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## Deliberative discussions as a research method: A qualitative and mixed methods approach to exploring young Europeans' identities and values\*\*

### Summary

This article examines the use of deliberative discussions as a method of analysing the geo-political affiliations and values of young people. Exploring such areas through traditional interviews and questionnaires can present problems in that they can unduly prompt answers. Using open-ended and loosely structured discussions can allow the generation of ideas and views in the particular vocabulary and context of participants using non-directive open-ended questions. The qualitative data generated by such an approach can be very unstructured, but has the value of being generated by participants without using stimuli that sometimes induce responses that are unreliable. This article focuses on the principles of conducting and managing discussion processes to maximise the potential usefulness of the data. Two investigations are outlined. The first uses data from deliberative discussions in a qualitative study of how young Europeans (aged between 10 and 20) variously describe themselves as members of a state/states, and/or of Europe, a particular locality or as global. The second study uses the same data, but in a mixed methods approach that included a quantitative analysis of the young people's use of values in explaining and illustrating particular affiliations. Deliberative discussion as a process is analysed and defined in some practical detail, with suggestions as to procedures that may elicit the most useful detail using the participants own 'natural' language.

**Keywords:** deliberative discussion; young people; geo-political affiliation; values; Europe

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## The background

This article describes how a particular method – deliberative discussion – can be used in researching beliefs, principles and values; how data generated from this might be used in both qualitative and mixed methods research approaches, and the potential advantages of this method over other methods. Deliberative discussions appear particularly suited for working with young people, still ‘in education’, but the method could also be useful with older groups of people.

The questions I sought to address in my study was how do young people – defined as within the 10 to 20 years of age bracket – identify themselves with particular geo-political units, such as a city, a province, a state or nation, or perhaps of a group of states, such as Europe, or more broadly as global citizens. In contemporary European society, young people (and others) elect to define themselves with different entities in particular social contexts: these entities are thus self-evidently socially constructed. Why, and how, are such identifications constructed and used?

Social constructionism holds that such concepts, beliefs and values are themselves the outcomes of dynamic processes of social interaction with others (Berger & Luckman, 1966). The problem I sought to address was that attempts to elicit from an individual how they variously used these concepts inevitably involved a social interaction between the researcher and the researched – the outcome thus becomes ‘artificial’, in the sense that is co-constructed in the interaction of investigation. Pierre Bourdieu (1973) explained this concisely when he asserted that public opinion did not exist: “public opinion is an *artefact*, pure and simple, whose function is to conceal the fact that the state of opinion at any given moment is a system of forces and tensions” (p. 223). In opinion polling, “the questions asked showed that the great majority of them were directly related to the political concerns of the «political staff»” [*“étaient directement liées aux préoccupations politiques du «personnel politique»*”] (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 223).

An example of this can be seen in the efforts of Eurobarometer, the European Commission’s opinion monitoring exercise, to report on public engagement with European values. In 2013, representative samples in all EU member states (and accession states) were asked in a survey (Eurobarometer 79.3) QD9: “In the following list, which are the three most important values for you personally?”, and were presented with a list of twelve items (such as the rule of law, equality, respect for other cultures, democracy, solidarity, etc.). This appeared to be a partial selection from the values listed in the European Union’s *Treaty on European Union* (EU, 2012) and the Council of Europe’s *Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* (ECHR, 1950). The presumption is that respondents

would know all these values, and be able to partially order them in terms of personal importance, which might present some difficulties (such as values not listed, considering more than three values to be essential, embarrassment and not knowing about/having considered some items, etc.). They were then asked QD10: “Which three of the following values best represent the EU?” (which makes the same demands as above, and assumes some knowledge about EU policies, and implies that some different values might/should be more representative of the EU). Figure 1 shows the aggregate responses, sorted into four age categories, including ‘young people’ (15–25; data were not collected from younger people). The presentation

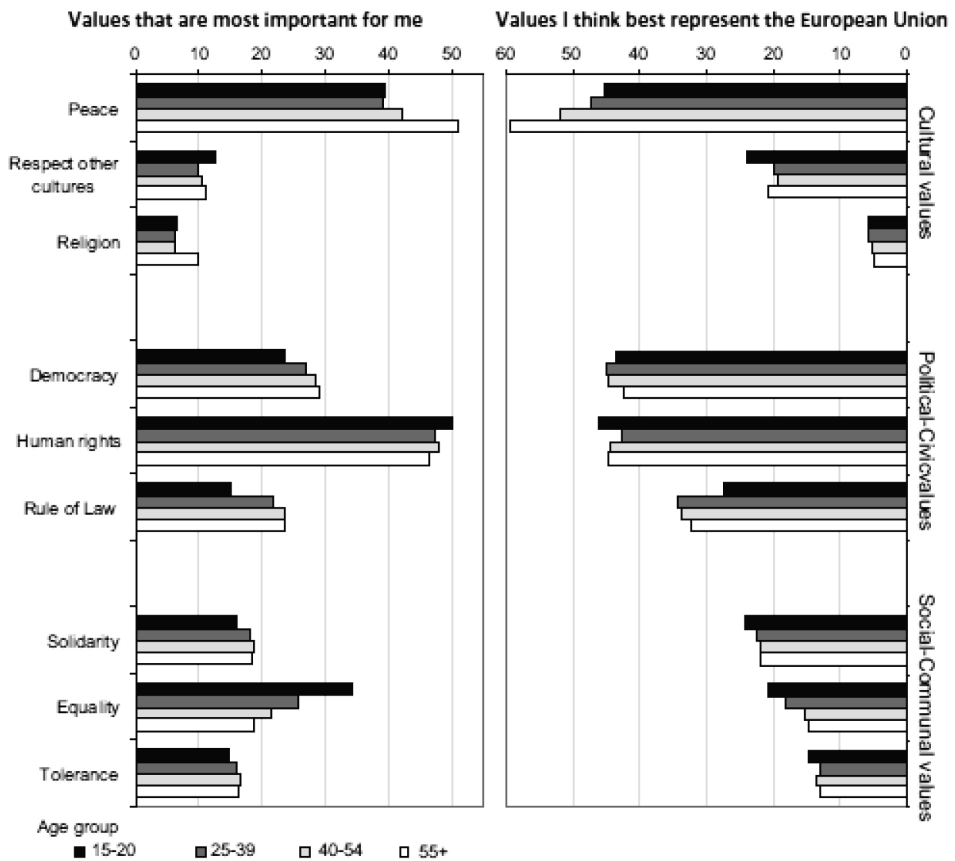


Figure 1. Responses to the Eurobarometer survey, May 2013, on personal and European Values. QD9: “In the following list, which are the three most important values for you personally?”; QD10: “Which three of the following values best represent the EU?” Eurobarometer response, 2013; responses to selected values grouped by age of respondents.

Source: European Commission (2017). Eurobarometer 79.3, 2013; TNS opinion, Brussels [producer]. Extracted from the GESIS Datenarchiv, Köln. ZA5689 Datenfile Version 2.0.0, taken from Ross (2019, p. 53).

of pre-determined categories, the varying contingencies of time and place, the assumption that they are seen as having different levels of importance, and that personal values may differ from EU values all place demands that will vary from individual to individual respondents that suggest that the findings are of limited value in understanding what populations think these values 'mean'.

Asking questions has a particular complication when working with young people who are in school or college: they often anticipate questions used by teachers (and other adults) to be used to test or assess their knowledge (Alexander, 2008; Hogden & Webb, 2008). There is therefore an expectation that a question should have a 'correct' answer, that they are expected to give, and may feel obliged to find a 'right' response.

Young people have also been characterised as uninterested in politics, and as sceptics of democracy: some studies suggest that a weakening of civic life and falling voter turnout are particularly seen among younger people (Franklin, 2004; Putnam 2000; van Biezen et al., 2012). Pippa Norris observed that "young people are believed to be particularly disillusioned about the major institutions of representative democracy, leaving them apathetic (at best) or alienated (at worst)" (cited in Sloam, 2014, p. 664). Some scholars have suggested that this lack of commitment to liberal democratic values endangers democracies and will result in instability and "democratic deconsolidation" (Foa & Mounk, 2016, p. 16), particularly in areas of Europe where young people face social discrimination, 'apathy has become active antipathy'. An Open Society Foundation study of global attitudes towards democracy concluded "there was less enthusiasm among 18-to-35-year-olds for democracy, with 57 percent preferring it to other forms of government, for those aged 56 and above, the figure was 71 percent" (Peiris & Samarasinghe, 2023, p. 7), and similar proportional differences supporting army rule and strong leadership. But Eva Fernández et al. (2023) suggest that "concerns about young citizens lacking support for or even being opposed to liberal democracy's institutions, values and system functioning must be tempered" (p. 4). Ronald Inglehart (2016) argues that discourses of 'democratic deconsolidation' are overstated: young people feel insecure, rather than rejecting liberal democracy. Norris (2017) suggests young people are sceptical and critical of democracy, rather than oppositional. Young people are generally more satisfied with democracy than older people, and studies point to 'do it ourselves' political behaviours (Pickard, 2019; Pontes et al., 2019). These forms of engagement go beyond the limits of the classic exposition of political culture, made by Almond and Verba (1965), which proposed an essentially passive culture, in which most citizens vote and accept existing political systems and structures, and a few are more actively involved in political roles (Ross, 2018).

Around the world, recent mass mobilisations have brought to the fore groups of young people critical of current political offers and who seek to participate in democratic life in ways that liberal democracies struggle to meet. Cammaerts et al. (2014) describe “a strong desire among many young Europeans to participate in democratic life, but this desire is not met by existing democratic institutions and discourses” (p. 645). Instances of this include the Occupy mobilisations against the excesses of global capitalism, Black Lives Matter, Friday Strikes for Climate Change and Just Stop Oil.

Resistance to discussing politics with young people is sometimes associated with a denial that they can understand sophisticated political concepts (described by Maitles, 1997). Manning (2010) points to the “discourse of youth apathy typically draws upon quantitative methodologies and orthodox hegemonic notions of politics” (p. 2). Henn et al. (2002) call this “conventional political science” (p. 170) and argue that including wider forms of political participation in studies of young people’s participation would show much greater evidence of activity among young people, and higher levels of youth political participation (Henn et al., 2003). Hahn (1998) concluded that students report that when they (a) frequently discuss controversial issues in their classes, (b) perceive that several sides of issues are presented, and (c) feel comfortable in expressing their views “they are more likely to develop attitudes that have the potential to foster later civic participation” (p. 233). Kudrnáč (2022) points out that the teacher’s role is vital as it is “the teacher that decides if and how often discussions take place that he or she consequently moderates...sets up the topic ... [and determines] how much time these discussions take from school hours” (p. 224).

This emphasis on the significance of how classroom discussion can support the understandings of the political is an important contribution to the research method of deliberative discussion. If a researcher can create a young person led discussion, in which the language and vocabulary are those of the young people themselves, it can be possible to listen to the development and use of ideas, concepts and beliefs in their own discourse, rather than that of the researcher. It is to this methodology that we now turn.

### **Deliberate discussion as a methodology**

The term deliberative discussion is precisely formulated. It is a discussion, not a debate: there are no decisions or victories at the conclusion. It is deliberative, in the sense that ideas and examples put forward are listened to by the group, and are challenged by any who disagree. It is also the discourse of a group, known to

each other, not necessarily very closely, but one in which members are acquainted with each other, and share, to an extent, the same environment and context: they will be comfortable with each other, and have no need to introduce themselves to the group, unlike a focus group. It is a discussion, and not a sequential interview, in which each member responds to each question in turn.

Schools or colleges can be a useful and convenient place to recruit such a group – within a year group, or a couple of year groups, they will know each other, but on the other hand, they will be accustomed to the school discourse, where very often form of the question is used to test and evaluate, as noted above. The researcher needs to quickly establish the role of a non-intrusive moderator who asks open ended questions that have no right or wrong answers. They also need to show how they expect the group members to listen to each other, rather than to the researcher. The group must be introduced to the idea that they can disagree with each other, in a civil and respectful manner. The researcher will need to use a highly constrained vocabulary that does not introduce any leading terms or categories. They need to demonstrate that they have no apparent agenda, no list of questions to be got through, no apparent expectations of what will be discussed – and give no indication of frustration when a conversation appears to go off-*piste*, but gently – invisibly – re-orientate the focus if possible. The role is demanding.

Group conversations have been developed in German social science research over the past three decades. Gugglberger et al. (2015) argued that “the more structured focus group method” is not “a very open and flexible method of data generation” (p. 127). Gugglberger and her colleagues were among a number of German social science researchers who have developed the *Gruppendiskussionsverfahren* [group discussion method]: for example, Bohnsack (2000), Loos and von Schäffer (2001). Bohnsack (2000) described the process as “an open interview, intended to let respondents develop a topic in their own language, in their symbolic system and their relevant framework” (p. 21). She argued that this would avoid evaluations that might project on to “single utterances meanings that are not appropriate. ... [One will] learn more if this statement is put into a narrative context by the respondent ... in his/her own language” (p. 21). Scheunpflug et al. (2016) described how such an approach allowed “respondents [to] ... set the structures and contents of the conversation by themselves,” and that this allowed access to “knowledge stocks that are not located on the surface of [the] conscious ... [or] clear explicable attitudes and values, but which are beneath the surface” (p. 10). Wagener (2018) has referred to such processes generating what she calls “conjunctive knowledge ... implicit, action-guiding knowledge ... based and acquired in fundamental experiences ... that groups of individuals share with each other” (p. 92).

There are some parallels in this with the motivational interviewing strategies Miller and Rollnick (2002) describe, to “create a positive interpersonal atmosphere that is conducive but not coercive to change” (p. 34). I sought to capture what Wood (2014) calls the “everyday data” that is sometimes seen “as rambling, off-task or divergent ... with frequent interjections, incomplete sentences, questions and queries or a sense of ambiguity or uncertainty” (p. 16). In these discussions I was seeking to assure them that there are no right answers, that any response can be accepted and valued, that they may disagree, and if they did, they should say so. The objective was to establish an empowering rapport, so that discussion was, to a substantial extent, directed and paced by group members thus giving them the opportunity to develop structures that seem relevant to them.

### **Practicalities**

As will be described in the following section, the author has had extensive, if not excessive, experience of carrying out deliberative discussions, and I make no excuses for now setting out the rules of engagement that I have developed, as suggestions rather than instructions for others. They generally are successful for me: they may be so for you.

### **Preparation**

Group size is generally best if between four and eight young people, with a target of six. Group members should ideally be drawn from the same aged or close-aged class, if in school contexts. Typically, these conversations may last about an hour. Tell everyone – young people, teachers and parents – that there is no need to prepare for the discussion, and it is not a test or assessment of the young person or of teaching in the school. Refrain, as much as possible, from giving details of topics to be discussed.

### **Setting up the group**

*Take a little time to explain what's going to happen ...*

Sit in a circle, so everyone can see each other. Have name cards in front of each person, positioned so you can read them from your position (with one for you). Introduce yourself and explain what your research is about (broadly), and that you will record the conversation. Explain the anonymity rules (give an example, using one of their names), and explain that the tape will be wiped as soon it's been transcribed. Explain how the discussion will proceed:

- you will ask a few questions – none of them have right or wrong answers;
- they may not agree with someone’s answer – just explain what you think, and why;
- one person speaks at a time (because of the recording).

### Getting going

Avoid having a list of questions or notes (this suggests you have an agenda you want them to follow). Try not to introduce leading terms and vocabulary (like identity, nation, state) or other categories: only use such terms after they have been first introduced by a participant.

Start with an icebreaker (the only time you go round the table and get everyone to respond – this makes it easier for shyer people to become involved). “Tell me a few things about yourself”. Accept what they say – comment positively, ask a question back. (You may get very similar responses – if one describes their pets, they may all tell you about pets. Allow this: don’t get frustrated. The first minutes may give you no usable information, but it will start a relationship with them.)

Ask questions that are open and encourage a multiplicity of potential responses (How and Why are usually better than What, When, Where).

*The earlier stages may be slow: they are trying to learn about what you want!*

### During the discussion

Don’t make notes (this signals that something ‘interesting’ (or ‘wrong!’) has been said – or ‘Ah, so *that’s* what she wants us to talk about!’ Try and keep eye contact; smile and nod as they speak. Accept whatever is said. If something’s unclear, say you are confused, can they give an example? Model *how* to discuss – how to listen to everyone – “Do you all agree with that?”, “Does anyone disagree with (any of) that?”. Loop the conversation back to what’s someone’s said earlier – again, demonstrating that they need to listen to each other, and comment on each other’s views. Respect shifts in the focus away from the issues that you, as researcher, would prefer they focused on – but then appropriately later redirect the group’s attention, preferably back to a particular person’s contributions (“earlier Gunther and Freida were saying that ...”).

Appropriately challenge or question views, in a way that extends and keeps discussion open, rather than closing it down. For example, a person may say something that appears to clash with what they’ve said earlier: rather than saying they’re contradictory, say “I’m a bit confused – you’re saying *y...*, but earlier I think you said *x...*?”. Not everyone needs to participate by speaking – but do try by



gesture, eye-contact, etc. to not let some people dominate discussion (“We haven’t heard very much from this side of the table ...”).

If asked for your opinion, *either* give a short account *if you feel it appropriate*, but stress that it is only *your* opinion – others will have different views and they don’t have to agree with you; *or* offer to discuss your opinions later – it’s their opinions you are interested in. If asked for factual information – give a short account if you can, or say you don’t know, and that you can all look for the details later. Try to protect young people who may be vulnerable because of their particular characteristics or experiences.

### **As you gain their confidence, and they start disagreeing and arguing ...**

This doesn’t always happen – but may after 30 minutes, or more. They need time to understand how they can participate in this kind of discussion. Try more leading questions, such as “Do you think everyone in this country] would agree with that point?”, “What would you think if x happened? Would this be a good thing, a bad thing, or not matter?”

### **At the end of the discussion**

Thank them all for their contributions, tell them it’s been interesting and helpful, and wish them well for their futures.

### **A qualitative study**

The first example of deliberative discussion techniques was a purely qualitative study. This was made as a one-person post-retirement project, largely self-funded. The objective was to analyse the range of ways that young Europeans described their identity/ies as affiliated to a geo-political region, be this a local settlement, a state, or globally. The original intention was (in 2010) to survey young people in the new members of the European Union, who had joined the EU after 2004, and the countries that were then in the process of joining. All those under 20 would have been born after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact, and might therefore perhaps have a different construction of this than older generations.

Fifteen countries were included, and through an extensive set of European contacts and networks, social scientist colleague in each state assisted in identifying a range of locations (from large cities to small towns), distributed in various parts of each state, where deliberative discussions might be arranged. Fuller descriptions of the arrangements are described elsewhere (Ross, 2014, 2019).

As this progressed, it was decided to follow this with a second phase from 2014, that would include fourteen more countries that were longer established members of the EU or of EFTA (The UK and the Republic of Ireland were to have been included, but the Brexit debate, referendum decisions and consequences made the UK impossible to include, and the Republic was judged to be feasible only in the UK was surveyed in parallel).

In all, 29 countries were surveyed, each usually with between 8 and 20 groups (more groups in the larger states): 104 different locations, 182 schools, colleges and institutions, 324 groups, and in total 1,998 young people participated. Consent was obtained from all young people (and parent/guardian consent for those under 16). All discussions were recorded transcribed in full and all individuals and schools were anonymised. This was a very large quantity of data – about 1.25 million words – far more than the amount normally expected to reach data saturation, which is usually defined for group discussion numbers as the point when new material and opinions are not emerging. In the case of this study, there were two factors that meant that data saturation was not fully achieved: firstly, the very wide geographical sweep, through counties and regions within countries, continued to show up contrasts in emphasis and detail that were significant; and secondly, the protracted period of time over which the discussions were conducted – just over six years – was marked by a continuing movement of the particular examples and illustration selected by the groups and their relationship to the very recent past – often recent weeks or months. These points will be illustrated in the paragraphs that follow.

The ice-breaker was followed by a short discussion about characteristics they shared, which nearly always soon reached a point where individuals, and then groups, would identify themselves as from the country of discussion (or not, or from a mixture of countries), at which point they were asked “Why are you Danish?” (or “Danish-and-Serbian”, etc.). This usually led to a long discussion, about matters such as birthplace, parentage, language, culture, ‘feeling’, quite often laced with descriptions of other similar identities (the town, the region, Europe, global, for example). From this we moved to aspects of these countries that they liked, and then that they disliked. The later was an area that was usually discussed for quite some time, and was frequently about behaviours they disapproved of, ranging from discarding litter to racism, inequalities, the behaviour of politicians: all of these were raised by the group themselves, with in most cases some disagreements about emphasis and detail. In all cases, I focused on not just the examples they raised, but the specific phrasing and vocabulary they used. Open ended questions extended the discussion: for example, did everyone in the country feel the same way as they did? This often led to discussions about generational differences, and

sometimes to contrasts to other areas (often cities, or the capital, by those groups in rural areas, and vice versa).

One of the striking characteristics was the emphasis they gave to contemporary and recent news events, from local to global: it was relatively uncommon to draw on events of more than three or four years earlier, or historical examples. In particular the migration of Syrian and other refugees into Europe in 2015 gave rise to discussions in many groups: this will be analysed in more detail in the following section (at Figure 2).

After about half an hour, I would generally go back to some of the alternative identities (particularly to Europe, if this had been mentioned by someone). There was often a degree of 'othering' of different countries: specifically, the USA was 'othered' in respect of insufficient social welfare and health provision, gun violence, racial injustice and the death penalty (all conversations were in the period of the Obama administration, and before Trump was the leading candidate in the 2016 election, and all these references were completely unprompted).

By this stage – maybe about three-quarters through the hour – the nature of the discussion, and my role, were well established, and I was able to introduce some specific prompts. In many cases, I might say: “Your country is a member of the European Union [or applying to become a member]: how would you feel about other countries, like say [deliberate pause, as I appeared to search for an example] – Russia applying to join the EU?” This produced a variety of responses: generalising, groups in the Baltic and Visegrád states spoke of fear of invasion (citing Georgia in 2006, or Ukraine in 2014), or parental and grandparental accounts of the Cold War era; while in the Nordic states, Southern and Western Europe they raised the lack of democracy and dictatorship, and the suppression of human rights (particularly with respect of LGBT communities and freedom of expression). These were also mentioned in Balkan and south-east European groups, but less often, and a not insubstantial minority saw Russia as economically rich and powerful potential member (few appeared to realise that the GDP of Russia was significantly lower than any of their own countries).

Another finding of significance was the impact of the deliberative process, particularly of the encouragement of disagreement between members. This often led to individuals and groups not just challenging each other, but moving in their opinions as they discussed each other's experiences, views and examples. For example, it was possible to trace individuals who initially dismissed or minimised the EU as a mere economic convenience to having some significant role in establishing communal values – solidarity between states, standards, democratic processes, for example. The introduction of Russia and the USA into the discussion not infrequently sharpened these views. Discussions in France, Spain, Portugal and

Germany all took place during or just after the 2015 migrations into Europe from the Syrian conflict (and from Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and Eritrea): the majority of comments were positive and sympathetic to the refugees, with negative comments particularly directed at the Hungarian response (for example: “After that, I don’t feel European any more”, or “that was against all the Europe stands for”). There was in many cases much discussion and some disagreements on the response: in Germany, these were sometimes framed within family stories of the migration into Germany immediately after 1945 as a consequence of the new post-war Polish frontiers, and exclusions from the Sudetenland.

Racism was frequently discussed in generational terms: (some) parents and (more often) grandparents were seen as racist: what was particularly of note was the way that this was often explained (particularly in Nordic, Western and Southern Europe) in terms of demographic changes in the population. From the early 1990s there has been significantly more migration both into Europe and within it (Gatrell, 2019), and since 2008 the number of non-EU migrants of both first generation (birth) and second generation (origin) has again risen sharply, from 6.6 million in 2008 to 9.4 million in 2014 (Eurostat, 2017a, 2017b). Agafitei and Ivan (2016) estimate that by 2014, just over a fifth of all EU households included at least one person of migrant origin. This was reflected in the composition of the discussion groups: 7 per cent of them had at least one grandparent of non-European origin and a further 16 per cent from another European country: nearly a quarter had some origins in a different country to the one in which they were living. (In terms of birthplace, nearly 94 per cent were born in the country of the discussion.) This led to observations such as “we’ve grown up with this” and “we know them well”, and of how some older people’s prejudices came from their upbringing in different times. There were also accounts from several young people who had moved from rural areas to more cosmopolitan ones in the previous few years, and how this change had resulted in them having a more positive view of minorities.

Two other generational differences were also clear. Firstly, the political changes in the former Warsaw Block countries (and, to a slightly lesser extent, in former Yugoslav countries) had led to a family history narrative that many young people in those countries saw as creating a sense of difference in the way that they identified themselves geo-politically. Secondly, across all regions of Europe, the rise and ubiquity of the internet was widely seen as creating a fracture with older generations: parents were seen as having adapted to this, grandparents as (largely) struggling: but many of them saw themselves – as one put it – “kind of born with a cell-phone in our hands.” Many of them argued that they were well able to handle net-based rumours and misinformation that their elders struggled with.

## A mixed-methods study

The second project was based on the same data, but as a mixed methods investigation. A Jean Monet Network Project (CitEdEV: Citizenship Education in the Context of European Values) had started work in late 2020, with one of the objectives being to investigate “the knowledge of young people in European countries about civil society, its principles, citizenship, European values and the European Union”. A small working group, with members drawn initially from Estonia, Czechia, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Turkey and the UK had been established to undertake this, but the Covid-19 pandemic made undertaking fieldwork and having access to schools and students impossible, as the repercussions of lockdowns and school closures persisted well into 2022. The group therefore looked to existing data, and several had been involved in the earlier study (as the principal researcher, or as academic affiliate contacts in some of the locations), and it was recognised that this data differed significantly from material such as the Eurostat analysis (European Commission, 2017) in that it was unprompted data, without leading or direct questions. Moreover, the sample size of 1,998 young people was very similar to that of the 15–20 age group identified in the previous section. The group brought in additional members from Sweden, Greece and the UK (either academic affiliates of the former study, or with particular statistical skill sets).

The group first defined ‘European Values’ to be those set out in the European Union’s *Treaty on European Union* (EU, 2012) and the Council of Europe’s *Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* (ECHR, 1950). We did not see that these were exclusive to Europe, nor that they were necessarily only of European origin. Other states (and individual European states themselves) may refer to these values as being ‘their’ values, and many other countries in the world may hold the same values. There are many lists of human values, most of which include social and political values, from the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights onwards. And before this, many countries have long histories of establishing citizenship rights – civil, political and social. What made these ‘European values’ was that they were within treaty obligations, to which all European states (save Belarus and, from 2023, Russia) are signatories: these date back to 1950, and has the unique distinction, amongst all international declarations and statements, in that that a European Court of Human Rights can make judgements on contraventions of these rights, and require remedies of states that fail to apply them. We simplified and reduced the various values to:

- **Structural Values** (principles which underpin the values are determined and upheld): Democracy and the Rule of Law;

- **Core Fundamental Values** (principles of human dignity, respect and safety): Tolerance of diversity; Respect for Other Cultures; Respect for Life; Respect for the Safety; Social Inclusion; the prohibition of capital and unusual punishments, and of persecution;
- **Process Values** (mechanisms to achieve values): Freedoms (divided into fundamental freedoms and the EU value of freedom of travel); Equalities and Solidarity.

Reading exemplar transcripts of the original data, it was recognised that many of the discussion group participants had references to these values, though often not in the vocabulary of these documents, nor with their precision and legal exactitude. A working group collectively examined a sample of transcripts, and devised a coding system, in which each individual group member's references to these values could be identified, with codes to identify specific examples, the geographical location referred to, the time that the example referred to, if a group was 'othered' and whether the value was positively supported or negatively rejected (or was unclear), as shown in Table 1.

We also devised a data capture system, that could be used alongside each transcript, to note each individual's relevant remarks and code these in a way that could be relatively easily transferred to an SPSS file. Each member of the team was then allocated a batch of about 35 transcripts to code. These were arranged so that no individual received any material from their own country, in order to try and minimise any specialist knowledge of a situation distorting the analysis.

The analysis, when complete, was sampled to check for consistency of coding, and discussions and correcting followed this. The data was clearly relatively old: the earliest material was, at the time of analysis, twelve years old, the most recent six years. We recognised from the outset that the analysis was not going to reveal the current preoccupations and concerns of young people over these values. But we had also recognised that *any* data of this nature would be out of date by the time it reached dissemination. The value lies not in the identification of the examples raised, but in the processes and kinds of practices employed by the young people: the references to the immediate concerns of the day, the othering, the location of values within different geographical areas, the general tendency to refine values within discussions, the sense of specific generational concerns. While not completely timeless, these do indicate ways of identifying the process and direction of travel in young people's concerns.

The 1,998 young people mentioned such values on over 5,000 occasions: in 44 per cent of these they were discussing values about the state in which they were living; in 33 per cent of cases they concerned Europe; values concerning the local area or global affairs were each raised in 5 per cent of cases; and the remaining

Table 1. Examples of coding

| Fragment of speech<br>(with pseudonym, gender, age, location)  | Value     | Characteristics of value |          |           |              |  | Positive/<br>negative |
|--|-----------|--------------------------|----------|-----------|--------------|--|-----------------------|
|  |           | Example                  | Location | Time      | Othering     |  |                       |
| <b>Ladislav (M,17), Lille:</b> I'm proud of France, because there are many ethnicities in France – we are all mixed together, and we have equality: that's what I like about France.   | Diversity | Ethnic                   | State    | Now       | No           |  | +                     |
| <b>Tirza (F,14), Linz:</b> Many people complain about ... people coming to Austria from other countries – my grandmother is complaining all the time – I love her, but I can't understand it.  | Diversity | Ethnic                   | State    | Now       | Older people |  | +                     |
| <b>Waltrute (F,17), Wien:</b> some countries in Europe that have a monarch, like the UK or Spain – it's not like the old monarchies, there's only a king or queen for presentations.   | Democracy | General                  | Europe   | Now       |              |  | +                     |
| <b>Yekikki (F,17), Turku:</b> France passed a law that it's forbidden to wear the niqab? – that goes against the European Union – if there's supposed to be freedom, how can they pass that sort of law? It's a little hypocritical to do that, and at the same time insisting that [applicant] countries have some level of human rights. | Democracy | General                  | State    | Now       | –            |  | +                     |
|  | Freedom   | Dress                    |          | This year | French       |  | +                     |

13 per cent could not be allocated to a geo-political level. The great majority of references were positive about these values (over 90 per cent), 5.5 per cent were neutral or ambivalent, and 4 per cent negative about each particular value. 52 per cent of responses were about the processes of upholding values (the support for freedoms, equalities and measures of social solidarity); 28 per cent were values about human rights; and 20 per cent were about the underlying structures of democracy and the rule of law. More specifically, Social solidarity was raised in 30 per cent of cases, Democracy in 17 per cent, Equalities in 10 per cent; and Respect for Other Cultures in 10 per cent of cases. Unlike other surveys of values, these were – because of the methodology of deliberative discussion, as described above – totally unprompted mentions (Ross, Loughran, Brunold, Hartsmar, & Liljefors Persson, 2024).

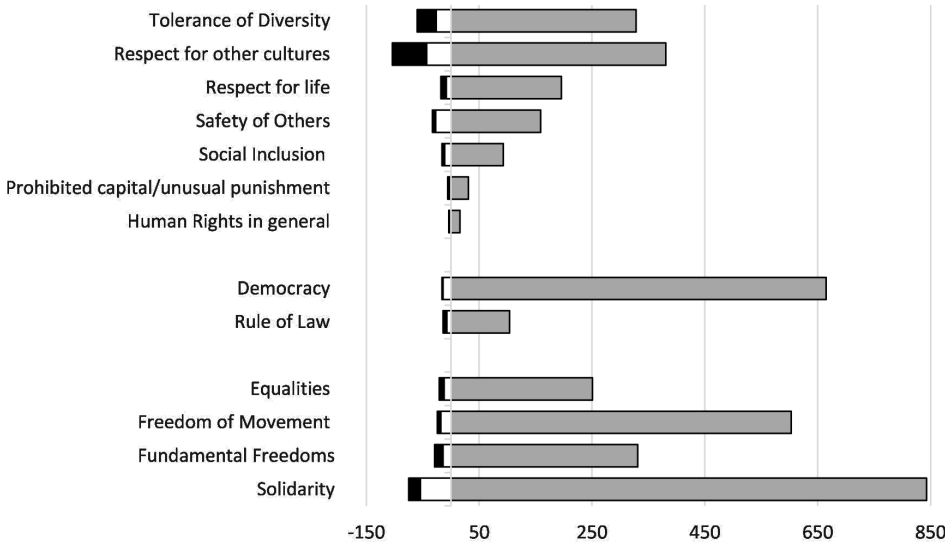


Figure 2. Strength of feeling about each value, numbers of mentions.

Figure 2 shows the various responses for each of the 13 values identified. The length of each horizontal bar shows the total number of instances where the particular value was mentioned. The grey element, to the right, shows the positive mentions of support for that value; the left-hand elements (shown as negative numbers) represent the negative comments (black) and the ambivalent or ‘neutral’ remarks (white). Thus Solidarity, the most frequently mentioned value (918, 41 per cent of the whole sample) was mentioned positively 843 times, neutrally 54 times, and negatively 21 times. Other frequent mentions were of Democracy (total 681) and Freedom of Movement (603). The least commonly mentioned value was the prohibition of the death penalty, cruel punishments and persecution (37). Note that the significance of this is not that there was significant support for capital punishment, but that it was not raised as an issue, in the context of these discussions. (‘Other Human Rights’ was a catch-all residual category for remarks that could not be classified in the other six categories). Social Inclusion (109) was not mentioned often, but the human rights values of Respect for others (485) and Tolerance of diversity (383) were relatively popular.

We were able to use the data analyses in this mixed methods way to combine qualitative examples of the actual vocabularies, expressions and examples used with quantitative indications of the relative frequencies of use. For example, we were able to include numbers of positive, neutral and negative attitudes to each value, as shown in the figure above, demographic data about parental occupations, and the geographical origins of parents and grandparents. The following four



examples indicate some of the additional value the quantitative analysis added to the qualitative data.

In the previous section mention was made of when refugees were particularly mentioned correlated with the large movements in 2015: Figure 3 shows this graphically, linking the number of times refugees were mentioned each year (the lower broken black line, right hand scale) to the actual numbers of refugees entering Europe each year (upper grey line, left hand scale).

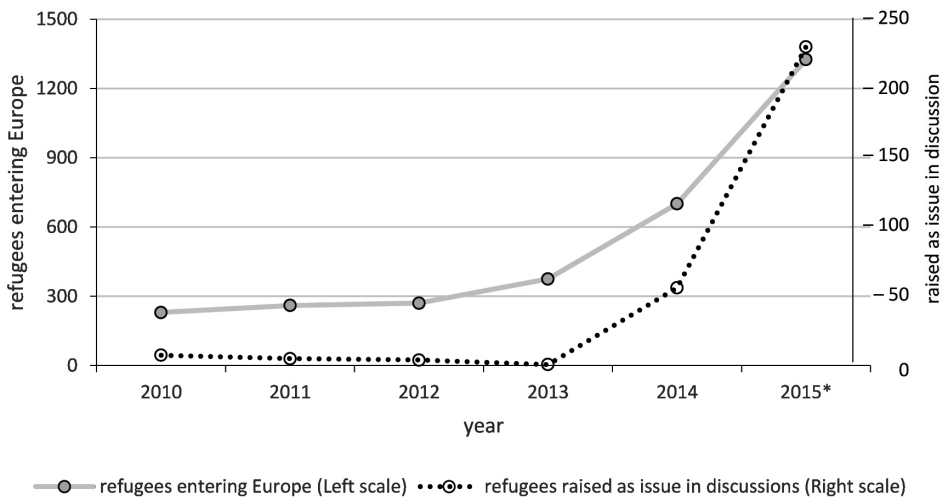


Figure 3. Refugees: mentioned in discussions; numbers entering Europe.

This shows how the common popular discourse at the time of a particular deliberative discussion impacts greatly on the examples used to illustrate the value being mentioned. Both figures 2 and 3 plot the actual numbers of a value being mentioned. It is also possible to show the percentages of two or more particular populations, allowing a comparison of different responses, as in the following three examples.

Figure 4 shows the various times individuals mentioned the Freedom of Movement within Europe, generally as an advantage, in EU membership and the Schengen agreement.

Figure 4 groups respondents in particular countries together, based on the lapse of time between that right first becoming available to that group for countries and the time of the deliberative discussions in the country (with additional categories for the right being available in the future, and for those where it was not, at that time, even a matter for discussion). The percentage of young people mentioning this freedom was mentioned was calculated for each country in the study:

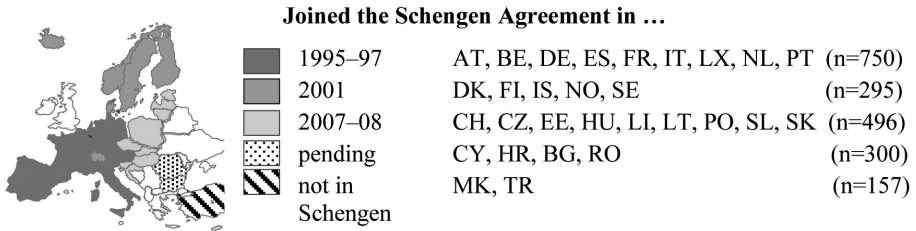
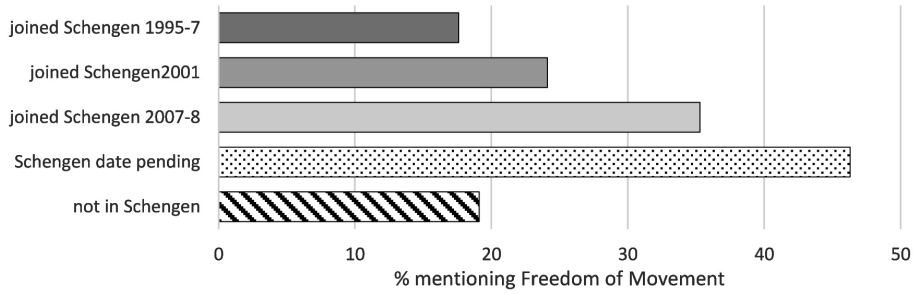


Figure 4. Freedom of movement mentioned, by date of country formally joining the Schengen Agreement.

Figure 4 shows that the rate of mentioning this was particularly high in the countries where Schengen was pending, and how it was much less a focus in discussions in those areas where Schengen had been in force for many years. These figures are of proportions of the number of young people in each group of countries (these groups of very different sizes). On several occasions in France and Germany, for example, there were comments such “Oh, I’d forgotten that” or “We’re so used to that”. Recent acquisition of the right meant that it was more frequently mentioned; anticipation of the right in the future made it even more important.

We also had collected data on parental occupations (of both mother and father). When the data was originally collected for a qualitative study, it was thought that possibly the children of police officers were making rather more negative comments about human rights issues than those whose parents were in other occupations – but this was only a possibility: checking this would have required disproportionate effort. The quantitative data set in the mixed methods study enabled us to look at this in more detail, as we had coded the occupational data on a standard occupational coding system. Figure 5 shows a comparison, value by value, of the relative frequency of mention of two sets of young people: those who had one or both parents in the ‘education services’ (shown in the lighter grey bands) and those with a parent or both in the ‘protective services’, a category that included police, gendarmerie and military personnel (shown in dark grey).

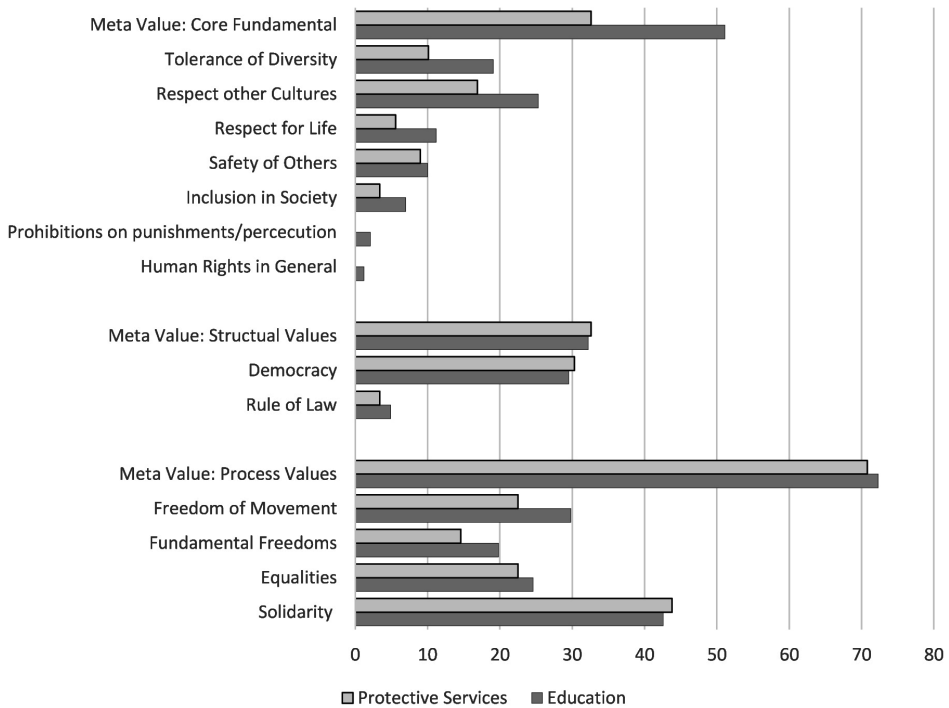


Figure 5. Strength of values by parental occupation sector: Education and Protective Services.

As in Figure 4, these are percentage proportions of each occupational group, not absolute values. The differences are revealing: the structural values of Democracy and the Rule of Law, and the process values of Equalities, Rights and Freedoms, the two groups are very similar. But in terms of the fundamental core values, such as respect for other cultures and tolerance of diversity, the children of teachers are very much more likely to mention these values than those in the other group.

It was noted earlier that the sample of young people include a significant proportion of young people who had a parent (or both) or a grandparent from a country other than that in which the discussion took place. Figure 5 shows the data on each value gathered for three groups. The first, shown in pale grey (the upper bar in each group of three) are the frequencies of those who had two parents originating in the country of the discussion. The second group (the middle bar, in mid-grey) shows the responses of those who had both parents from other EU or EFTA countries. The third band (black) shows the proportions of young people who have one or both parents from Africa, Asia, the Middle East of Latin America.

Structural and Process values are broadly similar for each of the three groups, but Human rights values are generally more likely to be mentioned by children from

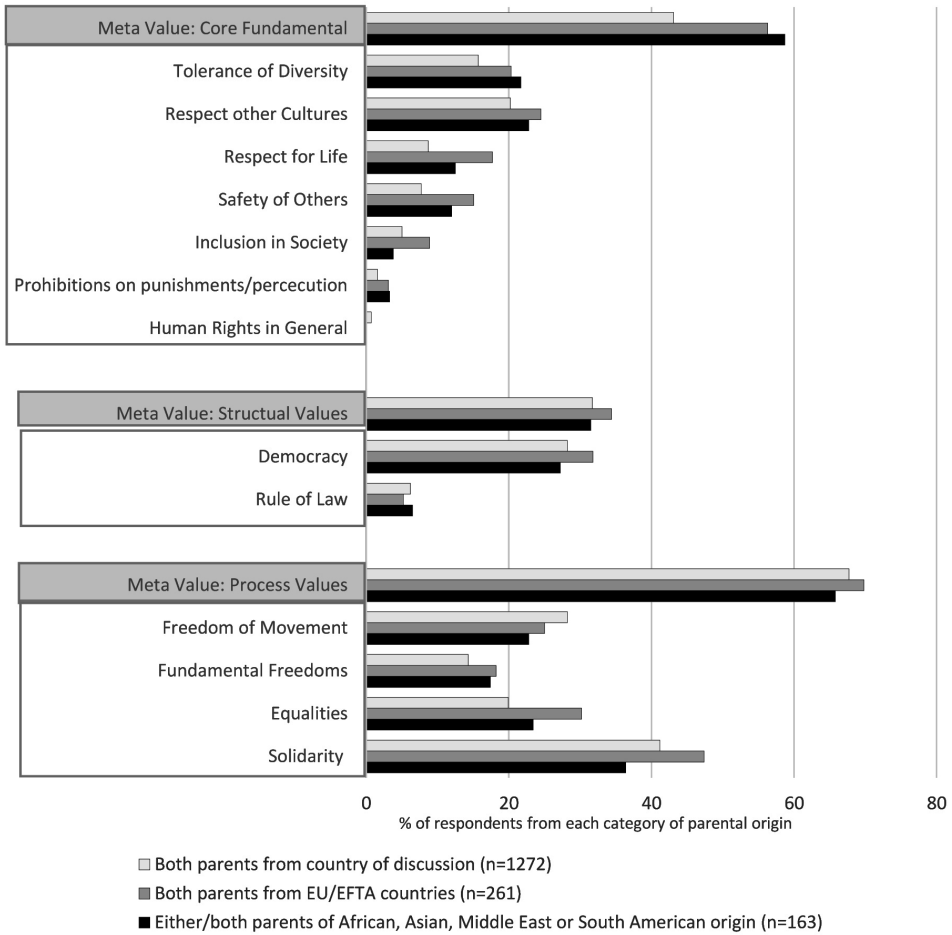


Figure 6. Responses to individual values by individuals, grouped by parental origins.

migrant family backgrounds, more so than those whose parents both originated in the country of the discussion. The young people who had some non-white ancestries in particular were more positive about these values; the European migrants were also positive, but not as much as the non-white origin young people.

These findings contrast to the populist right-wing discourse of some social and political commentators, who argue that peoples of migrant, particularly non-European, origin have difficulties in accepting European values (either being unable or unwilling to do so). They are thus said to represent a threat to the continuance of European values. For example, Victor Orban has said “western Europe is the half [sic] where European and non-European peoples live together. These countries are no longer nations: they are nothing more than a conglomeration of peoples ... no longer

the Western world, but the post-Western world. ... here we are in Central Europe ... the West in its spiritual sense has moved to Central Europe – what is left over there is merely the post-West” (Orban, 2022). Others who appear to subscribe to this ‘race replacement’ theory include Thio Sarrazin (2018) and Eric Besson, the former French Minister for Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-Development (2009–10), whose Immigration Act required immigrants who sought French nationality to adhere “to the essential principles and values of the republic” and “to sign a charter of the rights and duties of the French citizen” (République Française, 2011).

But these findings suggest that those young people whose parents have origins in the less-economically developed countries of Asia, Africa, the Middle East and South America are *more* likely to accept the fundamental human rights principles in the European Charter than those young people of whose parental origins are both from the country in which they live. Of course, as has been acknowledged in the earlier discussion on the nature of ‘European’ values (as simply codified and legally sanctioned global values) means that these values, some or all, may be equally or more valued than they are in Europe. It also suggests that the experience of being brought up in a family of mixed origin supports young people in recognising these values in a more explicit way than those with a monocultural family upbringing. This effect is seen even when the ethnic diversity is not particularly great or explicit – the EU/EFTA group, of 169 individuals, comprises 99 where both parents come from outside the country, 39 where the father does so, and 31 where the mother is from a different country.

### Some conclusions

This paper has shown, through an examination of the practicalities of two related research projects, that data collected through deliberative discussions offer opportunities for both qualitative and mixed methods analysis. These examples have taken young people between 10 and 20 as their subjects, but such an approach may also be suitable for other age ranges. The particular value of the method is that it gives the researcher an opportunity to minimise their own involvement in how subjects elect to describe their understanding of particular topics:

- the use of non-leading questions,
- the encouragement to listen and respond to other group member’s contributions,
- members to take ownership of many elements of the course of the discussion, and particularly
- young people using their own terms, vocabulary and structures.

Encouraging them to introduce practical examples and instances can lead to disagreements, more detailed expositions, subtle changes in viewpoints, and a sense of ownership over the whole process. The power relationship that is inherent in all researcher-subject interchanges is weakened.

This diminution of researcher control may bring out epistemological illumination, but it is at the expense of allowing a lot of discussion to run in alternative directions, listening to narratives that are not the intended focus (Wood, 2014). Consequently, the data saturation point – when further discussions are of little incremental value – takes longer to achieve and is perhaps never reached. This in itself might be a useful finding: that certain meanings are so multiple that an absolute range of meaning may be unachievable, because it may not exist in a wholly unambiguous way.

There are other potential problems with this approach. The need to assemble groups makes true random sampling impossible. The need for group members to (in some way) know each other and be comfortable with each other as fellow discussants is a limiting restriction, which is why institutional settings – schools, colleges, workplaces – become valuable sites for recruitment. There are regional variations that require any sample to take into consideration such variations, for example using a range of different sized settlements, the sometimes more cosmopolitan capital often being very different from distant and rural settlements.

The extension to using qualitative analysis is thus limited: the construction of a statistically true sample is not possible, and the kinds of analysis used here are only possible because of the particularly large set of qualitative data: most qualitative studies have far fewer participants. It becomes possible to divide the sample into distinct groups – by locations, parental background, etc., and show comparative percentages volunteering particular issues or values, as well as absolute numbers for the whole group. While such access to a data set of unprompted, volunteered data does present particular advantages in gaining insights into people's constructions, these may need qualification: for example, the very low number of times that the prohibition on capital punishment was mentioned cannot be used to infer that there was any lack of interest in this, or rejection of it: it was (probably) simply not volunteered as an issue of current concern. (It was raised particularly by some of the Norwegian groups, who used the way that the mass-murderer Anders Breivik (who had killed 80 people, mostly teenagers, in 2011) was being held in detention as an example of Norwegian tolerance; and more generally as a means of contrasting European states with the USA.) Non-prompted data collection can leave lacunae, as well as providing detailed constructions.

But the process does address Bourdieu's concerns (1973): it does not present research informants with pre-formed categories, and seek responses to these, but attempts to allow categories to emerge, be discussed and argued about, to be rejected

or confirmed as the specificities of meaning are refined. The nature of the state is, as Benedict Anderson reminds us, is to impose a “totalizing classificatory grid” (Anderson 1991, p. 184). Kertzer and Arel (2002) describe how “the use of identity categories ... creates a particular vision of social reality. All people are assigned to a single category, and are hence conceptualised as sharing, with a certain number of others, a common collective identity” (p. 5). This reification of identity categories imposes tidy boundaries between groups (Kertzer, 2017). Appadurai (1996) puts this neatly: the “process of enumeration and assignation through ... body-counts create not only types and classes ... but also homogeneous bodies, because number, by its nature, flattens idiosyncrasies and creates boundaries around these homogeneous bodies, since it performatively limits their extent ... Statistics are to bodies and social types what maps are to territories: they flatten and enclose.” (p. 133).

Deliberative discussion produces data that troubles this process, and challenges the use of categories that are far less distinct than is often admitted. It is a process that seeks to capture what Wood (2014) called the “everyday data”, that can be seen “as rambling, off-task or divergent ... with frequent interjections, incomplete sentences, questions and queries or a sense of ambiguity or uncertainty” (p. 16). Rochat (2010) points out that in much social science “Universality claims get more attention because they are cleaner and sharper, encompassing control and predictive power ... This tends to relegate diversity to noise rather than as a primary object of study” (p. 107). Deliberative discussion may produce data that is necessarily noisy, but “not everything that can be counted, counts; and not everything that counts can be counted” (Cameron, 1963, p. 13).

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## Ethical approval

This study received ethical approval from the London Metropolitan University, in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, in two stages:

- for the study in Phase 1 (between January 2010 and October 2013) (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania, Poland and Turkey) on 15 October 2009, extended 22 September 2012,
- for the study in Phase 2 (September 2014- January 2016 (Austria Belgium, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland) on 25 February 2014.

## Participant consent

Written consent was obtained from all participants (young people) and from the parents or guardians of those under 16 years of age, before each discussion took place. This included permission for the discussions to be recorded, transcribed, and then used in a range of unspecified academic publications, including articles and books, based on their anonymised contributions. These statements are held in the archives of the University.

## Data availability

All recordings of the discussions have been transcribed, and have not yet been archived because they are still being added to and further analysed by the writer. The original audio recordings have been deleted. Records of demographic data and consent forms from parents and young people that contain material that would identify them are being securely held in the archives of London Metropolitan University until 2026, when they will be destroyed.

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The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.