: all the fieldwork was completed before the 2016 referendum campaign on the UK's membership of the EU began, but I was nevertheless a foreigner, which was perhaps an advantage as I would need to have things explained to me. My ethnicity, as a white European, may also have been a factor: Eddo-Lodge [62] convincingly suggests that people of a visibly different ethnic group may have reservations in discussing {xe "discussion groups: potential issues around 'race'"} racism {xe "racism: potential issues in discussion groups"} and ethnicity with members of a society's dominant ethnic group. This last issue may also have affected the group dynamics of mixed ethnicity discussions.

### 3. Results

This section will discuss two broad areas of findings. Firstly, I will consider evidence of some of these young people's participation in political discussion and activities. It should be borne in mind that at no point did I directly ask any of the groups if they discussed or participated in such matters, and I never introduced the word 'politics' to a discussion: I would only use it with some caution, if one of them had first introduced the term. In this section I will also consider what activities they engaged in that might be construed as political, and look at what sense of empowerment they displayed. Secondly, I will consider the range of political issues that they raised, usually as matters of concern that they had about the nature of their country or state: most groups had examples of things that they wanted to change about their societies, and—particularly as conversations progressed and deliberation took hold as a group activity—many of these coalesced around issues of perceived injustices around human rights. The most frequently raised issues were criticism of hostile reactions to refugees and migrants, towards racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia, the denial of rights to the LGBT communities, gender inequities and the rise of nationalism (and there were a much smaller number espousing such views). These were differently expressed in different regions of Europe, partly, I will suggest, because of the different historical contexts of these regions, and partly because of the different times at which the various conversations took place.

These findings present a bricolage of young voices, selected to show the range (geographically, by gender, age and opinion) of this data. It is necessarily very selective, but is representative of the diversity found in the discussions. But throughout there was a widespread emphasis of perceptions of difference from many older people. These young people largely saw themselves as a cohort that had grown up in a markedly more diverse society, that was more acutely aware of the lack of equity in the recognition of human rights (but also of the European Union and Council of Europe's concern with this), and that was more able to access global media than their parents and grandparents. Section 4 will further discuss these underlying trends: but this section is primarily given to the voice of these young people.

#### 3.1. Political Participation and Activities

##### 3.1.1. Discussing Politics

Most groups showed a willingness and ability to discuss political issues with me. More significantly, many groups also talked about how, when and where they engaged in political discussions at other times, but this was often accompanied by expressions of frustration at what they saw as the patronising attitudes of their elders. There is a common assumption that young people's political views are no more than repeated opinions from parents and the media (for example, Brown [63], Lopes et al. [64]). In Hungary, Erzsébet (♀13) said she had 'asked my parents yesterday why can't we talk about politics in school, and they said we are not old enough to have viewpoints about it, and what we say about things is not our viewpoints, it's only other people's. I often talk about politics'. Implicit in such a statement is an assumption that older people's views are rational and independently reasoned, based on wide experience and understanding of political discourse. There were a few groups that said that they did not engage in political discussion: for example, in Finland Karri (♂12) said: 'We don't think much about these things', and Aura (♀12) added: 'young people like us don't think about these things every day'. A few groups suggested that their views and opinions were naturally and properly identical to those of their parents. In Poland, Paweł (♂13) said: 'What we are like is what our parents have taught us ... this is how our identity and our mentality is shaped'. Such attitudes were those of a small minority, were often given early in the discussion, and sometimes later remarks suggested more debate with parents: perhaps family differences became articulated as confidence grew about the nature of our discussion. Thus Serafin (♂13) in Poland explained that although 'we are similar to our parents, we are not the same ... we don't agree with our parents, and we would like to have our own views on certain matters'.

The family appeared to be the principal location for political discussions. There were many instances of families where there was encouragement of discussion and independent thinking. Chaffee et al. [65] suggest that if family discussions are strongly orientated towards conceptual matters, rather than harmony and acceptance of authority, the young people in the family tend to be both knowledgeable about politics and to demonstrate an interest in public policies. Watching the news was a common prompt for family discussion: Emir (♂13) said that they did this ‘mostly after the newscast on the television—we discuss these topics at home, and comment on each other’s opinions’. Hasret (♀13) added: ‘when we see news on the TV it reminds the family about what’s going on, and we discuss it’. On some issues, family debate might provoke confusion, and family discussions were not always easy. Some felt that there was too much discussion: in Croatia, Dominik (♂17) said that his mother ‘works in politics, and everyday when she comes home I have to listen about politics . . . politics every day at lunch, and I have enough politics for my lifetime!’ In Italy, Luca (♀13) complained that when her grandmother ‘starts to talk about the war. I just sit there and listen—it’s like the thousandth time I’ve heard it’.

There were more serious difficulties in some families. In Poland, Jolanta (♀15) said she had problems talking with her grandparents: ‘they have had traumatic experiences, and they don’t like to talk about Russia or Germany . . . they have a kind of trauma from the past—that suddenly Germans will come and will start killing . . . they are still afraid of the unknown.’

The following examples from a group in France show both a willingness to engage and degrees of frustration. Aimée (♀16) began by saying: ‘Usually people of our age think the same as their parents, but not always—sometimes we really think differently. My father is *gauche* [left wing], and my grandfather is rightwing, and my grandfather [and] father disagree.’ Berthe (♀16) said neither her parents nor grandparents showed any interest in politics: ‘they *say* that there are left wing, but they never talk about political problems, about equality’. She was struck that ‘with the “immigrant problem”, if we can say that, they say nothing. It’s really strange.’ Marinette (♀16) said: ‘my father agrees, because his education was like that. My mum agrees with me—but she’s not very interested in politics. If you talk about immigration, she’ll say “Oh yes, I agree with you”—but it’s just that.’ Léone (♀16) clearly disagreed with her father: ‘I gave a euro to a man in the street and I told my father. He said that I can’t, because if I do it for one person, I should do it for all people. He says it’s not a place for immigrants, and I think he’s so *closed*. My mother, she’s like me, she works in healthcare, and she agrees with immigrants coming to France.’

There were similar political disagreements discussed in an Austrian group: Waldtraut (♀10) said: ‘In my family every one is racist, I’m the only one who says leave them alone—I don’t really argue with my father about politics, because he has opinions that I can’t stand. He isn’t able to discuss—he doesn’t shift a centimetre.’ Cordula (♀19) said that ‘maybe because my parents are very political, and I’m also a part of a political party, I see myself as part of change. It’s all I talk about with my parents! Politics, it’s so interesting. I have always discussed it with them.’ These comments seem to corroborate Zukin et al.’s [66] finding that young people involved in political discussion at home were more likely to regularly be involved in community activities.

Friendship groups were less often seen as places to hold political discussions. In Portugal, Aleixo (♂18) suggested that politics was not part of everyday conversation: ‘I don’t think that we talk about that, we talk about things that are related to our routines.’ Damião (♂17) agreed, but at the end of the conversation it transpired that they *did* talk politics with each other, but in the particular context of the college’s Student Association. Gonçalo (♂17) said: ‘We try to make sure that the people we work with understand what is happening—yes, there are matters that we try to discuss.’ Rui (♂18) elaborated: ‘We discuss the concerns, and recent issues that are in Europe, in nearby countries—for example wars, we have discussed what happened in Syria, what would be the best.’ This context-specific discussion of the political with friends was also seen in Sweden: after saying they never talked about politics with friends, Mattis (♂14) added: ‘Right now we talk about politics—sometimes. It’s just now, around the election, I think.’ The Swedish general election of 2014 had been held three weeks earlier.



Towards the latter part of a discussion in one Budapest school, Kató R (♀13) commented: 'Maybe after this conversation we will go home and talk about this more! This discussion really drew my attention to the fact that I can't form an opinion on these matters—I have to get more information.'

To what extent were these discussions perceived as political? The state as an institution was not widely referred to; hardly at all in the states joining the EU after 2004. There were very few references made to parliamentary institutions, and much dissatisfaction with political actors (corruption being a particular issue). Despite this, there was general support for democratic systems and the rule of law in their states. In the eastern European countries, it was often when comparisons were being made with countries such as Russia that the democratic nature of their own countries was mentioned and praised: it was the contrast that brought democracy into focus. In Romania, Cristian (♂16) was initially very critical of the inefficiencies of the Romanian political systems, but when Russia was raised, he described their system as lacking in cooperation, in following rules or having common sense. He contrasted this with Romania, which he described as behaving in a politically well-regulated manner. There were many examples of democratic systems being welcomed in this context: not only in the eastern European countries, but also in the western European countries, in both cases democracy being particularly given as a *European* characteristic, rather than something particularly applied to their own country.

### 3.1.2. Political Participation

In Austria, young people have been able to vote in all elections from the age of 16 since 2007, and some older teenagers in a *Mittelschule* had voted the day before my discussion in provincial elections: their excitement was palpable. Sieglinde (♀16) said: 'I voted yesterday—it was the first time! Young people don't really get all of the information that they need.' Amelie (♀17) was less keen: 'Not all the teenagers of our age want to vote—personally, I'm not interested in politics now—maybe in two or three years—it's too soon for 16 year olds.' Margot (♀18) disagreed: 'We have all the possibilities to inform ourselves. I think it's important to vote at a young age, [so] the younger people are heard. If we didn't, no one would know what we're thinking, and no one would be interested in what younger people wanted and think.' In another group in the same school Cordula (♀19) said she was 'part of a political party—yes, I see myself as part of change.' Lulu (♀17) said: 'I voted, and I was really excited—I hated politics at first, but when I turned 16 . . . I watched news on television because I wanted to know something about politics, and it was really exciting, and I went and voted . . . I know that if I don't vote, it won't make much—but if everyone thought like that, then there wouldn't be change.' Karolin (♀16) agreed: 'Many of my friends could vote last year, and they didn't—this is bad . . . it won't make a change. But if you vote, and all the others vote, together you can make a change.' Cordula had voted the day before, and argued that her vote could be significant 'especially when you live in a village it's important to vote—there may be just 300 people.' But, she went on 'you can make much more change than through voting if you go on the street and demonstrate. I do this—the next one's on Friday, and it's the right-wing party's ball in Vienna, the *Akademikerball*—I'll be there!' This annual event is attended by members of many right-wing parties and extra-parliamentary far right organisations from across Europe. Reports of that year's ball suggested that Cordula's demonstration had been effective: there were only 400 visitors, much lower than in previous years.

There were other discussions about participating in demonstrations. In the Czech Republic Anezka (♀12) suggested: 'More protests against deforestation might help'. In Bulgaria Nikola (♂16) called for direct action: 'When any government in the world . . . makes changes not liked by the people, [people] should stand up and protest about that change . . . We should stand up and fight for our rights'. In a Hungarian discussion on proposals to curtail press freedom, Margaréta (♀16) said: 'Demonstrations are OK if they are safe—it's great that someone shows their opinion, and steps forwards'. Others suggested using social media for political action. In Switzerland Abel (♂17) proposed: 'We can use Facebook and stuff, create groups that show the government. If we are many together, we have weight for our ideas.'

Voting in elections was what most young people mentioned when they talked about the possibilities of effecting change. Most of the young people I spoke with were too young to have voted themselves, but many of them nevertheless showed an interest in both the process and the results. In Vevey, in Swiss Romande, they talked about the political parties. Isaac (♂14) identified ‘really different groups in Switzerland, who think very differently. During elections, or when there’s a vote, different groups argue for often really opposite things’. This, said Bernard (♂15), was ‘very positive, because you can see the issues from different angles.’ Older teenagers were more precise: in a small town Bénédicte (♀18) described the right-wing *Union démocratique du centre*: ‘The UDC—The Swiss Peoples’ Party—they made publicity about people who are “black sheep”—trying to get all foreigners to go away—I think it’s a big problem, to do things like that.’

Some younger groups talked of engagement with specific issues at a very practical level. In the Czech Republic, Anezka (♀12) described collecting money for disaster relief, and that she and Zdenka (♀12) discussed ‘ecological problems, such as tropical deforestation, in far off areas’, which, they said have ‘an influence on the whole of Europe, on every country.’ Oldrich (♂12) was involved in direct political action, which had left him temporarily frustrated: ‘I think we cannot influence these issues—I’ve been trying for two years to influence the schedule of the Czech Railways because I think there are many problems, but I’m not very successful—it’s useless, nobody listens to a child.’ In a Slovenian village, Tine (♂13) said the government ‘should invest money in green technologies and eco technologies.’

Older groups spoke more about the need for collaborative action, and the forms that this might take. There was some direct involvement with refugees in the 2015 crisis: in Spain, in September 2015 Yana (♀16, Syrian origin, Spanish born) said she was ‘in an association of Spanish teenagers who are helping Syrian families cross Spain. We wait for them at the station, give them directions on how they can get to . . . wherever they want to go.’ In Denmark, Mirjeta (♀18) said: ‘We were down at the station waiting for them with food and so on, then you see another whole different view of the refugees’ (in January 2016, when many refugees were moving on to Sweden: Mirjeta’s family had been Kosovan refugees to Denmark in 1992).

Empowerment and a sense of impotence were evident in this exchange in Italy, where young people at an agricultural college talked about the need for a generational shift in the nature of their political involvement. Aniceto (♂19) thought change would be problematic: ‘We should move in a united way to change things, but there are too many people that don’t care about changing things. Damaso (♂16) suggested there was ‘a difference between the older generation of voters and the younger generation. The older generation trusted the parties, the younger generations consider the parties’ projects and the reforms before voting’. Sonia (♀17) agreed: ‘Most of the [older] people are not well informed, and are conditioned by the old attitudes. Younger people have better means of getting information—they use the internet’, and Gaudenzio (♂16) agreed: people used to be less informed, and ‘voted because they were told to vote like that, without being properly informed—now it’s much better, the internet gives you a wider idea of the political system.’ There was a similar sense of generational difference further south in Italy, where Severino (♂17) argued that ‘our generation, and the next, have to change the relationship between the politicians and the population. Politicians promise something but we never see what they promise.’ Lamberto (♂16) wanted a more critical change in the relationship with government and politicians: ‘we can change the world, because government is what we are—if we change on stupid things like racism or corruption, if we just think about things and make them better, we could change the world. It isn’t just a problem of government, it is *our* problem. If we don’t support each other, how can we change the world?’

### 3.1.3. Perceptions of Political Empowerment and Disempowerment

The Hungarian group referred to in the previous section discussed at length their desire to be active in effecting change within the country. Margaréta (♀16) said: ‘We have different opinions, but we all want to do something for the country, to do something better. One or two of us don’t want to

work in Hungary, but we want to do something for the world to be better—we have ambitions . . . being Hungarian is that we take care of our country, and want to do something for it . . . I don't think it's about living somewhere, but doing something for it.' Gyöngyi (♀16) echoed this: 'This is our home country and our home city, and as Margaréta (♀16) said, we want to do something for Hungary,' and Julianna (♀16) then added what was a frequent trope in the former eastern bloc countries 'but others don't want to do anything—there's the problem, I think. There is just a small proportion of the country who want to do something to better society.' Such expressions of a desire for agency (and an assumption that they would soon have this) were found across all countries, though in some countries there were also counter-expressions of powerlessness. Many young people, like Julianna, were critical of their compatriots, particularly about their failure to engage in civic activities. For example, in Poland Małgorzata (♀16) pointed out that though many Poles disliked the government, 'they don't bother to go to the elections to do anything about it. Poles are passive about politicians' activities.' There were similar charges of electoral apathy in Bulgaria. In a heated discussion, Nikola (♂16) said 'in some countries when the government makes a change which is not liked by the people—they stand up and protest about that change . . . but whatever our government changes, we just say 'OK' . . . I think that's not right. When they raised taxes in Greece, they protested—but in Bulgaria we say "Oh, it doesn't matter". I think we should stand up and fight for our rights.'

Many of the discussions about the faults of civic society included discourses of power and powerlessness. Some young people clearly lacked any sense of agency or ability to influence the system. For example, in Latvia, although Klinta (♀15) was able to say: 'I feel satisfied with my country,' she went on 'we cannot change what is happening. We cannot change the future of Latvia.' Nikolai in Bulgaria, quoted above, saw the situation as 'a bit of a one-way road: there are no other choices'. But such views were often contested: for example, in Romania, there was debate about the possibility of political activity:

Olga M (♀16) said: 'We don't have the power to change. We've tried to change the president and our parents to vote for someone else—but it's still the same—men want power, and when they have it, they make use of it.'

Mihai (♂15) said: 'I'm sorry, but *we* are the people—*we* have the power—*we* are democratic, so the power should be with the people. Though I must say, at the last election for the president there have been a few [irregularities]—like seven votes a second from France!'

These debates were particularly found in smaller countries (where the language was seen as threatened) and where there was substantial emigration of young people (much of the countries who had joined the EU post 2004). Many saw themselves as on the threshold of having to make a decision; to stay in the country to add to its development and population (as Žanete (♀13) put it: 'We have to speak Latvian, and we have to make the population grow—get more babies born!') or to migrate in order to (possibly have a better personal future). Two examples illustrate this: in Bulgaria, when Angel (♂15) said: 'I think we can change the country, but *all* of the people must change,' Ivana (♀17) countered: 'Yes. But if you go abroad, you will not change anything.' And in Poland, Maria (♀16) challenged her group: 'You all say that this should be changed, but are you able to say that in two years' time, when you're 18, you'll go to vote? Because many young people usually don't. So, when you are all 18, will you go to vote?' Dominik (♂16) said he would, but did not sound very convinced, and Małgorzata (♀16) admitted 'I could say yes I will, but then it could turn out that I won't.'

### 3.2. Political Issues of Concern to Young People

What were the issues that concerned young people? Having asked them what they were pleased with about their country, I then asked if there was anything that they were displeased about, or they would like to change. Most responses concerned either events that had happened in the previous few days or weeks, or that were relatively local to them. This in itself suggests that they were following news media, but many issues were also based on a sense of political values: there were frequent references to equalities and fairness (or lack of fairness), to human rights, and to solidarity with

others. Their specific concerns included attitudes towards migrants and refugees (particularly in the western states, where I was holding discussions in 2015 and early 2016, at the height of the ‘crisis’); on racism and Islamophobia in their country; on attitudes and policies towards LGBT+ communities; on discrimination against women; and on expressions of nationalism. There was dissatisfaction with inequities in society, which was often seen in generational terms.

### 3.2.1. Rights, Equalities and Fairness

Most young people appeared to have concerns about civic and political rights. Most thought they should be more extensive: in a small Swiss town, Heike (♀16) said that ‘sometimes I speak with my mother, that foreigners should have the same rights as we have.’ In Italy, Albizzo (♂17) emphasised how ‘civil rights’ contributed to the fact that ‘we are leading a good life: there is democracy, I’m proud of this.’ There was an association, made by many, between civic rights and their construct of Europe, coupled with critiques that rights needed to be extended. Although there were a number of instances of antiZiganism, in Poland several young people said that local Roma were stigmatised. Boženka (♀12) said: ‘Everyone should be treated equally: we are all different, but we should all be treated the same.’ Dilek (♀18) spoke of the differences in status between Turks and Kurds: ‘It’s not important, being Turkish or being Kurdish, but it’s important to be equal’.

Equality and fairness were often raised: in a discussion in France, Léonie (♀16) described the ‘inequality between [the] very rich and very poor’ as a problem: ‘We could make everyone equal.’ Adolphe (♂16) took this straight to the Republican motto: ‘In the three words of the Revolution, *égalités* are not very present in the location of wealth, and *Fraternité* is not accomplished, because there’s racism between French and immigrants.’ Valéry (♂16) observed that the Revolution’s conception of equality ‘was not economic, but equality in the law . . . but someone who is poor cannot pay a very good lawyer.’ In Belgium, there were similar comparisons of the state rhetoric with the reality of everyday inequalities. Hassan (♂15) said: ‘Yes, we are equal—but if something happens . . . they are going to blame the other.’

### 3.2.2. Human Rights

Civic rights were variously described under terms such as human rights and democracy. Sometimes these were seen in a geographic and historical context. In France, Pascaline (♀15) gave a narrative of how civic rights had spread eastwards from western Europe after 1989: ‘In France these are values that are so deep—human rights, liberties, democracy—these are the foundations of our society. Europe shared those values—but the newer the countries, the less these values are really shared—it’s a good job that Europe has the power to bring these values to other countries.’ There were similar sentiments, and memories of fascism, in Agustín’s (♂15) remarks: ‘Spain has a confident feeling and feels very European . . . we are Europeans because we share the same rights and freedoms.’ In Poland, Onufrius (♂15) compared his country with the United States: ‘The USA is in a good position in politics—and human rights too—they are civilised like we are—the rights are quite the same.’

The expression of human rights was most frequently described by their absence for certain groups. Thus contemporary issues and debates—the Black Lives Matter movement in respect of Afro-American rights, the rights of Kurds in Turkey, and the denial of rights to LGBT groups in Russia, all provoked concerns. There were frequent comparisons to the perceived absence of rights in Russia: Stjepan (♂15) in Croatia argued: ‘Russia will have to change politically—there are literally two people with all the power and they are just exchanging every four years. Europe is democratic—that’s like a dictatorship.’ Similar comments were found in western Europe: in Portugal, Rufino (♂16) said: ‘Russia is a dictatorship, and most of the European countries are democracies . . . so I wouldn’t think that they could be part of Europe.’ There were also examples of lack of rights being used to other the United States: in Iceland, Katrín (♀17) saw capital punishment as a civic rights issue: ‘They shouldn’t be killed—I don’t like that about America, and that’s what I like about Europe, the death sentence isn’t allowed.’

### 3.2.3. Solidarity

Fraternity and solidarity were also frequently advocated. In France, the Republican motto was invoked (and the failure to live up to it), but there were specific references found across both Western and East-Central Europe. Some referred to national solidarity, or the lack of this, when in Poland Bogusław (♂13) said: 'There was solidarity earlier—right now we are lacking in this. We have lost what we had'. In Denmark, Mirjeta (♀18) said that Danes could 'rely on each other to stick together,' giving the example of the terrorist attack in København 11 months earlier: 'Citizens came to hold each others hands around the synagogue: we stick together, Denmark is one of the most trusting societies.' References were made to European solidarity: in Italy, Albio (♂13) said: 'When there were the terrorist attacks in France [the *Charlie Hebdo* killings, a month earlier], we all felt European'; yes, added Rachele (♀13): 'Italians, Austrians, Germans, UK—we all helped France—we are all together in Europe'. In Hungary, Ildi (♀14) described Europe as 'a community, where solidarity exists between the countries.'

In some of the former communist states, some participants said parents spoke of greater solidarity and security in the past; in the Czech Republic, Katka (♀17) said: 'People then were more equal to each other. They did not care about who had how much money. People used to stick together more'; and Dominika (♀16) added: 'At that time there were few contrasts—it was more equal'. In Romania, one group contrasted the effect of the change: Silvia's (♀) grandmother had told her 'no matter how bad it was, you had a secure place of work . . . now it doesn't matter that you have work, because tomorrow you are fired.' Mara (♀) pointed to the housing: 'They allotted you a place to live after you got married . . . they would give you a job—right now you are just afraid'. But in another Romanian group, Cosmin (♂13) said that while 'it was more organized, you were only allowed to get a certain amount of food every month. People . . . were threatened by the communist regime—it was a horrible period.'

### 3.2.4. Migration and Refugees

Many young people saw the initial response to the 2015 refugee crisis as a positive and welcome example of European humanity and solidarity. By the late summer of 2015 this feeling was being compromised by the actions in Hungary. The following comments were all made in September 2015. In Spain, Jaime (♂11) said: 'Now I feel less European, because almost all the countries of Europe collaborate over Syria, but some don't—all the continent should work in a group.' In a rural French school, Rosalie (♀14) said: 'in Hungary, they rejected the refugees—in France we try to welcome the refugees as well as we can.' Amandine (♀15) burst out 'I feel less European—we can't be proud of what has happened—what Hungary is doing now is not human.' Lola (♀15) was impassioned: 'Europe is one—but the *unity* is destroyed—Hungary is not respecting the *principles*—Europe says we should help refugees.'

The dominant narrative was that refugees should be welcomed and supported, as an obligation to implement human rights. 'Europe' was frequently invoked as a champion of human rights. The Germany reaction was particularly striking. There was widespread acceptance of refugee settlement. Four reasons were put forward for Germany's welcome to the refugees, often made in combination. Firstly, Germany's role in the Holocaust (Ivonne (♀15): 'We're Germans, and we were the bad ones in history, and now we have to be the good ones'). Secondly, Germany's extensive experience of German refugees in 1945–1950, when up to seven million Germans moved when the Polish frontier was moved west, and a large number of Sudetenland Germans were deported from the Czech Republic. (Annegret (♀15) said: 'Grandparents on my dad's side [who] had to flee in the second world war . . . there might be more of an understanding than with people who haven't experienced anything like that'). Thirdly, the German population is in long-term decline. (Hinriche (♂13, part Kenyan origin) said: 'Germany actually *needs* these refugees'). The predominant explanation was that accepting the refugees was a simple act of humanity—and, significantly, of *European* humanity. (Abadi (♂18, Iranian origin) said: 'Our generation doesn't have to feel guilty about the past, but I think it's a good to welcome refugees. In Europe it's a part of our communal values'; Karl (♂18) said: 'The western countries . . . have a

responsibility for other countries who live in much worse conditions, because these have constructed their wealth on the back of these other countries’).

### 3.2.5. Racism and Islamophobia

The prejudicial and discriminatory stereotyping of ethnic minorities was also a matter of widespread concern, particularly with regard to migrants in western Europe, and Roma in eastern Europe, though a minority of young people made prejudiced comments about both of these groups. Generally, there was a condemnation of racist attitudes, with the views of some parents and many grandparents being strongly criticized. In Luxembourg, the particularly diverse population was welcomed by most young people: Amaury (♂17) spoke of how he enjoyed ‘the multicultural part of it—you are in contact with so many different nationalities or cultures,’ and Lou (♀17) of how ‘we are used to having different nationalities and cultures mixed together.’ In Denmark, Alvilda (♀18) complained: ‘My parents keep making racist jokes—I don’t think they realise that they are being racist . . . it’s just the way that she was brought up.’

However, there was a particular perception of racial difference among some of the young people in the Visegrád countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary), where there was a stereotyping of Africa as undeveloped and primitive. In the Czech Republic, Zdenek (♂15) saw Africa was a place where ‘it’s important to have some food, not to die.’ In Poland, Iwonka (♀12) referred to ‘people living in Africa usually are much more undressed than people in Europe.’ Europe was sometimes characterized as ‘white’: in Slovakia, Iven (♂14), who had said there were no black people in Europe, and then corrected himself: ‘Well, there are some, immigrants,’ then sorted the continents by diet: ‘American have fast food, African have what they can find, Indians have bamboos and plant roots, and Europeans have normal food.’

Several discussions on racism concerned the role of the media in supporting racist stereotypes. In Belgium, Loes (♀17) focused on television: ‘Our shows are almost all white, and if they’re not then it’s like “the angry Spanish woman”, or “the criminal who has Moroccan roots”’. It’s something that has to be more spoken about in the media and in education— more diversity should be shown.’ There were many comments on the nature of everyday racism. Some sought to explain racism as a generational concept, such as Cristóvão (♂14) in Portugal: ‘You can’t expect a man of 80 years old to think the same as a boy of 15 or 20—the world has changed, and some of our grandparents are racist, because of the colonies of Angola, there was a lot of racism.’ Others were concerned at the abuse of the migrant workforce, as in Marzio’s (♂14) comments in Italy: ‘On TV they say that they migrate and steal our work—they don’t steal our work, they are exploited, they are unhappy, they have to work 10 or 12 hours a day for six or seven days and get paid [very little]’.

Racism was often coupled with specific Islamophobic remarks. In a small mono-ethnic Belgian town, some members of a group were critical of Muslim migrants. Aart (♂16) said: ‘Most immigrants come with a mindset that “Belgium has to change for me”’. I asked for an example. Pim (♂16) said: ‘They want to build *their* church on *our* grounds—they want to build mosques . . . we have a normal Christian church, and they want to build their mosque, in the middle of the city.’ I adopted a more interrogatory stance: ‘Belgium had colonies, and built churches there—what’s the difference?’ Pim responded: ‘Belgium occupied the colonies, so they had the right to do what they want—but now they come to our country, but we are still above them, we have a little bit more to say than them.’ Others in the group were critical of these remarks.

A similar issue was raised in a discussion in a small town in the Swiss Romande. When Julien (♂15, Swiss-born of Kurdish origin, with a French forename) pointed to divisions over religion in Switzerland, Isaac denied this: ‘We have Catholic, Protestant, Jews equally, and the Swiss people really respect these different religions.’ Julien (not a practicing Muslim) pointed to a constitutional ban on the construction of minarets, and on face veils in public areas in one Canton. Isaac (♂14) responded as Aart had in Belgium: ‘If they come to Switzerland they have to adapt to the Swiss rules—or bear the consequences.’ It was noticeable how racist comments by young people were largely

made in mono-ethnic communities (usually small) in countries that had higher levels of people of migrant origin.

### 3.2.6. LBGT+ Issues

The rights of the LBGT communities, and prejudicial behaviour towards them were a particular concern, more common in western Europe, but not only there. In Croatia, Dragan (♂14) used the acceptance of gay rights as a marker of European behaviour, arguing that although Croatia was about to join the European Union ‘we will never be on that level of European society, because here people . . . don’t accept differences—when Gay Pride was in Zagreb, people came to throw stones at them.’ But western Europeans were also prejudiced: in Austria, Waldtraut (♀17) had thought that ‘most of the people I know of my age were really tolerant to homosexuals—but I hear that classmates really dislike homosexuals. I was shocked!’ Her colleague Karolin (F16) thought generally: ‘Our generation are more open to homosexuals—if you are, then you are, if you’re lesbian, then you’re lesbian.’

Many saw it as a generational issue. In Sweden, Sarah (♀16) described coming out to her parents: ‘My mother was like “Well, I hope you don’t marry a girl, because that won’t be acceptable!” at first, because when she was younger it was—well, not really a disgrace—but [now] no one cares. It’s just that they grew up in a whole different perspective, we’ve evolved since then.’

The Russian lens sometimes provoked the issue; in Denmark, Nelly (♀15) said if Russia was allowed to join the European Union ‘I would be outraged . . . they don’t have the right to be homosexual—they can be arrested for it, actually. It’s not in the laws of all [European Union] countries yet . . . I’m particularly interested, I spend a lot of time researching it. It is very important that a country in the European Union has human rights, the basic rights to be yourself.’ Janko (♂15, Serbian born and origin) defended the Russian position: ‘It’s against their religion—they’re Orthodox Christians—and it’s not normal for people to be with the same kind of, er, homosexuality—it’s against their rules.’ Nelly responded that the Orthodox church controlled too much, and in Denmark it was politicians, not church leaders, that allowed gay marriage.

### 3.2.7. Women’s Equalities

Gender inequities were frequently mentioned. Sweden’s high global ranking for gender equality (fourth globally [67]) was a matter of pride; Tore (♂15) said: ‘There’s a lot of feminists in Sweden . . . who want to make Sweden and the world a better place . . . we are good at keeping women and men equal, compared to other countries, but there’s still a long way to go.’ In Portugal, (39th in the global rankings [66]) Tatiana (♀14) and her colleagues argued closely with Aarão (♂14): ‘I’m a feminist, and it bothers me that a woman receives less than a man, just because she’s a woman. It’s only 13 percent, but it’s the idea.’ Gertrudes (♀14) pointed out that ‘wives who worked [were employed] do more than men, they clean the house, cook, take care of the children—they don’t get the credit’. Telma (♀13) said: ‘We don’t want more, we want the same. Men do construction—women can do the same. It’s so annoying, because men are always the first in everything.’ Aarão responded: ‘You say that women do the work in the home—but that’s changed! That was in the 1900s.’ This was met with shrieks of laughter from the young women. Telma had the last word: ‘I’m not saying that women are best, no, we are the same. And we want to be the same as the men.’

In Turkey, Birsu (♀16) attacked Turkish ‘male hegemonic society . . . it’s claimed that there is equality, but it is so clear that women are seen as below men. Men will say “Shut up, I’ll do it”, and women are silent and accept this.’ But other young Turks subscribed to gender stereotypes. Dilmen (♀12) said: ‘Turkish men think that they are really strong, because they can fight very well, but Turkish women say we cook very well, so we are good housewives’, and in the same town, Kaan (♂13) set out the essential roles: ‘The Turkish man is the head who takes care of the family, financially and in other aspects, and the woman is the person who helps the man to secure their lives. The Turkish man is the person who can sacrifice their life for their country, and the woman is the supporter of her man.’

### 3.2.8. Nationalism

In all the discussions, I was careful never to introduce the word ‘nation’: I always referred to the ‘country’ (in the case of Cyprus, ‘the island’). Most young people responded using this term, but sometimes nation was used by them, in which case I would explore the term with them. In one Danish group there was a very explicit discussion:

Julius (♂17) said: ‘... I’m aware that it’s a social construction {xe “social constructivism: explicitre fence by young people”}, {xe “young people: identifying social constructs”} and that until the eighteenth century you wouldn’t have had nationalities in the sense that you have it now—and I try to look away from nationalities ... I want to feel at home everywhere I go with different cultures ... ’

Cæcilie (♀17) said: ‘I think our nationality is a way of expressing ourselves when we’re abroad, but also at home, using it to feel secure ... I do this because I was raised in Denmark, because I feel Danish ... For example, I feel European as well ... ’

A group of 16-year-olds in Stockholm were as detailed, but there were similar sentiments expressed by at least some young people in every country. Margreta (♀) said: ‘Swedish is nothing more than my passport says that I’m Swedish. I’m born here, and so were my parents—but to me that’s not exactly relevant.’ Agne (♂) agreed: ‘The only thing that defines you’re Swedish is your passport, or if you have citizenship’, and {xe “citizenship: as an inheritance”} Albertina (♀) said ‘Sweden doesn’t matter a lot to me, I don’t care if I’m Swedish, Norwegian or Guatemalan.’ They variously identified themselves as Stockholmers, Europeans, global citizen but, as Margreta concluded, ‘these past few years its been more relevant to me personally to consider this whole “being Swedish—not being Swedish” thing, because there’s been this nationalistic movement [*Sverigedemokratern*], {xe “racist political parties: knowledge of: Sweden”} and patriotism growing stronger—to me that became very serious, because I don’t want to be whatsoever identified with them, I don’t want someone to think that, if I say “I’m proud of being Swedish”, that I am a nationalist, because of what’s happening in Sweden and in the rest of Europe—it’s become important to *not* identify myself with where I live, or where other people are from’ {xe “Sweden: discussion: Stockholm (nationalism)” \r “stokconv”}{xe “citizenship: and identity”}.

Some key formative experiences of these young people were different, some were shared, but all of them contributed to the sense of a generational cohort that perceives itself as different, particularly in loosely identifying with the *country*, as opposed to strongly identifying with the *nation*. In Helsinki, Heini (♀17) said: ‘The borders of a country are just lines on a paper, but sometimes they become lines in our minds and our thoughts, which is kind of sad’. Tor (♂16), in Stockholm, spoke of the ‘imaginary lines that separate all the countries’.

Identification with a nation or a country was seen as a matter of accidental contingency. In Sevilla, Sancho (♂14) used Shachar’s [68] term, a lottery, to describe his citizenship {xe “citizenship: as an inheritance”}: ‘It’s a lottery that you are born there—if you are born there and you love your country, and agree with the rules, and the people that are with you—then you are Spanish.’ In Prilep, Macedonia, Lazar (♂18) was of the same view, and thought that he had had a poor deal: ‘We are all Macedonians, but not by our choice—we are unlucky to be born here. I wish I was born in Denmark because here we are surrounded by poverty, by corruption, and the unemployment rate is high {xe “nationality” \t “See citizenship”}.’

Others felt divided in their affiliation to a particular country or nation, but generally found this unproblematic. In Bucharest, Vlad (♂17, Egyptian father, Romanian mother) said: ‘I feel pulled between two worlds, the west and the east. I’ve learned much about both cultures—and not strictly referring just to Romanian and Egyptian, but European culture and Arabian and Asian culture ... and the best part is that if one country goes to war, I can always run to the other!’ {xe “citizenship: multiple”}.



#### 4. Discussion

The data that has been presented above shows the diversities and similarities among these young people, but also, as should be clear, demonstrates the contingencies of their narratives: what they elect to talk about, the examples they chose to illustrate their points, their interaction and development—all are a reflection of the exact time and place at which the discussion took place. This data is not replicable, in any sense.

Nevertheless, I suggest it has value. In part, it does show the way in which they interact with current political events, and the broad lines of argument that they develop: this has been indicated, in part, by the thematic organization of the previous section. But it also demonstrates some more fundamental points about young European's political constructions. Most of them are clearly able to operate with a variety of political identities, which they can easily and fluidly move between, without seeing any particular sense of difficulty or incongruity: they can be at one moment civic individuals debating the politics of their state, at another moment talking about their concerns as global citizens, and in another context actively considering their town or city concerns.

Their discourse also shows a particularly clear sense of identity as a generation different to their forebears. Every generation of young people does this to an extent, but in this discussion I suggest that there is a very real sense that we are witnessing a more intense and profound shift. The notion of the cohort—meaning those born within a particular period of time, rather than a particular year—is a useful analytical tool with which to examine the different experiences and societal constructs of different age groups. Lutz et al. summarize the differences between a cohort effect and a period effect:

A period effect is something affecting all ages and cohorts simultaneously, such as wars, epidemics or specific political events, while cohort effects only affect groups of people born in the same year and typically relates to factors that are associated with childhood experiences or socialization. [57] (p. 3).

Lutz and his colleagues were here analyzing Eurobarometer data relating to how respondents said that they themselves were attached to Europe or their country, or to some mix of the two, and suggested that there was evidence of a generational shift towards a greater sense of being European evident in the younger cohorts and that, significantly, this persisted as the cohort grew older. This does appear to be confirmed by the qualitative data presented here (as well as by further Eurobarometer analysis conducted after Lutz et al.'s work in 2006 [57], such as Ross [30] (p. 20).

In Mary Fulbrook's [59] study of German political identities in the twentieth century, *Dissonant Lives* she argues that there are not only significant differences in the ways that identities are constructed between generations, but that these are the consequence of political fractures and dissonance in German society. The age at which people experience key historical moments, such as the transitions within Germany in 1933, 1945 and 1989, can be a critical explanatory factor behind an individual or group's 'availability for mobilisation' for political expression. She uses this 'construction of a collective identity on the basis of generationally defined common experiences' [59] (p. 11) to explain the rise of National Socialism and the post-war politics of the Germanys. Age, she suggests, is 'crucial at times of transition, with respect to the ways in which people can become involved in new regimes and societies' [59] (p. 488). She did not suggest that key formative experiences 'necessarily produce similar *outcomes*, but [that] common *challenges* at a particular life stage, and . . . *unresolved issues*' produce generational difference (emphasis in original [59] (p. 9)). Fulbrook draws here on Mannheim's [69] conception of 'key experiences' (*schlüsselerlebnisse*) that contribute to the formation of a 'social generation' (*sozialen Generation*). I am suggesting that similar cohort effects seem to be present in these young European's narratives of nationalism, diversity and racism and connectivity, and these arise from significant transitions in the population, in the rise of social media, and in different generational experiences of conflict and war. This appears to be a pan-European trend, although different regions of the continent may particularly emphasize specific aspects.

I have suggested [29] that there is a cohort phenomenon in the accounts of young people in the post-2004 European Union states. These eastern-central European states went through a political fracture in the early 1990s, and the cohort born in the decade after 1989 were free of Soviet hegemony, and grew up in very different social and political conditions from their parents and grandparents. Their constructions of identities are different: period and cohort effects interact. In these states, the cohort of parents can recall the end of the Cold War and reconstruct identities in the post-communist state; and the cohort of grandparents could recall the communist state and sometimes World War II.

There have been other changes, particularly demographic changes, especially in the west European states. {xe “demographics of young people: changes in”} The dating of this is less clear cut than the fall of the Berlin Wall: it began in the 1950s in some of the former major colonial powers, rather later elsewhere, and is only beginning in the former communist states, but it has accelerated, very sharply, since the early 1990s. Not only are at least 23.3 percent of the sample of full or partial foreign descent, but 10.2 percent of them are of mixed descent, and these young people are thus in educational institutions where they are in daily contact with a demographic very different from that experienced by their grandparents, and substantially different in most cases from that that experienced by their parents {xe “diversity of population: changes in”}. They are aware of this, and many say that it means they have very different attitudes towards those of other backgrounds {xe “generation: changes: from demographic diversity”}{xe “generation: changes: from social media”}.

This perception by many young people of a generational shift, between themselves and either the generation of their parents or that of their grandparents, is also partly driven by the increase in the diversity of origin of their age cohort, particularly in the western European countries. In terms of the life experiences of the different generations, it is significant to look at the likely diversity of the school populations of the three different generations: group members, their parents and their grandparents.

The period spent in school is of particular significance, as this is when most people are most likely to experience most intensely the widest social diversity [70–72]. Data on the diversity of European schools is not straightforward, not least historically: ethnicity data cannot be collected in France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Denmark or Italy [73,74], and categories of diversity and origin are constantly shifting [55,56,75]. But from the early 1990s there was a significantly diversified and larger pattern of migration both into Europe and within it, and after 2008 the number of non-EU migrants of both first generation (birth) and second generation (origin) again rose sharply, from 6.6 million in 2008 to 9.4 million in 2014 [76,77]. Agafitei and Ivan estimated that by 2014, just over a fifth of all EU households included at least one person of migrant origin [78] (p. 1). Although there has since the early 1950s been much intra-state migration (Italy from south to north, Germany from east to west), and migration between European states (Portugal to north-western Europe, Italy to Belgium, Turkey to Germany), the most significant extra-European migrations before the mid 1970s were of former colonial subjects to the UK and to France [75,76].

This suggests that the diversity of the population in the schools attended by these young people was very different from that of their grandparents, and quite different from their parents. Grandparents, at school from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, would in nearly all cases have attended schools that were largely monocultural, except in a very few areas of migrant settlement in the UK, France and Germany. Parents at school largely in the 1970s and 1980s would also very largely have been in schools that were monocultural, although in more urban areas in western European states there would have been some first and second generation non-European students. It was in the 1990s that diversity began to substantially increase, and over a wider area in these states, as second and third generations moved from initial areas of denser settlement to other areas, and from the early 2000s, as the number of children of mixed origin began to increase, to become the fastest growing group of the school population in the UK, France, Germany, Belgium and The Netherlands, followed by Sweden and Denmark [72,74,78,79]. Perrin et al. report that ‘among the Belgians born with at least one foreigner-born parent, there are only 23 percent with two foreigner-born parents’ [80] (p. 205).

The young people in the discussion groups commonly offered this as an explanation: they had grown up, and in particular been to school with, a diverse cultural group. This was usually a generalized comment, as when Godofredo (♂15) in Lisboa said: ‘In school we get together with people from other races, we learn they are people too, the same—white, black. This didn’t happen with our grandparents—though my family is not racist’; and Anton (♂15) in Wien said: ‘Because I go with them [migrants] to school, I know them’. But sometimes it was more specific and personal: in Haslev, Troels (♂18) had arrived in his upper school two years earlier:

I grew up in the countryside, where we didn’t have any immigrants—I’ve never been really prejudiced against immigrants, I’d just never experienced it in the place I grew up—and then I came to the gymnasium, and suddenly there are lots of them. And at the start—I had some prejudices against some of them—because of the way they looked, they matched the way I had seen them look on the news, like the ‘immigrant criminal’ tends to be shown. I started thinking about them as what I’d seen through the media, but then, experiencing being with them as normal human beings, just ordinary people like me and you, that gave a lot to me.

The most extreme othering, where some migrant groups seemed to be considered literally ‘beyond the pale’, occurred in locations where schools were largely segregated or where there was residential segregation. This seems to illustrate Allport’s contact approach theory [81], which hypothesizes that inter-group prejudice will be reduced under optimal conditions. ‘In particular, Allport held that reduced prejudice will result when four features of the contact situation are present: equal status between the groups in the situation; common goals; intergroup cooperation; and the support of authorities, law, or custom’ [82] (p. 752).

A second significant cultural change over this period has been the development of the internet, the world-wide web, and the associated communication technologies of the social media. Many young people said that they thought they were using these technologies in ways that were both qualitatively and quantitatively different from many of their elders. Technological changes in the 1990s and 2000s have meant that these young people have had access to the media, in a social and interactive form, than did not exist for earlier generations. The first browsers for the world wide web became available in 1990. The size and use of the internet has risen exponentially. In January 1992—when the oldest people in this survey were born—there were just over 700,000 internet hosts worldwide. When the youngest were born, in 2004, there were 285 million. When this study began, in January 2010, there were more than 730,000 million such sites [83] {see “social media: generational use of”}. Over the period of data collection, the number of households with internet access in the EU–28 countries rose from 70 percent to 85 percent, but of households with dependent children, 94 percent had access by 2014. By 2014, 90 percent of all 16- to 20-year-olds were reporting at least daily use of the internet (by 2016 only 57 percent of 55- to 74-year-olds were reporting at least weekly use) [84,85]. These young people constitute the first generation to have such access, and—as they described in chapter four—they recognized the significance of this: they made a greater use of, and had a greater interest in, social media technology than older people; they were more able and willing to use it; they were consequently in greater contact with others in different countries; and had a different global perspective. As Marcelino (♂14, Portugal) said, ‘We were kind of born with a cell-phone in our hands.’

Young people saw the way they used social media as another significant way in which they differed from older people. The differences they perceived seemed to centre around four interlocked themes: the extent to which older people used the social media; their difficulties in using these technologies; their hesitation about such new media sources; and their (perhaps consequential) lesser understanding of a globalised society.

Firstly, it was sometimes asserted that some older people did not possess technological devices, and were not interested in them. ‘My parents’, said Marine (♀13) in a small south Italian town, ‘live differently: they don’t use the technology, the mobiles, the tablets and so on.’ Narcisa (♀16) in Spain said: ‘Older people don’t want more information—they are happier with what they know and

with what television says, and they don't want to contrast information. The internet is bigger, there is a lot of information, there are more sources.'

Secondly, those older people who did use the technology were unable or unwilling to fully exploit its capabilities. Rinus (♂16) in The Netherlands claimed: 'A lot of older people have a hard time adapting to all the new technologies that are being brought on the market. The younger generations have been brought up with those things.' In Portugal, Agostinho (♂15) said that 'older people tend to stick to their own ways—we multi-task, do various things with this one device.' Another young Portuguese, Davi (♂14), claimed that 'old people usually don't know how to use the internet—so they think it's bad, because they don't know how to use it.'

Thirdly, younger people were more open-minded, to the world and to new technologies. The argument was to a degree circular, openness to the world stimulating openness to new media, and vice versa. In Norway, Lovinda (♀17) thought that 'younger people are more open for it—today we have all this social media, and we talk to people from all over the world . . . so we are more open for people coming into our country.' In The Netherlands, Mieke (♀15) said that digital media meant that 'I see a lot of different sides to every story. Older people just know their side, and that's right, so they stick with that.' In Italy, Gaudenzio (♂16) said 'in the past people . . . voted without being properly informed. Now the internet gives you a wider idea of the political system—in the past there was just the news on TV.'

Young people felt that their global perspective was a consequence of their use of social media, and it also meant that they used these media to become even more aware. In Norway, Gøran (♂18) linked social media use with global awareness and anti-racism: 'We have grown up with the social media, and it's a lot easier for us to get to know people from the other side of the world, to see what's happening in other places than Norway. A multicultural society [means] we learn [about] other cultures, and that's something that our grandparents didn't experience—my grandfather is very, very racist—he has a lot of strong opinions, because he doesn't know any better.'

News media consumption is now, as O'Loughlin and Gillespie argue, 'intrinsic to living and doing citizenship. News media consumption enables young people to acquire discursive competences in discussing news events and, as a consequence, develop an understanding of what politics is' [86] (p. 199). For this generation, this includes electronic and personalized media sources and, for many, the superdiversity of European society.

## 5. Conclusions

These narratives show a perception of a generational difference, across a wide variety of countries of Europe. This was a reading, it should be noted, of the young people themselves, and not one necessarily held by other generations. But, following Fulbrook's analysis [59], there do appear to be particular contingent historical developments that have, since around the mid 1990s, constructed a different set of European cultural, social and political contexts, which have been used by this generation to challenge previous constructions of the nation and state. These changes have not been uniform, in that some have been more significant and apparent in some parts of Europe than in others. In many western Europe states, there have been significant and accelerating demographic changes that have led to younger people challenging what they see as the racist beliefs and practices of their societies. In many countries that were part of the Warsaw Pact, the sense of national culture and solidarity that sustained many in this region from at least the 1940s through to the early 1990s has been seen as less relevant by many young people: they understood its importance to earlier generations, in the context of their lives, but were impatient that it should not govern their own futures. Across both east and west, there appeared to be a sense that the some of the supranational aspects of the European Union {*xe* "European Union: and national identities"} were making national identities a less important element in young people's construction of their identities, from the functional and utilitarian freedom of movement for study and work to the development of human rights enforceable through a supranational court (although this was generally associated with the European Union, not the European Court of Human

Rights). In western Europe in particular, there was a desire for rights to be extended in the areas of gender identities and sexuality; across Europe there was a recognition that rights in Europe were better supported and more embedded in the values of *their* continent than in either Russia or (sometimes) the United States of America.

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