YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Youth Partnership

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Preface

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Youth political participation today is taking place against a background of democratic transformation and political, social and economic uncertainty. When the conceptual and editorial work on this book began, the main issues regarding young people's participation were shrinking space for civil society; a decline in young people's institutional participation; rapid digitalisation; advancement of populist ideologies; and an increase in global youth movements, focusing on climate change and demands for equality. Since then, young people have experienced a range of other challenges, including the two years of the Covid-19 pandemic, increasing polarisation of the political and social space, increasing inequalities, economic crisis and precarity, and most recently, war. This Youth Knowledge book reminds us that while the context might be changing, young people's participation is crucial for shaping and transforming democracies.

The European Union (EU)–Council of Europe Youth Partnership has been researching young people's participation and citizenship since its establishment in 1998. Its 2005 book *Revisiting youth political participation – Challenges for research and democratic practice in Europe* opened spaces for exploring young people's relationship with democracy and ways to support and promote their effective involvement in decision making. The focus on political participation continued with the 2019 symposium entitled "The future of young people's political participation: questions, challenges and opportunities", which created a space for examining tensions and opportunities, learning and inspiration. The resources and knowledge products developed for the symposium include the literature review on youth political participation, a paper on young people's "Visions of the future", a compendium bringing together relevant practices, the symposium report, videos, animated videos, infographics and webinars.

Since the 2019 symposium, the Youth Partnership has published the studies "Meaningful youth political participation in Europe: concepts, patterns and policy implications" (Bárta, Boldt and Lavizzari 2021) "Insights – Meaningful youth political participation" (Bárta and Lavizzari 2021) and study New forms of political participation. Statistical survey (Yurttagüler and Pultar 2023) exploring young people's contemporary engagement in politics, including both conventional and non-conventional channels of participation, namely voting, membership of political parties, national youth councils and youth organisations, volunteering and participation in global movements and protests. It has also followed more closely the trends of young people's participation in the youth climate strike movement and the challenges of youth participation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Young people's political participation, citizenship and relationship with democracy remain a complex topic for youth research, policy and practice. This book by no means

claims to answer all the questions relevant to the topic or represent the realities of all young people across Europe. For example, the engagement of young women and minority groups, or new ways of participation within the digital environments, remain to be explored in other spaces.

The editorial team, through seven chapters and four essays written by young people, skilfully gives a glimpse into the landscape of contemporary young people's political participation in a changing world, highlighting realities, trends and main issues. We hope that it will serve as a tool for better understanding the phenomena involved, and as a source of inspiration for youth research, youth policy, youth work practice and young people.

Introduction

How are young people engaging with democracies in transformation?

Cristina Bacalso and Tomaž Deželan

Our democracies are shifting in fundamental ways and at an unimaginable pace. In recent years, we have witnessed an increasingly shrinking space for the political participation of citizens across the democratic world. From subtle obstacles to the direct prohibition of activities, public authorities and their agents have in numerous states restricted freedoms of expression, association, assembly and other basic democratic rights and liberties. This trend of illiberalism has not gone unnoticed, with some of the most influential sources of global measurement signalling a widespread decline in the state of democracy globally, referring to it in terms of democracy in retreat (Freedom House 2019), increased polarisation and repression (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2018) and an increase in "democratic backsliding" (International IDEA 2021).

With the emergence of Covid-19, containment measures imposed by governments, such as restrictions on mass gatherings and physical contact, have challenged traditional modes of in-person organising and protests. The measures have also led to backlashes from reactionary, anti-state movements, under the banner of protecting democracy, while posing challenges to the current democratic order. Meanwhile, the internet and Information and communication technologies appeared to provide possibilities for continued political mobilisation, despite the restrictions on exercising civic rights in public places. However, the long-known concerns about the pace of digital disruption posing threats to democracy, such as reality distortion, decline of journalism and surveillance capitalism (Pew Research Center 2020) meant that a simple switch from offline to online is neither simple nor linear. The pandemic laid bare the extent of our misinformation ecosystems, where a corresponding "infodemic" posed challenges to an adequate public health response, and the overall possibility for civic dialogue.

Where do young people stand within this tumultuous political context? Young people are increasingly affected, socio-economically and otherwise, by successive global crises, from the economic and financial crisis that started in late 2008 to the Covid-19 pandemic, which initially emerged as a public health crisis, but the impact of which will eventually translate into a range of areas where young people – and other

marginalised population groups – will suffer the most. However, young people are disadvantaged also politically. Even in the most democratically developed countries, young people experience high levels of political inequality. Disproportionately low levels of political representation are just one visible sign of such inequality. Despite the fact that young people make up about 15% to 20% of the entire population, less than 3% of members of national parliaments are under the age of 30, with young women making up 1.1% (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2021). This is further revealed in the composition of membership of political parties. If parties have problems with getting new members (see, for example van Biezen et al. 2012), the decline in party membership among young people is particularly marked (Cross and Young 2008; Deželan 2015) and this then translates into their absence from key party bodies, such as boards and candidate selection panels (Deželan 2018).

Young people are losing trust in political institutions and the functioning of democracy more dramatically, and at a quicker pace, than older generations (Foa et al. 2020; Kwak et al. 2020). Contemporary social and economic barriers, changing economic models and the accompanying austerity measures, which hit services that are essential to young people, are affecting the level of young people's participation, as they become increasingly disengaged from the political system, despite being the generation most equipped in terms of education and technological capabilities in history (United Nations 2014; Guest 2016; Deželan 2015). It is no surprise then that we have been witnessing a decline in youth participation in institutional politics for more than two decades now (Deželan 2015) and that age, along with income and education, have become one of the strongest predictors of political participation (Zukin et al. 2006).

However, this sharp decline in participation is not equally shared across all segments of the youth population. Factors such as economic well-being, race, ethnicity, religion, migration status, geographical location and level of urbanisation are all relevant for the level of political participation of a young person, and the most marginalised individuals also face the most difficulties when it comes to participation. Previous work by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership, including the symposium on the future of young people's political participation (EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership 2019), the associated compendium (Yurttagüler and Martinez 2020) and the study on meaningful youth political participation in Europe (Bárta, Boldt and Lavizzari 2021), in part explore these persisting inequalities in participation and the challenges of inclusion for under-represented groups.

Taking stock of youth political participation at this moment in time, this volume asks the question: "How are young people engaging with democracies in transformation?", noting that the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership broadly defines political participation as "any activity that shapes, affects, or involves the political sphere" (EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership 2019). While the research question intentionally places youth agency at its centre, ultimately our exploration shows how young people are both shaping and being shaped by their political context and the structures and institutions around them.

Popular definitions of political participation include participating in elections and referendums, membership of political parties and unions, signing petitions and

organising demonstrations and strikes, but also include activities such as boycotts and expressing political opinions via badges, T-shirts, stickers, letters to newspapers or posts on social media (van Deth 2001 and 2014; Bárta, Boldt and Lavizzari, 2021). In addition, also commonly included in the definition of political participation are less accepted forms such as vandalism, civil disobedience, armed resistance or violent acts classified as terrorism, which are often considered to be illegal in most legal systems. This volume encourages a deeper look at youth political participation, where the concepts of both "political" and "participation" are understood in the broadest sense possible. For example, narrow definitions of "political participation" are typically state-centric, concerned with the action of individuals or groups, based on their roles as citizens, that is aimed at influencing government, political parties or policies (Bárta, Boldt and Lavizzari, 2021). However this discounts a wide variety of actions, such as expressive political participation and personalised politics (including political consumerism, boycotts/"buycotts", which occur at the individual level and go beyond duties associated with citizenship, or action that does not necessarily target the state but creates new visions of the public sphere or community, such as volunteering (ibid)). Moving beyond traditional binaries such as "conventional" or "non-conventional" and "institutional" or "non-institutional", the authors of this volume sought to understand the ways in which young people themselves are defining their participation: in some cases, challenging, stretching or reimagining it.

In their chapter entitled "'Radical kindness': young climate activists transforming democracy", Bowman, Kishinani, Pickard and Smith explore how young people's increasing engagement in environmental protest movements is a challenge to democracy. They argue that young people, through movements such as the "Fridays For Future" school climate strikes, are engaging with this challenge through a process called "radical kindness", or a specific form of civic participation that aims to transform democracy through the formation of a youth-led and youth-centred political culture based on care, justice and horizontal democratic structures. They explore how the concept of radical kindness represents a movement of dissent, calling for systemic change and a global renewal through social and economic justice; how it constitutes a movement of kindness that involves complex solidarities and advocates democratic change at levels from the local to the global; and how the movement transforms the blurred boundary between the political and the personal, mixing and remixing everyday issues and practices with policy advocacy, lobbying and direct action.

One example of such activism is presented in the chapter "Youth climate activism: the Fridays For Future Rome experience", where Belotti, Bussoletti and Donato examine the engagement strategies of a Fridays For Future group in Rome using ethnography, observing the symbiotic mobilisation activities that serve to both empower members in the movement ("inward engagement strategies") and push for pro-climate policies ("outward engagement strategies"). Operating in a continuous loop, inward engagement such as studying and researching climate data, organising meetings and assigning roles, and connecting with other Fridays For Future chapters, facilitates and supports external (more overtly political) activities such as social media campaigns, participation in public assemblies and collectives, and protests. Here, the conceptualisation of "political participation" extends to those activities that take place internally within a movement.

As is frequently the case, environmental activism, as well as mechanisms originating from it, lead to broader implications of targeted actions for democracies and societies at large. Demonstrating this through a juridical-legal lens, Scissa focuses not on the popular street activism of young people in the climate movement, but instead on ways to secure environmental justice through access to information laws. The chapter entitled "Young people and EU environmental justice: the 1998 Aarhus Convention" looks at how the right to obtain environmental information from governments – including on the state of the environment and the relevant impacts on human health, safety and culture – is a fundamental building block towards securing environmental justice. Young climate campaigners can extend their activism through the Aarhus Convention, which enshrines their rights to environmental information, public participation in environmental decision making and access to legal review procedures when these rights are not fulfilled.

In addition to environmental activism, youth policy and structures also proved to be robust areas for democratic innovation, particularly with regard to the representation of youth interests. In the chapter "Pluralising the democratic imaginary: youth beyond the liberal-democratic canon", Xavier explores the idea that liberal democracy limits the emergence of alternative democratic possibilities by young people. The word "imaginary" used as a noun here, and elsewhere in this volume, echoes the "social imaginary" of Charles Taylor (Taylor 2003). By examining key approaches within the European youth sector in the last 20 years, in particular the European Commission's 2001 White Paper on Youth and the "magic triangle" of youth policy, youth work and youth research, Xavier asks the question: are young people in Europe being provided with the opportunities to shape their own futures, or only those futures prescribed by liberal democracies? He argues that current approaches and discursive frameworks around young people's political participation may, in reality, be depoliticising young people, reinforcing the status quo and dulling any radical or emancipatory potential of youth participation.

Likewise, in the chapter entitled "'Youth voice', dialogue and democracy", Moxon critically examines the "youth voice" that has shaped the work of many youth organisations and, more recently, occupied the minds of many policy makers with regard to its limits. Based on the theoretical and empirical advancements in the field, the author argues against the idea of a homogenous, universal "youth voice" waiting to emerge from young people through the process of participation. He rather indicates that "youth voice" could be better understood as a dynamic interaction between young people and those they are in dialogue with, this interaction being framed by intergenerational differences, other intersections, and created by the context in which it occurs. Moxon thus, instead of asking which forms of participation are more representative of young people's voices, looks at how different forms become part of the voices that are created and what value this has for policy making and democracy.

The volume also addresses some of the classical questions regarding youth political participation that are yet to be sufficiently explored and contextualised. In the chapter "Political participation of young Europeans: the role of liberal values and democratic context", Stanojević, Todosijević and Pavlović address the question of who is actually active among young people in Europe and in what way? By doing this they re-examine three common assumptions about youth and politics, namely: young

people are insufficiently interested in politics; they are increasingly disengaged from the institutional side of politics; and they have created new spaces, via new forms and channels of participation, through the lens of ideological self-understanding and minority attitudes. They base their analysis on European Social Survey (ESS) data from 2018, and focus on the participatory practices of young Europeans by exploring associations between ideological orientations/attitudes towards minority groups/ indicators of social context and different forms of political activism. They manage to add weight to previously less convincing evidence of an association between liberal attitudes and all forms of political participation, and reiterate the importance of democratic context when it comes to youth participation.

The last contribution to this discussion on the transformation of the political imaginary of youth is Lehto's chapter on "'European citizenship' and young people's democratic participation: a case study of Finland". Lehto draws attention to the development of young people's political agency, inclusion and exclusion in the neoliberal era, when citizenship is increasingly articulated and practised outside the regulated spaces and mechanisms of democratic participation. She critically explores the concept of citizenship emerging in the context of the EU Erasmus+ programme, which provides a specific moral and normative framework for young people's citizenship participation. By identifying the strengths of European citizenship and alerting to the amplification of neoliberal societal values and the consequent practices of com- modification, Lehto pleads for a more comprehensive understanding of European citizenship by the programme's beneficiaries and other relevant stakeholders, and showcases innovative practices of better anchoring European citizenship to the democratic values and mechanisms of actions fostering young people's participation in democratic life in Europe.

In addition to the chapters outlined above, four personal essays are included, written by young people themselves who are engaging in political participation to shape their schools, communities and Europe, but also the broader systems on which our current politics is built. Antoszek, a high-school student, seeks self-actualisation in his education system in Poland, where students are "treated as objects rather than subjects in their learning" when it comes to educational decisions made during the Covid-19 pandemic. Pereira, Capão, Capellini, Freitas and Martins explore the approaches of non-formal education and the social-solidarity economy in community- building projects, which they feel can promote feelings of possibility, togetherness, self-realisation and empowerment among young people. Matache reflects on his experiences as a "European transnational" – a European citizen who lives in an EU member state other than their state of origin – and the reimagined possibilities for political activism and citizenship. Wilhelm, in her essay, similarly challenges the aim of political participation, seeking "system change" that shifts institutional logics, norms and traditions, as opposed to simply tinkering with policies and politics, which fundamentally leaves underlying structures unchanged.

With these exciting new takes on some traditional as well as fresh questions related to youth activism and the "political imaginary" of young people, the contributions in this volume will take you on a journey of exploring the (new) boundaries of the debate around youth political participation, while knowing that the voices of many still remain unheard.

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Chapter 1

"Radical kindness": the young climate activists transforming democracy

Benjamin Bowman, Pooja Kishinani, Sarah Pickard and Marion Smith

Introduction

"We are radical in our kindness. We are breaking social norms. We are a radical community."

(Skylab, 19, Extinction Rebellion activist, London, October 2019)

Young people are leading the call for action on climate change. Young people's visions for democratic change, and movements like the Fridays For Future school climate strikes are inspiring new approaches to democratic participation and new ideas/notions about the role of young people in society. In this chapter, we explore the visions for democratic change among young people. In our studies of the current wave of youth-led environmental activism that began in 2018, we have observed that young people's environmental activism emphasises an ethics of intersectional justice, solidarity and care. Moreover, this activism tends to take place within fluid networks that foster internal democracy and aspire to horizontalism: they are networks of mutual support rather than leadership, in which sharing and collaboration coexist with more traditional political aims and demands. We posit that the ethics, structure and actions of much of young people's environmental activism are characterised by a combination of features that we call "radical kindness", a term used by a young environmental activist/demonstrator in our interview research.

Young environmental activists are calling for a new approach to environmental politics. Radical kindness is the system of civic ethics they are developing to serve as the foundation of the new environmental politics they wish to see. We argue that these ethics are characteristic of the current wave of youth-led environmental activism. Radical kindness, as we explain in this chapter, challenges contemporary notions of civics. It also challenges traditional assumptions about the place of young people in democracy. We explain how young people are developing a transformative and youth-led political culture in environmental movements, and thereby engaging with democracies in transformation. We posit that these young people are transforming democracy itself, by exploring, imagining and building a new ethical approach. We hope that our work on radical kindness, which is a new and emergent concept, can support others who seek to reflect on, learn from or study the ethics, goals, issue framing and internal organisation of young people's environmental movements.

In this chapter, we first provide a brief introduction to the authors' research and experience in the area of young people's environmental activism. We then explore three of the main characteristics of radical kindness among young environmental activists, each based on a slogan shown on placards by young protesters at a 2018 climate strike in Manchester, United Kingdom, described below.

"System change not climate change"

Radical kindness is about dissent. It is about calling for wholesale, systemic and radical change in the politics and economics that have brought the world into a climate crisis. Radical kindness is reflected in the words of Greta Thunberg (Snapes 2019) when she declared that activism represents a deliberate choice: "We can create transformational action that will safeguard the living conditions for future generations. Or we can continue with our business as usual and fail."

"Waves of support"

Radical kindness is about a vision of transformative change that comes from grass-roots collaboration. To quote Drew (Youth Strike for Climate participant): "Everyone needs to get involved… everyone's involved and everyone has a say." Radical kindness is an intersectional approach, according to which, in order to involve everyone, one must recognise that everyone is coming from different places. For instance, climate change does not impact everyone equally, and to understand the impact of climate change one must also understand inequalities, such as those arising from structural racism, economic inequalities, gendered inequalities and enduring global inequalities of wealth across the world.

"Care for the earth"

Radical kindness is a system of civic ethics based on care and kindness. For this reason, young people's environmental activism tends to be based on expressions of emotions and feelings, such as anxiety, love, support and empathy, alongside more traditional political demands, and policy preferences and outcomes. Radical kindness can be observed and experienced in artwork, singing, dancing and other creative modes of expression that challenge traditional ideas of what is political and what is not. Young environmental activists working in this system of civic ethics often concern themselves with the mental health of others (and themselves), community building and showing care and consideration for emotions such as anxiety and fear.

Lastly, we describe the opportunities for positive democratic transformation arising from young people's environmental activism. Our study gathered data by working with young people who took part in Fridays For Future school climate strikes and Extinction Rebellion protests during the period of study (2018-21). In short, radical kindness is a system of civic ethics based on transformative change, grass-roots democracy and love for others. We hope our work can support further, wider studies of how radical kindness functions as a system of civic ethics among young environmental activists.

This chapter is co-authored by a team of academic researchers and young people. We present the model of radical kindness as a way to make sense of this complex global movement of young people for action on climate change, using examples from our research and our reflections on the movement across Europe more widely. Our findings, and our conceptual model of radical kindness, are intended to support young people as they lead positive new transformations in democracy. Radical kindness is an opportunity to transform young people's democratic participation in a changing world, to empower young people and support them as they imagine a new, just and sustainable world. We hope our work helps to counter the negative stereotypes associated with young people's environmental activism, such as immature school students skipping school, which do not correspond to young people's very real engagement.

Radical kindness in young people's environmentalism

The global movement of school climate strikes – often known as the Fridays For Future or Youth Strike for Climate movement – is now a consistent presence in cities and towns across Europe. Young people are calling for immediate and substantial action on climate change from politicians and other "powerholders". These young environmental activists agree with the general consensus among natural scientists who have asserted for decades, if not centuries, that climate change represents an existential threat to humanity (Foote 1856; Hagedorn et al. 2019; Warren 2019). Due to the impact of young people's environmental activism on the gathering pace of political change, the year 2018 has been called a "a watershed year" in environmental activism (Pickard, Bowman and Arya 2020: 251). Indeed, Greta Thunberg held her first *Skolstrejk för klimatet* (School Strike for Climate) in Sweden, in August 2018, when aged 15; just over 12 months later, in November 2019, the European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, called the climate crisis "an existential threat" to humanity and pledged that the EU would lead the world's response (Boffey 2019).

The term "existential" must be emphasised: as the environmentalist Bill McKibben writes, "the science has been clear for twenty years" that humanity is enduring an existential crisis and we will either save ourselves or we will not. For environmental movements, McKibben states, the argument over climate change has been resolved for decades, and what remains is to "win the fight" against the individuals, governments, industries and other actors who profit either from inaction or from the exacerbation of the threat to human civilisation (Diehn 2015). If humanity is winning the fight to survive, then the global wave of mobilisation by young people since 2018 may be remembered as the tipping point at which action on climate change, of the scope required for human survival, began to look politically viable. The importance of young people's environmental activism cannot, therefore, be overstated. Young people's environmental activism is changing the human response to climate change. We consider it likely that the years in which our research took place (2018-21) will be regarded as a critical moment in the history of environmentalism, and, if adequate action is taken on climate change, in the history of human civilisation.

In this chapter, we argue that young people's environmental movements, such as the Fridays For Future school climate strikes, base their activism on a system of civic ethics that we call radical kindness. This is a term shared with us by a young woman

we interviewed, as part of our studies of young people's environmental activism in the United Kingdom and France. In our analysis of the findings of our in-depth interviews with young people, and in our wider research, we argue that radical kindness offers many opportunities to transform democracy for the better for young people and future generations. Radical kindness, among young environmental activists, represents a specific form of civic participation that aims to transform democracy through the formation of a new political culture. This transformative political culture is led by care, environmental justice and horizontal democratic structures.

We explore in this chapter the ethics of care among young environmental activists; the commitment of the activists to environmental justice – a conceptual approach with historical roots in research and activism concerning environmental racism, which is the disproportionate impact of environmental damage on people and communities racialised as non-white – as "a way to critique and restructure existing power relations" (Sze, Ambriz and Correia 2017: 54) such as the enduring global inequalities that endure after "over 500 years of colonization and oppression" (Environmental Leadership Summit 1991). We also refer to the horizontal democratic structures among young activists, which are often youth-led and youth-centred: they are run by young people, for young people and for future generations, in other words for the benefit of everyone. Radical kindness is the ethical foundation of a movement that considers itself to exist at a turning point in human history. This movement consists of young people seizing the chance to change the world by imagining a new (better and fairer) one. Radical kindness, we contend, is the basic ethical structure of the new world that this movement is in the process of imagining.

We define radical kindness as a concept consisting of three parts. First, the concept represents the radical dissent among the young environmental movement, as young people call for systemic change and a global renewal through social and economic justice (Pickard, Bowman and Arya 2020; 2022). Second, radical kindness represents the complex solidarities and advocacy for democratic change at levels from the local to the global. Third, radical kindness denotes a transformation of the theoretical boundary between the political and the personal. As Bronwyn E. Wood writes, young people occupy a liminal place in society, "neither completely 'child', nor completely 'adult' in their ability to operate as autonomous political agents or access the full entitlements of adult citizenship" (2011: 338). Feminist critiques of a binary concept of public life v. personal life, formal v. informal participation and institutional politics v. the politics of everyday life draw our attention to the ways that young people can use informal participation, everyday interactions and so forth as "an arena for the contestation and transformation of dominant, often oppressive modalities of citizenship" (Dickinson et al. 2008: 105). In other words, radical kindness is a system of civic ethics that upholds young environmental activists as they subvert the conceptual boundary between the public and the private, mixing everyday issues and emotional and cultural practices with policy advocacy, lobbying, direct action and "do-it-ourselves politics" ("DIO politics") approaches to citizenship (Pickard 2019) or "everyday" DIY engagement (Bang 2010).

This chapter is co-authored by a team of two academic researchers and two university students who have written on and advocated better emotional processing of the climate crisis's effects, most prominently in their work, "Student guide to

the climate crisis" (Kishinani and Smith 2020). The chapter is a collaborative work, informed by our shared knowledge gained through research and experience, and this combination is rare in traditional scientific research. We write in the first-person plural, using the term "we", in order to reflect the importance of our social location to our analysis (Tanaka 2002: 265). This work is only possible because we are working as a team, and so we style our writing with the first person plural to emphasise the collaborative nature of our study.[1] We consider that young people's environmental activism is characterised by an environmental-justice approach, and we reflect that environmental justice includes the call for "the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation" (Environmental Leadership Summit 1991). Our evaluation and assessment of the data, and our theoretical approach to young people's environmental activism, is based on our equal partnership.

We, the authors, present the model of radical kindness as a way to make sense of this complex global young people's movement for action on climate change, using examples from our research and our reflections on the movement across Europe more widely. We hope that our work supports young people and others at what young activists say is a turning point in human history. Our goal is to write about radical kindness, as we see it in our research, in order to support the positive transformation of democracy we see young people participating in.

Research background

Studies with young environmental activists in the current wave of activism began in 2018 (see Pickard 2021). In 2019, fieldwork was conducted in the United Kingdom and France to explore our concepts of young people's environmental activism with the use of exploratory, qualitative interviews, before and in the field, during environmental demonstrations, which included demonstrations aligned with the Fridays For Future, Youth Strike for Climate and Extinction Rebellion movements. In all, 60 semi-structured interviews were conducted in six cities (and, therefore, all urban contexts) – Edinburgh, London, Manchester, Nottingham, Sheffield and Paris – in September and October 2019. Young protesters between the ages of 11 and 34, from young people starting secondary school through to those leaving young adulthood, were interviewed. Participants signed ethical consent forms prior to the interviews, and parental consent was given for interviewees under the age of 16.

The two university students on the team have worked to support peers and fellow young people, especially students, with the experience of the climate crisis. This body of work brings together frameworks for self-care, supportive accessibility-oriented guidance for local democratic participation, and reading lists for students who wish to know more. This chapter is a collaboration between all members of the team, and the research that underpins this project goes hand-in-hand with the writing, practice and experience of working with, and on behalf of, young people during climate change.

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1. The authors would like to thank Dena Arya (Nottingham Trent University) who was part of the research design, planning and fieldwork for 2019 studies undertaken with young environmental activists in the United Kingdom.

"System change not climate change"

Young people's environmental activism, including young people's movements for action on climate change,[2] features a wide range of young people among its supporters and activists. They are global in nature and include young people of all ages (O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward 2018; Boulianne, Lalancette and Ilkiw 2020; Bowman 2020; Nissen, Wong and Carlton 2021). The young generation is not a monolithic or homogeneous group, and neither are young environmental activists. Academic work, including our interviews, shows that young people are motivated to participate in environmental movements for many different reasons (Pickard, Bowman and Arya 2020; Bowman 2020). However, there are features of young people's environmental activism that differentiate young people as activists, and young people's movements, from mainstream activists and mainstream environmental movements.

Illustration 1. "System change not climate change" placard, Manchester, September 2019 (photograph: Ben Bowman)

When considered together, we call these aspects of young people's environmental activism "radical kindness", and the first facet of radical kindness is dissent. In their work on dissent among young activists, O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward define dissent as "the conscious expression of disagreement with a prevailing view, policy, practice, decision, institution, or assumption that is exacerbating climate change" (2018: 42). Young people's environmental activism is radical because they dissent: they imagine, and work for, radical and transformative change (Pickard, Bowman and Arya 2020).

Radical kindness is characterised by dissent. Dissent is not a form of engagement with the political system, but rather a call for systemic change of the current political system. The call for dissent among young activists is frequent and, to quote the activist Greta Thunberg (Snapes 2019), represents a deliberate choice: "We can create transformational action that will safeguard the living conditions for future generations. Or we can continue with our business as usual and fail." Dissent against "business as usual", as Thunberg calls it, is both a call for the transformation of failing political, social and economic systems and for imagining and developing new ones. The dissent of young environmental activists is often full of hope that "we are unstoppable; another world is possible" (Rosie, 25, Extinction Rebellion activist, London, October 2019).

Young environmental activists do not merely protest. They dissent, that is to say they challenge "prevailing norms, lifestyles, decisions and action that perpetuate business as usual and its far-reaching, long-lasting and in some cases irreversible global impacts" (O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward 2018: 1). The young environmental activists' challenge to the status quo, and their call to overhaul "business as usual"

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2. We included interview data from young Extinction Rebellion activists in our study, but we recognise that Extinction Rebellion has a broad age profile (Saunders, Doherty and Hayes 2020: 31).

(metaphorically and literally) is not limited to the environmental impact of the status quo. Young environmental activists are typically, as discussed above, environmental-justice activists. They take action on climate change while also navigating complex solidarities with other campaigns for climate justice, racial justice and global economic equality. For instance, the demands of the Lausanne Climate Declaration of the Fridays For Future movement includes the call to "ensure climate justice and equity" (Fridays For Future 2019). The call for justice and equity, which is common among young environmental activists, represents a particular form of dissent that is characteristic of young movements such as Fridays For Future. Young people, as the activist Becky put it during an interview, are "going against the status quo" (Becky, 32, Extinction Rebellion activist, London, October 2019), in an act of broad dissent that seeks to imagine a new, better and more just world. Young environmental activists, acting in radical kindness, dissent from the status quo and aim for transformative "system change". For this reason, radical kindness leads young environmental activists away from the more "narrowly constructed, technocratic, and dehistoricised" approaches of mainstream environmentalism (Curnow and Helferty 2018: 149).

1. "Waves of support"

Radical kindness among young environmental activists is an intersectional approach to what we referred to earlier as "system change". Intersectionality is the theoretical approach that acknowledges the "need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (Crenshaw 1991: 1 245) and reveals how structures of privilege and disadvantage interact to form a system of "interlocking oppressions" (Roberts 2012: 240). An intersectional analysis of climate change helps us to understand "how different individuals and groups relate differently to climate change, due to their situatedness in power structures based on context-specific and dynamic social categorisations" (Kaijser and Kronsell 2014: 417). One example of an intersectional approach – and one which examines the intersection of racialised inequality, economic inequality and the impact of environmental damage – is provided

Illustration 2. "Waves of support" placard, Manchester, September 2019 (photograph: Ben Bowman)

by Alexandra Wanjiku Kelbert (2016) in her analysis of why the Black Lives Matter movement blockaded, and closed, London City Airport in 2016.

> Why are communities like east London's Newham, where 40% of the population survive on £20,000 or less, hosting airports such as London City, where passengers earn on average £114,000 a year? When we say black lives matter, we mean *all* black lives, and that includes the lives of those who live in proximity to airports, to power plants, to

the busiest of roads, and whose children grow up with asthma, and skin conditions exacerbated by air pollution. Black British Africans are 28% more likely than their white counterparts to be exposed to air pollution.

An intersectional approach guides the work of many young environmental activists. The "waves of support" placard (above) was held by a school climate strike participant in our study in Manchester, in September 2019, who explained:

> It's artistic, but also spreads the message that everyone needs to get involved, which I quite like. And the waves of support, like, it shows unity, that everyone's involved and everyone has a say in what's happening. (Drew, 16, Youth Strike for Climate activist)

Young people's environmental activism tends to be less oriented towards the "top-down" flows of information on climate change (Tanner 2010: 2) that have historically dominated traditional, mainstream environmentalism found in "professional environmental charities, foundations and NGOs and in mainstream politics" (Castree 2006: 11). Although the environmental movements young people are involved in do call for political leaders to "listen to the science" – that is, the evidence and evidence-based claims of elite scientists – top-down flows are part of an ecology of knowledge, agency and voice in young people's environmentalism. As Drew puts it, radical kindness, which characterises young people's environmental activism, is a democratic concept that "spreads the message that everyone needs to get involved… that everyone's involved and everyone has a say". Because young environmental activists perceive environmental issues to be bound up with wider inequality and injustice in the world, their solidarity reaches out to others who suffer inequality and who face injustice. In other words, we argue that young people's environmental activism is typified by an intersectional analysis of environmental issues that seeks to explore the multiple and intersecting inequalities at the heart of the climate crisis. Some young environmental activists will refer specifically to intersectionality and to "systematic oppressions" (Mickey, 17, Youth Strike for Climate activist). Others, like Drew, may call for sharing, co-operation, diversity and pluralism. It is for this reason that youth-led environmental movements such as Fridays For Future demand climate justice as opposed to, for example, economic sustainability; in other words, young people want to build a fairer, better world, rather than make technical adjustments to sustain and perpetuate the unfair one we have. Young environmental activists tend to perceive that environmental issues intersect with other interlocking oppressions. Accordingly, they position themselves in favour of unity and support with other activists and non-activists, movements and communities that wish to change structures of privilege and disadvantage in an unfair world.

We posit that young people's environmental activism is distinguishable from mainstream environmentalism in part because of the characteristics of radical kindness. The scholar Laura Pulido distinguished "subaltern environmentalism" as the environmentalism of "those who are highly marginalised both economically and socially" (1997: 25). We follow Pulido, and define young people's environmental activism as subaltern environmentalism because young people are marginalised, but also because, as Pulido writes (1996: 28): "The issue of positionality is most important in distinguishing mainstream and subaltern activism." Positionality is "a person's location in a larger social formation" (Pulido and Peña 1998: 33) and, as we illustrate, young

people's environmental activism is focused on questions of positionality. For instance, due to "the disproportionate racialised and classed impacts of environmental damage" (Curnow and Helferty 2018: 149), the worst harm is inflicted on poor, powerless and minority communities (Foster 1993: 728). For this reason, young people's environmental activism focuses on people's positions in social formations of intergenerational injustice, racism, class inequality and other systems of injustice and oppression.

As young environmental activists are different from mainstream environmentalists, young people themselves often feel the environmental movement itself represents a barrier to the transformative changes they wish to see. Mainstream environmentalism has tended to exclude the activism of marginalised people, including young people, in a way that "artificially compartmentalizes people's troubles," so as to claim minority environmentalism to be "not 'environmental'" (Austin and Schill 1991: 72). Mainstream environmentalism has historically ignored the racialised inequalities in environmental problems, a concept known as "environmental racism" (Foster 1993). This is unlike young environmental activists, who more often "link the histories and continuities of colonialism to climate change and understand that the root causes are shared" (Curnow and Gross 2016: 380). According to Bessant (2021), the activism of young environmental activists is often artificially compartmentalised by environmentalists and scholars of environmentalism with claims that "a simple but unambiguous message" emerges from their activism, calling on adults to "listen to the science" (Schinko 2020: 20). As O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward (2018: 1) write: "Surprisingly little attention has been given to analysing expressions of dissent among youth." It may not be surprising to young environmental activists themselves that little attention is being paid to their dissent. Historically speaking, environmental activists who dissent from systems of racialised oppression, class inequality and other injustices have their dissent compartmentalised as "not environmental", and their complex politics distilled into "simple but unambiguous" policy requests.

In a deeper conceptual sense, young people's dissent challenges contemporary norms of engagement, namely that the role of young people in a democracy is to participate in the processes of democratic governance, and that through their participation they will sustain and regenerate the status quo (Kisby and Sloam 2014: 52), as dutiful and "good' citizens" (Pickard 2019). Simply put, it is so commonly assumed that the role of young people is to participate in our economic and political systems, that it comes as a surprise to many researchers, commentators, politicians and others in power when young people wish to change those systems. "System change not climate change" is a transformative proposal that promises a new, youth-led and youth-centred political culture for young people and future generations. In doing so, young environmental activists tend to be well informed and rather pragmatic about the task of "system change" and, rather than making rash and revolutionary claims, they call for a process of sharing, learning and discussion. It ought to be noted that these goals are similar to the cutting-edge approach of the "citizen's climate assemblies" that are being developed across Europe and the world (see, for example, Cherry et al. 2021).

The "waves of support" slogan illustrates the characteristic solidarity of young environmental activists who perceive their cause, and their movement, to be closely linked with other movements for justice and equality around the world. Our study, based on a theoretical approach, explored this solidarity but did not investigate

in detail the identities or socio-economic statuses of the young people in the movement. Future work could examine more of what Curnow and Helferty call the "contradictions of solidarity" (2018) where, for instance, white and relatively affluent young people may be seeking to act in solidarity with other people while also inhabiting and benefiting from social locations of racialised and economic power. Similarly, future work could explore the difficult intersection between youth and justice and the ways global inequalities can erode the belief among young people that they have a claim to justice, as they feel unworthy compared to others around the world who they believe suffer more (Thew, Middlemiss and Paavola 2020). We also hope to contribute to future studies on the importance of young women in these movements, or, contrariwise, the fewer number of men they attract (de Moor et al. 2020). We hope that our study contributes to the exploration in future work of these facets of young people's environmental activism. In the next section, we explain how radical kindness is also an ethics of care for others, and what that care means for the transformative potential of young people's political participation.

2. "Care for the earth"

Young people's environmentalism is, characteristically, a movement of care and kindness. Radical kindness, as we define it, means thinking about social change as a process of care for others. By "care", we mean the practices of emotion, morality and empathy among young environmental activists. These practices frequently include the expression of love and consideration for others and emotions such as joy, fear and hope, and feature malleable and adaptive approaches to activism that benefit from a permeable public/private divide. Traditionally, academic work on political activism divides young people's activism into "dichotomies of political instrumentality versus self-expression" (Bowman 2019: 302) and tends to "celebrate agency and view youth as isolated, bounded, individual subjects" (Wood 2020: 219). The activism of young people, in other words, is examined in terms of individual acts of political agency. These acts are separated into two

Illustration 3. "Care for the earth" placard, Manchester, September 2019 (photograph: Ben Bowman)

categories. The first consists of political instrumentalist acts, namely things young activists do in order to achieve a political goal. The second consists of self-expressive acts, which are expressions of the self, of feeling, emotions and so forth. Radical kindness, as an ethics of care for others, challenges the traditional approach to young people's activism in two ways.

First, the care and kindness of young people challenges commonly held assumptions about young people's activism in general, and young people's environmental activism in particular. Young people do not act alone, nor do they act only for young

people. Young people, including young environmental activists, do what they do as part of a wider community, and amid connections to adults, parents, younger children, teachers, schools, colleges and so forth. As Bronwyn Wood states, "the focus on youth alone has led to a tendency to celebrate agency and view youth as isolated, bounded, individual subjects" (2020: 218). Wood argues that due to this focus, young environmental activists are commonly described as "an angry young generation – isolated and alone" (ibid.: 219). On the contrary, we find young environmental activists working collectively, mirroring what Pickard calls "do-it-ourselves" modes of citizenship that are based on collaboration and networking with peers (Pickard 2019; 2021).

The radical kindness of young environmental activists challenges the assumption that the young person is an isolated individual actor. At the climate strikes we studied, for instance, the activism of young people was full of emotions including joy, fear and hope, and the rich interplay of emotions and feelings has been documented by other studies (Wahlström et al. 2019). We also recorded fluid, organic and intergenerational relationships at the strike sites, not just between young people and older adults, but also among young people of different ages. At the climate strikes held in Manchester and Nottingham on 20 September 2019, for instance, the demonstration was recognisably a rally of young people, but with many parents, grandparents and other adults standing just outside the main body of demonstrators. Furthermore, we observed groups of small children, toddlers and babies playing, participating and making chalk drawings on the street, waving flags and chanting. There were also specially designated play areas for small children, as well as tents and workshops for making placards.

The rich, complex and caring atmosphere of the climate strikes we studied is not easy to assess with scientific measurements. This is partly because our research methods are ill-suited/not adapted to working with young children. Like the researchers who conducted the landmark Protest for a Future study (Wahlström et al. 2019), we noted that there were a sizeable proportion of participants in the climate strikes we studied who were aged 16 and younger, but we did not consider it ethically advisable to interview them on the street. Although the scientific methods used to study the movements were unable to measure the inclusion of very young children in the environmental movement, young children were there, and so were older adults. The kindness and inclusivity of young people's environmental activism is characteristic of the movement. The kindness of young activists challenges the common assumption among policy makers, politicians and other power holders that young people's activism is a process by which individual young people make their voices heard. Activism, for young environmental activists, is also a process of building community in relationships of kindness. It should be noted that the largest available studies of the climate strikes record that, although an increasing number of individuals began attending the strikes alone, possibly because the "demonstrations are becoming such well-known public events", "interpersonal mobilisation remains predominant – especially among friends" (de Moor et al. 2020: 30). In our study, too, young environmental activists participated with friends, brought collaborative artwork, made protest signs with schoolmates and family members, walked with others and so forth.

Second, the radical kindness of young environmental activists challenges assumptions about what constitutes political activism, and even the definition of activism itself. As Emily Rainsford writes, political activism is an "essentially multidimensional concept" that is commonly misinterpreted as a dichotomy (2018: 792), and young people are defined as active or not, political or not, engaged or not. Rainsford explains that many young people "do not see their activism as political" (2018: 800). In addition, in established democracies, young people tend to be disillusioned with electoral politics and so their engagement is more likely to be on a case-by-case basis relating to issues, especially local issues, which connect social, economic and environmental concerns (Sloam 2020). In other words, the radical kindness of young environmental activists challenges a common assumption in democracies that when young people are active in politics, they will perceive themselves as political and engage with political institutions in order to have a voice and push for change. In fact, the reality is frequently the opposite. Young people who are active in politics often do not consider themselves activists or even political: rather, they may care strongly about an issue, or have a sense of common endeavour with a group of peers or friends (Pickard 2019). They tend to be sceptical about electoral politics and, accordingly, often feel sceptical about the utility of raising their voice to sway the opinions of elected officials: on the contrary, many young people do not seek a voice, but seek the power to change things themselves.

Positive transformations: the opportunity of radical kindness

At the beginning of this chapter, we argued that radical kindness is an ethical approach that aims to change democracy for the better. The radical kindness of young environmental activists is transformative. It is an approach that challenges assumptions, changes understandings and moves democracy forward. In this chapter so far, we have defined the approach we call radical kindness as we encounter it in our work with young environmental activists. In this final section, we explore some of the transformational opportunities in radical kindness. There are many opportunities to learn from young people's environmental activism but, here, we suggest three.

First, radical kindness challenges democracy to recognise that for young people, politics is about more than simply "having a voice". A voice combined with another might create feelings of solidarity and well-being, but if it does not change anything in terms of concrete outcomes, young people often feel their voices are ignored. Politics, for young people, is often a more complex relationship between voice, voicelessness and finding ways to "do it yourself". Democratic institutions often celebrate young people for "having a voice", but radical kindness challenges the assumption that "a voice" is what young people want. Young environmental activists do not typically want a voice in the political and economic systems that have brought civilisation to the point of the climate crisis. They want a fundamental reshaping of those systems. This challenge is especially pertinent in movements that fight for political change, such as the climate strike movement, because young people's political struggles are often articulated not through voice, but through voicelessness (Kallio and Häkli 2011). As Kallio and Häkli found with regard to young people's resistance to privatisation in

Finland, young people's ways of being political "do not necessarily consist of intentional but purposive action" (ibid.: 70), employing tactics such as self-help, passive non-compliance and subtle subversion.

Young environmental activists who want to reshape the world, in other words, often seek to reorganise the relationships in the society around them, in order to make them fairer, kinder and more supportive. In the "Student guide to the climate crisis" (Kishinani and Smith 2020), for instance, the authors provide an extensive guide for young people to "acknowledge climate grief" (p. 4) and to care for themselves while supporting others. Writing in England, where economic austerity reforms following the 2008 recession have been associated with worsening mental health, and have disproportionately impacted young people (see Thomson and Katikireddi 2018), the "Student guide to the climate crisis" does not form an intentional political act concerning the struggle of young people to access adequate mental healthcare, but it is purposive in caring for and supporting young people in their struggle. Radical kindness challenges democracy to uphold the complexity of democratic participation and recognise that politics is multidimensional, and that young people's politics is not always about having a voice, or even intending to be political. Often, for young people, if you care for others or care about an issue, you get up and do something about it yourself. Radical kindness challenges democracy to welcome wider practices of citizenship and political action.

Second, in a related way, radical kindness challenges democratic institutions to recognise the reasons many young people are sceptical about institutional politics. Since at least the 1990s, the so-called "problem of youth participation" has come to dominate thinking about the role of young people in democracy (Farthing 2010). By this phrase, we mean the inaccurate assumption that young people can simply be divided into two camps: engaged young people, who know about politics and are active in politics, and disengaged young people, who are passive, disinterested and detached from politics. Radical kindness challenges this assumption, as it seeks radically new approaches to the environment rather than reforms that sustain the current approaches (see Pickard, Bowman and Arya 2020: 258). Radical kindness, in other words, does not stem from a grievance among young environmental activists that they do not meaningfully participate in environmental politics, but that environmental politics itself is wrong. It is a call for a new politics, a new approach to the environment and a complete change in how things are done.

Young environmental activists are characterised by an attitude of dissent towards institutional politics, which is to say they dissent from "prevailing norms, lifestyles, decisions and action that perpetuate business as usual and its far-reaching, long-lasting and in some cases irreversible global impacts" (O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward 2018: 1). These activists are young people who believe, to varying extents, that existing political institutions are the problem. It is not surprising, then, that many young environmental activists look outside those institutions for the solution. They may even think that if they engage dutifully with the elected officials and democratic institutions that have presided over the climate crisis, their engagement will sustain and legitimise a political system they wish to transform. For young people who dissent from "business as usual", the way to care for the earth and for others may indeed be to disengage from business as usual and embark on something new. For democratic

institutions, then, the dissent, and even disengagement, of young people should be seen as an opportunity to find out more what they are doing when they resist doing politics in the traditional way. We can learn from young people's practices of care, kindness and community in order to transform society more widely and fulfil the intergenerational social contract (Pickard 2021).

Third, radical kindness offers democracies an opportunity to reflect on the intersecting nature of the issues that we face. While we agree that young environmental activists tend to respond to matters that interest them on an issue-by-issue or case-by-case basis (Sloam 2020), we suggest that radical kindness is an ethics of care that recognises shared experiences and reaches out to build solidarities across issues. Prominent examples include the relationship between young people's environmental activism and the anti-racism movement, solidarity between young environmental activists and campaigners for better social provision of mental healthcare around issues such as eco-anxiety, and a common search for what have been called "post-capitalist" futures (Herbert 2021: 7), in particular future economies that are not based on growth.

Radical kindness is the basis from which young environmental activists build the solidarities they envision. Young environmental activists want a new environmental politics, and they are building a new system of civic ethics that is different to mainstream politics. Radical kindness is an approach that weaves together multiple issues, does not always result in the concrete policy demands that democratic institutions are used to dealing with, and challenges democracies to expand the vision of what young people's participation looks like. For young environmental activists, and for other young people who wish to build a better world, the first step is not to propose incremental changes to the world we have. The first step, for many young people, is to share in imagining what a better world would look like. We cautiously suggest that, practically speaking, imagining a better world might start by supporting young people to recognise global issues and address them at a local level (see Kishinani and Smith 2020; Sloam 2020; Herbert 2021). At the local level, it is possible that the huge, systemic issues surrounding climate change can be more practically targeted on an issue-by-issue and "do-it-ourselves" basis.

Conclusion

This Youth Knowledge book poses the question: "How are young people engaging with democracies in transformation?" One prominent young people's movement in democracies today is the environmental movement, including the Fridays For Future school climate strikes. In this conclusion, we argue that young people's environmental activism is characterised by a system of civic ethics we call "radical kindness", based on a term used by a young person in our interview research. Radical kindness is a transformative vision for democratic change. We define radical kindness as having three main components.

First, young environmental activists who act in radical kindness are, as one activist explained to us, "[radical] in a good way" (Emilija, 20, Extinction Rebellion activist, London, October 2019). They are radical because they do not call for incremental or technical changes that can sustain business as usual, but for positive, transformational

change to imagine and build a new world. For this reason, we categorise young people's environmental activism as a movement of dissent rather than one of protest. Young people's dissent is a vital part of their engagement with democracies in transformation, especially in environmental movements. For many young people, politics begins with dissent: that is, disagreeing with the status quo, and calling for positive, transformational change.

Second, radical kindness is radical and it is also kind. Young environmental activists do not tend to see their radical visions for transformational change as antagonistic visions, nor do they act as isolated individuals with opinions about the changes they would like to see. Young people who engage with democracies in transformation, using the civic ethics of radical kindness, want to transform democracies in ways that uphold and support others who seek justice in networks of solidarity and "waves of support".

Third, radical kindness is a civic ethics of care that does not always follow traditional approaches to citizenship and to politics. Young people who act in radical kindness perceive that political participation is a multidimensional concept, and not a simple question of what is political versus what is not. Our examples included the mutual networks of aid, support and care for peers among young environmental activists, for helping each other with mental healthcare. While such processes of care, kindness and support are not always categorised as "political engagement", they have a profoundly civic and political purpose in that they establish a new, transformative vision of democracy.

The radical and transformative visions of young environmental activists offer enormous opportunities for democracies in transformation. Young people are taking on climate change, and other environmental issues, across Europe and around the globe. Their activism, characterised as it is by radical kindness, represents a world-building project. Young environmental activists perceive that they are at a turning point in human history. The goal of their movement is to build a better, fairer and kinder world. We hope that our writing explains, celebrates and upholds the work of young people across Europe and around the globe, as they work together to imagine a new, just world.

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Chapter 2

Youth climate activism: the Fridays For Future Rome experience

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Introduction

After Greta Thunberg started her protests in 2018, the Fridays For Future movement has restored visibility to climate change as a democratic issue, while inaugurating a novel wave of climate activism informed by a social justice perspective. Young people, especially teenagers, have been massively mobilising worldwide through the well-known Friday school climate strikes and the biannual global strikes, deployed across public squares and social media platforms.

Studies on the Fridays For Future movement are still rare in Europe and do not yet provide a systematic analysis of the engagement strategies that make this movement unique and distinguish it from other youth and environmental movements. In this chapter, we attempt to fill this gap, inspired by the literature on digital media practices of grass-roots movements and studies on young people's participatory culture and politics. We carried out an ethnographic study within the Fridays For Future Rome group between July 2020 and January 2021 as part of broader qualitative research, exploring how and where the movement's young activists – who refer to themselves as the "Fridays" – mobilise, and highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of their engagement strategies.

By moving across multiple environments (schools, public squares and social media), the "Fridays" effectively combine scientific training, mobilisation and networking actions, both online and offline. This array of activities supports the movement's advocacy objectives – namely obtaining adequate climate-related policies from public institutions – while pursuing the engagement goals of encouraging and maintaining political participation in the movement. To attain the advocacy objectives, activists leverage and capitalise on adhesion to the movement, within a virtuous loop that nurtures the climate dispute as much as it does the affiliation to the movement. As for engagement, which is at the core of this contribution, there are two types of strategies: anchoring the "Fridays" themselves to the movement ("inward engagement strategies"), while involving external people in the fight against climate change ("outward engagement strategies"). In both cases, Fridays For Future's grass-roots politics is mainly tailored to young people, since the climate crisis is thought of as linked to the rights of future generations who, more than anyone else, will pay its economic and environmental costs.

What do we know so far about Fridays For Future?

One year after its emergence, several studies on Fridays For Future have been undertaken, especially in Europe. As the movement was initially inspired by Greta Thunberg, a few authors have specifically focused on her character. Vavilov (2019), for instance, sheds light on her rhetorical devices and moral arguments, while Evensen (2019) criticises her excessive reliance on data and science as arguments against the climate crisis, since – in his opinion – it comes at the expense of ethical and political arguments. Finally, von Zabern and Tulloch (2020) focus on German newspapers' portrayal of the "Fridays" as Greta's "followers" or "fans", thereby diluting the scientific legitimacy of the climate dispute. While these analyses underestimate the processes, subjective elements and scope of youth climate activism as a "glocal" phenomenon, an additional branch of Fridays For Future literature deals with the movement's genesis and grievances. Kühne (2019), for instance, traces Fridays For Future back to the scientific arguments backing its political demonstrations. Schinko (2020) contextualises it within the failure of international conferences and agreements on climate change, and suggests a number of "building blocks" for supporting the socioecological transformation that Fridays For Future is demanding (realising the actual climate risks; broadening the climate crisis governance; nurturing the activists' perception of self-efficacy). On the other hand, Maier (2019) identifies three collective action frames of Fridays For Future Germany, thus providing some timely insights into the movement's political practices. The three frames are: 1) the "Fridays" break the climate issue down into diagnostic and prognostic dimensions, identifying different political issues and related solutions; 2) they invoke climate justice as an intergenerational pact, by contrasting young people with older people through catchy protest signs and online cultural codes; 3) they treat both climate change and their own engagement as transnational in scope and responsibility.

These studies focus on the specificity of the climate dispute and Fridays For Future's demands, yet lack analyses that account for what makes the movement unique in terms of grass-roots politics. However, other studies try to outline the social composition that makes Fridays For Future special. Smith and Bognar (2019) describe it as a decentralised movement, based on local groups established worldwide that tactically combine weekly student strikes with large-scale co-ordinated marches. Surveys carried out in Europe show that Fridays For Future seems to be mainly composed of novice, well-educated teen activists who, initially inspired by Greta Thunberg, engage in Fridays For Future out of concern for their own and the planet's future and in order to demand political accountability from public institutions (Wahlström et al. 2019; Gardner and Neuber 2020). The latter, in particular, zoom in on the German "Fridays" who participated in the two 2019 global strikes, identifying them as mainly middle-class high-school and university students, with a moderate left-wing orientation, discontent with neoliberal policies and private companies. The surveys' results also highlighted the pivotal role played by interpersonal networks, both on social media and at school, in sharing information and emotions.

Indeed, the role of social media in Fridays For Future's activism, in particular, is addressed by multiple authors, and seems to be an identifying element of the movement. Ethnographic analyses carried out by Rivas-de-Roca (2020) show how Fridays

For Future sways public opinion and encourages political action through digital media, in an attempt to attract mass media and find political support to prioritise the climate crisis in agenda-setting. These findings also resonate in Trimonytė's thesis (2020), whose analysis of the posts published on Fridays For Future's official Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages confirms Maier's (2019) findings about diagnostic and prognostic dimensions. Both dimensions appear on social media. The diagnostic dimension can be seen in posts where activists denounce the inactivity of institutions relating to climate change, use scientific references and institutional statements to show that the problem is real, and emphasise the global scope of the issue and its daily repercussions. The prognostic dimension can be seen in posts where activists call on world leaders to declare and respond to the climate emergency, propose concrete solutions and enhance their own actions. While using social media to promote this discourse on the climate crisis ("outward engagement"), the "Fridays" also experience these platforms as places to meet and consolidate the movement ("inward engagement"). According to Brünker et al. (2019), Instagram in particular enables Fridays For Future to form its collective identity, since young people from all over the world interact with each other, and with Greta Thunberg, on the same platform, thus experiencing solidarity, group cohesion and emotional attachment to each other and to the issue of climate change, on and beyond Instagram. In this regard, Reyes-Carrasco et al. (2020) emphasise how the whole array of practices (digital or not) of Fridays For Future Salamanca are opening up a space for informal "learning by doing", where knowledge is built through the development of guidelines, radio shows and social media campaigns. This strand of research thus paves the way for our analysis of the engagement strategies adopted by the "Fridays" as a feature that, more than any other, encapsulates the specificities of the movement with regard to the practices, subjective elements and environments of youth climate activism.

Youth (and) digital activism

This brief review of literature on Fridays For Future suggests that there is something unprecedented in the way the "Fridays" construct participation and mobilisation. Our hypothesis is that this has to do with how they combine different engagement strategies while spanning multiple online and offline environments. This hypothesis is based on both the well-established strand of research on the digital activism of grass-roots movements and the literature about youth activism.

The first body of research includes studies that show how digital media support social transformations by enabling activists to share personalised content horizontally and with a glocal audience, through a participatory process aimed at achieving practical and communicative goals (Castells 2009; Bennett and Segerberg 2012). Digital media have progressively changed the communicative practices and actions of grass-roots movements, to the point of redefining their very structure according to the network paradigm (Toret et al. 2015; Treré and Barranquero 2018). This is the reason why we consider digital media practices equally legitimate to (Vaccari et al. 2015; Dennis 2018) and embedded into (Treré 2019; Mattoni 2020) traditional grass-roots politics, thus also valuing the long-term media logic that activists adopt beyond the protest "peaks" and including the latent in-between stages (Mattoni 2017). We focus on

social media as privileged environments for sharing information and emotions (Gil de Zúñiga, Nakwon and Valenzuela 2012; Papacharissi 2014; Gravante 2016). The "networked publics" enabled by social media – namely the spaces constructed by digital media practices through networked technologies and imagined communities (boyd 2014) – help activists develop innovative mechanisms for political action by negotiating with both technical architectures of the platforms and social dynamics among users (Comunello, Mulargia and Parisi 2016). While social network sites work as the "frontstage" element of digital activism, hosting external communication processes, mobile instant messaging services are the backstage element, where collective identity processes unfold, along with the construction and maintenance of solidarity and co-operation (Treré 2019).

Some branches of the second body of research, on youth activism, emphasise digital communication technologies as environments where young people express their political voice (Bennett 2012; Loader, Vromen and Xenos, 2014), while others stress the disconnection of young people from traditional forms of political participation (van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke 2012; Zukin et al. 2006). While is undeniable that more traditional settings, such as family or school environments, still play a part in mobilising and politicising young people (Maher and Earl 2017), social media are a particularly fertile field because, there, young people invest with political significance the sociocultural activities through which they engage with both the platform and their peers (Kahne, Lee and Feezell 2013; Jenkins et al. 2016). By sharing and producing content online on issues that matter to them, young people treat this material as symbolic resources (Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik 2019) to identify and bond with a like-minded audience, recognising themselves as part of a group of peers (Marchi and Clark, 2018). In this way, social media become both circulation channels and information sources, expanding the scope of young people's political participation (Hao, Wen and George 2014; Loader, Vromen and Xenos, 2014), as self-expression and personal experiences innervate their wider political experience (Vivienne 2016; Zhu et al. 2019).

By having this scholarship dialogue with the research conducted on Fridays For Future so far, we attempt to highlight the centrality of the engagement strategies that the "Fridays" activate in different environments to internally support and externally garner participation in the climate struggle. This approach valorises the seamlessness of youth political practices performed between the online and offline realm, thus allowing us to grasp their specificity.

Methodology

Our research design adopts an ecological approach (Barnes 2008), which values individuals' practices, sense-giving processes and relationships related to climate activism. This is the reason why we focused on ethnography to acquire sociocultural descriptions of Fridays For Future that encompass the complexity of strategies and communicative aspects of the movement between online and offline environments (Boellstorff 2012; Kraemer 2016).

Between July 2020 and January 2021, we carried out participant observation and digital ethnography with(in) the Fridays For Future Rome group (which is mainly

supported by activists in their 20s, along with some teenagers, and a few over-30s). Part of our research team attended assemblies, meetings and protest actions which were held both online and offline depending on imposed restrictions under the Covid-19 pandemic. This method allowed us to observe processes and dynamics unfolding among the "Fridays" and interact with them, in their natural settings and on a long-term basis (Emerson 2004; Pink et al. 2016). Once we finished collecting low-structured but comprehensive field notes (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995) we coded segments of notes both deductively and inductively, by recognising multiple analytical categories. We reviewed the codes and proceeded to carry out thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006; Guest, MacQueen and Namey 2012) by clustering all the codes into core themes, which allowed for sorting the observations and their subsequent interpretation (Boyatzis 1998). In this chapter we focus on the inward and outward engagement strategies of the "Fridays" as the two themes that best capture the specificity of their grass-roots political practices.

In implementing the research, we applied an ethical protocol that ensured the activists' anonymity and privacy of data. For this reason, extracts from field notes – mentioned in the results analysis section below – are identified by date and type of event (online or offline assembly, workshop, protest action, etc.), and activists are identified by an alphanumeric code containing, within square brackets, an alphabetical letter, age and gender ([Z19m], for example). We collected iterative informed consent during the fieldwork, since the "Fridays" repeatedly agreed to participate in the research both explicitly and tacitly, individually and collectively (Busher and Fox 2019; Nairn et al. 2020).

Engagement strategies of Fridays For Future Rome

"Skipping school every Friday and taking to the streets: hence, the 'Fridays' in the name. Claiming our right to a future: hence, the 'For Future' in the name." This is how C, a 14-year-old girl, summarises Fridays For Future's political practices and stance. According to her, the specificity of the movement is that it is carried out by "a generation ... that no longer had a voice ... and decided to go for ... claiming something that, eventually, belongs to everyone but not anyone feels particularly close to": a healthy planet for all living species (9 December 2020, webinar). Fridays For Future is thus a young people's movement in its social composition, but also in its demands (Wahlström et al. 2019; Gardner and Neuber 2020; Maier 2019). After all, as put by [Z19m], "young people will be those to face the climate crisis as protagonists" (10 July 2020, face-to-face workshop), even if the problem is global in scope, and "everyone should be involved" ([M20m], 4 September 2020, face-to-face workshop).

If we examine Fridays For Future's grass-roots politics in depth, we observe specific engagement strategies the aim of which is either to sustain the activists' commitment over time ("inward engagement strategies") or to motivate external people, especially young people and other organisations/movements, to join Fridays For Future in the fight against the climate crisis ("outward engagement strategies"). This is what makes the movement unique. Along with the advocacy and policy goals that Fridays For Future pursues by leveraging and capitalising on adhesion to the movement,

the "Fridays" are dedicated to encouraging and maintaining youth participation in the movement while forging alliances with other like-minded organisations. In this section we analyse both types of engagement strategies and discuss how/where they combine in shaping a movement as novel as Fridays For Future, while also attempting to pinpoint their strengths and weaknesses.

Inward engagement strategies

Studying

For many "Fridays", the first step in the fight against climate change is to build solid climate-related knowledge by seeking and sharing accredited information on which to anchor grievances and demands. According to [M20m], "the climate emergency has a lot of scientific studies [and] research behind, [which] we must constantly bring to the attention of governments because, apparently, they don't know about it" (9 December 2020, webinar). Therefore, the "Fridays" join the fight against the climate crisis by studying and learning about it, thus grounding their demands for political and ethical accountability in science (Kühne 2019), but mostly stressing the knowledge-building process. The demands made vis-à-vis (mainly national and European) public institutions mature internally, in the scientific training that brings activists together around the climate dispute. First of all, the "Fridays" directly consult updated data. The national Fridays For Future working group on science was created for this purpose and is responsible for sifting through the research on climate change ([M20m], 9 December 2020, webinar). Since the technical reports are difficult to understand, the "Fridays" resort to graphics and summaries produced by specific online websites that collect data and make them more intelligible. Additionally, as [P23m] explains, since data might be "correct but incomplete", or even biased when scholars are "conservative" in their estimates (10 July 2020, face-to-face workshop), the "Fridays" double-check sources and select only those they consider reliable. This is particularly evident when it comes to newspapers. National newspapers in Italy are considered unreliable as the activists claim that they "are financed by fossil fuel companies," which means activists consider them "one-sided, basically [standing] on the wrong side!" ([M20m], 9 December 2020, webinar). Conversely, accurate and consistent climate-related journalism has been found abroad, where there are newspapers that, according to the activists, approach the climate crisis "using the right words" ([M20m], as before) and refusing any funding from polluting companies.

In this way, the "Fridays" concretely learn about climate change by independently navigating online graphics, summaries and articles, and by studying climate change diagnosis and prognosis. Contrary to the arguments of Evensen (2019), these science-based strategies are essential for uniting people around the issue of climate change, while legitimising it within a public debate that still has many sceptics about its veracity. This sort of data activism is particularly evident in Fridays For Future advocacy campaigns in relation to institutions and in its protest campaigns against polluting companies. An example of the first type is the "Back to the Future" campaign, which was designed during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic as a "programmatic strategy aimed at intensifying awareness on

climate issues at the institutional level" ([H23m], 20 July 2020, online assembly). As [M20m] recalls, it is "a seven-point plan of requests and actions ... on many issues such as energy, construction, agriculture, land protection, water resources, and so on," whose "authority" comes from the "mammoth effort" to gather contacts "from the world of science, associationism, and activism" (9 December 2020, webinar). This campaign brought the climate dispute to the attention of public opinion and institutions (advocacy goals) but also strengthened the internal commitment of those Fridays For Future activists who engaged in the training, communication and networking activities that gave rise to it (engagement). As for the second type of campaign, one example is "Kick Eni out of schools". Eni is an Italian energy company which has been on several occasions accused of pollution and green-washing (Aneris 2020). According to some activists, this company was so "good at advertising itself" ([M20m], 10 July 2020, face-to-face workshop) and making "people believe that it is becoming sustainable, [whereas] it is not true" ([P23m], 9 December 2020, webinar), that the Italian Ministry of Education even made it responsible for teaching environmental education in Italian schools. The campaign is managed within a specific working group on Telegram (the messaging app) where the "Fridays" periodically brainstorm and co-ordinate protest actions featuring the #ciavvelENI ("you, Eni, poison us") hashtag. While setting up these campaigns, the "Fridays" learn "by doing" (Reyes-Carrasco, Barrón and Heras Hernández 2020), thus turning political engagement into an autopoietic process.

Networking

Even the networks in which the "Fridays" participate – including local Fridays For Future groups scattered around the world and allied organisations and movements – are a fertile field to learn about climate change. In this, the mass self-communication (Castells 2009) enabled by social media not only structures the movement as a composite network at the glocal level (Treré and Barranquero 2018) but becomes an engagement strategy per se for involving young activists in less didactic but equally proactive ways, through personal social networks and peer-to-peer processes (Vivienne 2016; Zhu et al. 2019). In this regard, [M20m] explains that "talking directly to other activists or associations facing the same [dispute]" is a good way to get first-hand information and to know what is going on at a local level (9 December 2020, webinar). Mobile messaging apps such as Telegram and WhatsApp are pivotal for sharing information among different activist groups, since they provide a networked, albeit "confused and not well co-ordinated" space ([Z19m], 10 July 2020, face-to-face workshop), where activists can meet and define key grievances. Any alliance is weighed up and discussed in accordance with the bottom-up and radical conception of the fight against climate change, which is why Fridays For Future Rome does not always adhere to initiatives involving organisations with an institutional approach – Fridays Future would thereby lose "a part of truth and authenticity' ([P23m], 10 July 2020, face-to-face workshop). Networking is also beneficial because other organisations or even single activists might be particularly informed about climate change and its ramifications. In this regard, [M20m] highlights that Fridays For Future in Italy often relies on Greenpeace and ReCommon "research groups and ... campaigns" since they "carry out investigations, reports, and serious dossiers" (9 December 2020,

webinar). According to him, even "if you read Greta's posts, you learn a lot because ... every now and then she mentions the latest study by, I don't know, ... the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research ... and it's usually very significant research" ([M20m], as above). In this sense, networking is both a strategy and a structuring process for Fridays For Future, as for any other movement (Toret et al. 2015; Treré and Barranquero 2018), spanning multiple settings in a glocal conformation that echoes that of social media and the connective logic according to which these platforms redefine activism itself (Castells 2009; Bennett and Segerberg 2012). This mutual shaping between online and offline realms, as well as between technology and political struggle (Vaccari et al. 2015; Dennis 2018; Treré 2019), is quite clear in [M20m]'s words when he says, "that's the beauty of Fridays For Future: we can talk to each other just by texting with people [who live] on the other side of the world [and are] doing the same thing". The platforms host the interactions but are also the sine qua non, to the point of becoming identifying elements of the movement itself (online chatting is described as a positive element of the movement rather than a technological affordance), and are similarly characterised by a glocal attitude (digital networks are described in terms of a set of people scattered worldwide rather than a technological architecture).

Organising

Alongside these inward engagement strategies based on training and learning, the "Fridays" also get involved through the internal organisation process itself. The weekly schedule is such that on Mondays they decide what action to take, on Tuesdays they list the materials and resources needed for the protest, on Wednesdays they book the squares chosen for protest with the relevant city authorities, and on Fridays they strike ([P23m], 19 October 2022, face-to-face assembly). The movement is articulated into a decentralised structure where each local group has autonomy but co-ordinates nationally and within an international network. As [K22f] explains, "each local group gathers in physical or online assemblies, which are like decision-making moments where the most important issues ... ranging from [political] actions ... to in-depth analysis ... are discussed" (9 December 2020, webinar). Then, each local group is divided into WhatsApp working groups, carrying out the tasks decided at the assembly. The assemblies are always public, open to everyone who would like to "participate and say what they think," because "everyone's word counts in the same way" ([K22f], as above). While there are some established roles, such as the "moderator" (who collects, orders and monitors the interventions) and the "national spokesperson" (who reports the opinion of the local group to the national level), the deliberative processes are governed by horizontality and inclusiveness. Assemblies usually open with a round of presentations that, according to [P23m], are a "form of inclusiveness for the newcomers" (14 September 2020, face-to-face assembly). Afterwards, as [K22f] recalls, activists remind people of the codes to participate in the discussions: "'C' [is] for clarification, 'T' for technical interventions and 'F' for when an intervention needs to be shortened" (9 December 2020, webinar). In addition, consensus might be expressed by typing "+" in the chat room for online meetings, or by using "the deaf-mute applause in the physical meetings," while dissent would require a "–" in the chat room, "but it is not used much because people might be hurt," and it is therefore best to "take the floor and explain why you don't agree" ([K22f],

as above). Activists wait their turn before taking the floor, talk for a maximum of three to five minutes in order to give everyone a chance to participate, and often apologise for "monopolising" the floor if they intervened multiple times. In other words, they apply an etiquette involving online syntax and offline body language, informed by the principles of politeness (prioritising respect and consideration for others) and inclusiveness (inviting people to have their say and get involved in the activities). [P23m] describes this etiquette as "in-assembly well-being" inspired by "regenerative-culture" practices regarding "not only values but responsibilities, manner of treating newcomers ... and rules" (19 October 2020, face-to-face assembly). While making young people feel welcome and thus motivating them to join the movement, these criteria mirror "the ideal society that the movement would like to achieve ... in which all people are involved in decisions that may affect their lives," such as the ones related to the climate issue. In the words of [K22f], "likewise, regarding anything that concerns the movement, we involve all the people who participate in it to hear what they think" (9 December 2020, webinar). Young people thus engage because they believe that what happens in the movement (just like what happens with the climate) "concerns them". And this is not just a rhetorical device, but rather an actual practice and an effective strategy that keeps interest in climate issues and related activism alive. The "Fridays" identify and bond with a like-minded audience, recognising themselves as part of a group of peers (Marchi and Clark, 2021), where self-expression and personal experiences innervate the fight for climate (Vivienne 2016; Zhu et al. 2019).

Glocalising

At national level, the internal organisation follows similar criteria, except that there are no physical meetings, co-ordination being entirely online. Along with regular assemblies, the national working group on Telegram, the working group on science and the working group on Eni are open to an unlimited number of activists from all local groups. Each working group shares reports and technical documents in order to facilitate co-ordination between different cities and possible discussions on decisions to be taken. This strategy combines specialisation and transparency, and allows the "Fridays" to engage based on their interests and to feel informed about everything that is happening in different parts of the country. At the same time, it is a way of managing different branches of the movement in order to help local groups, so that no one is left behind. As [K22f] states, "it's a new way of organising ... compared to other movements, which allows for the integration of any type of person ... and ... for the use of the so-called 'collective intelligence': a mix of thinking heads always gives better results than a single thinking head!". Moreover, this strategy is effective because it leverages young people's sociability for content and meaning. Being involved in these national working groups "is a way to learn things by discussing, chatting, having fun ... and making friends" (9 December 2020, webinar). The sociocultural engagement with both the platforms and the other users shifts into the political adhesion to the movement (Kahne, Lee and Feezell 2013; Comunello, Mulargia and Parisi 2016; Jenkins et al. 2016). Therefore, Fridays For Future inward engagement strategies unfold within relational spaces (whether digitally mediated or not), in which collectivisation and conviviality are effectively combined with learning and pragmatism.

Outward engagement strategies

Communicating on social media

The creation of effective engagement strategies becomes more challenging for the "Fridays" when recruiting new activists outwardly. They attempt to especially attract and train young people by avoiding scientific technicalities when explaining the reasons why the climate crisis concerns them. Social network sites, especially Instagram and Facebook, are a perfect fit for this task: they are the frontstage element for building and maintaining climate activism (Treré 2019). In [M20m]'s opinion, these platforms "allow the creation of trends and … can gather new support" by thematising and framing climate change according to Fridays For Future's vision (26 October 2020, online assembly). In this regard, [F23m] speaks about "new contents" when referring to hashtags, stories or pictures: he conceives of these social media affordances as tactical and fresh tools that make it possible to "cultivate activists from an early age" (12 October 2020, face-to-face assembly).

Regarding social media content production, the "Fridays" make use of specific WhatsApp and Telegram groups where, as explained by [C14f], they "package" the content to be published on Instagram and Facebook pages on a weekly basis (9 December 2020, webinar), which represents the backstage element of digital activism (Treré, 2019). There, the "Fridays" draft the text for posts, decide on the graphics (photos, inscriptions or banners) and discuss which hashtags to spread. The strategy they adopt is to make the content intelligible and interesting to an audience that is not necessarily sympathetic to or informed about climate change. As [C14f] explains, "it's not easy … to take a very complicated piece of information and make it really simple" (9 December 2020, webinar). This is why the "Fridays" always try to share "catchy and readable" posts filled with many emojis, which "make everything so … lively and fresh!" ([C14f], as above). According to this same logic, [G25f] proposed to use some "memes in romanaccio [Rome's dialect] about the problems that we submitted to the [institutions], on what has been done and what has not" (26 October 2020, online assembly), thus avoiding the off-putting effect of intense technical content and "taking a break [with] ironic contents" ([C14f], 9 December 2020, webinar). Similar logic guides the choice of using Instagram stories, which "are the ones that give the most interactions", and "short videos … with understandable concepts", since they can bring many people closer to the issue" ([C14f], as above). According to [G25f], multiple high-quality and "incisive videos [should] be passed on to national and local media in view of the strikes," while going viral on social media; they serve "to attract different people and associations … to the square protests" while representing "what we have done and achieved so far, and what remains to be done" (4 September 2020, face-to-face assembly).

In this loop between frontstage and backstage platforms (Treré 2019) we grasp, therefore, beliefs and criteria that guide outward engagement strategies, with media practices being embedded in broader political ones (Mattoni 2020), and expressive and customised actions being at the core of the youth feature of the movement (Bennett 2012; Vivienne 2016; Zhu et al. 2019). If in the previous section, social media (in particular mobile instant messaging services) were the environments dedicated to internal communication and information exchanges aimed at keeping the "Fridays"

engaged, here these platforms (in particular social network sites) are pivotal for outward communication aimed at engaging new activists. Moreover, while taking care of social media content engages the "Fridays" inwardly, the production of attractive and easy-to-understand media content captures other people outwardly. A proper Fridays For Future social media ecology is thus configured (Treré 2019), with a two-way communication system that combines training and information sharing with enjoying and socialising as a hybrid and complex strategy primarily designed for a young audience.

Meeting up and self-training

However, as digital environments are never thought of or experienced separately from physical ones, the "Fridays" carry out the same work of training and providing information outwardly, in an entertaining and sociable way, by means of face-to-face meetings. The dynamic with schools is exemplary. Middle and high schools "have always been a priority for the movement, both because the squares are mostly made up of students, and because a social change comes from a cultural change, from creating a new shared consciousness" ([K22f], 9 December 2020, webinar). Invited by students or professors, the "Fridays" "always go [to the schools] with a very open approach," without any prepared presentation or lecture, but rather by "setting up a debate among the students" ([K22f], as above). In doing so, the "Fridays" present themselves as proactive and respectful of school dynamics; they do not lecture on sustainability from the pulpit, but rather integrate themselves "into assemblies and collectives", in order to influence the students' practices with climate-friendly proposals such as buying products without packaging, proposing "trips to landfills [and] national parks," and setting up working groups aimed at analysing data about climate change ([C14f], 10 July 2020, face-to-face workshop). On the other hand, they always strive to grasp the students' daily needs and to draw out kinship with the climate struggle. For example, [Z19m] suggested promoting the digitalisation of books to reduce the annual costs for students, but [P23m] replied that "producing electronic devices is resource-intensive anyway" and, therefore, "the best system might be to print fewer books and share them," which would also challenge the publishing lobbies (10 July 2020, face-to-face workshop).

Intersecting the struggles

This set-up is empowered by a networking attitude that, once again, is an engagement strategy in itself; seamlessly deployed online and offline, it allows the "Fridays" to interface with committees and organisations that are fighting climate-related battles in their local territories. The networked nature of social media and their audiences (boyd 2014) facilitates this dynamic. As [P23m] declares, "we have been approached on social media by other entities ... then we have acted together, and when they post on social media, we share their post and, therefore, we support each other" (26 October 2020, online assembly). This, for instance, happened with the citizens' committee of DeLiberiamo Roma (promoting popular initiative resolutions for decentralised, participatory and efficient waste management) and that of Valle Galeria (a place close to Rome that has suffered damage from polluting facilities, where local activists have denounced the institutions' inaction and mismanagement). These organisations approached Fridays For Future Rome on social media and have

since then been supported by the movement. The "Fridays" endorsed their struggle to the extent of giving them the floor on the stage of the autumn 2020 global strike; as [C14f] argues, "it's always good to know the local struggles; otherwise, just by 'thinking big', we forget the local declinations of the problem against which we fight" (26 October 2020, online assembly). The logic is therefore to "think global but act local" and to acknowledge that fighting for climate has to do with social justice and with the inequalities that underlie the concentration and mismanagement of resources. This is why the "Fridays" adhere to the struggles carried out by other movements and invite them to support the climate dispute. On several occasions they joined the protests of the Black Lives Matter movement (international anti-racist movement in defence of Black communities) and NonUnaDiMeno (Italian feminist movement to combat all forms of gender-based violence) with climate-related interventions. During preparations for the autumn 2020 global strike, [J24m] suggested "to build the action together with" multiple allied organisations (rather than simply "invite them" to the square) (4 September 2020, face-to face assembly) and, in the aftermath of the protest, he even proposed to establish weekly meetings or a joint assembly with them (12 October 2020, face-to-face assembly). The "Fridays" conceive of the fight for the planet as a common interest that implies the intersectionality of different struggles and hence alliances with other organisations and movements at local, national and international level. As climate activists they build a sense of belonging by focusing on content and narratives that function as symbolic resources (Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik 2019) to define a like-minded audience (Marchi and Clark 2021).

Protesting

Mobilisation itself works as a proper outward engagement strategy, which unfolds between physical and digital realms seamlessly (Vaccari et al. 2015; Dennis 2018) and mirrors the glocal and networked nature of the movement (Castells 2009; Bennett and Segerberg 2012). The "Fridays" entertain and educate about the climate crisis during the protests, thus effectively engaging both long-standing and novice activists in the fight. In doing so, they also manage to reduce the distance from traditional forms of political participation otherwise observed by some studies on youth activism (van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke 2012; Zukin et al. 2006). On the one hand, weekly online and offline actions create a sense of presence, simplicity and regularity that conveys seriousness and belonging. For many months, different local Fridays For Future groups have gone on strike on Fridays, while recently they "have moved on to classic afternoon protests where [they] make signs, sing choruses … have some megaphone speeches: in short, simple things!" ([M20m], 9 December 2020, webinar). In order to maintain a rhythm while maintaining the curiosity of the target audience, the "Fridays" invent something new every week, thus managing "to attract the broader media and gain high visibility" on both the climate crisis and the movement ([L25f], 26 October 2020, online assembly). The logic that drives youth participatory culture, therefore, imbues political participation (Jenkins et al. 2016). [M20m], for example, reports of "die-ins", which "are like sit-ins but, instead of sitting down, you kind of pretend to die," and "funerals for the future," that is, "staging funeral processions in which the future dies" (9 December 2020, webinar). For Halloween, [K22f] proposed creating a "trick-or-treat" on the climate crisis using the expression "plant-or-petrol" instead, while [C14f] suggested launching some challenges on social network sites (26 October 2020,

online assembly). At the time of restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the "cameretta tour" was particularly effective; it was "a huge round of Instagram live streamings," in the words of [M20m], in which the "Fridays" invited artists, scientists and well-known personalities to talk about the climate crisis, thus engaging their social media followers with them (9 December 2020, webinar). In some Italian cities, the "Fridays" even managed to organise some symbolic but still physical protests, such as the "shoe strikes", where they "collected two thousand pairs of shoes from relatives and friends ... and they filled half of the biggest square in the city," thus demonstrating that many people "who would like to be there [even if they] couldn't" ([M20m], as above). This range of protests, spanning online and offline, symbolic and material protests, shows how the "Fridays" leverage their participatory culture, consisting of peer relations, creativity and cultural interests, to create innovative participatory politics (Jenkins et al. 2016; Zhu et al. 2019) that continually motivate themselves and new activists to join the fight against the climate crisis. The effectiveness of this logic based on "being novel and trendy" is particularly clear when all the "Fridays" "start tweeting … the same thing with the same hashtag" until this "ends up in the trend, that is, everybody sees that it's … being talked about [and] goes to see what it is" ([M20m], 9 December 2020, webinar). The "Fridays" build a collective and alternative narrative on a climate-related issue by creatively and contentiously exploiting the platform's affordances (Comunello, Mulargia and Parisi 2016; Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik 2019).

Alongside this type of weekly and ritual actions, the "Fridays" organise biannual global strikes in which the engagement strategy is informed by decentralisation and simultaneity. Combining these two elements makes it possible to multiply protests, thus conveying a sense of massiveness which, in turn, makes them attractive to the general public and the mainstream media. In these cases, a large-scale creative effort is required to attract the participation of many people to a physical and/or digital location. As [M20m] recalls, in the autumn 2019 global strike, the "Fridays" went in front of the gates of Eni, in Rome, and "stayed there chained up for eight hours; eight like the years until the carbon budget runs out" (9 December 2020, webinar). In this case, the strategy was to draw attention through a physically risky and symbolically rich action, whereas in other cases alternative contentious practices might be as effective, such as the critical mass organised for the autumn 2020 global strike proved to be. At the time of Covid-19 restrictions, the "Fridays" generated collective moments of co-presence even from a distance, involving many people simultaneously in massive actions against the climate crisis. He recalls further that during the spring 2020 global strike, for instance, they "wanted to make a huge human mass around Montecitorio (the Italian Parliament building), but unfortunately the gatherings could not be made; so [they] created an online service where people could take a small icon ... and place it near Montecitorio, by geolocating themselves there ... [thus generating] digital gatherings," in which they "managed to get a lot of people to participate" ([M20m], as above). On other occasions, instead, the "Fridays" used to engage with the broader social audience by launching a sort of contest among Fridays For Future followers: that is, they asked "people on Instagram to show their perception of climate change by sharing videos and songs and, finally, to present their ideas on live Instagram stories" ([C14f], 10 July 2020, face-to-face workshop). In this way they drew attention to climate-related issues, especially among young people who are mostly attracted to this kind of content, while attracting new activists

to the group. They succeeded in doing so by interweaving the logic of connective digital activism (Bennett and Segerberg 2012) with the expressive needs underlying online youth activism (Vivienne 2016).

Conclusion

When we participated in assemblies and protests alongside Fridays For Future Rome's activists, we experienced first-hand the engagement strategies analysed above. Inwardly, for example, we were socialised as "Fridays", learning the proper assembly etiquette along with technicalities related to urban regeneration, circular economies and sustainable mobility. At the same time, we brainstormed with the "Fridays" to discuss novel ways to – outwardly – raise more people's awareness of the cause, while getting involved in strategic alliances. Our analysis, then, reflects our experience as researchers and activists who observed and lived the strategies deployed by the "Fridays" when engaging newcomers, especially young people, while keeping their own commitment and interest alive. This is why, besides revealing Fridays For Future's advocacy goals – certainly the movement's contentious feature – in this chapter we have focused on its engagement strategies, which constitute the movement's unprecedented identifying feature.

Inward engagement strategies have been analysed as the backstage element of youth climate activism. They unfold between online and offline realms, through individual and collective activities and relational dynamics. The "Fridays" get involved when learning; they learn by studying (data and technical sources), by doing (campaigns and protest actions) and by interacting (with other activists fighting locally and worldwide). The "Fridays" also remain committed to the movement when organising and discussing collectively (in accordance with the values of inclusiveness and politeness), and when working together on specific tasks (thus specialising, while having fun and socialising). Outward engagement strategies constitute the frontstage element of Fridays For Future's climate activism. They unfold through the provision of information to potential activists in a simple, interactive way, and are also deployed online and offline seamlessly, by inhabiting (personal and collective) social networks and injecting them with creativity and curiosity. The fresh and clear content published on social media is combined with an equally simple but resolute style of intervention in schools and local territories, making the "Fridays" recognisable precisely because of their ability to span different environments (whether physical or digital) with the same youthful character. The strategy is to inform and entertain, to learn by being together, and from there to mobilise by sustaining a sense of belonging to the same struggle.

This overview of logic and practices reveals that the "Fridays", as social media users, anchor their protests in creativity and sociability, making these digital platforms part of their protests. At the same time, as young students who will primarily pay the consequences of the climate crisis, the "Fridays" root their claims in scientific studies, thus combining technical knowledge with political agency. The interplay between these identities and strategies generates a serious but fresh movement operating in various settings, which elastically interacts with different actors under the aegis of the same genuine interest in saving the planet and thus guaranteeing a sustainable future for the next generations.

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Chapter 3

Young people and EU environmental justice: the 1998 Aarhus Convention

Chiara Scissa

Introduction

> The creativity, ideals and courage of the youth of the world should be mobilized to forge a global partnership in order to achieve sustainable development and ensure a better future for all. (1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Principle 21)

Shortly before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, within the framework of the Fridays For Future movement, thousands of young people called for concrete actions to tackle the severe effects of both climate change and an increasing number of environmental disasters worldwide. The 1998 Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (hereinafter, "Aarhus Convention" or "convention") promotes effective public involvement in the preservation of the environment and the protection of human health. Arguably, the convention also describes provisions potentially applicable in the current context of Covid-19, such as effective public access to information related to the origins of pandemics and their impacts on biodiversity, ecosystems and human health, as well as effective procedures for public participation in decision making on these matters (UNECE 2020).

Although the EU and its member states are parties to the convention, the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee – the monitoring mechanism under the convention – concluded that neither the EU institutions nor the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) complied with the convention's provisions, since the measures to allow members of the public to review administrative acts under EU environmental law have remained deeply cumbersome (Milieu Consulting SPRL 2019: 77).

This paper aims to highlight the role that the Aarhus Convention can play in not only preserving the fundamental rights of young environmental activists – even in the exceptional context of the Covid-19 pandemic – but also exploring how young people who are individually and collectively engaged in environmental justice can benefit from the convention's provisions at EU level. To this end, the contribution also intends to assess the impacts of the recently released European Commission proposal to facilitate civil society's involvement in EU environmental policy and the review thereof, highlighting also the Commission's opportunity to fruitfully engage the young public in fostering the climate transition at the core of the European

Green Deal. The first section briefly highlights the linkages between environmental harm and human rights, stressing the urgent need to counteract the worsening of climate and environmental changes. The second explores the different ways through which young people engage in environmental matters and the increasingly relevant role they are playing as agents of change. The third section focuses on the Aarhus Convention and the benefits it can bring to young environmental activists who, individually or collectively, are involved in environmental matters at EU level, while the fourth considers environmental activism during the Covid-19 pandemic. Lastly, we assess the impacts of the European Commission's recent proposal to facilitate civil society's involvement in EU environmental policy and conclude by affirming that further improvements are needed for the EU to fully comply with the Aarhus Convention's requirements on access to justice and to promote the meaningful participation of young people in fostering the climate transition at the core of the European Green Deal.

Environmental harm and human rights

Climate change and environmental disasters are among the main human rights challenges of the 21st century, especially owing to their adverse effects that are felt, and will be felt, worldwide on the present and future generations (Sommario 2021; Lambert 2020; European Parliament 2020a; Boyle 2012; Shelton 2009). The threats posed by climate change to the adequate enjoyment of human rights are now widely acknowledged at both the international and EU level, in that climate change damages the right to life, to health and to an adequate standard of living, including access to food, water, clothing and housing. It impinges the right to education, to effective remedy and to reparation, the principle of non-discrimination and the right to freedom of expression and information. Climate change also hampers the right to property, to a private and family life, as well as the right to self-determination and development, and the right to a healthy environment where recognised (Bratspies 2017; UN Human Rights Council 2019; Gutiérrez González 2019; Scissa 2021a), and is considered to be a "vulnerability-multiplier", especially for children and young groups. According to UNICEF, for example, 26% of the 5.9 million annual deaths of children under the age of five are attributable to environmental harm (UNICEF 2017). Among them, air pollution is deemed to cause 570 000 children to die every year. Recent data suggest that over half a billion children and young people live in areas with extremely high risk of flooding, 115 million are at high or extremely high risk from tropical cyclones, and almost 160 million are exposed to high or extremely high drought severity (UNICEF 2019; UNICEF and IOM 2021). Environmental harm gives cause for particular concern in relation to the rights of children and young people, who will inherit an environmentally damaged world. According to the 2013 report issued by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), by 2050 a child born in 2000 is more likely to be living on a planet that is 0.8°C to 2.6°C warmer than in 1990, with sea levels 5 cm to 32 cm higher (IPCC 2013).

Environmental protection and human rights are key elements in countering this increasing trend. They mutually reinforce each other, given that, on the one hand, the fulfilment of essential human rights enshrined both at international and EU level,

as listed above, depends on environmental protection. On the other hand, human rights allow for environmental actions to be fully and democratically taken. As for environmental rights in the context of EU law, individuals and collective entities enjoy procedural and substantive environmental rights. "Procedural rights" refer to the procedures through which the public can participate in environmental matters, covering the ways through which members of the public can effectively express their opinions, preferences and concerns in relation to the decision-making process and the final decisions concerning the environment. "Substantive rights" cover individual and personal interests, such as protecting human health or safeguarding drinking water (European Commission 2018). Both types of rights are protected and promoted under the 1998 Aarhus Convention at international and EU level through its incorporation into EU law.

Young people's engagement in environmental matters

According to the survey released by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), already in 2011 the vast majority of young people were sensitive towards climate change, calling for more and reliable information to prevent its adverse effects (UNEP 2011; O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward 2018), while the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) argued that close to half a million young people around the world have taken action in recent years to implement, and advocate, climate mitigation and adaptation strategies in their homes, schools and communities. According to the 2020 Peoples' Climate Vote launched by UNDP in co-operation with the University of Oxford – the largest survey of public opinion on climate change ever conducted – around 70% of young people under the age of 18 are more likely to believe that climate change is a global emergency than other age groups, but a substantial majority of older people still agreed with them (UNDP and University of Oxford 2021). Importantly, young people constitute the majority of the population in several developing countries and are increasingly raising social and environmental awareness of the irreversible damage caused by the fossil fuel-based economy, unsustainable policies and the anthropogenic cause of climate change. Other forms and instruments of active involvement include the 2019 Global Youth Climate Action Declaration (UNMGCY 2019), through which young people announced a global, social and ecological state of emergency caused by the worsening impacts of climate change worldwide, calling on states to take up their joint responsibilities, *inter alia*, in the field of climate resilience and adaptation, energy transition, gender-inclusive and human rights-based climate finance, among others. It has been estimated that during the first three months of 2020, around 1.4 million students held strikes and demonstrations in 112 countries, calling for urgent, concerted and efficient actions against climate change (Youth4Europe 2019).

According to the Eurobarometer survey conducted in March 2019 (European Commission 2019b), young Europeans between the ages of 15 and 30 ranked environmental education and climate protection as key priorities to be achieved by their municipalities and states within the EU. In particular, the survey detected a strong increase in climate awareness and action. In fact, 75% of the young respondents declared that they took part in some form of organised environmental activism,

ranging from participation, advocacy and political actions to getting involved in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with an environmental mandate. This increasing participation of young people in environmental activism is also confirmed by the number of dedicated street protests, strikes and climate change litigations in several EU states and beyond. This demonstrates the solid determination of young people to actively influence national and international climate actions, despite the fact that their interests and priorities are often not represented at the political level (Deželan 2018).

Many also believe that climate change, environment and eco-friendly behaviours need to be uplifted in and by schools. In this respect, 56% of the young respondents expressed concern at the insufficient access to education and training – both quantitative and qualitative – including in relation to environmental and climate change issues (European Commission 2019b). Environmental education is acknowledged as a key factor in achieving environmental literacy, defined as "the capacity to perceive and interpret the relative health of environmental systems and take appropriate action to maintain, restore, or improve the health of those systems" (Roth 1992: 8). In turn, environmental education encourages young and adult individuals to improve their knowledge, commitment and skills towards environmentally responsible behaviours (Goldman, Pe'er and Yavetz 2017: 2). Given the present and future ambition of the EU to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, the European Green Deal should encourage meaningful and inclusive participation of its young population.

According to the United Nations, young people are always more active agents of change and have demonstrated a high sensitivity towards environmental protection, also as a matter of social justice (United Nations 2013; Sarno 2021; Sze and London 2008; London 2007; Driskell 2002; Chawla et al. 2005). In analysing the types of young people's engagement in the field of the environment, as highlighted above, studies identified that some young groups work directly to address climate change through green individual behaviours and informal community-based activities, such as advocacy events, educational programmes, sustainability campaigns, boycotting and "buycotting" food and clothes. Others join voluntary global organisations, such as 350.org, Friends of the Earth and Climate Youth (Hayward and Selboe 2014; O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward 2018) or collaborate with local authorities through state-led green programmes (such as national civil services, solidarity corps, etc.). Many students who are committed to environmental and climate matters rely on elections in student councils or other educational institutions, while still others are politically engaged at local or international level to shift the political debate towards sustainable development, environmental protection and ecological rights (O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward 2018; Partridge 2008; United Nations 2013; Fisher 2016).

Additionally, there is also increasing acceptance that there is a "growing momentum" for youth engagement in climate-related debates (Sarno 2021). Remarkably, during the UN Climate Change Conference held in 2019 (COP25), UNESCO launched the "Youth UNESCO climate action network" (YoU-CAN) with the aim of leveraging youth-led climate action by supporting young people and existing youth networks, and by reinforcing their networks. Youth NGOs have definitely paved their way with regard to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); in this context, they annually organise the Conference of Youth before each COP conference

to encourage hundreds of young environmental activists from all over the world to strengthen their role and commitments, prepare position papers, advocate youth interests in climate policy and give voice to their priorities prior to the Climate Change Conference. In September 2021, the Milan pre-COP26 summit hosted the "Youth4Climate: driving ambition" event that gathered around 400 young people from 197 countries to develop concrete proposals to counter climate change and discuss them with participating ministers.

Last but not least, and most importantly for the purposes of this work, youth NGOs recently started to bring environmental cases before national and supranational courts. Emblematically, in 2018 the Colombian Supreme Court recognised the legal rights of the Amazon rainforest thanks to the legal activism of 25 children and young people, aged from 7 to 26, who sued the Colombian Government for violating the constitutional right to a healthy environment and neglecting its obligations towards tackling climate change under the 2015 Paris Agreement (Supreme Court of Justice of Colombia 2018).

Other landmark law cases concern the Greenpeace Nordic Association and Nature and Youth (also known as Young Friends of the Earth Norway) – an NGO with around 7 600 members under the age of 25 – which brought a case before the Supreme Court of Norway (Supreme Court of Norway 2016), alleging the failure to adequately protect human rights against the implications of climate change, contrary to the right to a healthy environment, to life and to a private and family life enshrined in the Norwegian Constitution. What is more, six Portuguese children and young adults between the age of 8 and 21 issued an application against 33 members of the Council of Europe (27 EU member states, plus the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Norway, Turkey, Russia and Ukraine) owing to the continuous and worsening impacts of climate change on the enjoyment of their human rights presently and in the future (Clark, Liston and Kalpouzos 2020; Pyrkowski 2020), which is currently pending before the European Court of Human Rights. Most recently, in 2021, environmental groups, including Fridays For Future and Greenpeace, achieved a groundbreaking result when the German Constitutional Court declared German climate law to be partially unconstitutional, as it did not respect the civil liberties and fundamental rights of future generations (German Federal Constitutional Court 2021).

Several young environmental activists rely on networks of civil society organisations and lawyers to bring their claim before judicial authorities. Some of these – such as Greenpeace, The Law Society Gazette, National Lawyers Guild, ClientEarth – provide legal experts offering legal advice, representation and assistance, and help with funding to cover legal costs. These cases clearly demonstrate the ongoing empowerment of young people as active political agents as well as human and environmental rights defenders.

Another element that, regrettably, confirms the increasing role of young people in environmental matters is the rising number of threats and acts of violence against, and murders of, young environmental activists (Rueda 2021). According to Human Rights Watch, a number of member states of both the EU and the Council of Europe are looking at young environmental activists with suspicion, to the extent that some have been included in the list of people suspected of terrorism.

For example, during different COPs, Poland and France activated emergency counter-terrorism measures, including arrests of some environmental activists (Tayler and Schulte 2019). Remarkably, killings of environmental defenders have doubled over the past 15 years to reach levels usually associated with war zones. At least 1 558 people in 50 states were killed between 2002 and 2017 while trying to protect their ecosystem (Butt et al. 2019). Protecting human rights and fully ensuring the physical integrity of young people's environmental activism is therefore of paramount importance. In this regard, the Aarhus Convention plays an essential role.

Young people's engagement through the Aarhus Convention

The Aarhus Convention is a landmark international agreement focusing on environmental protection, which: enables young and adult citizens and environmental NGOs to access environmental information (first pillar); fosters public participation in environmental decision making (second pillar); and recognises that these enhance the quality and the implementation of decisions, contribute to public awareness of environmental issues and give the public the opportunity to express its concerns through access to justice (third pillar). The convention has, therefore, the ultimate intergenerational aim of protecting and improving the environment for the welfare and well-being of present and future generations. As noted, it is not a mere administrative environmental arrangement, rather the expression of "a human right to the environment in its most solemn form" (Jääskinen 2014: 89).

These three pillars correspond to human rights, as outlined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and, specifically in the environmental context, in Principle 1 of the Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment (United Nations 1972a) and Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (United Nations 1972b) . In this regard, it is particularly noteworthy to recall Principle 21 of the latter declaration, which acknowledges that "the creativity, ideals and courage of the youth of the world should be mobilized to forge a global partnership in order to achieve sustainable development and ensure a better future for all". They are also reaffirmed in the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (the "Escazú Agreement") (ECLAC 2018). Moreover, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is also based upon these rights. In fact, it is based on a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, meaning that all agents of policy making, at the vertical and horizontal level, and all parts of society, shall be proactively included in the promotion of sustainable development. In the 2030 Agenda, the international community stresses the importance of providing propitious conditions for the full realisation of the rights and capabilities of young people, with a specific focus on fostering education and employment opportunities, as also reiterated in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education. Specifically, SDG 16.7 calls on governments to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making at all levels, while SDGs 16.10 and 12.8 call for public access to information. Most importantly for the purposes of this analysis, climate change is at the core of SDG 13, which specifically points out the need to promote mechanisms to raise capacity for effective climate change-related planning and

management, particularly for least developed countries and small island developing states, including a strong focus on youth. With the dual aim of supporting governments and public authorities in promoting transparency and effective public participation, and guiding environmental NGOs, specific guidelines on existing good practices have been developed under the convention, namely the Maastricht Recommendations on promoting effective public participation in decision making in environmental matters (UNECE 2015). Finally, the 2002 Lucca Declaration (UNECE 2002), adopted by ministers and heads of delegations at the first meeting of the parties to the Aarhus Convention, emblematically affirmed that the three pillars of the Aarhus Convention are essential elements of good governance and sustainability, as well as fundamental for the functioning of modern democracies that are responsive to the needs of the public and respectful of human rights and the rule of law.

To adequately empower young people, and enable them to exercise their human rights connected with the environment, EU institutions at the supranational level and member states at the domestic level should provide them with the highest level of awareness, not only through environmental and climate change education, but also education on their procedural rights to access and obtain information on environmental matters. In this regard, the convention obliges all states parties to explain to the public the theoretical and practical steps envisaged at national level to obtain access to information, participate in decision making and obtain access to justice in environmental matters. To this end, effective environmental education is also envisaged under the convention, to ensure that young and adult members of the public have the necessary level of understanding to address climate change both as individuals and as collective entities.

More specifically, in its preamble, the convention recognises that every person has the right to live in an environment adequate to their health and well-being (also referred to in Article 1), and the duty, both individually and in association with others, to protect and improve the environment for the benefit of present and future generations. To this end, each party shall guarantee the right to access to information, to participation in decision making and to access to justice in environmental matters, to the public – namely natural or legal persons, associations, organisations or groups affected or likely to be affected by, or having an interest in, environmental decision making, including NGOs promoting environmental protection and meeting any requirements under national law (Article 2, paragraphs 4 and 5). The three pillars of the convention are explained in greater detail below.

Access to environmental information

Pursuant to Article 2.3, environmental information means any information on:

a) The state of elements of the environment, such as air and atmosphere, water, soil, land, landscape and natural sites, biological diversity and its components, including genetically modified organisms, and the interaction among these elements; (b) Factors, such as substances, energy, noise and radiation, and activities or measures, including administrative measures, environmental agreements, policies, legislation, plans and programmes, affecting or likely to affect the elements of the environment within the scope of subparagraph (a) above, and cost-benefit and other economic analyses and

assumptions used in environmental decision-making; (c) The state of human health and safety, conditions of human life, cultural sites and built structures, inasmuch as they are or may be affected by the state of the elements of the environment or, through these elements, by the factors, activities or measures referred to in subparagraph (b) above. (Aarhus Convention, Article 2.3).

A particularly relevant provision for young environmental activists concerns Article 3.9, which states that the public shall exercise the rights enshrined in the convention "without discrimination as to citizenship, nationality or domicile and, in the case of a legal person, without discrimination as to where it has its registered seat or an effective centre of its activities". Therefore, refusal by a public authority to deliver requested environmental information cannot be based on the ground of nationality or citizenship of the applicant or the organisation they are involved in. Moreover, when the state receives a request to access environmental information, this should be delivered within one month, and in any case not exceeding a period of two months after the request has been submitted. In case the information requested cannot be delivered on one or more grounds for refusal under Article 4.3, reasons should be submitted in writing within the same time frame.

Therefore, access to information is a crucial right upon which the right to participation and access to justice depend. The implementation of this right passes not only through institutional channels but also though alternative ways of communication such as newspapers, mass media (TV and radio) or websites. Social media communication may prove a particularly effective way not only for public authorities to engage with young people, but also for young activists to spread news among their peers, keep themselves updated, organise social media campaigns and have facilitated access to relevant environmental information.

At the EU level, the first pillar of the Aarhus Convention is endorsed through Directive 2003/4/EC (European Parliament and Council 2003), which provides for a wider application of the right to access information. For example, the directive provides for the right to access information held not only by public authorities but also by others for such authorities (Lavrysen 2010: 659). It also contains an exhaustive list of all cases where member states may refuse a request for information. While member states are not allowed to add further exceptions to that list, they are not requested to transpose all the items of the list into their national law, thus leaving them the possibility to grant even wider access to information at national level than those provided under EU law. Similarly, Article 7 of the Directive (Dissemination of environmental information) provides for higher standards than those required under the convention. In fact, to the categories of information to be disseminated it adds: the text of international and EU treaties on or relating to the environment; progress reports on the implementation of those treaties or policies, plans and programmes relating to the environment; data or summaries of data derived from the monitoring of activities affecting, or likely to affect, the environment; authorisations with a significant impact on the environment as well as environmental agreements; and, finally, environmental impact studies and risk assessments concerning the environment. For its part, Regulation (EC) No. 1367/2006/EC (European Parliament and Council 2006) – the "Aarhus Regulation" – provides further details on access to information held by EU institutions and bodies.

Public participation in environmental decision making

Articles 6-8 constitute the second pillar of the Aarhus Convention. These provisions cover a broad range of policy and regulatory activities related to the environment proposed by public authorities. In particular, public participation in specific environmentally related activities include all those activities listed in annex I (pertaining to, *inter alia*, the energy sector, mineral and chemical industry and waste management) as well as to activities not listed therein, which nevertheless may have a significant effect on the environment. On a case-by-case basis, states parties may decide not to apply this provision if the activities at stake serve national defence purposes. States should ensure timely and effective notification to the public concerned, and reasonable time frames for participation in related decision-making process, which shall take into account the outcome of the public participation. Pursuant to Article 7, each state party shall make appropriate practical and/or other provisions for the public to participate during the preparation of plans and programmes, as well as policies, relating to the environment. It has been argued that this provision, given its breadth, could be applied also to plans and programmes prepared for all those sectors having a significant impact on the environment, such as transport, energy or tourism (Lavrysen 2010: 661). Finally, Article 8 covers public participation in relation to regulations and other legally binding arrangements related to the environment. The EU transposed these provisions into a number of secondary legislation instruments concerning water policy (Directive 2000/60/EC), consultations with the public in environmental plans and programmes (Directive 2001/42/EC) and in the already mentioned Aarhus Regulation.

Access to justice

The third pillar of the Aarhus Convention is outlined in Article 9, which aims to enforce the convention's standards on access to information and public participation, as well as the provisions of domestic environmental law. Access to justice in environmental matters means allowing members of the public, namely young and adult individuals and NGOs with an environmental mandate, to have access to legal review procedures concerning requests for environmental information (Article 9.1). Article 9.2 covers environmental plans, administrative acts and programmes, environmental policies, environmental impact assessments, industrial permits and environmental liability (Lavrysen 2010: 664). Finally, Article 9.3 requires access to review procedures for decisions, acts and omissions related to the environment undertaken by private persons and public authorities at the international, EU or national levels.

In particular, it provides for an obligation to ensure that any person who considers that their request for information under Article 4 (access to environmental information) has been ignored, wrongfully refused, whether in part or in full, inadequately answered, or otherwise not dealt with in accordance with the provisions of that article, has access to a review procedure before a court of law or another independent and impartial body established by law.

When it comes to the subject of to whom access to justice is provided and under which conditions, there are two considerations to be made. Firstly, according to

Article 9.2, the right to access to justice shall be granted to members of the public concerned who have a sufficient interest or, alternatively, who maintain an impairment of a right where national law requires this to be a condition, always keeping in mind the objective of the convention. To this end, the article continues, the interest of any environmental NGO meeting those requirements shall be deemed sufficient for the purpose. Secondly, being aware of the high costs of review procedures, Article 9.2 also provides for access to a preliminary administrative review procedure before turning to a court, which is free of charge or inexpensive. This seeks to fully implement the convention's rights, while preventing them from being prohibitively expensive. The possibility to access a body other than a court in the first place does not, however, replace the right to appeal before a judicial authority (United Nations 2000: 130). For access to review of the acts covered by Article 9.3, the convention provides for both administrative and judicial review procedures. These provisions are of paramount importance, especially in the case of youth environmental NGOs that do not receive public funds or private sponsorship but nevertheless claim that their interest has been ignored or neglected.

Finally, the fourth and fifth paragraphs of Article 9 outline the general minimum standards that must uniformly characterise access to justice. Pursuant to this provision, review procedures must have adequate and effective remedies, including injunctive relief as appropriate. They shall be fair, equitable, timely, not prohibitively expensive, while decisions should be given in writing and be publicly accessible.

Under current EU legal practice, environmental NGOs are able to file a request for internal review under Article 10 of the Aarhus Regulation. This provision aims at facilitating access to justice to those NGOs that would not have direct access to the CJEU pursuant to Article 263.4 of the TFEU (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union), which allows judicial review for acts of direct and individual concern to individuals and NGOs, as well as for regulatory acts which do not entail implementing measures. In other words, those NGOs unable to challenge an EU act directly before the Luxemburg Court can nevertheless directly challenge the implementing measures which the act may entail at national level. Moreover, individuals and environmental NGOs may pursue the annulment of a national measure alleged to run counter to EU environmental law, by asking the national court to file a preliminary ruling before the CJEU, under Article 267 of the TFEU.

Environmental activism during the Covid-19 pandemic

At the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee was concerned that states parties might have been tempted to introduce and justify restrictions on the rights guaranteed under the convention by making reference to the national and worldwide health and economic crisis (Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee 2020). To guard against this possibility, the committee recalled that even in the case of a crisis, such as that of Covid-19, the rights under the convention were still binding upon all states parties, and that their promotion, protection and application could not be reduced or curtailed. All measures undertaken to stop the proliferation of the pandemic that, directly or indirectly, restricted the right of access to information, to public participation and to access to justice

in environmental matters "should adhere to international commitments, be limited to narrow circumstances, such as the duration of the lockdown, be proportionate to the pandemic situation and non-discriminatory and by no means put the rights themselves in jeopardy" (ibid.: 4). Rather, the ways and means through which rights were implemented could vary – for example, preferring the issuance of requested environmental information in an electronic format rather than in hard copy. The committee stressed also that, even during a global health and economic crisis, in light of the non-discrimination and non-penalisation principles, persons exercising their rights under the convention must not be penalised, persecuted or harassed for their involvement. At the same time, special arrangements would perhaps need to be put in place to ensure that foreign members of the public had access to the convention's rights without discrimination as to citizenship, nationality or domicile, especially in cases that may have transboundary impacts. The committee concluded its report by reminding states parties that any shortcoming in ensuring effective access to information, public participation in decision making or access to justice during the health and economic crisis, as well as effective access to communications, submissions and referrals to the committee itself, could be challenged by members of the public in accordance with Article 9 of the convention. This interpretation is consistent with relevant CJEU case law. For instance, in the 2008 *Dieter Janecek v. Freistaat Bayern* case, the court considered that legal and natural persons can invoke EU environmental law that aims to safeguard human health (CJEU 2008).

With the benefit of hindsight, the committee was right to express its concerns. Indeed, what immediately followed the spread of the virus was a proliferation of national declarations of state of emergency, as well as restrictions to a great number of human rights and fundamental freedoms, from the freedom of movement to the right to assembly. Beyond the confusion and the unpredictability of the pandemic, these human rights limitations also resulted in constraints to the rights protected under the convention, which cannot be reduced or curtailed, as recalled by the committee, but whose application is extremely timely and relevant during a health crisis. Indeed, and as we have seen in the previous sections, the ultimate aim of the Aarhus Convention is to protect the right to live in an environment adequate to everybody's health and well-being. To this end, its Article 2.3(c) provides for effective public access to information related to the state of human health and safety inasmuch as they are or may be affected by the state of the elements of the environment or, through these elements, by the factors, activities or measures affecting or likely to affect the environment. Therefore, the convention is a suitable instrument through which information about the origins of pandemics and their impacts on biodiversity, ecosystems and human health could be requested to competent authorities. Article 5.1(c) endorses this assumption and goes even further, by maintaining that: "In the event of any imminent threat to human health or the environment, whether caused by human activities or due to natural causes, all information which could enable the public to take measures to prevent or mitigate harm arising from the threat and is held by a public authority is disseminated immediately and without delay to members of the public who may be affected." Young and adult members of the public, on an individual or collective basis, are therefore entitled to request information related to the ongoing pandemic, pursuant to the Aarhus Convention.

The same requirements are applicable at EU level, as outlined precisely in the Aarhus Regulation, and in Decisions No. 2119/98/EC and No. 1786/2002/EC.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, applications against the violation or unlawful limitation of the convention's rights have been lodged worldwide (UNECE 2020). As also recalled by UNECE, a number of New Zealand's environmental organisations have alleged that their government was using Covid-19 as an excuse to centralise the decision making of local resource management projects, thus overriding public participation in the consultation process (Voxy 2020). Among their requests, they have called on the government to sign up to the Aarhus Convention. In addition, 10 Maltese environmental NGOs have condemned the decision to extend development permits valid until 2022 for another three years, arguing that the legal notice was not preceded by the required public consultation, that the competent authority's invitation to public hearings electronically was discriminatory since it excluded persons without access to electronic means of communication, and that the global pandemic was used as an excuse to facilitate the construction industry, which was struggling with the economic crisis caused by Covid-19 (Calleja 2020). Moreover, three NGOs have asked the Slovenian Constitutional Court to examine the legitimacy of building permits introduced as part of the emergency measures to counteract the economic crisis following the Covid-19 pandemic which, according to them, prevent NGOs participating in the consultation process, thus breaching the Slovenian Constitution, EU law and the Aarhus Convention (UNECE 2020). Finally, a Ukrainian NGO denounced the proposed changes to the national law on environmental impact assessment during the peak of the health crisis, claiming that they limited public discussion of the planned activities exclusively to written comments and suggestions, excluding the possibility of public hearings during the lockdown period (ibid.).

Conclusions

The committee issued two reports on the status of the Aarhus Convention at the EU level, in 2011 and 2017, respectively. In both cases, as also reiterated by an external study published in October 2019 for the European Commission (Milieu Consulting SPRL 2019), it found that EU institutions failed to comply with Article 9.3 and 9.4 of the Aarhus Convention concerning the access to justice by members of the public because neither the Aarhus Regulation nor the case law of the CJEU granted adequate access to justice in environmental matters to NGOs, especially with regard to administrative and judicial review of non-legislative environmental acts adopted by EU institutions or bodies that are legally binding or have an external effect. In its January 2020 resolution on the European Green Deal, the European Parliament supported the committee's findings, stressing that guaranteeing public participation and access to justice is essential to compliance with fundamental rights and to promotion of the implementation of the Green Deal, therefore calling on the Commission to ensure EU observance of its international obligations (European Parliament 2020b).

In response to these criticisms, the European Commission contextually published a proposal to amend the Aarhus Regulation and a communication, where it recognises that: "The public is and should remain a driving force of the green transition and

should have the means to get more actively involved in developing and implementing new policies." (European Commission 2020b: 1). In its previous communication setting out the European Green Deal, the Commission already stressed the role and importance of public participation, affirming that both wide and consistent public engagement in the promotion and implementation of pieces of environmental policies and legislation, as well as adequate enforcement of EU environmental law, are essential for the transition to succeed and for it to be fair and inclusive (European Commission 2019a: 2). The delivery of the Green Deal, therefore, is significantly tied to the delivery of the Aarhus Convention at EU level.

In its proposal to amend the Aarhus Regulation, the Commission suggested, first, expanding the definition of administrative acts so to include both acts of individual scope, that directly or individually address natural or legal persons, and those acts of general scope, in line with most environmental acts adopted by EU institutions. Secondly, it proposed extending the administrative review procedure under Article 2.1(g) not only to acts adopted under environmental law, as it currently stands, but also to all those administrative acts that contravene EU environmental law, irrespective of their policy objective. Finally, it proposed to extend the time frames for requests by environmental NGOs (from six to eight weeks) and replies by the Commission (from 12 to 16 weeks), in order to improve the quality of the administrative review process.

Although relevant, it has been noted that the Commission's proposal still leaves some of the shortcomings highlighted by the committee unresolved (Hadjiyianni 2020). Among other points, members of the public beyond entitled environmental NGOs are still excluded from access to administrative review procedures; this is something that may particularly affect young people who do not belong to formal organisations. The Commission partially justified this omission by the fact that the convention provides for privileged access to justice for NGOs, compared with individuals, given their structured and higher professional position. Moreover, according to the Commission, this provision would not be observed if individuals were granted access to both judicial and administrative review procedures, something that the convention does not require.

Although it is certainly true that Article 9.3 of the Aarhus Convention does not literally expect the EU and its member states to allow for both administrative and judicial review, it does not prevent them from doing so (Lanceiro 2011; Scissa 2021b). Additionally, it is widely accepted that states parties may introduce measures providing for higher standards of rights' protection than those set therein, as Article 3.5 of the convention coherently states. It is also important to stress that having the mere possibility of requesting the national court to send a preliminary reference to the CJEU does not mean that domestic judges automatically do so. What is more, such a procedure not only appears to be extremely expensive, but might also take years and – especially in the context of environmental and climate issues – time is often of the essence in order to avoid wrongdoing.

Remarkably, these shortcomings were confirmed once again by the committee in early January 2021 (Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee 2021). While welcoming the significant positive developments advanced in the proposal, the

committee still finds some loopholes. Among others, it reiterates the need for the EU to ensure access to review procedures not only to NGOs but also to other members of the public. Most importantly, it restates that there is no legal basis in the Aarhus Convention to limit the scope of review to acts with "binding" legal effects.

It seems therefore that further improvements are needed for the EU to perfectly align itself with the convention's requirements. Moreover, the broader amendments suggested by the Compliance Committee would integrate the actions envisaged by the Green Deal concerning public involvement. Although it is undoubtedly true that all institutions should engage with EU civil society to deliver the Green Deal, the ambition of a climate-neutral EU cannot possibly be achieved without the constant and comprehensive involvement of all EU citizens – both young and adult – as well as single individuals and public and private organisations, in all phases of the Green Deal, from its inception to its implementation and monitoring. As the Commission acknowledged: "The public is and should remain a driving force of the transition and should have the means to get actively involved in developing and implementing new policies." (European Commission 2020: 1). For example, the European Climate Pact (COM(2020) 788 final) endorses the proactive participation of the public in climate actions, which are however limited to information sharing, inspiration and creativity, leaving aside public engagement through consultation in policy-making processes and through administrative and judicial review (Scissa 2021b).

In a nutshell, for the EU to fully comply with its obligations under the Aarhus Convention, and to widely promote environmental protection, it should take into due consideration the social and political role of young people advocating in environmental matters and acknowledge their importance by protecting and promoting their rights.

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System change not climate change! How can we transform systems together?

Nora Marion Wilhelm

Environmental destruction, rising social inequality, global pandemics – the challenges that humanity is facing are severe. Our systems and the effects they generate are threatening the very survival of our species on this planet. It is high time we recognised that old methods will not suffice to address these challenges. But if our tried and tested tools have not been able to address global challenges at the pace and scale needed to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and for example limit global warming to 1.5°C, how do we reverse the effects of climate change? We urgently need to not only look at the symptoms but address the root causes. There are promising systemic approaches, often driven by the younger generation. Many young people are disillusioned by the way today's decision makers are handling the global crisis. Activists of the Fridays For Future movement march with placards reading "system change not climate change". But what actually does system change entail? And how can we bring it about?

System change can be defined as a change in how a system operates (Hassan 2014), for example affecting the "rules, roles, relationships or resources" that govern it (USAID 2016). This means a change in the law, for example declaring gender equity, enabling people to marry regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation, or implementing a CO_2 tax law. A change in the law is, however, not sufficient in itself. For example, the Swiss Constitution has long contained an article on gender equity, yet we are still far from having achieved it. Switzerland ranks the fourth worst-performing OECD country on *The Economist*'s glass ceiling index, which measures gender equity in the workplace (*The Economist* 2020), because other systemic barriers such as taxation, lack of affordable childcare, wage inequality and conservative gender stereotypes remain in place. To give a different example, a system may also be changed if crucial relationships are built (such as those between the elites with decision-making power and the beneficiaries of a certain programme) or the roles shift (such as former beneficiaries – say, refugees or young people – being mandated by governing bodies to co-decide on programmes addressing their needs). A systems theory lens helps us analyse the interconnections of different elements within a given system – be it micro, macro or in-between – and explore the ways in which it changes, or could change.

The most powerful kind of system change is a shift in the "institutional logics, norms and traditions" (Nicholls and Murdock 2012) or, in other words, the paradigms upon which a system is based (Meadows 2008; Scharmer 2018). For example, given the speed of climate change, it is clear by now that the linear paradigm our entire economy is built on cannot be sustained. As the only species to create waste that nature cannot reabsorb and repurpose, we have at last witnessed the concept of circular economy gain traction over recent years. This shift from a linear to a circular paradigm has profound implications for not only the economy but also the functioning of our societies, and even our way of thinking.

Assuming that there is general agreement that change is needed, the pressing question is: how can we bring about systems change? Many of today's challenges require new forms of collaboration and a new, holistic way of thinking to address their root causes. In short, we need to leverage cross-sector collaborations to collectively address root causes. No single actor, organisation or sector can address these challenges alone. Representatives of all parts of the system need to come together to find solutions. This work needs to be based on a systems approach in order to address root causes instead of fighting the symptoms. A key ingredient is to move away from applying "band-aid" policies. For example, when it comes to ocean plastic, a typical rhetoric is: "Let's get the plastic out of the ocean!" We then celebrate people who create ocean or beach clean-ups and make yoga pants or other products out of the plastic that they collected. While this is important work, based on good intentions, we need to talk about how to prevent plastic from getting into the ocean in the first place, and addressing this issue on a systemic level. Important work like this motivates fewer people, as it is less visible, more complex and less rewarded by society. If we want to see significant change, we will have to shift our focus, energy and funding from where it currently is – almost exclusively on symptoms – to the root causes. There are amazing young people investing all their energy and passion to find new ways of reducing waste significantly.

Additionally, we need to experiment to find solutions rather than draft linear plans. A key feature of systems is that they cannot be controlled, nor can we ever understand them fully. The best we can do, as we work together across sectors, is to find leverage points for change. Then, we co-create what we call "prototypes": small experiments of possible solutions to understand and evaluate if they will make an impact or not. Making room for failure is critical in this process. When faced with complexity, after much observation and reflection on the systems dynamics, we must probe and see how the system responds. Then we can react by adapting our prototype or scaling it up. Linear planning in silos (focused on the symptoms) does not help us address the root causes, and in order to solve the problem, it is time for us to try something else.

These insights led me to co-found Collaboratio Helvetica with a group of fairly young like-minded people in early 2017. After years of working on youth participation and active citizenship, trying to engage young people in different institutions and systems, I recognised that while this is valuable work, the most important thing is to work to change the systems themselves. Collaboratio Helvetica is an initiative that catalyses systemic change towards the societal transformation of Switzerland. We cultivate a cross-sectoral innovation ecosystem, run different capacity-building programmes and enable others with our knowledge and resources. With our partners, we convene

actors from all sectors in "social innovation laboratories" around the complex challenges contained in the 2030 Agenda to co-create solutions. In addition to contributing to the transformation of our country, we are part of a global movement and a laboratory that can inspire and support other social innovators across the globe.

In order to build a better world together, we do not need leaders to "listen" to young people or to "include" us (which usually means mere consultation, without following up with action).

Young people are constantly facing the bias of being young, and this is especially the case for young women, people of colour and people of different body types and abilities.

We also do not have time for the young people of today to work their way up to positions of power in the current systems – it is the responsibility of the power holders today to act.

For those that have decision-making powers, listening and co-creating not only with young people but people who are radically different is a crucial first step towards systems change, in order to ensure a more just and sustainable world. It is up to leaders – and not only young people and change makers – to challenge the status quo. And if they need inspiration on how to do it, they just need to ask young people.

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Pluralising the democratic imaginary: youth beyond the liberal-democratic canon

Sérgio Miguel Seno da Silva Xavier[3]

"[Young people] call for a radical change in thinking and practices."

White Paper on Youth, European Commission (2001)

Introduction

This chapter mostly results from a cross-disciplinary literature review and attempts to strengthen the understanding of the "democratic imaginary" of young people. It explores how liberal democracy curtails democratic pluralism, hence limiting the emergence of alternative democratic possibilities.

The chapter begins by looking at the historical formation and present validity of the hegemonised liberal democracy, starting from the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Secondly, the concept of "democratic imaginary" is defined, articulating notions from different disciplines, such as philosophy, psychology, sociology and literature. Thirdly, the chapter looks at the White Paper on Youth (European Union 2001a) after 20 years of its implementation, focusing in particular on two areas: the problematisation of the youth policy affiliation with the liberal-democratic canon, and the building of a critique of the youth triangulation models of consortium. At the end, some conclusions are drawn, arising from the main problems addressed.

Many of the authors reviewed – such as Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, Chantal Mouffe or Boaventura Sousa Santos – fall outside the area of youth studies, exploring the broader fields of sociology, philosophy or political theory. The conclusions in the last section take inspiration from the empirical experience of the author on the ground,[4] within and beyond the scope of analysis of this chapter.

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3. This chapter was written following – and including arguments defended in – the talk "Unlearning European youth work and disengaging the XXI century liberal democracy dystopia" during the event Offenburg Talks#3 in November 2020.
4. The author has more than 10 years' experience as a youth worker, involved in training, consultation processes and youth policy advising.

Is liberal democracy the end of history?

On the evening of 9 November 1989, hundreds of thousands of Berliners gathered at the six checkpoints of the wall dividing West and East Berlin. After 28 years of division and massive protests, they were finally granted the right to freely circulate between the eastern and western parts of the city. "We are the people!"[5] was the chant echoing in the streets. It was a clear statement against the Soviet political regime, and a clear demand for a democratic new order. The popular will for freedom was somewhat awkwardly celebrated weeks later on New Year's Eve, when the American actor David Hasselhoff – internationally known for his lead role in the television series "Knight Rider"[6] – sang his biggest hit "looking for freedom" live on television, from the heart of the falling wall, surrounded by the crowd.

The fall of the Berlin Wall was the catalysing event for many historical narratives and subsequent transformations. It symbolised the end of the Iron Curtain, the end of the Cold War, the "end of the Soviet Union", the "end of the world division between the East and the West". For Francis Fukuyama[7] it meant the consecration of an old Hegelian prophecy[8] – the "end of history", "the end-point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (Fukuyama 1989: 4).

Along with the "endings", the fall of the Berlin Wall also precipitated some beginnings. It marked the final achievement of a 300-year-old project, which the broad Enlightenment intellectual elite[9] fantasised about – a generalised order where the values of rationalism, universalism, individual rights and freedoms could thrive in compatibility (Williams 2018) with the ongoing colonial empires of the time. That is one of the reasons why, to fully understand the story of the Berlin Wall, some knowledge of liberal democracy history is invaluable.

From the 18th century onwards, liberal thinkers[10] followed up the Enlightenment project by articulating it with a much older idea of sociopolitical organisation – the Athenian tradition of democracy. Raised from an imperialistic background – apparently in compatibility[11] with Napoleon's bloody Revolutionary Wars in the 19th century – liberalism guided the most foundational democratisation process

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5. "Wir sind das Volk!" in German.
6. David Hasselhoff performed the leading role as Michael Knight on the American series Knight Rider (1982-86), where – together with *KITT*, his modern, indestructible and artificially intelligent car – he was fighting criminals in a crusade bringing the "dangerous world" to justice.
7. Francis Fukuyama is regarded as a neoconservative, and beyond his academic activity, he was influential to different governments, such as the Reagan administration in the United States and Muammar Gaddafi in Libya.
8. Hegel epitomised the idea of the western centrality of history. The "West", as the ultimately developed civilisation, was set the mission of "civilising" the non-Western world.
9. Such as Descartes' rational existentialism, Kant's universalist moralism or Rousseau's govern-centred absolutism.
10. Such as Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, Alexis de Tocqueville or John Stuart Mill.
11. The Napoleonic Code was adopted in 1804 and remains in force as the official French Civil Code, after continuous amendment. It was strongly influential in the development of legislation in many states formed after the Napoleonic Wars, within and beyond Europe.

in the world, triggering countless revolutions,[12] three "waves of democracy"[13] (Huntington 1991) and a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, establishing the definite plateau for modernity, universal suffrage and universal access to education. The liberal-democratic revolutionary project has grown over three centuries, from deed to deed, encountering its definitive installation when the Berlin Wall collapsed, taking with it the main adversary ideology – Soviet communism.

The global, imperialistic competition for power in the world order came to a halt and a new hegemony arose. The liberal democracy model – or "democracy" as rendered in the popular and political discourse – gained a "Western victory over despotism" (Sayyid 2014: 74) narrative, the status of the supreme and final solution for freedom and equality for humankind. The "West" overpowered its central position towards all "the rest" (Dussen 2016) – until the present day. Regardless of the paradoxical nature of the articulation between liberalism and democratic traditions (Mouffe 2000), a new beginning has come after Berlin. At Fukuyama's "end of history", liberal democracy was set to totalise the whole civilisational success, under a hegemonic, infinite and unchallenged canon.

Jacques Derrida (1994) perfectly expresses how and why the vision taken in this chapter diverges from the one of Fukuyama:

> For it must be cried out, at a time when some have the audacity to neo-evangelize in the name of the ideal of a liberal democracy that has finally realized itself as the ideal of human history: never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic oppression affected as many human beings in the history of the earth and of humanity. Instead of singing the advent of the ideal of liberal democracy and of the capitalist market in the euphoria of the end of history, instead of celebrating the "end of ideologies" and the end of the great emancipatory discourses, let us never neglect this obvious, macroscopic fact, made up of innumerable, singular sites of suffering: no degree of progress allows one to ignore that never before, in absolute figures, have so many men, women and children been subjugated, starved or exterminated on the earth. (p. 9)

Now, some time has passed since Hasselhoff's cathartic performance at the Berlin Wall. Some centuries have endured Western imperial colonialism (Mbembe 2001; Quijano 2007). Currently, strong concerns do exist about uncontested neoliberalism (Harvey 2005) and about the ever-growing socio-economic inequality (Oxfam 2016). The uninterruptible destruction of the planet is clearer than ever before (Salleh 2010). Now, global awareness of structural racism (Goldberg 2015) is flourishing,[14] while the European refugees' crisis is expected to increase (Maier 2021), after 10 years of

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12. The American Revolution (1775-83) paved the path for the French Revolution (1789-99), the liberal revolutions of Central and Latin America and the strongest revolutionary wave in Europe – the Revolutions of 1848, encompassing more than 50 countries.

13. According to Huntington, there were three major transitions form non-democratic to democratic regimes in history. The first one in the 19th century with the white male suffrage in the United States, the second after the Second World War and the third one in the 1970s, starting with the Carnation Revolution in Portugal.

14. A paradigmatic case is the "Black Lives Matter" movement, founded in 2013 in the United States, the scope of which broadened through countless global actions, particularly after George Floyd's murder by a Minneapolis police official in May 2020.

political impasse. Gender equality still needs to rely on enforcement through quota regimes (Butler 1990), and populism and extreme-right and authoritarian leadership is exploiting people's scepticism of democratic institutions (Pasquino 2008). Social media algorithms are influencing electoral outcomes (Lyon 2015) and the Covid-19 pandemic – yet another concern for human extinction – globally saturated the visuals of a verging dystopia.

Now, at the "end of history", is it possible to imagine other democratic possibilities? What is the possible role for young people in figuring out alternative democratic solutions for the unfulfilled promises of liberal democracies?

The "democratic imaginary" and the "radical take"

After Alice passes through the looking-glass (Carroll 1871), she finds that beyond the mere reflection of her house, there is a whole different world – an opposite world. She is granted to be a pawn in the chess game orienting world events. That is where she meets the White Queen, from whom Alice learns something about imagination:

> Alice laughed. "There's no use trying," she said: "one can't believe impossible things."

> "I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I have believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." (p. 59)

Carroll's metaphor helps to understand how challenging imagination can be. Even in the looking-glass world – a territory transcending reality where time runs backwards and talking eggs do exist – Alice finds it impossible to believe in "impossible things". On the other hand, Carroll also suggests that imagining the "impossible" was important for the White Queen in becoming a voice of maturity[15] and in occupying a powerful position within their world's chess board.

From a more scientific angle, cognitive psychology approaches imagination as the ability for "mental representation of things that are not currently seen or sensed" (Sternberg and Sternberg 2017). Interest has grown recently in studying an opposing neurological condition – the incapacity to visualise mental images, or "aphantasia" (Zeman, Dewa and Della Sala 2015).

The concept of imagination has been approached in social sciences in numerous ways and with different motivations. At least one fundamental distinction is important in these approaches. A Bordieuan approach, aligned with the notion of "habitus" (Bourdieu 1995), explains the phenomenon of "imaginary" as a consequence – reproduction – of the contingent social structure. For example, Charles Taylor (2003) defines "social imaginaries" as the "ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others … the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations". Others are more literal in their understanding of the concept, by defining it as a result of collective representations of reality (Castoriadis 1975) or even using the concept of "social reality" (Searle 1996) instead.

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15. As part of the very same dialogue, the White Queen claims to be more than 101 years old.

A different sociological approach is concerned with the leverage that "reality" has taken over "theory", making it "difficult for our theories to account for what's going on and ultimately being different from the reality that they supposedly theorise"[16] (Santos 2013: 26). By coining the "sociological imagination" Charles Wright Mills (1959) paved the way for other contemporary conceptualisations such as that of Anthony Giddens (2009: 6): "The sociological imagination requires us, above all, to 'think ourselves away' from the familiar routines of our daily lives in order to look at them anew." Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985:152) write on the importance of a radical take on contemporary social struggles: "There is therefore nothing inevitable or natural in the different struggles against power ... the struggle against subordination cannot be the result of the situation of subordination itself."

The ground taken in this essay relates more with this transformative pluralism, not necessarily relying on the universalist, rational consensus-based approaches, which are widely mainstreamed in deliberative democracies in general and in representative spaces in particular. For the purposes of this chapter, "democratic imaginary" can be defined as the ability to conceptualise, visualise and represent democratic possibilities beyond what the current democratic reality reproduces, generating a multiplicity of correlated alternative understandings and propositions. Similarly, the opposing notion of "social aphantasia" could be described as the reproduction of the normative and epistemic contingencies of the current social apparatus. In liberal-democratic contexts, the democratic imaginary refers to the inventory of alternatives to the liberal-democratic status quo, while social aphantasia forms the reproductive archive of the liberal-democratic reality, which is not necessarily democratic.

For the democratic imaginary to exist, and because it implies the plural exploration beyond the current democratic reality, the "radical take" mentioned by Laclau and Mouffe is required. A radical perspective over the current democratic status quo means to look beyond the dogma of the "end of history" and to re-theorise the possibilities of the future. Enlarging the inventory of democratic possibilities for the future might require more than the exercise of imagining what is realistic (Coussée 2014). It might require the Carrollian exercise of "imagining the impossible" – the radical idea that yet, better democracies are possible, beyond the hegemonised liberal model, against any proclaimed end of history.

The "Greta Thunberg Effect" (Sabherwal et al. 2021) shows how young people can occupy a singular creative position for the radical take, being able to involve the widest global community, if they find the rare conditions to do so. One of these conditions is the rejection of the prejudice against the "radical". Widespread documents (for example, European Union 2017) and intergovernmental initiatives (for example, Council of Europe 2015; Radicalisation Awareness Network 2017) which associate "radical" with "violent" – even in cases suggesting a careful approach (for example, García López and Pašić 2018) – deploy narratives that relegate radical thinking to borderline marginality or criminality.

While the global concerns with violent extremism may have solid grounds, the discursive association with the "radical" is largely debatable, raising questions such

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16. Free translation by the author.

as the extent to which preventive policies are "educating or controlling, (Mattsson, Hammarén and Odenbring 2016) or how far these policies are ways of "informal criminalization" (Onursal and Kirkpatrick 2021). In the youth sector, the prejudice against the "radical" configures one paradox. Young people are commonly regarded as the transformational hope for the present and future of a problematic world. However, their thinking is being capped in order to "prevent" world problems such as "radicalisation". Are young people really being given the conditions to transform anything?

This paradox leads to a remarkable contradiction. The common values of the youth sector,[17] such as "educative, empowering, participative, expressive, and inclusive" (Council of Europe 2017) fail to reach the radical, either by normative or moral reasons. The radical position requires, in fact, an extraordinary effort, risks and compromise: the effort of thinking beyond the solutions that an overwhelming part of population is triangulating[18] and reproducing; the risks of public ostracisation (Williamson 2006: 184); and the compromise of disengaging and abdicating from fundamental developmental and social-inclusive processes such as education, as it happens in Greta Thunberg's case.[19] As will be discussed in the next section, the failure of the youth sector to reach out and support young people committed to re-theorising the world forms an injustice of the European present, which hardly anyone can be proud of. The prejudice against the radical might be having consequences that transcend the liberal-democratic understanding, and might well be the source of perplexing embarrassment in times to come.

Two decades of the White Paper on Youth: 20 years of triangulated youth political participation

Perhaps the most influential document on mainstreaming political participation in the youth field – and in forming the idea of European "youth policy" (Williamson 2008: 11-12) – is the European Commission's 2001 White Paper on Youth, resulting itself from "an unprecedented consultation exercise" involving "young people from all kinds of backgrounds, youth organisations, the scientific community, policy-makers and public administrations" (European Union 2001a: 11). As a response to rising Euroscepticism[20] – and in line with the same year's European Commission White Paper on Governance (European Union 2001b) – the White Paper on Youth

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17. As defined by Yael Ohana (2020), "youth leaders, project carriers, youth organisations, ministries responsible for youth and civil servants responsible for youth policy, National Agencies, European institutions, multipliers, and youth activists associated with the institutional programmes, trainers and their representative associations or the pools they form and even young people themselves". (p. 12)
18. An analysis of youth triangulation is developed below.
19. In her most popular speech, Greta Thunberg says "I should be in school", referring to the school year she skipped in order to engage world leaders in the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2019.
20. In particular, the Irish 2001 referendum rejection of the EU Nice Treaty, originated in the EU a significant concern with Euroscepticism. This can be observed in various European policy initiatives of the time, such as the 2001 European Commission White Paper on Governance.

attempted to address the widening gap between young people and institutions, by "making young people stakeholders in our societies" (European Union 2001a: 4).

The White Paper on Youth has influenced countless policies in recent decades, both at national and international level. Nowadays, youth political participation in Europe – even the one considered to be most innovative (Crowley and Moxon 2017) – has consolidated triangulated models as a practice, featuring the involvement of public authorities in consultation/dialogue processes within public policies frameworks. Under the White Paper on Youth's narrative of "making young people stakeholders in our societies", the "magic triangle" was proposed to the youth sector (Chisholm 2006) together with a "structured dialogue" (European Union 2009), a "quadrilogue" (North-South Centre of the Council of Europe 2019), a "50-50" (Council of Europe 2018), all featuring public authorities as essential actors in the youth political participation processes.

In summary, the methodology of triangulation, characterised by bringing together different representatives of the youth sector for the conception of solutions in the name of young people,[21] gradually earned the status of lending pristine legitimacy to co-operation processes, where everyone is properly represented and, therefore, directly or indirectly, participating. Throughout the 20 years since the White Paper on Youth's publication, the triangulated models thrived, and have led to what can presently be described as a "crest of the wave" momentum for youth policy – and youth political participation – in Europe:

a. the EU renewed its Youth Strategy for 2019-27, resulting from – and promoting – structured dialogue, originating other triangulated instruments of "participatory governance" (European Union 2018: 6), such as the EU Youth Dialogue (European Union 2019) or the 11 European Youth Goals (Austrian National Youth Council 2018);

b. the Council of Europe launched its 2030 Youth Sector Strategy, after four years of a triangulated process, aiming to "engage young people with the Council of Europe's values" (Council of Europe 2020);

c. the new EU Erasmus+ programme[22] has recently launched its 2021-27 window, featuring a budget increase, a renewed Key Action 2 focused on "co-operation among organisations and institutions" and 30% budget allocation for its Key Action 3 supporting "policy development and co-operation" (EACEA 2021).

One could assume that the departing concerns for the White Paper on Youth – such as Euroscepticism – would show improvement after 20 years. Nevertheless, that does not seem to necessarily be the case. As Figure 1 shows, since 2001, distrust in the EU has increased (from 40% in 2001 to 48% in 2020), and the linear trend

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21. Including young people representing young people, as is often the case with European or national youth organisations.

22. Particularly since 2007, the Erasmus+ programme – named Youth in Action at the time – has been funding several political participation projects based in triangulation models, such as in the Youth Democracy Projects, Structured Dialogue processes and, after 2014, Support to Policy Development and Co-operation actions.

confirms this inclination. The weak EU electoral turnout,[23] the Brexit process[24] and the rising populism in Europe are concrete elements strongly adding up to this puzzling trend.
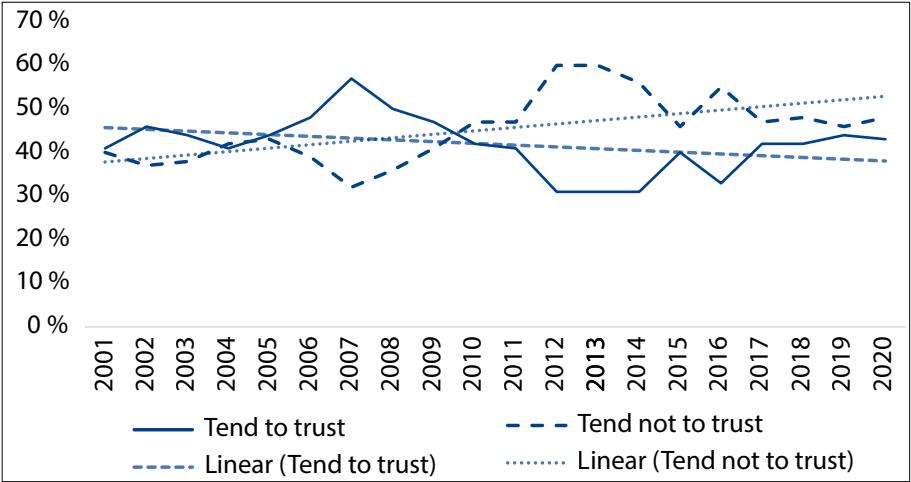

Figure 1. Trust in the EU, as recorded by the Standard Eurobarometer (Spring editions 2001-19, Summer edition 2020).

These facts may lead to many questions. Was not the idea of improved governance in Europe the pathway to avoid popular scepticism and to further engage people in the European project, from youth onwards? Are these 20 years part of an increasingly slow change in European democracies' deepest problems? Is there something wrong in the praxis of political participation of young people in Europe? One thing is certain, the White Paper on Youth had a fundamental role in mainstreaming the triangulated political participation of European young people in the 21st century, deriving in countless practices within the youth field. For the last 20 years, there was an ever-growing gravitas of the triangle in the sector, but is it working? For whom?

Although substantial differences do exist between the referred triangulated models,[25] and even though their critique is not necessarily new (Williamson 2006; Zentner 2016; Nico 2017), they all share a problematic ground relevant for this chapter. In the next section different – yet interconnected – dimensions of this problematic ground are introduced and analysed: liberal-democratic hegemony and political violence, liberal-democratic consensus and reasonable plurality.

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23. In 1999, the EU election turnout was 49.5%, reaching the lowest value of 42.9% in 2014, and 50.7% in 2019 (www.europarl.europa.eu).

24. In the case of the Brexit referendum in 2016, the more favourable numbers (Bruter and Harrison 2016) show a 64% turnout of young people aged 18 to 24, with an estimated 70% of those voting against Brexit, the highest percentage recorded per age group. Nevertheless, these young people were also the most absent from the polls, in comparison with all other age groups.

25. For example, some approaches are more youth-centred than others, some provide more complexity depth than others and some are more concerned with context than others.

Liberal-democratic hegemony and political violence

Unsurprisingly, the White Paper on Youth regards public authorities as central and irrevocable elements in the political participation of young people. They are also seen as holding the pivotal responsibility in building proximity between society and young people: "It is up to the public authorities to bridge the gap between young people's eagerness to express their opinions and the methods and structures which society offers." (European Union 2001a: 14). This inescapability is transferred into contemporary youth triangulation models, which make institutions – or "policy" – essential elements of political agency of young people. But there is an angle that is rarely addressed in the circuit of the triangle. Youth triangulation models have little concern with the power position occupied by public authorities, from within their particular – hard-coded – views of society.

Although one can admit that social stability and functionality both require differentiation in the power and roles of distinct social actors, if the power structure allows the dominance of a specific – universalised – view of the world, then a fundamental problem configurates: hegemony. Antonio Gramsci (1971) stated that "social hegemony" comprises two dimensions:

> 1. The "spontaneous" consent given by … the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is "historically" caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world.

> 2. The apparatus of state coercive power which "legally" enforces discipline on those groups who do not "consent" either actively or passively. (p. 12)

Posthumously, and from his own context of fascism,[26] Gramsci explains how the liberal-democratic model would come later to globally dominate the "social life". For him, the Enlightenment ideas legitimated a globalised colonisation process, generating power and economic accumulation within "dominant groups" (Western nations in this case).

After Gramsci's time, the global Western superiority "position" was "historically" consolidated by the liberal revolutions and then later with the prestigious victory over Soviet communism. Eventually, the violent tides of colonialism metamorphosed into liberal democracy, which presently configurates the central "function" of protecting and promoting what is called freedom (Freedom House 2018) and what is called human dignity (United Nations 1948) in the world. While the discussion of this terminology falls outside the scope of this chapter, it remains important to underline that nowadays the central functions of liberal democracies are officially carried out through international institutions such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission, the Council of Europe or most of the European national states and their local governments.

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26. Mussolini's fascism in Italy (1922-45) is regarded as the first fascist regime in history. Gramsci was a founder and leader of the communist party of Italy. He was imprisoned for 11 years by Mussolini's regime for political reasons, leading both to his main writings and to his death when he was 46 years old.

Gramsci also points out how the hegemonic condition can generate "coercive power" exercised through a "legally enforced discipline" over the ones who do not "consent". On one hand, he remarks on the naturalisation of state-based violence, either through laws or tangible punishments. On the other hand, he illustrates how this violence renders social transformation impossible, even if non-consent happens passively, such as in the case of imagining different sociopolitical solutions, departing from different views of the world.

One century later, 14 years before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Michel Foucault (1975) describes institutions as continuous "mechanisms" of sovereign power, disciplining and subjugating individuals through "docile forms of political violence" (pp. 195-228). The implications of this power asymmetry, as Foucault brilliantly details, go much beyond simple communication "gaps", or obstacles to "opinions", or "tensions" (Williamson 2006; Zentner 2016; Nico 2017), which are common describers in youth triangulation models. In fact, it "introduces bodies into a machinery, forces them into an economy" (Foucault 1975: 210), at the "least cost", "maximised force" and "minimum resistance". Foucault's conceptualisation of the methodology of modern political power is somehow related with General Clausewitz's definition of war: "to make [the opponent] incapable of further resistance" (1989: 75).

Similarly to Foucault, a few years later Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron were to explore the issue of power, particularly from the angle of education. They understand symbolic power as an imposition of meanings, legitimated through the concealing of the power relations between different social actors (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 4). Symbolic power leads to symbolic violence, which is defined by Bourdieu as "violence wielded with tacit complicity between its victims and its agents, insofar as both remain unconscious of submitting to or wielding it" (Bourdieu 1999: 17).

The insights of Gramsci, Foucault, Bourdieu and Passeron are useful for decoding what is beyond the reach of a simpler understanding of the power dynamics existing nowadays in the European youth field. The hegemonic condition of liberal-democratic institutions acting in the youth field bounds them to a normative – disciplining – view of the world, translated into more tangible features such as practices (e.g. youth triangulation), policies (e.g. the White Paper on Youth) or less tangible features such as narratives (including the end of history or the urge for prevention of radicalisation). The symbolic power exercised by the liberal-democratic apparatus towards young people makes it extremely difficult to politically engage society without submitting to or wielding the hegemonic imposition. It makes it even extremely difficult to be completely self-aware of that submission.

This is perhaps the main reason why friendly institutional support in the youth field might be in many ways desirable, but is not impartial and will rarely be on an equal footing with young people in terms of power. As the bodies and agents of liberal-democratic norms, institutions and public representatives exert hegemonic power over civil society, particularly over the powerless, including many of the young. The sophistication of the disciplinary apparatus might make it less visible, less tangible, but does not eliminate the political – or "symbolic" – violence, specific to the hegemonic condition.

The White Paper on Youth puts the spotlight on youth autonomy: "For young people, autonomy is an essential demand. It depends on the resources at their disposal, primarily material resources" (European Union 2001a: 13). But this autonomy unfolds a logic of conformation into a particular socio-economic dynamic – the (liberal) labour market. The participation of young people is seen as very valuable, but it is up to the (liberal) economic model to include young people, instead of a perspective where young people question the model.[27]

This liberal centrism goes further, by making young people's autonomy a means of contributing "to the economic and social development of society as a whole" (ibid.: 40). Moreover, the economic meaning young people may bring to society easily transfigures – in the very same document – into a dependency relationship towards the labour market, for giving meaning to young people's lives: "Jobs are a key element in enabling young people to find their place in society." (ibid.: 37). In summary, in the beginning of the 21st century, European youth policy grounded the idea that young people have more need for support in finding a job than for support in questioning and finding alternatives to the globalised model of work, or to the economic system and inequalities behind it.

Although employment and entrepreneurship strategies are not pioneered[28] by the White Paper on Youth, it holds the primary importance of blossoming the employment rhetoric into European youth policies, until today. A recent example is the "reinforced" Youth Guarantee (Council of the European Union 2020), which had its own triangulated consultation process (European Commission 2020a). Its predecessor – the Youth Guarantee (Council of the European Union 2013) – was widely implemented in the continent with the – triangulated – collaboration of national and local governments, youth researchers, youth organisations and youth workers, successfully "bridging" 24 million young people to the labour market (European Commission 2020b). However, to what extent does the advertised statistical success of these "economy inclusion" programmes reflect any success on including young peoples' ideas on the hegemonic model of economic development?

The aims of both Youth Guarantee cycles are similar. The original seeks "to help smooth the transition from unemployment, inactivity or education into work" (Council of the European Union 2013). The cycle in effect aims "to ensure that all young people

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27. One of the results of the consultation process leading to the White Paper on Youth dealt in particular with the issue of integration in the labour market. It was stated that this is actually a wish coming from young people, who need direction and guidance: "Young people are very concerned about the opportunities available to them on the labour market. They feel the best way to social integration is to find a job. Young people would like to have a genuine sense of direction, guiding them to find their place in the world of work in the long term." (European Union 2001a: 38).

28. The founding Treaty of the EU clearly states the aim of "economic growth ... highly competitive social market economy, full employment and social progress" (European Union 1992, Article 3.3 consolidated in 2012). Five years later, the first European Employment Strategy was launched in the framework of the Luxembourg process. By 2000, the Lisbon European Council – which resulted in the Treaty of Lisbon – had stated the new strategic goal for the Union for the decade: "to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (European Council 2000, I.5).

under 30 years of age receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship" (Council of the European Union 2020). By conforming certain young people[29] into a (liberal) production society, these policy initiatives "bridge the gap", as the 2001 White Paper suggests, between young people and the existent "methods and structures". The productive enlistment in the labour market and in the hegemonic model of economic development is here the priority, instead of the critique of the hegemonised model of work and economic development, regardless of the related problems still unsolved within and beyond liberal democracies, such as global inequality.[30]

Besides the critique (Williamson 2014), one may state that Youth Guarantee initiatives respond to Peter Lauritzen's known motto for youth work: "to provide opportunities for young people to shape their own futures" (2008). However, are young people being provided with the opportunities to shape their own futures, or only the futures prescribed by liberal democracies? Does the White Paper make "young people stakeholders in our societies", or only stakeholders upholding – not challenging – the established liberal-democratic order?

The Youth Guarantee initiatives are examples – among many others, in many different forms – of how youth policy can paradoxically relegate the social participation of young people, and youth workers,[31] to a shrinking space of non-contestation, where the hegemonic liberal-democratic project endures and prospers. Those are some of the reasons why any youth triangulation model that does not seriously address issues of power is unavoidably institutional-centric. A simplified lens – or blindness – over institutional power necessarily serves liberal-democratic reproduction, rather than possible democratic transformations, or the democratic imaginary. Ultimately, the failure to understand how hegemonic powers operate in the youth sector – through public institutions, but not exclusively – corresponds to the engagement with forms of symbolic violence, whether they are more or less visible, or more or less self-aware.

Liberal-democratic consensus and reasonable plurality

The White Paper on Youth provides extensive coverage of "diversity" and claims to involve unprecedented diversity of young people in its consultation process. The results of this process report the urge for European policy to "aim at safeguarding the existing plurality of cultures and lifestyles in Europe" (European Union 2001a: 52). Even though diversity is identified as a priority (and as an issue), there are aspects of youth struggles that seem to be absent from the White Paper. Perhaps the largest elephants in the room are the anti-capitalism and anti-globalisation aspirations,

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29. Often classified as "NEETs": not in education, employment or training.
30. Several authors from the field of political economy claim that the hegemonic development model of the economy and work reproduces and perpetuates inequalities, where neoliberalism is paramount (for example, Harvey 2005; Stiglitz 2013; Piketty 2014; Acemoglu and Robinson 2015).
31. For the sake of clarity, we mean here those performing the activity of youth work, not necessarily young workers.

particularly considering the events that occurred in Europe in the very same year the White Paper was published.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, a series of anti-globalisation and anti-capitalism events occurred worldwide. In Europe, London staged a number of those, such as when the Spiral Tribe[32] organised a street party in the Docklands area on 4 June 1992, where about 1 000 people danced and reclaimed temporarily an urban area of the city. In April 1994, the Critical Mass[33] movement organised a demonstration, with 90 people occupying key roundabouts through cycling, also in the city of London. By July 1996, the numbers had grown, with some 10 000 people – from the group Reclaim the Streets[34] – occupying the M41 motorway in London. On 18 June 1999, an estimated 5 000 people protested in the Carnival Against Capital (or "J18"), occupying Southwark Bridge in London, coinciding with the 25th G8 Summit in Cologne. The initiative gained global traction, involving more than 40 cities and thousands of activists. On 16 October 1999, nine European countries held a simultaneous protest against immigration laws in Europe, at the same time as the European Council Summit was happening in Tampere.

In 2001 – the year of the White Paper on Youth – the Mayday Monopoly protests converged on Oxford Circus, paralysing the city of London. Six weeks later, on 16 June, three protesters were shot by the Swedish police during the EU Summit in Gothenburg; it was the first time live firearms had been used in the framework of an anti-capitalist demonstration. Four weeks later, on 20 July, about 200 000 demonstrators gathered under the umbrella of the No Global movement at the G8 Summit in Genoa. Some 20 000 armed police – including military police – were mobilised, leading to a well-documented escalation of violence and to the first casualty ever in this type of demonstration: the 23-year-old Carlo Giuliani. The summit was "marred by the worst violence in the history of the anti-capitalist movement" (Dodson 2003).

The White Paper does, it is true, refer to divergences on globalisation and capitalism, for example mentioning that young people and youth associations consider that the "affirmation of an area of rights and freedoms is much more necessary today than that of an economic Europe" (European Union 2001a: 53), and that "they dispute some of the consequences of globalisation on grounds of social justice, openness and 'sustainable' development" (p. 10). Nevertheless, the White Paper evidently fails to proportionally address the anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation aspirations of young people, de-pluralising the democratic imaginary and stretching out the gap that the document urges be bridged. It also fails to address all the other youth

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32. The Spiral Tribe, or "SP23", were a musical and arts collective which organised rave parties and festivals in the early 1990s in the United Kingdom, progressively becoming very popular and a great influence in the "techno" scene. They toured in Europe and the United States until the late 1990s.

33. The origins of Critical Mass go back to Stockholm in the 1970s, where cycling tours were organised with hundreds of participants. The first Critical Mass ride per se happened in September 1992, in San Francisco, and was called Commute Clot. Since then, many spontaneous initiatives have taken place in cities in the Global North, and the movement is still active today.

34. Reclaim the Streets was formed in 1991, from anti-road protesting initiatives in London, spreading to the rest of the United Kingdom and worldwide afterwards. The group organised dozens of non-violent protests and is still active today.

realities that do not identify with the dominant system, such as squatting collectives (Mikkelsen and Karpantschof 2008), communes and self-governing communities (Tummers 2016), or youth subcultures (Wasiak 2012).

Moreover, the single proposal from the White Paper seems to be one that accepts the inevitability of, and conforms with, the liberal-democratic project. Even though there was a dedicated consultation process, the method used to outwit the possibility of anti-globalisation ideas in Europe was to use a kind of self-canonised citation (European Union 2001a: 11) from the President of the European Commission at the time, Romano Prodi: "Whether we like it or not, globalisation is here. Our task is to control it, to use it to the benefit of mankind." This is reinforced by the claim that the failure to "bridge the gap … might fuel the 'citizenship' deficit, or even encourage protest" (p. 10), as if protest had turned into something threatening and undesirable for democracies, 11 years after the "we are the people" demonstrations about freedom, leading to the celebrated fall of the Berlin Wall.

The "invisibilisation" and silencing of anti-capitalist/anti-globalisation conceptions of democracy are perhaps naturalised by a majority, given the proliferous labels ascribed to these movements, such as violent, anarchic, terroristic or radical (as previously discussed) which, by the end of the day, might lead to the categorisation of "undemocratic". On the other hand, while – within mostly peaceful acts – there are definite accounts of occasional attacks on mostly private property, it remains very difficult for a majority to unashamedly consider the supposedly democratic responses, such as police brutality against peaceful demonstrators, as something "democratic", even if they formally belong to the scope of liberal-democratic agency.

A more comfortable – neutral – discourse goes by the distinction between "reasonability" and "unreasonability", where reasonability is the key for consensus building, and consensus is the tool for inclusion and depuration of the plurality of ideas within the deliberative democratic theatre. The problematic – and paradoxical – dimension of "reasonable plurality" is that its inclusive agency is restricted to the ruling-out of aspirations considered "unreasonable", such as the uncanonised alternatives envisaged in democratic imaginaries.

As in the White Paper, youth triangulation models, despite the known tensions (for example, Zentner 2016), seem to seek an ideal – neutral – consensus solution, apparently without exemption. There are references to the importance of diversity of actors and to the value of "using difference positively", "divergent interests" and "multilogue" (Chisholm 2006). Nevertheless, in the same way as the White Paper, triangulated models fail to address dissensus and the plurality it produces.

The focus on consensus as methodology is solidly and massively present in the practice, from grass-roots to high-level events such as the recent 3rd European Youth Work Convention (JUGEND für Europa 2020) – a paradigmatic example of the triangulated consortium. The triangle of actors – being the community of practice central in this case – gathered to build a consensual outcome. Facilitators, rapporteurs, liaisons, co-ordinators and editors formed the countless checkpoints in the consultation process, seeking legitimacy through consensus.

A plausible explanation for this focus on consensus building is the hegemonic expression of the liberal values of rationalism and universalism, forming both normative and epistemic boundaries to young people's agency and to those who work in the sector. Mouffe (2000) provides a detailed argument on how liberal consensus acts as a symbolic policy of exclusion, under the narrative of "neutrality":

> To negate the ineradicable character of antagonism and to aim at a universal rational consensus – this is the real threat to democracy. Indeed, this can lead to violence being unrecognized and hidden behind appeals to "rationality", as is often the case in liberal thinking which disguises the necessary frontiers and forms of exclusion behind pretences of "neutrality". (p. 22)

Mouffe's point gravitates around the idea that, by setting a consensus-based model for individuals,[35] a territory of "reasonability" is established, selecting who falls in and who falls out. As a consequence of liberal-democratic hegemony, "reasonable persons" turn out to be the ones who consent to the principles of political liberalism, or the ones capable of excelling in liberalised environments. Hence, the plurality of any consensus-based approach is structurally compromised, even when showing concern for "inclusion", "diversity" or "divergence". This is the reason why initiatives based on democratic deliberation models may discreetly lead to practices and policies of exclusion. The liberal-democratic consensus is the legitimatised process for the exclusion of everything falling beyond the liberal-democratic canon, including the democratic imaginary.

Four conclusions

The following points are conclusive remarks on the issues explored in this chapter. Because many of the conclusions call for organisational and practice changes, the primary stakeholders addressed include all those working in the youth sector, within the triangle, such as intergovernmental organisations, national agencies, resource centres, youth policy makers, youth researchers, and international and local youth NGOs. Nevertheless, the following points can also be useful for others in a position to "twist" the triangle, such as young people, youth trainers, facilitators, youth leaders and informal groups of young people. Pluralising the youth democratic imaginary beyond the liberal canon is an extraordinary effort, but a necessary one if the common aim is to reach better democratic possibilities.

Reject the prejudice of the radical, break the liberal canon, stretch history and expand the democratic imaginary

Contemporary democratic societies require the commitment of all in identifying and resolving social problems. Structural problems such as racism, patriarchy or social inequality are reproduced within the liberal-democratic status quo, which has been canonised as final and infinite. From their singular creative position, young people can play a fundamental role in challenging the status quo and imagining alternative – urgent – democratic solutions.

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35. As defended by pro-deliberative democracy scholars, such as Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls.

However, imagining alternatives beyond the reproductive nature of the current hegemonic reality is extraordinarily difficult and defies solidly grounded sociological theory. Multiple forms of canonical contingency impact on young people's imaginary by restricting it to the liberal-democratic status quo. Triangulated participation models comprise liberal-democratic affiliation and narratives – such as liberal democracy as the "end of history" – curtailing the epistemic territory for imagination. If young people are seen as products and agents of the liberal-democratic canon there is no space for the democratic imaginary, only for liberal-democratic possibilities.

In order to expand the democratic imaginary, a radical take is necessary. The youth sector role is to identify and disrupt the contingencies of imagination, starting with its own canonical registration. Breaking the liberal-democratic canon means to reject the "end of history", and rather stretch history, moving forward, without forgetting the problems of the past that trigger the problems of today.

Allowing the "imagination of the impossible" means to reject the prejudice of the "radical", and to prioritise the re-theorisation of society by young people. Beyond their own futures, young people need the support of the youth sector to safeguard their role in shaping the future of their societies, be it within or beyond the liberal-democratic canon. The "radical change" that young people demanded by the time the White Paper was published is intended to secure radical change, not secure the control and subduing of the "radicals" themselves.

Identify and cancel symbolic violence, recalibrate power and create safe spaces for the democratic imaginary

While power is a mostly intangible phenomenon, it structurally affects social, educational and political processes. The Western liberal-democratic model of society has been globalised in recent centuries, now configuring a hegemonic position. This hegemonic power establishes a dominant view of the world which is compatible with structural problems such as racism, patriarchy, social inequality and eco-destruction. Through continuous disciplinary sophistication, hegemonies imply unchallenged forms of symbolic violence, serving the political purpose of maintaining a status quo. Due to their constitutional articulation with liberal-democratic norms, public institutions and representatives are continuous agents of hegemonic power, hence, symbolic violence. This is particularly important in the youth sector, in which many of the most powerless social groups are to be found, and where many policies operate.

There is little to no concern with hegemonic power in triangulated youth participation models. This simplified lens over power favours institutional centrism and necessarily serves liberal-democratic reproduction, instead of the "social transformations" which political discourse often refers to. The plethora of European youth policies based on triangulated participation is, paradoxically and discreetly, shrinking the social agency of young people to spaces of non-contestation, in which the hegemony of the liberal-democratic project endures.

Beyond young people's vigilance and scrutiny, safeguarding the space for the democratic imaginary requires the youth sector to understand deeply and continuously how hegemonic power affects young people's imagination. Practical action includes

identifying and cancelling institutional symbolic violence within youth activities, particularly the educational and political processes. Counter-hegemonic initiatives can include safe spaces to understand, talk and write about power, while inventing methodologies to radically recalibrate it.

Learn how to address dissensus and welcome plurality

Deliberative democracy theory is widely mainstreamed, resulting in the massive practice of consensus building, among different participatory initiatives, including within the youth sector. This hegemonic expression of the liberal values of rationalism and universalism define a territory of "reasonability", from which "unreasonable" persons or opinions are excluded, in a process perceived as legitimate.

By integrating consensus-building practices in the triangulation models, the youth sector reproduces the liberal-democratic failure to address dissensus and plurality. Pluralism requires more than Cartesian trigonometry. For the pluralisation of the democratic imaginary, the youth sector can develop a critique of consensus and explore dissensus. The youth sector can welcome pluralist methodologies, giving diversity and inclusion tangible political meaning.

Understand the impact of discourse (before changing it)

Discourse sets the epistemic universe where practices and meanings unfold. If discourse is dominated by a specific perspective – such as the liberal-democratic order – it becomes epistemically restrictive, placing knowledge-based boundaries on imagination. Opening the epistemic boundaries to the democratic imaginary requires a deep understanding of the impact of discourse. Beyond adaptation and sophistication of discourse, the youth sector can develop insight of its jargon, looking underneath the dense liberal-democratic veil.

Referring to liberal democracy as "democracy", asserts the liberal-democratic project as the single and unique democratic possibility. Recognising that modern democracies configure a hypothesis – among many others – for the organisation of societies allows and validates the broad scope of democratic alternatives and young people's democratic imaginary.

If – in European public youth policy – "political participation" tendentiously refers to liberal-tailored triangulated initiatives, it leads to the depoliticisation of young people's democratic imaginary. The same applies to the discourse of "transformation", which often refers to the reproduction of the liberal-democratic order and respective structural problems.

Acknowledgments

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Chapter 5

"Youth voice", dialogue and democracy

Dan Moxon

Introduction

This chapter provides a critical exploration of the concept of "youth voice" – a crucial but under-explored element within youth participation. Throughout, the author draws on recent theoretical advancements on voice within childhood studies. Children's participation and youth participation have a long history of informing each other, but many of the new ideas on "children's voice" have yet to be translated to youth studies. Based on this, the chapter outlines various ways the youth sector might understand "youth voice" as a concept.

First, the different concepts of a voice that "represents" a generation – and the challenges in creating this – are explored. They will speak to current debates within youth policy on which forms of youth participation "represent" young people most effectively.

We then look at a model of dialogue between young people and policy makers, which moves away from the concept of representation. Instead, it focuses on collaboration and the creation of mutual understanding between young people and policy makers. By exploring a dialogical approach to youth voice, I will question the extent to which such a strong focus on representation within youth participation is both achievable and desirable.

The link between youth voice and youth participation

"Youth voice", "pupil voice", "student voice" and others are terms used regularly within the field of participation. In many projects "voice" is even used in place of the word "participation" (Tisdall 2012). "Children's voice" usually refers to the participation of people under the age of 18. However, "children and young people's voice", is also used in countries where youth work focuses on teenagers. Many models of participation used by the youth sector, such as Hart's (1992) "ladder", are theories of child participation. But voice alone is not enough to be considered participation (Lundy 2007). Instead, it is one critical concept within the field of youth participation. Others include agency, competence, autonomy, citizenship, rights, protagonism, democracy, space and action (Hartung 2017; Percy-Smith and Thomas 2010; Thomas 2007).

The concept of youth voice is not the same thing as a young person's spoken voice. "Youth voice" is a metaphor that relates to communication within the context of youth

participation. It is an expression of young people's agency. Through youth voice, knowledge is communicated about young people's lives to some other party, such as a policy maker. This knowledge might include political opinions, young people's values or life experiences, and many other things. The voice metaphor often emphasises clearly articulated, well-formulated expressions (Wyness 2013a). In the youth sector, priority is often given to well-crafted policy recommendations or articulated debates. But "voice" can also include other methods of expression, such as visual arts (Eldén 2013; Lomax 2015). Silence, screams and sighs (Spyrou 2018), as well as emotions (Kraftl and Horton 2007), can also play a role alongside spoken words.

Youth voice can be both collective and individual. A young person expresses their individual youth voice when they do things like casting a vote or joining a protest. This means they engage in public decision making to express their views.[36] The term "youth voice" can also refer to something that represents the collective political interests of young people as a group (Thomas 2007). This includes youth organisations and youth councils, as well as "new forms" of participation (Crowley and Moxon 2017) such as digital participation or social movements. The statements or positions that these things create are said to be "the voice of young people"; they are some sort of collective youth voice.

What is recognised as "youth voice" is highly political. The term signifies a political goal of legitimising the views of young people within political systems (Skelton 2013; Cook-Sather 2015; McLeod 2011). However, what policy makers choose to recognise as youth voice is often determined by the dominant institutional discourses, and which methods of participation are used (see Bragg 2001; 2007; and Thomson and Gunter 2006). When youth voices do not conform to power holders' ideas about who young people are and what they should say, they are often excluded (Kallio 2012). An inherent part of youth voice is generational power dynamics, which affect whose views, and which type of messages, are politically recognised.

This politicisation is partly because youth voice is not a clear theoretical concept. Theories around what youth voice is, and how it is created, are undeveloped. Youth research has focused on identifying different forms of youth participation and trends in young people's democratic engagement. However, there is little research on how this links to what is said or voiced through participation. We have no clear theory of what youth voice actually is. We know a lot about how young people are involved in participation, but little about how this connects to the political messages that come from it.

Is there such a thing as universal youth voice?

Young people do not speak with one undifferentiated voice. It is wholly flawed to argue that an entire generation holds one homogenous identical view on a topic. Young people are not connected by a "hive mind", like worker bees, through which

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36. It is also possible to talk about individual young people expressing their voice in private decision making. This is typically considered part of child participation policy and practice, but not generally youth participation policy and practice. An example would be a minor in foster care expressing a view during legal proceedings about their care.

they can form a singular opinion on political issues. To claim there is a generic, universal and entirely homogeneous young people's voice, or view, on any given topic is implausible. Just as for any group of people, individual opinions, values and beliefs will vary amongst young people; in addition, youth itself, and the concept of being young, is socially and culturally situated. What it means to be young in 18th-century Russia is very different to 21st-century America. The experience of youth is not a static one; there is no reason to assume that the opinions and interests of an educated, right-wing, affluent urban young man in Germany will match those of left-wing, less educated young women living in Brazil, simply because they are young.

Despite this fundamental flaw, parts of the youth sector and youth advocacy use this concept of "universal youth voice". It occurs typically when the outcomes of a participation initiative or project are styled as "the voice of a generation", or "the youth perspective". This extends the voice expressed by a small number of project participants, and presents them as being commonly shared by an entire generation. It makes the claim that whatever outcome and voices are created by that participation project are homogeneously agreed upon by the entire world's youth. A literal example of this is the International Youth Foundation's "pocket guide for policy makers" (Sharma and Simms 2015). Based on a review of the outcomes of 25 international youth summits, this guide proclaims that "young people everywhere universally want the same thing", followed by a series of statements about what that is. Yet anyone attending the 25 youth summits would have likely experienced a fair amount of debate and disagreement amongst the participants. After comparing the pocket guide with the European Youth Goals – an outcome of consultations with 50 000 young people – many differences can be seen between the two statements of youth voice; if there were such a thing as a universal youth voice, that would not be the case.

Youth voice as a generational standpoint

Although the idea of a universal youth voice is flawed, it is not necessary to dismiss the concept of shared perspective or a collective youth voice entirely. We might instead consider the idea of a "generational standpoint". Feminist standpoint theory has long explored women's collective voices, and standpoint theory is directly relevant to youth voice. Standpoint theorists connect power with gender and voices, just as power and youth voice are connected. Modern standpoint theorists generally dismiss the idea that women have a fully universal experience of the world or homogenous voice (see Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). Instead, they argue that women have a common position from which they speak. This standpoint is framed by being marginalised within gender relations. No matter what your personal experiences of womanhood are, the common factor shared with other women is being part of a group that holds less power as a result of gender relations. A similar argument can be made for youth. What it means to be young varies with time, space, culture and personal experience (Jones 2009). But a defining feature of youth is that of being marginalised within intergenerational relationships and generational orders (see Alanen 2009). Young people are denied rights and disempowered by those who are older than them.

An important element of standpoint theory is intersectionality (for example, see Hill-Collins 1990). Intersectionality tells us that a youth standpoint cannot be considered on its own. Youth is intersected by gender, class, disability and many other social categories. Each of these contributes to the various identities and power relations that young people experience. A young person speaks from the standpoint of "youth", but they also speak as "a young woman" or as "a young Black person". These varying positions create differences of standpoints and voice within the youth population, and lead to varying groups with their own "youth voices". These voices might have commonalities or differences between them. Intersectional theory (Hill-Collins 1990) tells us no one group can give a complete and accurate account of the world or of being young. From their standpoint, they have a partial view of the world and youth. This standpoint is situated in their own experiences, and is intersected by youth and by other elements of their identity.

The idea of intersectional youth standpoints can inform youth participation projects in three ways. First, we need to be careful of making generalisations about the views of all young people based on the outcomes of participation work. Any project which claims to show a voice that is "universally shared" by an entire generation should be treated with scepticism. Second, we must be aware of how young people's views and experiences may vary between genders, ethnicities and other social groups. There are differing voices intersected within a youth voice; by homogenising the views of young people, we risk excluding already marginalised voices. Third, participation projects can still identify collective experiences and voices amongst their participants. Collectivising is an important part of naming and identifying the marginalisation of youth, and is not prevented by a lack of a universal youth voice. However, most projects should be cautious about claiming that their project outcomes extend significantly beyond the voices of the young people involved and their immediate personal contacts. There are very few youth projects which can make any sort of reasonable claim to represent the voice of large numbers or populations of young people.

Youth voice as collective representation

While we cannot assume that all young people share the same views and opinions, there is still a space for collective representation of young people's voice. Indeed, it is politically useful – both for young people and policy makers – to engage with youth voices that may, in some way, represent a whole population of young people from a specific territory (such as a whole country or city). However, in the youth sector, we are not always clear about how a collective representation of youth voice may be formed. In recent years our sector has been rife with debate about how representative various projects and approaches are.

This debate is often held using vague terminology and assumptions about who "reaches out" the most (Pirvulescu et al. 2019). Many youth organisations and projects find their work dismissed because they do not conform to policy makers' assumptions about what youth voices should say or sound like. Youth civil society, in particular, has found itself under criticism from policy makers for not being representative,

without any substantial exploration of what that means. Policy makers idealise, with limited evidence, alternative forms of participation, particularly digital, assuming they are more representative.

In this debate, two distinct aspects of representation are sometimes confused:

▶ "Demographic" representation of voice: the extent to which participants involved resemble a cross section of the youth population; to what extent they are a "descriptive representation" (Pitkin 1967) of the youth population; and how confident we can be that their views match the wider cohort.

▶ "Democratic" representation of voice: the extent to which democratic principles and processes have been used within the project. Does the project have "formalistic" structures and "substantive" representation activities (ibid.)? Are young people able to select their youth representatives and hold them to account through formal processes? Do youth representations engage in substantive activities to advance the interests of those represented?

We might understand demographic representation as a concept informed by survey-based youth research and large-scale consultations. As it is impractical to survey an entire population of young people, a "representative sample" is surveyed. For example, the Finnish Youth Barometer (Myllyniemi and Kiilakoski 2018) surveyed 1 901 young people in Finland on their attitude towards Europe. The researchers made sure that the ages, gender and mother tongue of the young participants matched what would be found if all young people in Finland were surveyed. As a result, the young people surveyed are said to be statistically or demographically "representative" of the Finnish youth population. The survey found that 66% of the young people surveyed felt that Finland benefited from membership of the EU.

We can contrast this to the work of Alliansi (Finland's equivalent of a National Youth Council). As a democratically representative youth organisation, Alliansi hosted an EU Youth Summit exploring Finland's place in the EU. The Youth Summit and its declaration (Alliansi 2020) took it for granted that Finnish young people supported the EU, exploring instead, in considerable depth, how Finland's relationship with the EU should evolve to suit young people. Alliansi, though its democratic process, sought to find an agreed common position amongst participants on EU policy. In its summit, Alliansi (2020: 3) also considered some descriptive representation (Pitkin 1967). The organisation selected participants based on the "most balanced representation possible in terms of gender, geographical location, age, educational background, minority groups and participation in different organisations" – thereby ensuring that they represented a microcosm of the wider youth population. However, Alliansi's main claim to representation comes through its democratic formalistic representation. Through its membership structures, any youth organisation in Finland has the right to shape Alliansi's positions and leadership. Hence, any young person in Finland could potentially influence Alliansi's positions, by joining a youth organisation and contributing to its work.

There is, of course, just as in any other structure, the potential for improvement in both the Youth Barometer survey and the work of Alliansi. They are both limited by their funding and resource constraints. The survey, for example, could have also considered income background when selecting participants in order to remove any bias towards a particular social class. As for Alliansi, its membership admits

both youth-worker-led, and youth-led organisations. Consequently, its position statements may be affected by the professional interests of both youth workers and young people; however, the distinction between the two is complex. Neither project seems to provide much voice for the 33% of young people who do not believe EU membership is beneficial. The youth wing of the populist right-wing party the True Finns tells us that a small portion of Finnish youth is very anti-EU. But it is unfair to criticise Alliansi or the Youth Barometer survey heavily for these limitations. Both projects are some of the best examples of their kind in Europe. However, by identifying these limitations we can see that being "representative" is not an absolute state of perfection, but something that is always worked towards. Any attempt to represent an entire generation's views has limits, and there are many further debates within political theory about the nature of representation, which are beyond the scope of this chapter to explore fully.

More importantly, the two approaches are based on different ways of representing voice. Both employ different values when it comes to policy making, democracy and to young people. The Youth Barometer survey identifies common or majority views held by young people across Finland, providing valuable knowledge. But it does not go deeply into how this view is formed or what Finnish youth want from the EU. By contrast, Alliansi's report addresses the complexity of policies. We can be less certain about how many young Finns would agree with every aspect of Alliansi's summit declaration. But that is not an issue; Alliansi provides a democratic process through which young Finns can collectivise their voice to influence public affairs. This process involves discussion, debate and compromise, and contributes to a healthy democracy. The event might be seen as a form of deliberative democracy, organised to inform the democratic representation of young people's views by the organisation. By contrast, the Youth Barometer survey does not seek to enable any sort of political collectivisation to help young people influence public debate. Ultimately, we should not expect the voice of democratic youth organisations to look and sound like survey-based research outcomes. We should not judge the two types of representative voice by the same criteria.

The extent to which Alliansi, or any youth project, democratically represents young people's voice depends on how well the democratic process is embedded within it. The project must be democratically accountable to the young people it claims to represent. While many youth projects use aspects of democratic decision making, only a few are democratically accountable to a whole youth population. Being accountable requires that young people in the represented population know what the project is, how to engage with it and how to hold it to account. This may mean an elected leadership, independence from the state, sufficient funding to operate at scale and being open, inclusive and non-discriminatory. For the most part it will be youth councils, youth parliaments and large structured initiatives that can lay claim to democratic representation of whole populations of young people.

Very few participation projects can make a strong claim to represent young people's voice based on demographics alone. Most participation projects are based on small group events. Even with a highly diverse group of participants, they can rarely be confident that the views of the participants are the same as those of the youth population. The Finnish Youth Barometer follows the principles of scientific methodology

to achieve this. This requires large numbers of participants, precise questions and statistical calculations. These conditions simply do not exist in most participation formats. Overall, we must be cautious not to confuse the two forms of representation, and how they are achieved.

Youth voice as youth dialogue

So far, I have discussed voice as a possession. We have assumed that voices are fixed and unchanging, inside someone, waiting to be expressed. This can be described as a monological approach to voice (Linell 1998). Monologism assumes voice is a message sent from the speaker to the listener. This message can, in an ideal setting, be transmitted (Shannon and Weaver 1948) from one to the other without change. Monologism assumes that the act of communication does not affect or alter the voice.

Many popular theoretical models of participation, such as Hart's (1992) "ladder", Shier's (2001) "pathway to participation" or Lundy's (2007) model, uncritically use a monological idea of voice. These models are highly influential in the youth sector. The concept of voice in these models stems from Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been hugely influential, acting as a normative anchor for concepts of participation (Hartung 2017; Wyness, 2013a). The convention itself does not use the term "voice", although Article 12 talks about the child who is "capable of forming his or her own views", having "the right to express those views". The General Comment on Article 12 (UN 2009) refers on five occasions to children "voicing their views" or similar, describing Article 12 as the "right to be heard". As a result, such discourses are widespread within the field of youth participation. They lead to an understanding that voice is fundamentally monological, based on enabling children and young people to transmit an independently held view to decision makers. Thus, monologism gives the impression that a participation project's role is to extract or gather the voice from young people and send it to decision makers. Decision makers are told that they must "hear the voice of young people" and that young people must be "listened to".

Many scholars of child participation (for example, Spyrou 2018; Komulainen 2007; Pinkney 2010; James 2007; Mannion 2007; Moxon 2021) are now critical of monological voice. They argue that it is flawed to assume a child or young person's voice will be unchanging and uninfluenced by those around them, or by the setting in which participation occurs. The assumption that meaning is held or formed internally within a person, and then expressed by voice, overlooks the complexity of the relationships and interactions that occur during communication and interaction with others. Monologism ignores the possibility that young people's understanding[37] and viewpoints can be developed through and during interaction and discussion. As a result of this critique, childhood participation scholars (for example, Fielding 2007; Graham and Fitzgerald 2010; Lodge 2005; Mannion 2007; Spryou 2018; Wyness 2013b; Moxon 2021) have called for a focus on intergenerational dialogue or dialogical approach to the area of children and young people's participation.

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37.   Or that of any individual, regardless of age.

Although the term "dialogue" is used in the youth sector, (for example, EU Youth Dialogue) there are no theoretical models of what is meant by "youth dialogue" or "intergenerational dialogue" and how this relates to youth participation. Youth work theorists, such as Batsleer (2008), have noted the value of dialogue after Freire (1972) as a form of non-formal education. The potential of intercultural dialogue, particularly in conflict resolution settings, is also identified (Council of Europe 2008). Scholars such as Gretschel et al. (2014) and Crowley and Moxon (2017) have shown deliberative democracy as a form of youth participation: a model implying a specific form of debate inspired by Habermas' theory of communicative action (1984). However, none of these areas of work have elaborated on a broader concept of dialogue and how it functions to produce "youth voice" claims within the context of youth participation. The typical stance taken is that dialogue is a desirable form of communication to establish, but exactly what is meant by dialogue and how it functions are left under-explored.

Terms such as "dialogue" and "dialogical" can be used in three ways. First, "dialogue" can simply refer to any and all communication in a very general sense. Second, the term can be used to imply a more specific, privileged form of communication underpinned by ideas about valued forms of communication, their goals and how communication should be conducted (Carbaugh, Boromisza-Habashi and Xinmei 2006, cited in Sleap and Sener 2013). Lastly, dialogue, or perhaps more accurately, "dialogical", can further refer to an epistemic perspective focused on relational and intersubjective understanding of communication and meaning-making (see Linell 1998, 2009; Marková 2003; Todorov 1984). It is in this last perspective that I would like to explore what a dialogue[38]/dialogical approach to youth voice might mean.

Using a dialogical approach to youth voice starts with recognising that all communication involves (at least) two people who both create meaning together. Voice – rather than being something that is owned and expressed by the young person – is a social and relational act that occurs between interlocutors (Mazzei and Jackson 2009; Moxon 2021). Dialogism means recognising that both the young person and the other interlocutor are interacting together to produce meaning and knowledge (Marková 2003). Through this interaction they create shared ideas and understandings of a topic, developing ideas that do not come from one side alone (Barrow 2010; Bertrand 2014; Birch et al. 2017; Cruddas 2007). This can be contrasted with the monological approaches to voice described above, where young people send their ideas/knowledge to decision makers, but the decision makers do not contribute to the knowledge produced (Linell 1998). In dialogical approaches we assume both parties come with some prior understanding but create new knowledge between them during dialogue. Both people may change and evolve their understanding through the process and a shared understanding develops between them.

Developing a shared or mutual understanding does not necessarily mean reaching agreement or consensus, or even a final position on a topic. Dialogue does not

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38. The common usage of the term "dialogue" implies extended face-to-face discussion. However dialogue theorists (for example, Linell 1998, 2009) have made a strong case that all communication is dialogical. Exploration of this topic goes beyond the scope of this article.

always have the goal of resolving differences between participants (Carbaugh, Boromisza-Habashi and Xinmei 2016). Hence, dialogue-based participatory projects do not have to lead to some sort of final recommendations or position statement to which all participants have agreed[39] (Birch et al. 2017). Participants can develop shared understandings while still recognising the differences between each other's positions (for example, Barrow 2010; Birch et al. 2017). Dialogical theorists argue that reaching a completely identical understanding between individuals is profoundly unachievable (see Todorov 1984). Moments of crudely shared understanding are achieved, but there are always some profound differences of understanding and knowledge among participants (Linell 2009: 88). Through dialogue we work imperfectly towards shared meaning, but never reach it (Cruddas 2007). Within participation projects, dialogue is an ongoing generative process that continually generates new meanings (Graham and Fitzgerald 2010). What was said before, and what might be said after, shapes the way meanings and understandings develop (Todorov 1984). Ideas can become more fixed or fossilised (Moscovici 1984) over time, but they are always subject to change, reinterpretation and redevelopment. The previous ways topics are spoken of provide both a resource and limitation for participants to build upon as dialogue progresses over the lifetime of a participation project (Moxon 2021).

The dialogue that occurs within a youth participation project does not exist in isolation from dialogue elsewhere in participants' lives. All participants, from young people to decision makers, to youth workers, are immersed in a web of language (Derrida 1982) that stretches across their lives. The discussion and interaction they have elsewhere inform the understandings that participants bring to youth participation projects and the ways that they are able to talk about a topic. Several studies (for example, Bertrand 2014; Gillen and Cameron 2017) have shown that the things children and young people say are often composed of phrases and meanings appropriated from past discussions with other speakers. This phenomenon (known as "heteroglossia/polyphony", Todorov 1984) is not specific to children and young people. It highlights that any one speaker's expression contains the "voices" of multiple past speakers within them, as we are inherently reusing and reappropriating past voices when we speak.

Thus, the discursive context and the wider discourses within which youth participation projects occur are part of the way understandings can be constructed and voiced within any project. Any particular style, form or setting of a youth participation project carries with it a set of pre-constructed understandings, discourses and terminology that both limit and enable what can be voiced within that project (Moxon 2021). For example, Bragg (2001; 2007) and Thompson and Gunter (2006) have shown that the voice claims of school councils, rather than being neutral, are often produced by and within the dominant policy discourses of educational institutions. Kallio (2012) has demonstrated that participatory projects designed to

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39. Here we can see a contrast to deliberative democracy approaches, where the goal is usually to reach agreement and consensus. Deliberation is a form of dialogue, but not all dialogue is deliberation.

elicit children's voices only do so in distinct ways, and on selected issues, when the things children say conform to the discourse of childhood advanced within the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

From a dialogical perspective, youth voice consists of what people say within youth participation settings, in conjunction with the wider context within which these things are expressed (Moxon 2021). The setting and nature of a project is an intrinsic part of how things are discussed and what is said. Taking a dialogical approach within a youth participation project means stepping away from debates on which is the most correct and truthful representation, and on "what young people want" (see Hadfield and Haw 2001; Spyrou 2018). Instead, it is about recognising that each style or mode of engaging with young people and doing participation work is part of the youth voice itself. Each instance of voice and dialogue is unique to the setting in which it occurs (Todorov 1984). The time, place, space and discourse surrounding any youth participation initiative are all elements of how things are voiced and what is said.

A final part of the dialogue is the role of mutual recognition (Marková 2003) and how interlocutors come to identify each other. The very concept of youth voice relies on one party being recognised as youth, and the other as something else (typically an "adult" or "decision maker"). A basic recognition of these social and organisational identities is fundamental for youth voice to occur (Arnot and Reay 2007). Moreover, recognition (Benjamin 1988) is an ongoing process that happens throughout dialogue. Participants negotiate and sustain their identities with each other, and this affects what is said as well as what shared understandings are reached (Graham and Fitzgerald 2010). The ongoing negotiation of generational identities, along with other intersections such as gender, sexuality and professional or organisational backgrounds, can all influence the process and outcomes of dialogue within participatory projects (Moxon 2021).

A model of dialogue for youth participation

Building on the arguments above, I would like to elaborate on a model of youth dialogue intended for youth participation projects. It is based on research developing a similar model within child participation (Moxon 2021) which drew on the theories of dialogism (for example, Marková 2003; Todorov 1984) as well as an eight-month qualitative case study of a youth participation project based around small group discussions between young people and decision makers.

The model (Figure 1) envisages voice as a social and relational act that occurs between two people. It sees voice – or voicing – as an interaction between individuals, rather than the property of an individual, or a product of interaction. For there to be "youth" voice, one person must be recognised as a young person and the other as a policy maker, or other target of youth participation. Their "youth" and "policy maker" standpoints are also intersected by other identities such as gender or social class. The way parties see each other – mutual recognition – is an integral part of the dialogue. Through recognition, their identities/standpoints are maintained and further negotiated during the interaction, affecting what can be said and how meaning-making occurs between them.
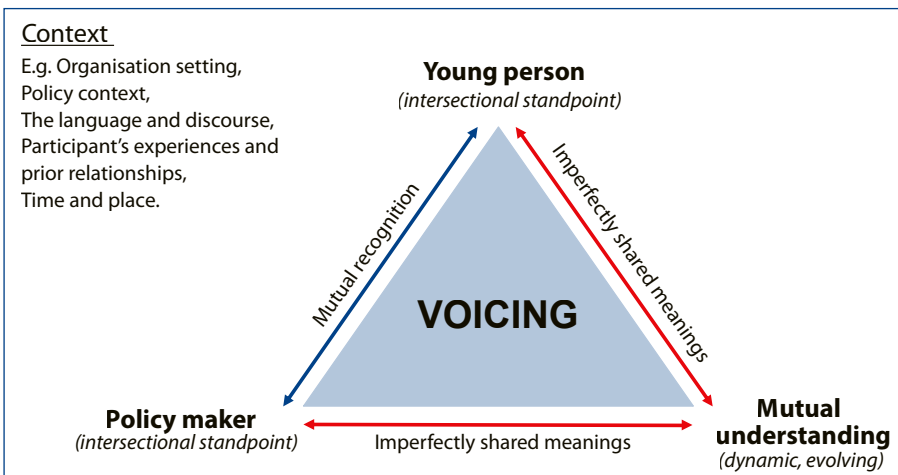
Figure 1. A model of youth dialogue for youth participation initiatives

As the dialogue progresses, imperfectly shared meanings arise between participants. Mutual understanding and new ideas continually evolve. These come not from one person or the other but instead arise between people, as a result of their unique interaction. Past understandings and meanings regulate, and provide resources for, new ones, but understandings are dynamic and not fixed. Mutual understanding does not necessarily mean agreement between participants on a topic, or complete commonality of understandings. Instead, it is a shared concept of what is said and known between participants.

The communications and interaction that participants have been involved in elsewhere in their lives all contribute to the way things are spoken about and how meaning is constructed. Thus, the context in which the interaction occurs is a fundamental part of the way understandings are constructed and how the interaction occurs. The policy and organisational context, prior interaction of participants, time and place at which the interaction occurs, and the wider discursive content, all contribute to the dialogue. So while the diagram shows two people interacting, this is a segment of a wider and more complex chain of interaction stretching across participants' lives, all of which are connected.

The potential of seeing youth voice as dialogue is that it allows youth participation initiatives to develop styles of engagement that may not be possible under mon-ological approaches (for example, Hart 1992). It provides alternatives to the idea that youth participation initiatives are primarily a contest over power and decision making between young people and policy makers, where one must convince the other of their view. Instead, we can explore communication and meaning-making between both parties that is collaborative and interactional, and that occurs by way of their interactions, involving their various standpoints, identities and surrounding context. For the youth sector, exploring dialogue-based projects may be liberating. There are many styles of work, such as deliberative participation and participatory budgeting, which already fit this concept. For these projects, embracing dialogue as a concept may free them from the obligation to produce "representative" youth

voices. Instead, they can focus on the quality of knowledge and understanding produced and its value to policy and the public good. This in turn may allow young people to have greater influence through youth participation projects.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored what is meant by youth voice and the role of communication in youth participation. I identified four concepts of youth voice.

The first was "universal youth voice", according to which all young people share a common opinion on topics, simply as a result of being young. No serious scholar of voice, in childhood and youth studies or beyond, would support such a theory anymore. Advances in feminist theory have entirely dispelled such a notion. As a result, it is difficult for small-scale youth participation projects to make confident claims that the views of participants will reflect what wider groups of young people think and feel. Universal youth voice has little credibility in youth participation outside of campaign slogans. Instead, we can talk of young people's voices coming from the second concept of voice – a "generational standpoint". Here, young people's perspectives on the world are framed by their marginalisation within intergenerational relations, and intersected by other identities. This approach to voice recognises that "youth" does not consist of a homogenous group with one voice; however, there may still be commonalities stemming from their lack of access to power. It is a concept of voice most suitable for activist and grass-roots youth participation work; useful for those seeking to enable young people to examine, reveal and challenge generational power structures. In such work, generational standpoints allow identification and expression of common experiences amongst participants. But the goal is creating action and social change rather than representation. The fundamental right of young people to associate and advocate political change is not reliant on them needing to accurately represent all young people.

The third approach to voice, "collective representation", claims to reflect the support or opinions of all young people within a given territory or community. Few projects can credibly claim to do this, since engagement with a relatively large number of young people is required. There are many debates about what representation is that are beyond the scope of this chapter (see Pitkin 1967). In the youth sector, representation of voice is worked towards in two ways – "demographic" representation and "democratic" representation. The first provides an account of common views amongst young people, whereas the latter provides a democratic, formal representation of their interests. Both approaches produce different accounts of "what young people want", but neither is more accurate or truthful than the other. The process of producing voice and providing representation is an inherent part of the voice that is generated. There is no "neutral" process to provide a representation of young people's collective voices that is unaffected by how it is produced. Furthermore, any attempt at representing voice will always have limits, gaps and individual voices that went unheard. Representation is something that is worked towards, not perfectly achieved. Models of collective representation are still the best approach to involving the voices of whole populations of young people in policy making. Democratic representation, in particular, allows for the transfer of power from political institutions to youth civil society.

The fourth approach, "youth dialogue", is based on how ideas and knowledge evolve collaboratively within discussion. It is a way of conceptualising youth participation initiatives that are not based on the belief that young people must transmit a fixed set of ideas to policy makers. Instead, it reveals how interaction can allow decision makers and young people to create new policy solutions and new ideas between them. It is most immediately useful to forms of participation based on extended discussion, such as co-production, deliberative models and co-management. But all communication, and therefore all forms of participation, can be understood dialogically (Linell 1998). Dialogical concepts give a way of valuing youth voice initiatives by the utility of the ideas generated and their ability to inform meaningful political and social change. Shifting the perceived goals of youth participation in this way may allow new forms and methods to be developed. At the same time, it gives existing projects that "listen to the voices of young people" a concept of voice that is more theoretically and empirically grounded than those implied by many popular theories of youth participation.

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The missing voice: how Polish schools leave students out

Antoni Antoszek

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on adolescents all over the world. Studies conducted in the United States show that in the most stressful months of the pandemic, the number of suicides and suicide attempts among teenagers rose substantially (Hill et al. 2020). Young people also turned to hospital emergency rooms for mental health reasons 31% more often (Leeb et al. 2020). The situation was even worse in less affluent countries: according to a UNICEF report, during the pandemic as many as 27% of young people in Latin America and the Caribbean experienced anxiety, and 15% struggled with depression, for which the worsening economic situation was named most frequently as a cause (UNICEF 2020).

In Europe, the transition to remote learning was the most pronounced pandemic-induced change in young people's lives. It should come as no surprise that such a substantial shift has produced its own problems – both for school staff and, perhaps more crucially, for the students themselves. In Poland – where I am from and where I currently attend high school – by the time the Covid-19 pandemic plunged millions of students into remote learning, the education system had already come under criticism for years, from teachers, parents and students alike. Students have traditionally not only been considered by politicians as not responsible enough to take part in consultations, but also ignored when they pointed out problems in the education sector that concerned them directly. What the pandemic has done is merely expose the archaic nature of the Polish education system and its treatment of students as objects.

For years, school education in Poland has served mostly as a bargaining chip in electoral campaigns (a perfect subject to appeal to the electorate's emotions, for who is not concerned for the welfare of their children?), whereas it is a system whose adaptation to the 21st century requires collaborative debate. The sociologist Przemysław Sadura analysed the key reforms the Polish education system underwent up to 2015, and found that – despite the near impossibility of identifying a common denominator of the reforms, owing to the different situations that accompanied the changes introduced – in the end there was a fundamental similarity. Sadura (2017) writes: "Each of the reforms discussed was partly prepared by experts and then introduced without in-depth community discussions or, much less, broader public consultation."

After coming to power in 2015, the conservative Government of the Law and Justice party announced a thorough reform of the education system. As Sadura points out, the reform was carried out hastily and without adequate research and expert discussion (ibid.). Public consultations, including with students, were nearly completely bypassed. Robert Dorczak (2020), after analysing the way the reform was introduced, notes that:

> The authorities use manipulation techniques, use access to knowledge and the opportunity to set the tone in the public debate to impose their view on other participants in the debate. Debate on education reform and the education system in general is sometimes treated instrumentally, as an element serving political struggle.

Unsurprisingly, the implementation of an unmeritorious and poorly prepared reform negatively affected the well-being of students. In 2018 the then Ombudsman for the Rights of Children published an extensive report on the situation of students of the first reformed classes, according to which as many as 80% of students reported a problem with excessive study material, and about 30% reported having to learn on their own the required material that, due to lack of time, was not covered in schools (Lewicka-Zelent et al. 2018). Experts unanimously assessed that the reform was a step backwards in terms of adapting the system to the widely voiced needs of the students. For the same reasons, the problems arising out of distance learning – which in Poland was mandated for the majority of education levels first from March to June 2020 and then from October 2020 until the time of writing (March 2021) – were inevitable.

Justyna Suchecka, one of Poland's most prominent education journalists, makes it clear that the transition to distance learning has only exposed the flaws in the Polish education system that have been ignored for years. She points out the passivity of state institutions when it came to looking for solutions to effectively implement e-learning:

> Once the school year ended around June 20 and we knew that in September we would have to go back to school - nothing was [done to prepare]! ... September came and the same [Minister of Education] already knew that [the ministry] did nothing to prepare schools for the return of 4.5 million students. (Suchecka and Sutowski 2021)

She emphasises that the needs of students in particular have been completely ignored, treating them as objects rather than subjects in their learning and states bitterly: "For the prime minister and the ministers responsible for managing the pandemic crisis, it is important that the spreadsheets agree, not how the children will feel" (ibid.).

The first reports on the impact of distance learning on schools did not focus on students. And so in May and June 2020, two months after e-learning was first introduced in Poland, I decided to independently verify how students evaluate this type of education. The outcome of my interviews was a reportage "E-learning exam" published in November 2020 in *Pismo* magazine, for which I deliberately chose to focus on students' opinions, and asked almost no adults to speak (Antoszek 2020). What surprised me most in the students' answers was the near absence of unqualified, extreme opinions, of the kind that then dominated in most media coverage and which posited that distance learning was either a smooth, problem-less affair

or that it was disastrous and did not allow for "normal" learning. In the face of a new reality of teaching and learning, the media turned out to be an unreliable source of information about students' experiences. Rather, analysts seemed to use students' voices to confirm preconceived notions about the policy's impact, misrepresenting students' opinions and wasting a great opportunity for an honest, substantive policy debate that could have been of real benefit to those involved – students and teaching staff.

The students I interviewed offered a more nuanced assessment and highlighted both the flaws and the advantages of distance learning. They generally agreed that e-learning has necessarily brought about positive changes to several irrational features of their pre-pandemic education experience, such as the rigid and overloaded class schedules or the fact that Polish schools notoriously ignore the natural circadian rhythms of teenagers, forcing them to commence their classes in early morning hours when they simply cannot work effectively. My interviewees also pointed out, however, the hasty and ill-considered implementation of distance learning. The prevailing feeling among students was that they were ignored throughout the decision-making process (ibid.).

The main conclusion of my reportage is a quote from the report "Between the Covid-19 pandemic and the education of the future", which was published in September 2020:

> The pandemic highlighted the shortcomings and weaknesses of the education system. ... Only by learning from the crisis can we rebuild the education system to be able to respond flexibly to future emergencies. (Czapliński et al. 2020)

This opinion was shared by Justyna Suchecka, mentioned above. However, it is not possible to create a refined system without consulting students. It is not possible to seriously approach the subject of education when students are treated by decision makers more like an inconvenience than protagonists. When they are finally given a chance to speak, students are able to formulate mature and important reflections on necessary changes. One of the few reports to ever actually incorporate student feedback is the 2019 "Citizens' narrative on education" report (Adamowicz et al. 2019). It is the result of nearly 150 discussions held across the country between teachers, parents and students about what can be improved in the education system. They resulted in clear and concrete demands, for example on changing the grading system. However, not only did the Education Ministry fail to support this private initiative in any way, it did not once use the conclusions of the document, completely ignoring its existence. In fact, on the official website of the 2017 education reform, the word "student" appears only twice, and by no means in the context of conducting any consultation with this group (Ministry of Education and Science 2020).

The government has treated students similarly in the context of distance learning. For example, both teachers and students have been pointing to the overloading of the core curriculum for years – and the 2017 reform, instead of solving this problem, added additional hours of mandatory subjects to the framework curriculum for high-school students. Distance learning, which in some schools introduced reduced class time, has made it virtually beyond reach for students and teachers to go over all the required core curriculum material – a feat that even prior to the pandemic

bordered on miraculous. The government was and is well aware of these problems: in October 2020 the prime minister announced that the core curriculum would be modified for the duration of distance learning to slightly decrease the burden on students (Głos Nauczycielski 2020). However, at the time of writing (late March 2021), no action has been taken on this issue.

Students are exhausted. Year after year, their activism becomes less and less frequent as resignation and a sense of being ignored set in. When in 2019 a group of students gathered in front of the school superintendent's office in Lublin, eastern Poland, to protest against provisions in a new bill that decreased access to quality schools in the district, all they heard from the superintendent was that "not all dreams come true" (Pospischil 2019). In October 2020, two mass high-profile student protests took place, in which students came to school dressed in black. The first of the protest actions was aimed at expressing disagreement at the appointment (which eventually came to pass) of a new Minister of Education (Szczygielska-Jakubowska 2020). The new minister was known for his homophobic and sexist statements (Malinowski 2019), including that "these people [LGBT people] are not equal to normal people," and that human rights are "some idiocies" (Kocejko 2020). In the second protest action, students railed at the government for continuing to ignore growing demands to reintroduce distance learning as the number of Covid-19 infections was drastically increasing (Kromer 2020). Both events went unreported in most media outlets.

One report on e-learning notes:

> The shock that the school experienced when abruptly faced with the necessary transition to distance learning has exposed its many shortcomings and weak spots: the weakness of the education system, the weakness of the way education is realized both in terms of adapting today's technological possibilities into the work of the school, into education, and the weakness of our education in terms of curriculum and methodology. (Jarosz 2020)

However, to change this system will be impossible so long as students continue to be ignored. It will also be impossible if reforms to the education system continue to proceed in a populist manner, fixing fictional problems rather than considering the real needs and aspirations of the various stakeholders involved in education. It will be impossible unless there is a complex, extensive policy debate involving consultations with students, resulting in real solutions that take them into account. The pandemic has provided one last call to begin that process.

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Chapter 6

Political participation of young Europeans: the role of liberal values and democratic context

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Introduction

"[Th]e notion of political participation is at the center of the concept of the democratic state" (Kaase and Marsh 1979: 28).

Youth political participation is a popular research topic in political science and sociological literature, and is likely to remain so, with its age-old questions: are young people today becoming politically more, or less, enlightened/corrupt/passive/active than – or to be concise, are they different from – older generations? A general consensus on what characterises young people in the political field is unlikely to be reached, simply because times are (forever) a-changing, to quote a certain Nobel-prize-winning author.[40]

The recent literature indeed reports observations of certain changes/specificities in young people's political outlook. For instance, although the second half of the 20th century saw a decline in electoral turnout in the general population (Macedo et al. 2005; Blais 2007), this trend was more pronounced among young people (Fieldhouse, Tranmer and Russell 2007). In line with these findings, young people appeared increasingly unwilling to get involved in other conventional forms of participation, such as being active in political parties, participating in political campaigns, contacting politicians directly or joining labour unions (Norris 2003; Furlong and Cartmel 2012; Henn and Foard 2014).

However, other authors report that in the last two decades, the turnout of those who vote in elections has been stable and relatively high among young people in Europe, and that they consider this form of participation to be the most important form of engagement in democratic societies (Pilkington and Pollock 2015).

Whether or not youth participation in conventional forms of political participation has been declining, some studies show that young people are – to a disproportionate extent – increasingly involved in unconventional forms of participation, such as

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40. "The Times They Are a-Changin'" is a famous Bob Dylan album released in 1964.

protests, boycotts, online activism, petitions and citizens' associations (for example, Marsh, O'Toole and Jones 2007; Xenos, Vromen and Loader 2014; Renström, Aspernäs and Bäck 2020; Norris 2003; Furlong and Cartmel 2012; Henn and Foard 2014; Fieldhouse, Tranmer and Russell 2007). However, there is no consensus among researchers here either. For instance, Pilkington and Pollock (2015) report no significant increase in young people's unconventional participation, and Fox (2015) concludes that British millennials are a generation characterised by apathy and political alienation, both from conventional and unconventional forms of participation.

Theoretical framework

While the bulk of research continues to compare younger and older generations in terms of average levels of participation, the question of determinants of youth political participation is at least as important. Whether or not the level of youth political participation is changing, and is different from older generations, the obvious fact is that there are large differences within the younger generations. Some young people are politically active, while others are passive.

Moreover, the empirical research shows the heterogeneity of the findings: studies from different periods and countries often show inconsistent results. In other words, not many relationships are consistently documented in different contexts. The observations tend to show the opposite: different relationships vary across different contexts. For example, there is a significant role of macro/contextual variables in explaining the variations in protest activity (see Dalton, van Sickle and Weldon 2010).

All this suggests that it is important to study youth political participation continually – as earlier findings can quickly become obsolete – and to study it taking the social and political context into account. Hence, the relevant research question is no longer simply whether young people are more, or less, active in various forms of participation. It is, rather, under what conditions and in what spheres can young people become more, or less, active?

In this paper, we are concerned with factors that account for individual differences in various conventional and unconventional forms of political participation. At the individual level, we focus on several relevant variables that proved to be relevant in explaining various forms of conventional and unconventional participation, such as age, gender, educational and income level, and ideological orientations (Burns, Schlozman and Verba 2001; Dalton, van Sickle and Weldon 2010; Dauphinais, Barkan and Cohn 1992; Oni et al. 2017).

Although the role of the basic socio-economic indicators is relatively well studied, we include those variables as the control variables, but also for substantive reasons. These variables are often regarded as constituting the "basic model" of participation (for example, Verba and Nie 1972; Brady, Verba and Schlozman 1995), and it is important to control for their effects in order to demonstrate the additional explanatory value that other variables might have.

However, our main research focus concerning the individual-level predictors is on the role of ideological orientations. Some studies (Kirbiš 2013; Dalton, van Sickle

and Weldon 2010; Welzel and Deutsch 2012) indicate that certain ideological orientations are associated with different levels of democratic participation. A long line of research suggests that the abstract dimension of authoritarianism versus libertarianism (or liberalism in some studies) has a consistent and strong influence on political attitudes, including participation (Adorno et al. 1950; Inglehart 1990; Kriesi 1998; Flanagan and Lee 2003; van der Waal, Achterberg and Houtman 2007; Kirbiš 2013). Kirbiš (2013), for example, concludes that, in Europe, "'authoritarians' are less likely to be politically active".

Further back in history, the seminal *Political action: mass participation in five western democracies* (Barnes and Kaase 1979) found that support for protest participation is closely related to support for democratic values (the opposite of authoritarian). A shift to more direct, non-institutionalised and weakly co-ordinated forms of participation, towards "elite-challenging" and away from "elite-oriented" political participation, is also claimed to be rooted in a shift in values from materialist to post-materialist (Inglehart 1990; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005), which is seen as equivalent to the authoritarian-libertarian dimension (Flanagan 1987; Flanagan and Lee 2003; Achterberg 2006).

Participation in unconventional political activities is found to be strongly related to the acceptance of pro-social, emancipatory and democratic values (Inglehart 1990; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Welzel 2013; Welzel and Deutsch 2012). These values, however, seem to be more widespread among younger people in virtually every society in the world (Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Welzel 2013).

We opted for two specific attitudinal dimensions that could be regarded as facets of the more general authoritarian-libertarian ideological dimension: attitudes towards LGBT rights and towards refugees and immigrants. Importantly, these are two politically "hot" issues: both topics have been very prominent in recent years across Europe, and are widely covered in the media, so it is likely that most people will have an opinion on these matters, and that they are relevant for both conventional and unconventional forms of political participation: there are political parties representing distinct views on these issues; there are NGOs active in the field; the themes are present in online political space; and they are also the subject of street protests.

The abstract liberal–authoritarian ideological dimension is operationalised in different ways in the literature, and attitudes towards LGBT rights and towards refugees and immigrants are frequent among them. For example, the acceptance of homosexuality has been repeatedly used in the measurement of authoritarianism–liberalism orientation (de Regt, Mortelmans and Smits 2011; Pavlović, Todosijević and Komar 2019). Tolerance of homosexuality is but one indicator of emancipative values, described as pro-civic and pro-liberal orientation (Welzel 2013). Similarly, ethnocentrism and ethnic prejudice have been conceived as some of the central elements of authoritarianism since its conception (Adorno et al. 1950; Altemeyer 1996).

Overall, we would expect more liberal or libertarian-oriented young people to be more politically active, in line with, among others, Kirbiš' (2013) conclusion that, in Europe, the "pro-democratically oriented public was found to be more politically engaged than authoritarians" (p. 243).

While this hypothesis is less controversial concerning anti-LGBT attitudes, its applicability is more problematic concerning anti-immigrant attitudes.

The migrant (or refugee) crisis has left a striking mark on European societies over the last decade. In many countries, the political sphere has become highly polarised around this issue, as demonstrated by the emergence, and success, of numerous right-wing populist political parties that exploit it (Norris and Inglehart 2019). Not only has this been a very prominent political issue, but it has also affected young people perhaps more than the older generations. For example, it might induce a stronger feeling of competition for resources (such as jobs and social positions) for young people, since they are in the process of securing their own social position. At the same time, youth organisations have been prominent and active in the pro-immigrant camp (for example, Pisani et al. 2018). Hence, it is less obvious whether heightened participation – whether conventional or unconventional – is expected to be associated with the authoritarian position on this issue (stronger anti-immigrant/refugee attitudes).

This ambiguity makes this research question all the more important and timely. In any case, our choice of the two ideological orientations (demonstrated by attitudes towards the LGBT population, and towards immigrants/refugees) seems appropriate for the study of youth political participation.

Association of active participation with the authoritarian–liberal dimension might indicate future ideological shifts in European politics. If young people with anti-immigrant attitudes are more active, this could lead to more anti-immigrant policies, for instance. Hence, the real-life implications of our study are worth keeping in mind.

As mentioned earlier, context seems to be relevant for various forms of participation. For the political issues we study here, and for studying youth participation, one contextual variable seems to be particularly relevant: the level of democratisation of a country. The level of democratisation (or quality of democracy) is obviously relevant for political participation (Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Dalton, van Sickle and Weldon 2010; Dalton and Welzel, 2014; Welzel, Inglehart and Deutsch 2005).

Political institutions, as the setting where political participation takes place, may be such that they do not readily allow for high levels of participation (Tarrow 1996; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996). Hence, lower democratisation may make citizens more passive, especially when it comes to the conventional forms of participation.

In open and democratic political systems, conventional forms of participation are supposed to be more meaningful, which should motivate participation (in less democratic contexts, citizens may conclude that there is no point in casting votes). But democratic systems can also stimulate protests, demonstrations and civil disobedience – in other words, forms of unconventional participation (Dalton, van Sickle and Weldon 2010) – because they are open, and citizens have less reason to fear repercussions. Thus, it may be that democracy begets more democracy. For instance, political mobilisation to support various underprivileged groups may become stronger where there is a relatively high level of democracy in mainstream society.

In general, we would expect that a more democratic context should be positively associated with all forms of participation.

In accordance with the theoretical debates and previous research findings, this paper is based on the following research questions.

- ▶ Which forms of political participation are more, or less, popular among young people (not comparing them with adults)? We expect that the most formal type of participation – voting at elections – is the one most practised.

- ▶ What are the main sociodemographic predictors of various forms of political participation? Following the literature, we predict that age and education should be the most significant predictors of higher participation.

- ▶ How are the attitudes of young people towards LGBT rights and towards immigrants associated with various forms of political participation? We hypothesise that more liberal orientations are associated with increased participation.

- ▶ What is the relationship between the sociopolitical context (level of development of democratic institutions) and different forms of youth political participation? Our hypothesis is that a higher level of democratisation is associated with more active participation, particularly concerning unconventional forms of participation.

Data and research design

To analyse the relationship between different types of youth political activism, values and characteristics of the sociopolitical context, we used data from the ninth round of the European Social Survey (ESS). The ESS data enable the comparison of different European societies, and contain a sufficient number of indicators to measure various aspects of political participation. The ESS data were collected on representative samples of population groups aged 15 and above in 29 European countries in the period 2018-20. For the purpose of the current study, we used the cohort aged 15-30. For social context indicators, we used *The Economist* (2021) Intelligence Unit's democracy index.

Outcome variables

Research on youth political participation often classifies forms of political participation as either conventional/formal/old or unconventional/informal/new.

While we think that these categories should not be set in stone, since various previously new forms of participation have now become, or are becoming, standard, we nevertheless adopted this distinction, as it seemed useful for the presentation of our results. Therefore, in this paper, we focus on nine specific forms of political participation.

The "conventional" forms of participation included are:

1. voting in national elections (voter turnout);
2. wearing a campaign badge;
3. contacting a politician;
4. being active in a political party or action group.

The "unconventional" forms of participation included are:

5. online engagement;
6. participation in demonstrations;
7. signing petitions;

8. participation in the work of civil society organisations – "CSO";
9. boycotting products.

Each activity was measured by a specific question with "yes" and "no" answers (and for voting, also the answer "ineligible to vote", which was excluded from the analysis). The question about participating in elections was 1) "Some people don't vote nowadays for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last [country] national election?". The questions on the other forms of participation were: "There are different ways of trying to improve things in [country] or help prevent things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following?": 2) "worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker"; 3) "contacted a politician, government or local government official"; 4) "worked in a political party or action group"; 5) "posted or shared anything about politics online, for example on blogs, via e-mail or on social media such as Facebook or Twitter"; 6) "taken part in a lawful public demonstration"; 7) "signed a petition"; 8) "worked in another civil society organisation or association"; and 9) "boycotted certain products".

Predictor variables

As independent variables, we used two scales that express liberal versus authoritarian/conservative attitudes towards the rights of members of the two minority populations currently at the forefront of political and social debate: the LGBT population and immigrants.

The attitude towards LGBT rights was measured using a scale consisting of three questions: 1) "Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own lives as they wish"; 2) "If a close family member was a gay man or a lesbian, I would feel ashamed"; 3) "Gay male and lesbian couples should have the same rights to adopt children as straight couples". Answers to each question included five-point scales (1-5) of the Likert type. To form a composite scale (range 3-15), the scale of the second question is reversed so that all answers are in the same direction; thus, the higher the score, the lower the degree of liberal attitudes towards the LGBT population. The reliability of the scale for the whole sample, Cronbach's alpha, is .83.

The scale used to measure anti-immigrant attitudes consists of two questions: 1) "Would you say that [country's] cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries"; and 2) "Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?". Responses were given using 11-point scales (0-10). The total range of the scale is based on two questions, which when summarised can take a value from 0 to 20; the higher the score, the more positive or liberal the attitude towards immigrants.

In order to describe the sociopolitical context, we used *The Economist* Intelligence Unit's democracy index, which consists of five dimensions: electoral process and political pluralism; the effectiveness of government; participation;[41] political culture;

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41. The main contextual variables include, among other things, the measure of participation. Since we included this, we wished to add a note. The participation indicator covers various areas, such as voter turnout and readiness to take part in lawful demonstrations. However, they are expressed as an average turnout in parliamentary elections since 2000 (expressed as above 70%/50-70% / below 50%) or as low/moderate/high preparedness to take part in demonstrations. As such, they are still aggregate or macro measures, thereby justifying the treatment as a contextual variable.

and liberties. It covers a total of 60 indicators and represents a weighted average of experts' judgments, public opinion polls and population data. The range of scores for countries in the sample is 5.77-9.81.

Other indicator

As control variables, we used the following sociodemographic indicators: respondent's age; gender (male gender is the reference category); education (number of years spent in the education system); and the total household monthly income.

Method and results

For data analysis, we used multi-level random intercept binary logistic models, with 29 countries in the sample. In this way, we were able to separate the effects of social context from individual characteristics of respondents, and identify both individual and social factors that shape patterns of youth political behaviour. Post-stratification weight involving design weights was used to weight the data, thus maintaining the relative uniformity of the size of individual samples and enabling the comparability of different social contexts.

Descriptive analyses

Descriptive data about the participation variables are presented in Table 1. There are significant variations in the degree of youth participation in the last national (parliamentary) elections held in European countries ("voter turnout"). The lowest proportion of young people voting is found in the Czech Republic (43.3%), France (43.1%) and Switzerland (43.7%), while the highest is in the Scandinavian countries – Sweden (86.6%), Iceland (72.9%) Denmark (82.7%) and Norway (79.1%). The percentage of young people active in various civil society organisations ("CSO") varies from about 1% to 30%; it is lowest in Cyprus, Slovakia and Hungary, and highest in the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands. The share of young people signing a petition ranges from around 5% in Hungary and Cyprus to over 40% in the Nordic countries (Iceland, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden). Contacting politicians is relatively rare among young people and is least common in Bulgaria, Slovakia, Cyprus and Hungary, and most common in Latvia, Belgium, Portugal, Norway and Sweden. It is somewhat more common in the countries of western and northern Europe than in eastern and southern Europe. Participation in the work of political parties is at a very low level, and of all the forms of participation, it is definitely the least practised. The countries with the lowest share of party activism among young people are Hungary, Bulgaria, Italy and Lithuania; those with the highest share are Iceland, Montenegro, Spain and Serbia. In the Balkans, this type of activism is probably the result of clientelistic networks that have monopolised resources, especially in the public sector (Stanojević, Gundogan and Babović 2016). There are large differences when it comes to participating in campaigns ("campaign badge"); it is least practised in Hungary, Slovenia and Cyprus, and most in the Scandinavian countries. Here, too, a certain pattern can be seen: this form of activism is more common in northern and western Europe, and less so in southern and eastern Europe.

Table 1. Country-level distribution of political participation key variables

	Voter turnout	Contacted politician	Active in political party or action group	Campaign badge	CSO[1]	Petitions	Demonstrations	Boycotts	Online engagement
Austria	73.9	13.3	4.9	5.3	14.0	32.2	12.0	28.6	27.0
Belgium	69.2	15.7	2.9	7.7	17.8	25.5	5.0	13.8	27.9
Bulgaria	62.0	1.5	1.5	3.2	2.0	7.7	7.9	5.2	7.4
Croatia	49.3	5.1	3.8	4.6	9.0	34.4	9.5	8.7	10.5
Cyprus	49.2	3.6	2.6	2.0	1.0	7.7	5.1	6.6	8.7
Czech Republic	43.3	8.5	2.7	11.0	5.0	24.1	14.3	15.0	22.2
Denmark	82.7	12.8	3.3	12.8	25.9	42.9	11.1	27.7	30.2
Estonia	48.8	10.3	3.3	7.7	4.3	14.6	2.9	9.1	23.0
Finland	71.8	8.5	2.3	22.1	26.5	43.5	7.3	42.2	27.6
France	43.1	7.7	5.9	14.5	13.8	37.7	16.5	30.0	30.5
Germany	76.9	10.6	2.2	8.8	24.6	36.3	12.9	34.2	28.2
Hungary	57.9	4.0	0.0	1.2	1.4	4.1	4.1	3.2	6.4
Iceland	72.9	14.3	11.1	39.3	28.7	43.2	25.8	38.8	24.6
Ireland	49.0	11.1	3.8	15.3	9.2	29.7	14.3	13.5	22.7
Italy	76.2	7.0	1.5	7.7	5.5	14.0	9.7	5.6	21.7

	Voter turnout	Contacted politician	Active in political party or action group	Campaign badge	CSO[1]	Petitions	Demonstrations	Boycotts	Online engagement
Latvia	65.2	19.0	2.9	8.8	12.7	14.5	5.2	4.6	29.1
Lithuania	45.6	6.3	1.7	3.5	3.0	19.6	6.9	5.2	17.4
Montenegro	70.7	10.3	10.9	7.6	8.8	19.6	7.9	6.7	10.0
Netherlands	76.1	12.3	2.7	6.2	30.2	26.3	4.9	9.6	17.3
Norway	79.1	15.3	6.3	47.0	22.1	45.1	18.1	29.0	33.1
Poland	55.5	5.9	2.8	8.1	6.9	13.1	4.4	5.6	8.8
Portugal	54.7	15.6	5.2	8.5	21.7	35.1	10.8	8.1	27.8
Serbia	57.4	7.0	7.0	2.8	17.9	23.8	8.6	11.8	19.3
Slovakia	45.7	2.3	1.8	3.2	1.4	29.9	6.3	3.6	7.7
Slovenia	49.2	10.7	2.4	2.0	8.7	13.6	4.0	7.9	15.8
Spain	70.5	12.3	7.4	12.3	20.4	24.3	25.3	13.7	34.7
Sweden	86.6	14.7	2.8	17.2	28.6	47.7	14.7	47.4	42.3
Switzerland	43.7	7.2	3.7	6.9	12.4	29.1	6.9	19.6	15.7
United Kingdom	55.2	7.3	3.1	8.8	7.2	40.5	6.3	14.8	28.9

1. CSO – Participation in civil society organisations.

Lawful public demonstration as a form of youth activism is significantly present in some countries, such as Spain and Iceland; less so in Norway, France, Sweden, the Czech Republic and Ireland; and least of all in Slovenia, Hungary, Estonia and Poland. The participation of young people who are politically active online is approximately the same, given that between 6% and 42% of them have posted or shared anything about politics online.

Overall, two features of the data presented seem obvious. There are wide variations in the levels of political participation across countries. And there are clear regional differences: the average levels of political participation tend to be lower in the regions of eastern Europe or post-communist countries, as found in Kirbiš (2013).
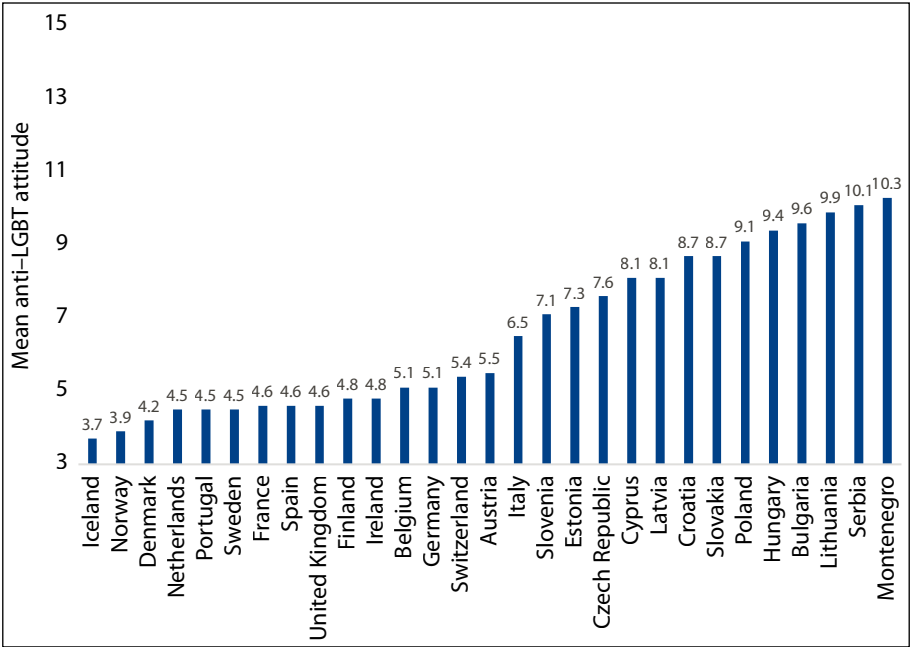
Figure 1. Mean anti-LGBT attitude in different European countries among young people

As shown in Figure 1, there are also significant variations between countries in terms of the mean anti-LGBT attitude. Young people in Scandinavian and western European countries on average express less anti-LGBT views compared to young people in eastern Europe (ex-socialist countries). Eastern European countries can be seen to have a less positive attitude towards the LGBT population and their rights. Various reasons could account for this, such as the post-socialist legacy; economic underdevelopment; and traditionalist and authoritarian political culture. However, fully testing the role of these factors is beyond the scope of this paper.
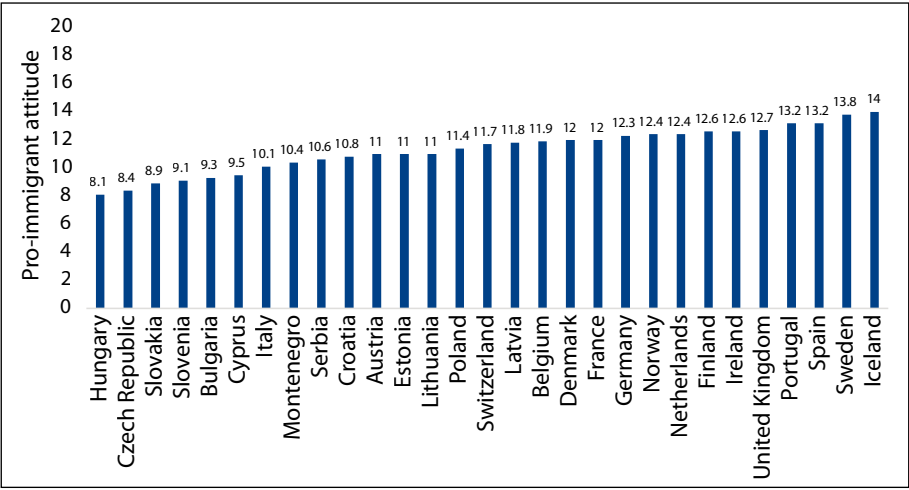
Figure 2. Mean pro-immigrant attitude in different countries among young people

As shown in Figure 2, when it comes to the attitude towards refugees and immigrants, young people in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Bulgaria are, on average, less positive about immigrants compared to their peers in Iceland, Sweden, Spain and Portugal. In general, the ordering of countries is similar along both dimensions. Eastern European former communist countries demonstrate more authoritarian attitudes.
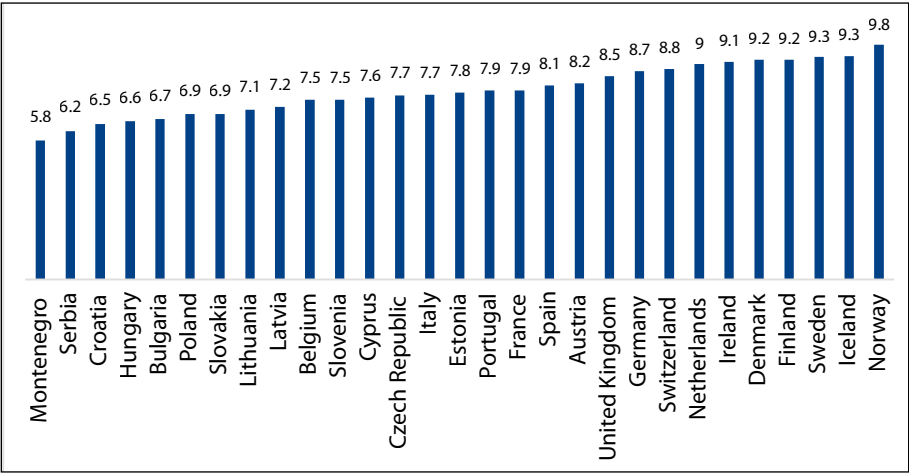
Figure 3. Mean scores on *The Economist* Intelligence Unit's democracy index

Figure 3 shows that young democracies – the former socialist countries – have the lowest scores on the democracy index; the countries of central, southern and western Europe are in the middle; and the Nordic countries record the highest scores. At this point, possible associations between the social context and individual characteristics, ideological orientations and behaviours in the political field can be recognised.

Analysis

We first present the results pertaining to conventional forms of political participation. Note that the analyses were performed on a subsample of respondents aged 15-30, who could be called "young people", "youth" or "emerging adults".

The first variable presented in Table 2 below is the voter turnout variable. Almost all coefficients associated with the individual-level variables reached the adopted level of statistical significance. On average, young men vote more often than young women. There is a positive association between voting and relatively higher socio-economic status, as indicated by the variables of education and household income. Liberal attitudes, towards both LGBT rights and immigrants/refugees, are also associated with higher turnout. The young Europeans who have more liberal attitudes towards the LGBT population, as well as those who have more positive attitudes towards immigrants, vote more often. The results also show that a more or less democratic context in Europe does not significantly predict voter turnout. It looks as if the most basic form of conventional participation is more a matter of individual resources and attitudes than of the sociopolitical context.

The second participation variable is that of contacting politicians or government officials. The probability of this activity increases with age, while young men engage in it more often compared to young women. With each year of education, and increase in household income, the likelihood increases that young people will come into direct contact with politicians or officials. As for voter turnout, this type of activity is more often practised by those with more liberal attitudes towards both the LGBT population and immigrants/refugees. The contextual indicator did not show statistical significance, indicating that the already low variability of this phenomenon is not systematically related to the level of development of democratic institutions.

Being active in a political party or action group – the third variable – is positively associated with gender: women take part in this form of political activism relatively less frequently. Concerning socio-economic status, only education is associated with activism in political parties (income is not). Again, more liberal attitudes towards immigrants/refugees are more frequently found among the politically more active. However, a more liberal attitude towards the LBGT population this time did not prove to be a significant predictor of this type of activity. Apparently, the socio-political context expressed by the quality of democracy does not explain individual differences in political party activism as well.

The fourth variable of conventional participation – having worn or displayed a campaign badge or stickers – is not related to any of the sociodemographic characteristics included. However, it is statistically significantly related to young people's ideological orientations. Young people who are more liberal in terms of their attitude towards the LGBT population, and have a more positive attitude towards immigrants, are more willing to engage politically by wearing a campaign badge. This activity is also associated with the degree of democracy of the country, and is the only conventional political participation variable to do so. In other words, the more democratic a country is, the more young people are willing to support political campaigns by wearing a campaign badge.

Table 2. Logistic regression models for conventional political participation

	Voter turnout		Contacted politician		Active in political party or action group		Campaign badge	
	Coeff.	Exp. Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.
Intercept	-4.026***	0.018	-3.816***	0.022	-4.274***	0.014	-2.347***	0.096
Age	.107***	1.113	.034**	1.035	-.02	0.98	-0.014	0.986
Female (ref. male)	-.123*	0.884	-.407***	0.666	-.261*	0.77	0.142	1.153
Education years	.138***	1.148	.050***	1.051	.105***	1.11	0.018	1.018
Income	.029*	1.029	.032*	1.033	0.021	1.021	-0.011	0.989
Ideological variables								
Anti-LGBT scale	-.137**	0.872	-.232***	0.793	-0.049	0.953	-.227***	0.797
Pro-immigrant scale	.091*	1.095	.192***	1.211	.170*	1.184	.231***	1.260
Contextual variable								
Democracy index	0.155	0.918	0.066	1.068	-0.083	0.924	.464***	1.591
ICC	0.086		0.027		0.072		0.078	
N1[1]	5333		7072		7077		7077	
N2[2]	29		29		29		29	

1. Number of cases – individuals

2. Number of cases – countries

Source: ESS 2020, youth (15-30), weighted by post-stratification weight.

***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05.

In Table 3 below, we present the results concerning the five unconventional forms of political participation. In the first model, we analysed participation in civil society organisations. The results show that participation decreases with age, while men are significantly more engaged than women. Education is associated with this type of engagement; the longer spent in the educational system, the more frequent the involvement in civil society organisations. Furthermore, there is a positive relationship between liberal attitudes towards LGBT rights, positive attitudes towards immigrants and participation in civil society organisations, indicating that ideological orientations are very important conditions for involvement in NGOs and associations.

Concerning the macro-level variable, there is a positive relationship between the degree of democracy in the country and the degree of participation in civil society, so that in countries with more developed democratic institutions, young people are more involved in civil society organisations.

The second model concerns the degree of participation in a lawful public demonstration in the previous 12 months. The results show that participation in demonstrations decreases with age, and grows with each year of education, but does not show an association with household income. Those who have a more liberal orientation are more willing to go on demonstrations. Differences in the country's degree of democracy, however, cannot explain the differences regarding participation in demonstrations.

In the third model, we analysed the probabilities of someone signing a petition in the previous 12 months. The results indicate that age, gender and household income are not associated with this activity, while a longer time spent in education does increase the probability of signing a petition. Those who have more liberal attitudes are also more likely to do so. This type of protest is well studied, and the data presented here are quite in line with previous findings (for example, Welzel, Inglehart and Deutsch 2005; Dalton, van Sickle and Weldon 2010). As in the second model, the coefficient for the contextual variable did not reach the level of statistical significance.

The fourth model analyses whether respondents posted or shared anything about politics online during the previous 12 months. The results indicate that young men are more politically active on the internet than young women and that the level of education is positively associated with online activism, as well as liberal attitudes towards LGBT rights and a positive attitude towards immigrants/refugees. Finally, the probability of online engagement increases with the degree of democracy of the country.

The fifth model analyses the factors associated with boycotting certain products ("buycotts"). The probability of boycotting increases with age, which is probably related to the increase in the purchasing power of young people as well as the development of consumer habits. The longer young people stay in education, the more the probability of boycotting certain products increases; purchasing decisions increasingly include considering the associated ideological and value connotations. Young people who have more liberal attitudes are more willing to use these political strategies to express a political attitude. Finally, the democratic context is statistically related to boycotts. In countries with a more democratic system, this activity is more widespread.

Table 3. Logistic regression models for unconventional political participation

	CSO[1]		Demonstrations		Signing petitions		Online engagement		Boycotting products	
	Coeff.	Exp. Coeff.	Coeff.	Exp. Coeff.	Coeff.	Exp. Coeff.	Coeff.	Exp. Coeff.	Coeff.	Exp. Coeff.
Intercept	-2.714***	0.066	-2.968***	0.051	-2.948***	0.052	-2.302***	0.1	-4.052***	0.017
Age	-.044***	0.957	-.021*	0.979	0.006	1.006	0.009	1.009	.026**	1.027
Gender: Female (ref. male)	-.307***	0.736	-.080	0.923	0.084	1.087	-.198**	0.821	0.003	1.003
Education years	.113***	1.120	.083***	1.087	.110***	1.116	.069***	1.071	.099***	1.105
Income	0.023	1.024	-0.025	0.975	0.018	1.018	-0.012	0.988	0.022	1.022
Ideological variables										
Anti-LGBT scale	-.194***	0.824	-.232***	0.793	-.377***	0.686	-.303***	0.739	-.278***	0.757
Pro-immigrant scale	.153***	1.165	.376***	1.456	.209***	1.232	0.009	1.009	.197***	1.218
Contextual variable										
Democracy index	.444**	1.483	.142	1.152	0.233*	1.262	.205**	1.227	.537**	1.711
ICC	0.17		0.087		0.079		0.031		0.102	
N1[2]	7080		7080		7071		7067		7067	
N2[3]	29		29		29		29		29	

1. CSO – Participation in civil society organisations

2. Number of cases – individuals

3. Number of cases – countries

Source: ESS 2020, youth (15-30), weighted by post-stratification weight.

***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05.

Discussion and conclusions

In order to analyse individual and contextual factors associated with different kinds of political participation among young people in Europe, we used the ninth round of the European Social Survey (ESS) data and applied a multilevel analytic approach. First, we observed that the forms of political participation among young Europeans are (a) diversified and (b) there are significant differences between countries.

Descriptives

European young people engage in different forms of political activism, but to varying degrees: each of the nine examined activities is practised by some, but no activity is practised by all. Expectedly, voting is by far the most popular form of participation. The highest level is observed in Sweden: 86.6% of the youth subsample voted in the previous election. Other relatively frequent activities are signing petitions, boycotting products and posting online content.

Cross-country differences are also notable, involving both conventional and unconventional forms of participation. Young people, particularly in the northern European region, seem to be active at above-average levels in most regards, but variations are obvious within each region. However, the discussion of country differences is beyond the scope of this paper.

Controls and sociodemographics

The patterns of significant sociodemographic predictors of conventional and unconventional forms of participation are mostly similar and can be discussed together. The results obtained for the individual-level predictors generally conform to our expectations, with some exceptions. For example, electoral turnout is predicted by older age (despite the sample being limited to young people), male gender, education and income. Each of these coefficients goes in the expected direction if we compare them with the results of Smets and van Ham's (2013) meta-analysis of turnout predictors. A deviation in this regard is the activity of wearing a campaign badge, where no socio-economic variables proved to be significant predictors. The reason may be in the cultural specificity of this activity, as demonstrated by the large variation in the frequencies of these activities between countries. For example, this activity is relatively common in northern and western European countries but rare in eastern Europe. In Norway, nearly 47% of young people wore campaign badges, while in countries such as Serbia, Hungary and Slovakia, the figures are below 3%.

The age variable showed some unexpected results. Although "young adults are notorious abstainers" (Smets and van Ham 2013: 348), the findings show that age is positively correlated with voting in elections. Age is also associated with contacting politicians and boycotting products; it is negatively associated with participation in civil society organisations and participation in protests. Age is one of the most stable predictors of turnout (Smets and van Ham 2013; Blais, Gidengil and Nevitte 2004), as it reflects gradual entry into conventional politics and the need to form a habit of participation (for example, of voting, Miller and Shanks 1996; Verba and Nie

1972). Boycotting products ("Buycotts"), as an expression of political preferences, implies a certain level of economic independence that comes with taking on roles of adults, such as completing education, entering the labour market and financial independence. However, negative associations of age with participation in associations and demonstrations are more puzzling. It is possible that participation in demonstrations is less compatible with adult roles and responsibilities. However, it is not clear what could account for the decreasing participation in civil society organisations with increasing age. Further research is required in order to determine if these are reliable findings.

The results for education suggest that this is of special relevance for political participation in general. Education is a key resource and facilitates political participation (for example, Smets and van Ham 2013; Persson 2015; Brady, Verba and Schlozman 1995). It leads to a better understanding of the world of politics and society. Also, a higher education level – especially college education – offers more options for involvement in various forms of associations and ad hoc actions, and as such represents a key reservoir and "recruitment framework" for youth activism (Flanagan et al. 2012; Persson 2015).

Although the "gender gap" in participation has been reported in the literature (for example, Paxton, Kunovich and Hughes 2007), among adults, gender is not a reliable predictor of electoral turnout (Smets and van Ham 2013). According to our results, young European men are more involved in several forms of participation than young European women. Men tend to vote more often, are more willing to contact politicians and participate in the work of political parties and other associations, and are more often active online. There is no form of participation in which women are more involved than men. The results thus support the thesis that specific socialisation of women – but also systemic barriers in many countries – lead to less interest and involvement (for example, Inglehart, Norris and Ronald 2003; Pfanzelt and Spies 2018; Milbrath and Goel 1977).

In general, the observed associations among the socio-economic and demographic variables support the "resource model" of participation (for example, Smets and van Ham 2013; Brady, Verba and Schlozman 1995; Nygård, Söderberg and Nyman-Kurkiala 2016; Verba and Nie 1972). The essence of the model is captured by Verba and Nye, for example, who conclude that those who take part in politics are those who have the necessary skills, time and money (Verba and Nie 1972; Brady, Verba and Schlozman 1995).

Ideological orientations

The relationship between ideological orientations and participation shows interesting connections. When looking at the youth population, respondents' more positive attitudes towards LGBT rights, and towards immigrants, are associated with greater involvement in almost all forms of political participation. Those who are more liberal on these two issues are more often politically and civically active. Being liberal means assigning more importance to human rights and freedoms, having more intense liberty aspirations and valuing the utility of freedom to a greater extent (for example, Welzel 2013). Thus, our starting hypothesis is confirmed.

This finding is quite in line with the emancipative and value-based view of causes of unconventional political activism. Questioning and challenging, instead of following and complying, are sometimes seen as the norm for democratic citizens today, but this can come from both sides of the political spectrum. Concerning voter turnout among adults, for instance, left–right ideology is not consistently associated with participation (Smets and van Ham 2013). However, ideology can become associated, depending on a particular time and place. It seems that at the end of the second decade of the 21st century, it is liberal young people who tend to be somewhat more politically active.

We speculated that anti-immigrant attitudes in particular could turn out to be associated with increased activism, given the prominence of the recent migrant crisis, which coincided with the politically formative years of our youth samples. However, the results showed that, in fact, liberal positions on both the ideological dimensions studied are characterised by higher average participation.

Nonetheless, it requires further research to see if this increased activism among liberal young people can also be seen with regard to other political issues (for example socio-economic left–right issues), or whether it only applies to those on the libertarianism–authoritarianism dimension.

Context

Sociopolitical context – in other words, the level of polity democratisation – is associated with variations in political participation in several interesting ways. First, the level of democratisation seems to be more important for participating in unconventional activities (civil society organisations, boycotts, posting on the internet) than in the formal, more conventional ways (the only significant coefficient concerns the culturally specific wearing of campaign badges and/or placing stickers).

It may be that within the European context, the basic democratic institutions are relatively well established and secure, regardless of whether a polity is ranked relatively lower or higher on its quality of democracy. Voting, contacting politicians and party activism are activities available to all in each of the countries studied, and therefore the overall level of democratisation is not associated with these forms of participation. Perhaps differences in the levels of democracy within Europe are not so large as to allow the supposed passivising effect of flawed democracy to materialise, at least in terms of voting and similar conventional activities.

Young people in more democratically developed countries participate relatively more often in unconventional political activities, such as working in civil society organisations, online posting and boycotting products. The association of participation in civil society organisations with the level of democracy supports the view that one of the basic prerequisites for the functioning of a democratic system is a developed civil society. Unlike voting, participation in civil society organisations is self-selected, and typically takes into account the ideological leaning of the organisation. While young people with anti-LGBT attitudes may participate more in churches (which do not fall under "CSO"), those with liberal gender views are slightly more frequently found among participants in civil society organisations.

This also indicates the importance of looking at specific forms of participation, rather than just conventional and unconventional ones.

The explanation of more frequent unconventional participation in more democratic contexts may be that young people in more democratically developed countries have more opportunities and established channels of participation, adequate infrastructure, more responsive institutions and political socialisation that enables them to engage in political processes, compared to countries where democratic procedures are still being established and the civic infrastructure is still being built – in other words, precisely because they live in societies that allow them to do so. It is also possible that growing up in a more democratic society creates an activistic political culture and also democratic expectations and demands. This may reflect the tendency of people to "protest because they can" (Dalton, van Sickle and Weldon 2010: 72) – in other words, not because they are deprived but because they are primarily motivated by the pursuit of more rights and freedoms (Barnes and Kaase 1979; Inglehart 1990; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Welzel 2013; Norris 2002; Dalton, van Sickle and Weldon 2010; Welzel and Deutsch 2012; Verba, Sclozman and Brady 1995). However, it requires further research to examine whether this means that societies show greater resistance to change in a liberal direction, which would then create demand for increased political activism.

Overall, our conclusions are clear. The socio-economic predictors of youth participation are basically the same as for the general population (for the summary concerning voting, for example, see Smets and van Ham 2013). In particular, age and education are particularly consistent predictors of participation, while gender is to a lesser extent. More interestingly, youth political participation does not seem to be ideologically neutral. Liberal positions towards LGBT rights and towards immigrants are associated with higher activism across the board. Finally, the democratic political context is a macro variable that predicts some forms of activism, in particular the unconventional ones. Is it possible to say anything about the future of European politics based on the results obtained? Not with any certainty. However, if overall political participation continues to be higher among the liberal sections of the public, the political picture of Europe in 20 to 30 years might look different to that of the last few decades, characterised as they were by the conservative turn of the 1980s (for example, Ignazi 1992) and cultural backlash of the 2000s (Norris and Inglehart 2019). Then again, if growing old and wise means also becoming more conservative,[42] not much change in the political landscape is to be expected.

For future research, we would suggest examining the role of some other attitudinal and ideological dimensions besides those included in this study. For instance, the classical left–right dimension is worth looking at. It would be important to examine the influence of additional macro-level variables and their interactions with the micro-level variables. For instance, adding indicators of the institutional inclusion of LGBT rights and freedoms could affect the role of the LGBT ideological dimension. While the ESS

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42. As originally expressed by Batbie (Alpert 2016: 647): "He who is not a républicain at twenty compels one to doubt the generosity of his heart; but he who, after thirty, persists, compels one to doubt the soundness of his mind." Anselme Polycarpe Batbie (19th-century French academic jurist).

methodology uses the classical indicators of political participation, it would be worth considering other forms of participation and motivations of young people to engage in political life, such as digital participation, subcultural groupings, art performance and alternative use of public spaces. In addition to the frequency of participation, it is also important to pay attention to the motivation behind the participation. Participation, for instance, could be clientelistically motivated. Thus, democratic context may be related not only to manifestation but also to the underlying motivation.

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Essay

Young European transnationals weaving Europe's fate

Narcis George Matache

Introduction

Aalborg (Denmark), November 2013. In front of a polling station, a young Slovakian woman is interviewed. The Danish journalist asks: "How was the experience of voting in Denmark?", to which the Slovakian woman replies with tears in her eyes: "I never thought I would feel the joy of democracy; this is my first time voting ever and I'm glad to have done it in a country where my vote actually counts." The conversation took place in English and was echoed in media reports from many other voting districts where non-Danish speakers, to the surprise of the poll workers, showed up to vote. Fast-forward in time, May 2020, same city. A diverse group of people gathered in the public square with raised cardboard placards, featuring drawings and messages written in English, such as "Abortion is a right" and "My body, my choice". In front of them, three speakers attempt to arouse the public with the same speech in three languages (Danish, English and Polish) – a speech about the anti-abortion laws in Poland. A march is taped on video, pictures are taken, and the Polish media are made aware of the protest in Denmark.

Two moving images of young people weaving Europe's fate. As a participant in those events, I understood the significance and the power of European transnationals, the first true European citizens. In 2019, some 17.1 million citizens of the then EU28 lived in another country – with 45% of them settling in Germany and the United Kingdom (Busquets Guàrdia 2019). The average number of Europeans living in another country increased from 2.4% in 2010 to 3.3% in 2020 (Eurostat 2021). This increasing movement of citizens within the EU has created the basis for a United Europe.

The root of power: electoral rights in the host state

The rights to vote and stand in local and regional elections in the host state was set in place in 1994, through Council Directive 94/80/EC (Council of the European Union 1994). The majority of those who use this right can be referred to as "European transnationals". There is no official definition of this term, however. I use it to describe European citizens who live in an EU member state other than

their state of origin. In my opinion, there are two types of European transnationals: "awake" and "sleeping". "Awake" if they know about their electoral rights and are keen to use them in order to exercise influence, and "sleeping" if they do not know about their electoral rights and consider themselves as guests in the host state. To become "awake", a European transnational has to complete the obstacle race that lies between finding out about their electoral rights and exercising influence in both the host state and state of origin.

Case study: Aalborg (Denmark)

In less than a decade, the former industrial city of Aalborg became a cosmopolitan city fully connected to European reality. The arrival of students and workers from all over Europe set the city on a path towards internationalisation, going on to become the happiest and safest European city, as well as the most diverse in Denmark. As they changed the place around them, the newly arrived young people became aware of their political power, and began to take an interest in also shaping the place they had left behind.

I discovered my electoral rights while I was in Denmark, and wanted to have more influence on local decision making. I wanted to share this knowledge with other European transnationals, but it was harder than expected. I started working on this issue in 2012, and while there is some progress, there are still numerous obstacles. The first obstacle, and the most difficult to clear, is the lack of trust in politics and politicians. The majority of European transnationals are unhappy with the situation in their states of origin and blame it on the corruption of the political system. In order to fix this relationship, we used the following formula in Aalborg: hosting non-political events (such as cultural and sports events), where citizens could meet politicians; organising information meetings with concrete conclusions; and making promises that became reality. Building trust has been a painstakingly slow process, but with long-term effects.

Once the trust in politics is regained, there comes the motivation obstacle. "Why should a newcomer have the power to decide the fate of the local society?" was a question we heard often. Our argument has always been "You breathe the same air, you drink the same water, you use the same public transportation, your children go to the same school, you spend weekends in the same natural areas, you go to the same cultural events." And also: "You pay taxes here, why shouldn't you be part of the decision making?".

Once they have been persuaded to use their right to vote, other questions will arise. What am I voting for? Who should I vote for? Why are there no politicians talking about my issues? How do I vote? These questions reveal a series of obstacles: lack of knowledge on how the local and regional councils function; political materials, debates and speeches in a language that is hard to understand; lack of dialogue between local politicians and European transnationals and a voting process that is hard to grasp. Truly an obstacle race, but one that yielded innovation on the political stage in Denmark.

While in 2012 the campaign I was leading was the only one using English (debates, speeches and materials) and actually trying to talk with European transnationals, in 2021 we had multilingual political campaigns all over Denmark. If in 2012, seeing a debate in English between local Danish politicians was an anomaly, in 2021 it has become normal in almost every city.

Over the years, we have seen the first political party to welcome non-Danish speakers; the first political club for local non-Danes; the first local initiative from non-Danes to pass in the City Council; the first elected non-Dane in university elections; and the first non-Dane to run for regional council. This series of firsts not only impacted Aalborg but led the way for the rest of the country. The political landscape changed from zero European transnational candidates for local elections in 2013, to five in 2017 and more than 30 in 2021. All of this shows that the number of European transnationals who have become "awake" has increased, along with their hunger for influence and change.

The city square became a place where democracy was regularly practised – the "new normal" meant seeing Romanians and Hungarians protesting together against Orbán; Germans and Poles marching together against Kaczyński; and non-Danish Europeans and Danes holding placards next to each other, demanding more student jobs. Social media, such as Facebook, played another important role in this process, as a source of information and a platform for organising locally and as a diaspora. Young Romanians from Denmark got involved in starting political movements in Romania. Young Hungarians from Denmark organised protests in Budapest for media freedom. And the list goes on…

Conclusion

Youth represents the future of a country, and the driving force for challenging the status quo. Each country has a carefully crafted reality, which can generate apathy or uproar among young people. If that reality is perceived as unjust, the status quo challengers are presented with two options: fight or flee. But what if you could do both? This is the story of those individuals that were born in one member state but live in another. Connected to both realities, they are reshaping democracy in the host state, while influencing the development of democracy in their state of origin. Torn apart, they represent the first European citizens to have the power to weave the different European realities together.

Empowered by European citizenship, European transnationals challenge the fundamental traits of the host state's political scene (language of political discourse and campaigning, background of political actors, the political agenda, etc.) and force into that reality issues from their state of origin. At the same time, technological advancements and freedom of movement allow them to continue battling injustices in their state of origin, and force fundamental changes to societal values. They weave together the two realities and anchor them into an emerging one – the European reality. Unable to be subjugated by any one state, they experience an unprecedented amount of freedom, which they use to fuel the fight against the "old ways", thereby influencing both realities.

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"European citizenship" and young people's democratic participation: a case study of Finland

Maija Lehto

Introduction

The societal debate about young people's participation since the start of the new millennium has been mostly based on two premises. On one hand, there has been growing public concern about the evident decline of traditional civic and political participation – such as voting in elections or systematic involvement in political movements and civil society organisations – which has generated a popular belief that young people are no longer interested in civic and political matters, posing a threat to the proper functioning of democracy (Bennett 1998; Dalton 2008; Norris 2004). On the other hand, novel youth participation practices, which are formed outside conventional political ideologies, structures or institutions and are associated with social spaces between the public and the private spheres, have aroused curiosity and challenged the narrative of civic and political disinterest of the young (Bennett 1998; Dalton 2008; Inglehart 1997; Norris 2004; O'Toole 2015). Nonetheless, the new practices of participation have also provoked controversy. While these practices can undoubtedly empower youth by broadening young people's repertoire of civic and political activity and strengthening their agency (Dalton 2008: 92; Norris 2004: 3-5), the kind of political culture that distances itself from the usual formalities of democratic participation can also be associated with societal atomisation and deterioration of the social fabric (Putnam 2000; Somers 2008) and decreasing social commitment to the norms of public accountability in safeguarding rights (Somers 2008). The pluralisation and transformation of the approaches and mechanisms of youth participation have indeed been associated with a growing distrust of the working of the conventional democratic processes (Inglehart 1997). Are young people turning away from the issues of public concern, or are they empowering themselves in new civic and political terms?

The questions and dilemmas concerning young people's participation reflect the changing relationship between citizens and civic and political communities in contemporary societies. While various claims for rights, identities and alliances beyond the state as the primary reference point for membership and involvement have been increasingly acknowledged, the traditional definitions of political subjectivity, agency,

frameworks and power relations have increasingly been questioned (Benhabib 2004; Isin 2009; Somers 2008). The practices of participation, and also the understanding of the very concept of citizenship itself, are undergoing transformation (Isin 2009: 368-372). This is part of the process that in social sciences is often characterised as the transition from modern to late-modern society since the second half of the 20th century, referring to the maturation and reorganisation of social forces, which originally created the modern social order (Giddens 1990; Giddens 1991; Hall 1999: 26). Many theorists of late-modern society emphasise the fundamental change in the relation of an individual and the society, namely the growing autonomy of the individual over societal structures. For example, the theory of "reflexive modernisation" claims that the more modernisation advances, the better individuals are able to reflect on their social conditions, and change them (Beck, Giddens and Lash 1995: 236). On the other hand, the critical views on late modern "reflexivity" argue, for example, that such an empowered disposition is accessible only to the privileged few and should not be considered universally applicable (Skeggs 2014: 111-115). As citizenship is considered the primary mechanism of societal solidarity over exclusionary structures (Turner 1997: 5), it connects to this debate through the questions of morality and social justice.

This chapter examines how the concept of European citizenship, as it is understood and used in the context of European youth work, in particular the EU's transnational learning mobility programmes in the field of youth,[43] frames the ethical and normative ideals and practices of young people's participation in late modernity. The focus is on how European citizenship actually unfolds for young people and, subsequently, how this connects to contemporary trends of civic and political morality.

The contribution builds on empirical research in Finland on the discursive formation of young Finnish people's European "citizenship dispositions", within the EU's transnational learning mobility programmes in the field of youth (Lehto 2020). The focus of the study was on how young people's civic and political subjectivity and agency manifested (or not) during the learning mobility programme, and how this shaped their civic and political identities –specifically, the European dimension of those identities. The main focus of inquiry was whether the concept of European citizenship, and the practices associated with it, could bypass the specific dilemmas concerning democratic youth participation and effective political agency prevalent in both modern and late-modern frameworks, and provide young people with a new constructive and empowering citizenship disposition. The study aimed to contribute to the sociological debate on the changing concept, ethics and practices of citizenship from modern to late-modern society, and how this process connects to the mechanisms of reproducing or countering structural inequality. The study focused on the Finnish context, but the conclusions can potentially be applicable to any other European country undergoing similar trends of youth participation and having access to the EU's transnational learning mobility programmes in the field of youth.

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43. In this chapter this primarily refers to the Erasmus+ programme (2014-20) in the field of youth and its predecessor Youth in Action programme (2007-13), unless otherwise mentioned.

European citizenship in transnational co-operation in the field of youth: a "dynamic and complex idea"

European citizenship or EU citizenship, as a juridical concept, refers to the rights of citizens of the EU, first defined in the Treaty on European Union, or "Maastricht treaty" (European Union 1992). At the core of European citizenship in this framework is the right to free movement and participation in political and democratic life in the EU. How the concept has been adopted in the European youth policy and practice, however, reaches beyond the political and institutional framework of the EU and the aspect of legal rights. For example, the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership refers to European citizenship as a "dynamic and complex idea" where the approach to citizenship in general is a "social practice" (EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership 2017: 7 and 13). In the context of the EU's transnational learning mobility programmes in the field of youth – especially the Youth in Action programme 2007-13, in which the concept was the most explicitly prevalent and most eloquently elaborated – European citizenship is then referred to as a "broad conceptual term" (European Commission 2013). Youth in Action projects, according to the Youth in Action programme guide, should encourage young people to "reflect on "European topics", "the emerging European society and its values" and "the essential characteristics of European society", as well as to "play an active role in their communities" and in the "construction of the current and future Europe". Projects with a European dimension "should not only 'discover Europe', but also – and most importantly – aim to build it" (ibid.).

Thus, as well as being dynamic and practice-oriented, the concept of European citizenship also has a strongly normative, value-based connotation that implies a specific role young people should take in relation to European citizenship – namely, an "active" role (Lehto 2020). In other words, young people are expected to take on the role of civic or political agents rather than respond or adapt to the given societal conditions in Europe. Participation and "active citizenship" – citizenship as an active practice – have in general been central concepts in the youth policies and programmes of both the Council of Europe and the EU since the start of the new millennium (Hoikkala 2009: 6). There was a shift of emphasis following the financial crisis in 2008, from promoting participation and citizenship per se towards countering the negative implications of the economic recession – namely the growing unemployment and skills gaps, and security concerns including the rise of radical extremism (Hoskins, Kerr and Liu 2016: 250-252; Hoskins 2018: 3-4). Nevertheless, both participation and "active citizenship" have persisted in the vocabulary of European youth policies and programmes, resurfacing for example in the EU Youth Strategy 2019-27 (European Union n.d.) and the new edition of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-27 (European Union 2021).

To further examine the understanding and adoption of European citizenship in the EU's transnational learning mobility programmes in the field of youth, the next section reviews the changing societal context and conceptualisation of citizenship in the transition from modern to late-modern society, how this has influenced the normative expectations for contemporary youth citizenship, and some of the related ethical dilemmas. The following section introduces the framework of the case study,

examines the concept of European citizenship in the context of Lance Bennett's (1998) typology of citizenship dispositions in modern and late-modern society and showcases an empirical example of how European citizenship works in practice. The conclusion addresses the issue of the still unused potential of European citizenship to foster the participation and inclusion of young people in European society.

The ethics and politics of the late-modern citizenship disposition: the promise of European citizenship

Disaggregation and re-conceptualisation of modern citizenship

Theodore Marshall's 1950 theory of citizenship as a counterforce to social inequality mainstreamed in post-war social sciences (Somers 2008: 162). Marshall's theory was canonised precisely in sociology, in which the perspective on citizenship focuses on the juxtaposition of social rights versus unequal distribution of scarce resources and the social identities associated to them (Turner 1997: 5-6). According to Marshall (1950) citizenship is constituted of civic, political and social rights that have been acquired and institutionalised through the historical development of the modern state. The Marshallian citizenship is notably rooted in the political system of sovereign Western liberal democracies, which commit to guaranteeing basic welfare to citizens and consequently reduce the impact of social class within the capitalist market economy (Turner 1997: 5).

An important element of the Marshallian tradition is the incorporation of social justice in the concept of citizenship, which in political theory so far had been examined primarily as a juridical status (Somers 2008: 162). As Margaret Somers states, citizenship is in its essence a moral concept, and the premise of citizenship, drawing from Hannah Arendt's (1951) formulation, is a "right to have rights", deriving from the recognition of an individual in his or her civic and political community as a moral equal, worthy of rights (Somers 2008: 6 and 25). Therefore, to be recognised – to become a citizen – requires first and foremost membership of a civic and political community. The perspective emphasising inclusion and recognition as the ontological premise of citizenship bridges the perpetual dichotomy between citizenship and human rights (ibid.: 7). It is not relevant to consider rights as individual possessions; any rights materialise only as public goods in relation to the exercise of power in a civic and political community (ibid.: 5).

Democratic citizenship – participation in political democracy – has in Western liberal democracies conventionally relied on a balanced relationship between the claims for rights of political subjects, institutions safeguarding these rights and a functioning civil society and public sphere that facilitate societal debate and hold institutions accountable (ibid.). The legacy is that both the republican and liberal citizenship traditions in political theory – where the republican stresses civic responsibility and the liberal stresses safeguarding rights – recognise these central elements in the equation of democratic citizenship.

The increasing global interdependence and transnational mobility have challenged the state as a sovereign political unit and the collective identities deriving from it

(Benhabib 2004; Isin 2009). The term "disaggregated citizenship" means that the rights claims, privileges of rights and collective identities associated with them are today no longer negotiated or acquired in a unified civic, political and social space; instead, there are parallel processes of deterritorialised politics (Benhabib 2004: 144; Isin 2009: 368). At the same time, there has been a plea for a novel way of conceptualising citizenship in social sciences that reaches beyond the static Marshallian triad or liberal–republican division, as a "dynamic institution" that produces and governs political subjectivity (Isin 2009: 371). How citizenship manifests in a specific context is influenced by ethical-political and cultural discourses, of which the most dominant have institutionalised into societal structures, policies and modes of operation determining societal inclusion and exclusion (ibid.: 368-372). Essentially, citizenship(s) should therefore be considered as fluid historical formations and ethical-political constructions, rather than abstract conceptions (ibid.: 368-369).

In this framework, citizenship at the individual level should not be perceived as a static category of membership, but rather as formations in ongoing discursive processes. According to Mouffe (1992), citizenship is an identity that forms in relation to the "respublica" – a public space of a political community. The institutionalisation of citizenship at the given historical period frames civic and political subjectivity and agency, and produces concrete consequences of inclusion and exclusion, privileges and disadvantages in different contexts; however, the subjects can also challenge these boundaries (Huovinen 2013: 36-37). This leads back to the essential nature of collective moral evaluations of who deserves the rights as the basic frame of citizenship (Somers 2008). These moral evaluations are questioned and challenged in the transition from modern to late-modern society, which becomes particularly visible in examining the changing youth citizenships.

Navigating the ethics and practices of late-modern youth citizenships

Bennett (1998) exemplifies the change in ethics and practices of citizenship from modern to late-modern society in an analytical typology of two citizenship dispositions. The "dutiful citizen" refers to modern society's ideal citizen, who is acquainted with the political parties' agendas, votes in elections, participates in organised civic and political activities, is familiar with the structures and functioning of the relevant political institutions and follows the mainstream news in order to stay up to date on the relevant developments. On the other hand, the "actualising citizen" of late-modern society is mindful about his or her consumer and lifestyle choices, practises decentralised and cause-based activism, questions the representations of the mainstream news and seeks alternative sources of information. Whereas the "dutiful citizen" aligns him or herself with the existing structures and mechanisms of political activity and information, the "actualising citizen" reflects on them critically and weighs up the motivation, legitimacy and consequences of different perspectives (Bennett, Wells and Rank 2009.) This is reflected in the curriculums and practice of civic education. For example, in Finland, universal human rights ethics and global responsibility have superseded patriotic morality and, equally, the emphasis has shifted from transmitting

national ideology to encouraging young people's active participation and critical reflection (Nivala 2006: 84-87). This is even more evident in different non-formal educational contexts, such as in youth work, where young people have a better chance of influencing the content of the programmes they take part in, or even be the authors of these activities (Kurki 2006: 173-174).

However, in the same way that the notion of late-modern society is considered a further developed and transformed version of modern society rather than an entirely new social order, "actualising" ethics and practices are in many ways intertwined and complementary to "dutiful" ethics and practices, and therefore cannot be fully separated, whether in a normative or empirical sense. Nevertheless, a generational difference can be observed: younger generations are more inclined towards "actualising" citizenship ethics and practices than older generations (Bennett, Wells and Rank 2009). Finnish young people demonstrate interest and accountability with regard to global issues, such as climate change or sustainable development, over strictly national concerns, and many Finnish young people also relate to Europe in a positive way (Myllyniemi et al. 2019: 5-6; Ronkainen 2019: 187-188). The broadening of the outlook from local and national to transnational issues occurs in conjunction with the proliferation of global, decentralised and cause-based engagement and virtual networking and communication among the young (Hoikkala 2009: 14-19; Myllyniemi et al. 2019: 5-6).

The changing ethics and practices of youth citizenship have had implications for the kind of role that young people can or are expected to play in contemporary society. A citizen of modern society – or a society of "dutiful" citizenship ethics and practices according to Bennett's (1998) typology – has evidently been expected to be aware and participate; however, it has been acknowledged that autonomous agency requires juridical and psychological maturity, economic independence and favourable societal conditions and structures to realise one's citizenship. Therefore, the sociological discussion on citizenship ethics has conventionally linked full civic and political agency with adulthood. This perspective particularly excludes minors, but potentially also many young adults, who have not yet finished their education or for any other reason have not yet reached self-sufficiency. Young people's role has primarily been to learn about the functioning of society and about socially recognised civic virtues, and to strive for maturity and independence (Hoikkala 2009: 10).

Citizenship in the context of late-modern society, and "actualising" citizenship ethics and practices according to Bennett's (1998) typology, has broadened the arena of civic and political activity to encompass areas of life that were previously considered apolitical; namely, lifestyle and everyday choices are perceived as taking civic and political action (Bennett, Wells and Rank 2009: 107). It can therefore be concluded that, rather than being exclusively learners of future citizenship, young people are already considered political subjects in the present moment. The broadening of the causes and mechanisms of potential civic and political activity have also seemingly opened an endless number of possibilities for young people to participate in and make a change; not only that – the civic and political potential inherent in all activity creates a responsibility for a virtuous citizen to harness and use this potential (Lehto 2020). The ethos of "active citizenship" embedded in contemporary civic education

reflects this new empowered and liable citizenship disposition of the young (ibid.), and contrasts with the relatively weak civic and political leverage of young people as an age group in modern society (Hoikkala 2009: 10).

Behind the scenes of late-modern "active citizenship": the neoliberal narrative of civic and political morality

However, while recognising the value of "actualising" citizenship ethics and practices (Dalton 2008; Norris 2004), the ways young people's participation through the ethos of "active citizenship" actually leads to effective political agency can also be ambiguous (Eliasoph 2011; Lehto 2020). Also, whereas socio-economic background influences young people's access to full citizenship in modern society (Hoikkala 2009), the evidence shows that late-modern youth citizenships do not seem to have overcome these challenges, quite the contrary. Young people who are socio-economically better-off still appear to be civically and politically more active than their disadvantaged peers, and are more prone to adopt cosmopolitan and transnational citizenship dispositions associated with socio-economic privilege (Faas 2007; Hoskins 2018). The non-linear and often compromised transitions from youth to adulthood seen in the late-modern era, owing to increased precarity in the labour market, further intensify the inequality already persistent in the modern-society citizenship (Hoikkala 2009: 11-14). The ethics and practices of "actualising" citizenship do not single-handedly lead to democratic empowerment of the young; indeed, could they have the opposite effect?

Somers (2008) argues that there has been a fundamental change in political discourse regarding how democratic citizenship should be acquired and maintained. Namely, there has been a shift of emphasis towards highlighting the role of citizens in realising their civic and political agency, and through that, shaping their societal conditions. This corresponds to the "reflexive" late-modern subject gaining agency in comparison to the modern subject strained by societal structures (Beck, Giddens and Lash 1995: 236). The concept of "identity politics" refers to the organisation of political claims and alliances on the basis of identity categories instead of macro-level political ideologies and social stratification (Garza 2019). Due to a number of political and social movements in the modern era seeking recognition of the rights of oppressed groups, a variety of marginalised identities became more visible, which inevitably fostered the pluralisation and democratisation of societies in modern times (Mouffe 1992; Turner 1997: 8) Today, when the arena for the negotiation of citizenship has become more confused, a variety of means and pathways for novel identity politics have opened up. This can still have the potential to awaken dormant political subjectivity, leading to empowerment and inclusion of the marginalised and transformation of societal conditions.

However, since citizenship has also increasingly "spilled over" into the pursuit of private interests in commercialised social spaces, which operate according to a different logic than civic and political spaces (Somers 2008), identity politics have a new basis. In this context the identities seeking recognition, even if seemingly civic or political, take the form of a commodity, in addition to or instead of a political agent. The "politics" of the commodified identities are aimed at gaining

or accumulating value themselves, which functions as a basis for rights' claims; in such a setting, subjects are dependent on the resources to "politicise" their personal identity, which place them not only in an unequal but also an undemocratic, relationship (Skeggs 2014: 324-330). The privatisation and commercialisation of citizenship reflects the proliferation of the neoliberal value system, in which the right to have rights depends on an individual's resources and status, as the "right for rights" and effective political agency become a privilege instead of unconditional universal human right (Somers 2008).

The ethos of "active citizenship", where one is liable to operationalise the assumed agency without the other pillars of democratic citizenship, reduces civic and political activity and agency into a simulation of democratic citizenship instead of actually demonstrating it. The disaggregation and privatisation of citizenship – together with the ethos of "active citizenship", which on the surface suggests further empowerment – make it harder to pin down societal factors that disable certain civic and political subjectivities and their agency, and therefore the underlying power structures and relations remain more likely invisible (ibid.). While democratic citizenship seems to be within everyone's reach, it is slipping even further out of reach for some. The concept of "conversion narrative" (ibid.: 3) also describes how neoliberal political discourse has become prevalent in spheres conventionally predominated by discourses of democratic citizenship, such as civic education. The discourse of the omnipotent subject who demonstrates virtuous "active citizenship", and is therefore empowered and integrated in society, could be characterised as a conversion narrative, since it places the blame for civic and political marginalisation and exclusion on individual immorality instead of systemic structural conditions.

Could European citizenship as a normative concept offer a democratic synthesis of the "dutiful" and "actualising" youth citizenship dispositions?

Introduction of the case study

The empirical study (Lehto 2020) was constructed around the hypothesis that European citizenship – as understood in the EU's transnational learning mobility programmes in the field of youth – contains elements of both modern and late-modern youth citizenship dispositions when examined and analytically deconstructed through the lens of Bennett's (1998) typology, and that it could function as a progressive synthesis of both dispositions, leading to the further democratic empowerment of young people.

The study was based on 14 half-structured interviews of former participants in European Voluntary Service projects – under the Erasmus+ (2014-20) and Youth in Action (2007-13) programmes – who had completed 2-12 months of voluntary service in 14 different European countries. The aim of the European Voluntary Service was to support young people's non-formal learning and active citizenship through transnational volunteering (European Commission 2017; European Commission 2013). The European Voluntary Service was discontinued in 2018, when similar opportunities became available within the new European Solidarity Corps.

Discourse analysis, in particular critical discourse analysis and new rhetorical analysis, were the main methodological frameworks for interpreting the data (Lehto 2020). Discourse analysis focuses on symbolic activity, namely language, as a social practice in creating meaning. It is based on the premise that, on the one hand, discourses – especially those that have institutionalised and hegemonic conventions of knowledge, societal structures and practices – shape the perception of the subjects reproducing them, but that, on the other hand, the subjects also have the potential to question and transform the established conventions, structures and practices by adapting the discourses (Suoninen 2016: 233-242). Critical discourse analysis in particular aims at making visible the subtle mechanisms of power working through the discourses (Fairclough 2015: 26). Such a concept of power is based on Foucault's (1982) understanding of power as a productive process that invites subjects to reinforce certain social practices. According to this perspective, power is not in anyone's possession but works through seemingly free subjects as they voluntarily adapt to the dominant practices (ibid.: 220).

In the case study, citizenship – and European citizenship in particular– were understood as context-specific social institutions upheld by institutionalised ethical-political and cultural discourses, which produce civic and political subjectivity enabling or disabling agency (Isin 2009: 368-372). Democratic citizenship (as a constitutive value in liberal democracies, such as the countries of the EU) was considered as an interplay of rights claims, institutions providing the rights, civil society and the public sphere, ensuring the legitimacy of the institutions (Somers 2008: 5); therefore, effective political agency in the sense of democratic citizenship was presumed possible only in the conditions where the mentioned elements were adequately in place and recognised (Lehto 2020). Civic and political identities were considered as discursive constructions framed by the boundaries of civic and political subjectivities and agency (Huovinen 2013: 36-37); therefore, the premise was that effective political agency in a given citizenship context would primarily produce civic and political identities, which would be perceived as moral or virtuous by the subjects themselves and the society around them (Lehto 2020).

How does European citizenship as a normative concept manifest through Bennett's typology?

Although the concept of European citizenship implies broadening citizenship from national to European level, it reaches beyond modern society's citizenship disposition, into a larger geographical context. It is markedly based on ethics and practices of the late-modern youth citizenship disposition, as it encourages reflective and critical participation in European society as a whole, not just through the decision-making processes in the representative systems (ibid.). This manifests in how European citizenship is articulated primarily as actively doing many things, such as "becoming aware", "reflecting", "being involved", "discussing", "playing an active role" in European society at different spheres and levels (ibid.; European Commission 2017; European Commission 2013). The activities supported by the programmes related to fostering young people's European citizenship are also often localised and cause-based, so that the European citizenship disposition should primarily form in the process of active participation in a local community and civil society in

a foreign country; therefore, "Europeanness" in how citizenship should be practised is primarily implicit, or remains to be discovered by the civic and political subjects – in this case, the volunteers themselves (Lehto 2020). This also means that instead of aiming at reproducing a single ideology, it encourages reflective and productive citizenship ethics and practices such as those of the late-modern framework rather than reiterating and reproducing the citizenship ethics and practices of the modern framework (ibid.). Similarly, the educational emphasis is on acquisition of broadly applicable civic and social competences, rather than teaching in a traditional manner on the functioning of the relevant structures and institutions of the EU and how to use the mechanism of democratic participation therein (ibid.; European Commission 2017; European Commission 2013).

Having said that, in the context of EU programmes, the concept of European citizenship here is nonetheless influenced by the specific juridical, civic, political, cultural and normative framework of the EU; therefore, practising European citizenship is assumed to take place in a particular framework upheld by the relevant political institutions and the public space associated with them (Lehto 2020), no matter the EU has been occasionally criticised of lacking transparency and civic and social demos (Jolly 2005: 12). Therefore, as much as young people are invited to "construct the current and future Europe" (European Commission 2013: 4) as a form of practising European citizenship, there are already existing "essential characteristics of European society" (ibid.: 4) which place the practice in a historical context of civic and political Europe. Practising European citizenship in this specific context should not be equated with participation through lifestyle or consumer choices in the framework of the largely unregulated and politically detached global market economy, in comparison to many other novel ways of youth participation of the late modern era (Bennett, Wells and Rank 2009; Lehto 2020). In order to understand and participate in European citizenship, despite appearing to be based primarily on "actualising" ethics and practices, the concept suggests one needs to adhere also to the "dutiful" citizenship ethics and practices associated with it. Again, according to the citizenship ethics distinctive of modern society, European citizenship is perceived as a competence and a virtue, which young people can gain through educational activities, or in this specific case, through transnational learning mobility (Lehto 2020). Yet at the same time, the concept suggests strong agency for young people at present, which is characteristic of the late-modern citizenship disposition (ibid.).

How European citizenship works in practice: Europe of cosmopolitan, individualistic and self-directed citizens – and its reverse side

The young people in the study expressed their civic and political subjectivity and relationship to the local and European context during the learning mobility period through two dichotomous continuums: detachment and commitment and individuality and communality. Both continuums appeared morally ambivalent for them. In the context of the learning mobility period the young people identified primarily with dispositions in discourses signifying detachment and individuality, as the discourses signifying commitment and communality young people associated with other subjects, namely the local people in the context of the learning mobility period (ibid.)

Although the young people perceived that learning mobility and volunteering in general were very meaningful for them, they felt they did not have the access to civic and political subjectivity and, consequently, had marginal agency. The lack of access to civic and political subjectivity in the local environment was likely due to the temporary nature of their stay, which led to, and at the same time explained, the relatively low level of attachment, commitment and integration in the local civic and political reality. It is noteworthy that the young people resided abroad for a number of months in a very privileged context, where their standard social rights and basic subsistence were ensured by the participation in the learning mobility programme, which again protected them from the volatility of being a foreigner. The privileged position was on one hand an asset for them, but on the other hand could have further distanced them from the urgency of formulating civic and political rights claims, finding causes relevant to advance and, through that, demonstrating more effective civic and political agency (ibid.).

Such positioning is characteristic of many cosmopolitan dispositions in the contemporary world, to the extent that inclusion and participation in a foreign local context often becomes an accessory instead of a necessity for the privileged subjects, whereas at the same time less privileged subjects are bound to the civic and political (mis)recognition in a specific geographical context (Benhabib 2004; Skeggs 2014). The benefit brought by the cosmopolitan disposition in transcending geographical localities might explain why the discourses signifying civic and political commitment and communality, which otherwise were considered by the young people as a generally moral way of citizens relating to society, at times had a negative connotation in this specific context. Although the young people acknowledged the value of the civic and political agency as such, they perceived that the locals were strained by "burdening" civic and political ties and liabilities, as well as social and cultural traditions in which the ties and liabilities were embedded, that the detached disposition liberated themselves (Lehto 2020).

The young people did not express explicit civic or political subjectivity at European level. In fact, when directly asked, they mostly did not know how European citizenship as a civic and political institution could manifest or work in practice in the context of the learning mobility. The elements of European citizenship consisting of rights claims, institutions, public sphere and civil society relevant in the European context – or in other words, democratic European citizenship – did not materialise to them enough in order to enable them to recognise, consciously formulate or take forward civic or political claims (ibid.).

Despite that, the young people were familiar with, and adopted, the identity of European citizens as articulated and conveyed to them by the programme they took part in. The temporary and inconsequential lack of civic and political agency in the local context of the learning mobility, which the young people acknowledged themselves, did not pose a moral threat for their identity as European citizens, since it was compensated for by commitment to the acquisition of civic and political competences through acts of participation, regardless of the impact the acts had or did not have. The conceptual intertwining of participation and education in the normative understanding of the European citizenship in the programmes' context could have further encouraged the young people's perception that demonstrating

civic and political activity per se was considered to constitute practising virtuous European citizenship, if motivated by educational objectives. Therefore, the identity of European citizen was in accordance with the ideal of how young people should manifest "active citizenship" in the European context. However, combined as it was with the lack of evident agency during the learning mobility period, the "Europeanness" of young people's citizenship was articulated more as an individualistic moral resource than an expression of right as "public good" (ibid.).

How is it possible that adopting European citizenship that was detached from effective civic and political agency appeared so harmonious and morally uncontroversial? The case study suggests that the young people indeed identified with European citizenship as defined in the programmes' context. What was interesting, however, was that the study's initial hypothesis that European citizenship has the potential to be a progressive synthesis of the modern and late-modern citizenship dispositions – leading to the further civic and political empowerment and inclusion of young people – was not confirmed. Instead, the empirical findings indicated a lack of continuum instead of complementarity between the two dispositions, suggesting that the European citizenship disposition adopted by the young people embodied entirely the "actualising" ethics and practices, which eventually detached it from tangible communal objectives or approaches. The European citizenship disposition was connected to the empowerment of the young people, but not necessarily through civic and political means or ends. This indicates a possible democratic deficit in how European citizenship is lived, which again reflects a more fundamental change of values and norms concerning late-modern citizenship than Bennett's (1998) typology presupposes. If effective civic and political agency is not a condition of a virtuous citizenship disposition, what does it mean for the ideal of democratic citizenship (Lehto 2020)?

Young people's dreams and ambitions to be mobile and gain new competences are of course acceptable and even recommendable. It becomes questionable only when a civically and politically detached European identity, which functions as an individualistic resource, begins to equal the moral ideal of the European youth citizenship disposition in relevant ethical-political and cultural discourses. This is especially the case if such a "conversion narrative", as argued by Somers (2008), proliferates precisely in the context of civil society, which is understood as the cornerstone of democratic citizenship. It is also questionable if the civically and politically detached European identity is articulated precisely in relation to its seemingly "immoral" opposite – the civically and politically accountable disposition. In that way, "Europeanness", instead of being a common denominator of democratic citizenship in Europe, becomes a marker of privilege, representing in a novel way the historical and colonial myth of European or Western supremacy. Only this time the European "other" is not a geographical outsider or cultural stranger, but a civically and politically accountable native, forming a constitutive limit to the cosmopolitan and individualistic morality of a European citizen (Lehto 2020).

Conclusion: the unused potential of European citizenship?

Is there a way the European citizenship disposition could be adopted and put into practice in a way that would surpass the aforementioned democratic deficits and lead to more effective youth participation and greater inclusion of young people in European society?

The ethics and practices of an "actualising" citizenship disposition are certainly of value; however, they should be applied in a stable democratic setting with all the basic prerequisites of democratic citizenship in place. Active, reflective and constructively critical participation by young people is, and ought to be, considered a virtue, and young people should be acknowledged as citizens here and now. However, young people – just as other political subjects – should not be left alone to "simulate" participation, with the promise of empowerment and inclusion, when the society they wish to participate in does not sufficiently uphold the prerequisites of democratic citizenship, be it within the state system, in transnational co-operation or in any form of "de-territorialised" politics.

Ethical-political and cultural discourses that frame citizenship on the basis of conversion narratives not only jeopardise young people's rights but also compromise the whole concept of democratic citizenship and democratic participation, since they do not directly deny it, but rather distort it. This can lead not only to a feeling of one's personal failure as a citizen but also provoke further distrust of civic and political structures and institutions. Participation should not be equated with activities that are merely aimed at gaining individual benefits or assets, no matter with a good cause such as learning or education. Keeping the communal aspect alive also requires that not only are "dutiful" citizenship ethics and practices not completely surpassed by "actualising" ethics and practices but also that the latter complements the former.

Europe, whether in the context of the EU or beyond, has the institutional and cultural potential of growing and nurturing a more democratic European citizenship, and conveying this as an educational approach. The idea of European citizenship, as introduced through the EU's transnational learning mobility programmes in the field of youth, is to date an ambitious attempt to articulate young people's citizenship and channel their civic and political agency and personal aspirations in a world that has become civically, politically, geopolitically, economically, socially and culturally increasingly complex. For this attempt to have a greater chance of success requires a further civic and political awakening of Europe beyond the learning mobility programmes and transnational co-operation in the field of youth. The continent has a vast number of young people who are eager to actively participate in building tomorrow's Europe, but who need the structures and institutions at European level to respond to their efforts, as well as the European-oriented public debate and civil society sector to "keep the conversation going". Only this way can a truly civic and political Europe for the young be born.

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Roads to youth empowerment: the role of community building

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Introduction

At a time when the need for social change is in the headlines, we all have the demanding but exciting mission of creating innovative solutions to bring about the transformation envisioned. As existing and emerging forms of youth engagement – online and offline – are proving to be effective contributions to facing global challenges, the participation and mobilisation of young citizens is increasingly regarded as an added value to society and is cumulatively promoted through different policies and types of education. However, there is a need not only to increase participation numbers but also to make participation accessible to young people from all backgrounds and, consequently, create societies that are more inclusive. What can be done to pave the way for young people to see themselves as actors of change and empower them for such an intergenerational responsibility? In this essay, five young people aim to provide answers to this difficult question, stimulating reflection on the role of communities and community building in youth political participation.

We argue that long-lasting empowerment requires training youth in social and political engagement, through activities underpinned by community-building methodologies, rooted in social solidarity economy values and based on non-formal education principles. To illustrate this, we will present two case studies, both implemented in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic: an initiative from a Portuguese NGO network (Academia de Ativismo) and an Erasmus+ KA2 project implemented in six countries (SSEVET2). In both cases, participants were given the time, space, resources, support and guidance to learn through active experience, as well as the encouragement to share their learning with peers and to take ownership of their learning outcomes.

Developing a structure for further co-operation among the participants of these projects, going beyond spatial and temporal boundaries, creates a sense of community among the participants, which resulted in an empowering feeling of possibility, togetherness and self-realisation, which is particularly relevant for young people and enables future action and engagement.

Promoting youth participation

The need to engage young people in finding and building solutions for today's societal concerns, such as climate change, digital readiness, migration and social inclusion, has been widely recognised by international and national organisations in a host of strategic and political documents (such as the 2030 Agenda, the EU's Youth Strategy and the Lisbon +21 Declaration, to name a few). Two distinctive traits of young people are the ability to innovate – that is, finding new methods, perspectives and tools to approach existing problems – and resilience in the face of change. These characteristics were particularly highlighted in situations where young groups and individuals showed initiative and a sense of enterprise when it came to supporting society as a whole throughout the Covid-19 pandemic or in the face of climate change (with the movement Fridays For Future, started by Greta Thunberg, being an outstanding example of the latter).

There are two key dimensions of promoting youth participation. First, local, national and global youth policies and strategies play a fundamental role in promoting participation, since they serve not only as guidelines for decision makers, but also as tools for better listening to young voices and youth organisations' know-how and empirical knowledge and valuing these as societal contributions. Second, education is vital for making young people aware of their rights and responsibilities, together with the historical, present and future needs and challenges of society. Thus, active and meaningful involvement should be encouraged through formal, non-formal and informal education.

Looking at the etymology of the word "education" in Latin ("educere" – "ducere" means to guide, while the presence of the "e" implies an outward direction), it can be understood as the process of nourishing something that has started to grow within another individual, with a view to fostering that individual's autonomy and ability to contribute to the outside world. Following this rationale, education should always aim to increase an individual's knowledge and skills, which they can then apply and share with others throughout their academic and professional life, and in their civic and political participation endeavours.

However, standalone political and educational initiatives and events might not be able to provide young participants with the necessary autonomy, confidence and abilities to carry out their ideas and goals. Creating such an impact requires establishing safe and motivating spaces for young people to not only share their vision but also act on it. Such spaces should not be limited physically, or in terms of time and resources, and should acknowledge the co-existence of different needs and goals among young people, while valuing the diverse experiences brought by each person. In other words, impact requires communities.

The importance of communities is visible in non-formal education, which offers experiences and programmes designed to bring about change in the attitudes and behaviour of individuals, often towards society, and their perceptions of how to contribute to communities outside the formal education system. The relevant methods and processes often imply a group, and sharing experiences and debating with peers, resulting in a sense of community. Through it, non-formal education creates

a motivating and enriching environment where young people can further develop their communication, management and leadership skills as well as the ability to relate to others when creating change.

Concurrently, the sense of community is a key element of the "social solidarity economy", an alternative socio-economic model rooted in inclusive values and practices. Pluralist in its approach, it seeks to reorient and harness states, policies and ownership structures to serve people and the environment, challenging people to go beyond individualist perceptions of common good. The social solidarity economy can take many different guises, from formal organisations to informal mutual support groups, but always focuses on creating horizontal relationships that are enriched by the different personal visions, knowledge and paths of its members.

The potential and existing results of non-formal education and the social solidarity economy to engage individuals in collective change show that combining active learning, participation and engagement through a community-based approach is an effective way to empower youth for active participation. The following case studies are practical examples of this.

Learning from case studies: Academy of Activism

Academia de Ativismo (Academy of Activism) is a national educational initiative gathering Portuguese young people to debate emerging societal challenges and support them to become leaders of the transformation they envision. It aims to develop a comprehensive educational process beyond space and time boundaries by developing a growing community around an annual event. By design, it considered community as a key framework for creating an inclusive, flexible and goal-oriented educational model encompassing the co-existence of different individual paths, roles, needs and vocations.

Four core aspects promoted the community-building process. First, a multilevel educational path (inspiration, training, incubation of ideas and action), encompassing different levels of engagement, provided an inclusive space for everyone regardless of individual experience and commitment. Second, co-responsibility in training and action enabled a transformative system in which young people played different roles. They were listeners, enquirers and pundits when actively participating in the inspirational talks; students, teachers and facilitators when designing and implementing collaborative training; young entrepreneurs when incubating their ideas with the support of experienced mentors; and activists, educators, youth workers and responsible citizens when translating their ideas into action within their community. Third, a purpose-oriented framework brought together a variety of like-minded individuals in terms of interests, skills, geography and commitment, and boosted their confidence by showing they were fighting the same battles. Strategically, the framework integrated and connected different areas of activism that are traditionally structured around single causes, thereby allowing young people to find a common ground and generating a privileged space for innovation and broader collaboration, without time boundaries. Fourth, high-intensity-interaction virtual spaces were paramount for creating a sense of belonging regardless of physical

distances. Examples of this included: video calls for semi-structured debates and informal moments; shared documents enabling asynchronous collaboration and resource collection; software to gather information and organise ideas; and social network groups for fostering interpersonal connections and sharing opportunities for further self-organised commitments.

As a result, in addition to personal and professional connections, new projects linking young activists and organisations in the country and beyond were created. In the long run, the academy envisions a strategic alliance between youth and the social solidarity economy, creating a virtuous connection between the forces looking for change and the socio-economic model promoting it.

Learning from case studies: the SSEVET2 project

One step forward in that direction is the SSEVET2 project aimed at promoting the social solidarity economy in Europe. The partnership understands the proposed innovation in initial vocational education and training programmes as a strategic approach to the civic and professional development of young people. Eight-day training courses were held in 10 European cities, putting into practice a programme co-designed by project staff and local participants, including visits to social solidarity economy initiatives, innovative methodologies and different session formats, moving the groups towards the creation of a community. Some 61 participants in Europe have benefited from this activity.

The project's pedagogy is based on the "action research" principles, namely the participatory approach emerging from a social and educational perspective that includes reflection, empowerment and emancipation (Riel 2019). It has a training-in-action methodology aimed at promoting a process of learning through experience and practice, with several aspects contributing to a friendly environment that is essential in order to foster the community. Participation was promoted before the training itself through the co-creation of the training programme. Although some content modules were defined within the partner organisations, local participants were given an active role and could express their needs, goals, suggestions and contributions. In Porto, the participants presented their research questions in advance, each of which was addressed individually. In the end, all participants presented their findings, as a way to validate and share knowledge. This also promoted the blurring of the trainer–trainee dichotomy.

Care was the ingredient at the centre of the community, which meant paying specific attention to logistical aspects: ethical shopping; solidarity carpooling; space arrangements; the Moodle platform; the InfoPack tool; reminder e-mails; innovative and participatory methodologies; and the "guardians of care". The "guardians of care" were participants who were attentive to specific issues, including: the maintenance of an inviting and open physical space; organising carpooling; ensuring the reuse and recycling of materials; keeping time and introducing breaks; and supporting the group in the use of non-violent and inclusive language. In addition, participants shared their experiences allowing for different perceptions of the social solidarity economy and the creation of synergies in informal moments they considered necessary to

develop a sense of belonging. The communities created within the training course are today working collectively to generate local social transformation through the social solidarity economy. The training process evaluation was also communal, and took the form of a five-day transnational participatory training event, where trainees were invited to share their training experiences and perceptions. This allowed for the promotion of a European community, brought about via an open-source communication platform.

Youth empowerment through community building

A distinctive feature of the examples provided is the implementation of methodologies aligned with community empowerment processes inspired in social solidarity economy practices, such as practical connections between values and action, shared processes, horizontal relationships and the ever-present concern with finding alternatives promoting a common good. Having been directly involved in one or both of the aforementioned projects, we believe such methodologies have the potential to empower young people to participate actively in their communities, promoting positive impacts.

First, they challenged participants to find and share their own questions and answers, while providing time, resources, guidance and inspiration to develop a wide range of skills, knowledge and intuitions related to their own interests. Active learning experiences as such are particularly relevant for young people, who are often on a path of self-discovery, developing their identity and self-confidence – some still looking for a purpose, others for a job, both of which Covid-19 made even more challenging. Therefore, these processes impact not only the participants personally and professionally, but also the communities where they become socially or politically active.

Second, both projects turned groups of virtual strangers into purpose-oriented communities, engaged together in transformation, either in person or in a spatially distant but close-knit network. Creating an environment where everyone feels able to contribute facilitates meaningful mutual support in navigating a complex system of choices by sharing personal and professional experiences, and generates opportunities. This is fundamental to us – young people – who often lack this sense of belonging, encouragement and safety if we have been uprooted from our birthplace to pursue personal, academic or professional goals. Nevertheless, young people's mobility presents a unique opportunity for building bridges between different levels of participation (local, national and international), as the challenges and the projects we engage in are cross-sectional to different geographical areas. This enables members to inspire each other to be actively involved, by replicating, extending or even creating new projects and communities beyond the original scope. This essay is an example of that.

In conclusion, we argue that an increase in youth participation is promoted by participative learning experiences entailing action. This conviction is supported by personal and professional knowledge and practices, as well as the success of the two case studies presented – namely, their valuable outcomes and the approval of funding and resources for follow-up. Educators and policy makers should embrace the

complexity of the world we live in and foster opportunities for young people to take on different roles and issues and involve them in development and decision-making processes. This will empower them to become active sociopolitical actors – a process where community building has a broad impact, as we have shown. Therefore, the importance of creating a structure involving different actors and perspectives for continued mutual support and inspiration, rooted in the values and practices of the social solidarity economy and the methods of non-formal education, should not be overlooked.

Bridging the gap between inspiration, learning and practice will initiate collective processes, paving a road for participation, youth empowerment and social transformation on different levels.

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Conclusions

What to do with youth political participation?

Tomaž Deželan, Cristina Bacalso

The existence of a youth participation problem

There is general agreement that we are witnessing a problem of low youth political participation in Europe, and across the democratic world, when it comes to institutional politics. With an abundance of studies addressing this issue (such as Wattenberg 2002; Norris 2002; Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley 2004; Macedo et al. 2005; Zukin et al. 2006; Marsh, O'Toole and Jones 2007; Dalton 2009; Martin 2012; García Albacete 2014; Xenos, Vromen and Loader 2014; and Pickard 2019), the fact that young people participate less in institutional politics than other age groups, and less than cohorts of young people decades ago, is undisputed. The extent of the perceived problem is fully revealed by voter turnout, since young people are significantly more absent in elections than other parts of the population.

This gap has widened considerably across the democratic world (López Pintor et al. 2002; Wattenberg 2012) and can also be seen when it comes to candidates standing in political elections (Deželan 2015). The diminishing participation of young people in institutional politics is further reflected in the decline in party membership across European democracies (van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke 2012: 38). Several studies have clearly identified a decrease in youth party membership (including Cross and Young 2008; Hooghe, Stolle and Stouthuysen 2004; Seyd and Whiteley 2004; and Deželan 2015). The results of Wave 7 of the European Values Study (EVS 2020) give a detailed picture of how young people across Europe vote significantly less than other age groups, at all three election levels; how other measured forms of political action (such as signing a petition, attending lawful demonstrations and joining unofficial strikes) are less practised by young people; and how their membership of political parties and groups has decreased.

There is little evidence for the general pattern assumed by Barnes and Kaase (1979) that young people are consistently more active than other age groups in other, less conventional, forms of political participation. Findings from Wave 7 of the European Values Study (EVS 2020) suggest that the problem of youth participation in contemporary democracies goes beyond mere differences in electoral participation and party membership to encompass other forms of political action. Signing a petition, participating in lawful demonstrations and taking part in unofficial strikes are less practised by young people today – despite assumptions to the contrary – and are more indicative of unconventional youth activism of the past.

The problem of definition

However, the issue of youth participation is far from straightforward. If we look at political participation from a traditional, more narrow point of view, and frame it as participation of individuals in the processes of formulation, enactment and implementation of public policies (Parry, Moyser and Day 1992: 16), young people demonstrate lower scores in almost all examined areas, particularly when we measure it with the methodology of prominent international comparative studies (such as the European Values Study, World Values Survey, European Social Survey and International Social Survey Programme). However, despite the existing and relevant differences in youth political participation across countries and regions (for example, Kostadinova 2003; Kostadinova and Power 2007), this universal trend is also seen to be a result of the diverse and frequently outdated definitions used in the measurement of this phenomenon. To be precise, the definition of what is political, and what is not, is not always shared among academics and among different population groups.

Parry, Moyser and Day (1992), for example, identified staggering differences in what survey participants and researchers understood "political" to mean. In addition, the concept of political participation has broadened over time, from activities that focus purely on elections and election campaigns (such as Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet 1944) to activities that take place beyond the ballot box. Examples of the latter include citizen-initiated contact with politicians outside the election process and participation through interest groups (Verba and Nie 1972), as well as petitions, demonstrations, boycotts, street blockades, and activities ranging from volunteering in local governmental bodies to jury duty. Some even include participation in non-governmental decision-making processes, since such activities might affect participation in the political sphere (see Verba and Nie 1972; Parry, Moyser and Day 1992; Dalton 2009; and Moyser 2003: 176).

As young people have a greater propensity to engage in non-institutional forms of political participation (see Norris 2002; Dalton 2009; Martin 2012; Deželan 2015; Pickard 2019), broadening the definition of political participation transforms the issue of youth participation from whether they participate to where they participate (Weiss 2020). This culminated in calls to broaden the definition of political participation (O'Toole 2003; Marsh, O'Toole and Jones 2007; Pickard 2019) and to recognise the problem for what it is. This discussion has not been limited to mainstream political science or political sociology. For example, childhood studies scholars have also argued for broadening the understanding of participation and politics, arguing that children, rather than being "blank slates" that learn to become political, are instead immersed from birth in the politics of the everyday world (for example, Larkins 2014 and Moosa-Mitha 2005) Their citizenship is thus shaped by lived, relational experiences of the institutions and people they have day-to-day contact with.

Youth political participation revisited

Narrow definitions of political participation lead to a narrow conception of the "political" being imposed by adults onto young people (Marsh, O'Toole and Jones 2007: 4), which consequently fails to fully reveal young people's political imaginaries.

As a result, relying on the most well-known instruments to investigate political participation fails to reveal how young people think about politics. A growing amount of data indicate that young individuals in fact have never withdrawn from politics or become inactive, but instead have taken up different forms of engagement. The results of the Flash Eurobarometer (2021) reveal that while elections are still the main formal means by which people are given the opportunity to influence the political process (46% of young Europeans voted in the last local, national or European election – see Figure 1), there is a wide repertoire of other actions at the disposal of politically engaged individuals. One of the most popular is signing an online or offline petition (42%), which is still quite a traditional form of engagement.

However, the popularity of less traditional forms is also noticeable. Posting opinions about a political or social issue online is a practice performed by more than a quarter (26%) of young people (this proportion could be higher if young people's definition of "political" matched more closely that used by the survey designers, as discussed in the previous section). One in four young Europeans (25%) has also practised politically aware consumerism through consumer boycotting, or "buycotting". Almost one quarter (24%) of young people have been involved in street protests and demonstrations and 23% of young Europeans have used hashtags or changed their profile pictures to show support for a political or social issue. More than one fifth of young people (21%) have volunteered for a charity or campaign organisation (such as Oxfam or Amnesty International) and 15% have actively taken part in public online or offline consultations.
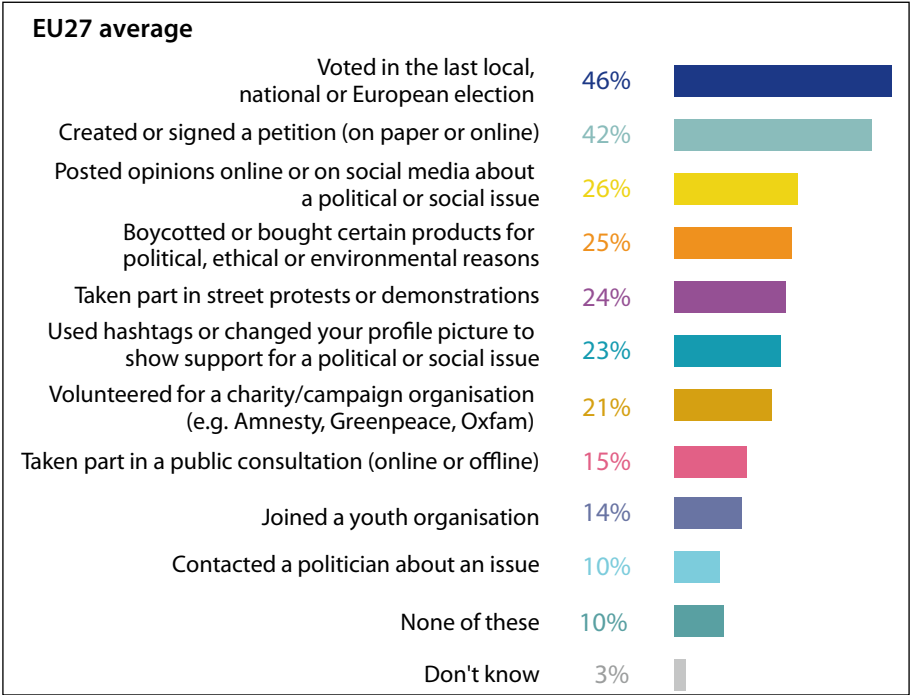

EU27 average

Voted in the last local, national or European election	46%
Created or signed a petition (on paper or online)	42%
Posted opinions online or on social media about a political or social issue	26%
Boycotted or bought certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	25%
Taken part in street protests or demonstrations	24%
Used hashtags or changed your profile picture to show support for a political or social issue	23%
Volunteered for a charity/campaign organisation (e.g. Amnesty, Greenpeace, Oxfam)	21%
Taken part in a public consultation (online or offline)	15%
Joined a youth organisation	14%
Contacted a politician about an issue	10%
None of these	10%
Don't know	3%

Figure 1: "Have you ever done any of the following?" (% – EU27)

Source: European Parliament Youth Survey – Flash Eurobarometer (2021)

It is important to note that only 10% of those who participated in the survey did not report any of the available forms of activities, from quite a specific list of possible political actions, which would suggest that the classical one-dimensional view of individuals who participate (see Milbrath 1977) is not relevant. We should rather adopt a multidimensional approach, indicating that certain individuals are very active in some modes of political action but passive in others, and vice versa (see also Moyser 2003: 177; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). More importantly, there are more young people who are politically active than is generally assumed. The findings are additionally supported by the frequency of discussions young people have with their friends and relatives about political and social issues: only 13% of young people never discuss political and social issues with their friends or relatives (Flash Eurobarometer 2021).

Insights from this Youth Knowledge book

New understandings of youth political participation concern the mode and style of participation, where the means are just as important as the ends. In "'Radical kindness': The young climate activists transforming democracy", young climate activists blur the boundaries between the political and the personal, creating a youth-centred political culture governed by care, justice and horizontal democratic structures. In this case study, the way you do activism is just as important as why you are doing it, and in addition to their climate aims, the activists also aim to transform democracy itself through their specific type of democratic practice. The chapter "Youth climate activism: the Fridays For Future Rome experience" similarly showcases the internal practices of a movement, where the inward engagement of members of the Fridays For Future Rome (or "Fridays") serves to underpin their outward engagement with the community. Political participation here is as much about how "Fridays" engage and empower each other as about how they engage with powerholders in public assemblies and protests. In contrast to the colourful street protests and energetic organising meetings of climate activists, the chapter "Young people and EU environmental justice: the 1998 Aarhus Convention" looks at the slow-moving, less glamourous, though nonetheless still influential judicial and institutional mechanisms upon which our democracies are built. Access to information – and accurate facts on the state of the environment and impacts on human health, safety and culture – will continue to be a cornerstone for young people to fight for environmental justice, particularly as we collectively struggle with misinformation and the distortion of reality in our digital age. However, the key institutions that we build our democracy upon should not be without scrutiny, and youth policy is no exception.

Critical re-examinations of key tenets of youth policy and youth participation are put forward in two chapters. The first, "Pluralising the democratic imaginary: youth beyond the liberal-democratic canon", looks at European youth-sector approaches, including the vaunted "magic triangle" of youth policy, youth work and youth research, within the liberal democracy context, which the author argues neuters the radical emancipatory potential to which youth participation claims to aspire. The second, "'Youth voice', dialogue and democracy", challenges an even more fundamental concept in youth participation – that of "youth voice" – pushing us to understand participation less

as an extractive exercise and more as a dynamic interaction between young people and those they are in dialogue with. This places more focus on the role of the other in dialogue (such as powerholders) and also the context within which this dialogue takes place. Both chapters call for a rethink of ideas, norms and concepts that have arguably shaped conventional youth participation and policy in Europe in the last 20 years.

Other chapters also call on us to challenge our assumptions about the current state of youth participation in Europe, in particular who is active and who gets to be a "citizen". In "Political participation of young Europeans: the role of liberal values and democratic context", the authors re-examine the participatory practices of young Europeans and their ideological self-understanding and minority attitudes. The chapter looks critically at common assumptions around young people's participation (that they are disinterested, disengaged with institutions and that they are creating new forms and channels of participation) by bringing nuance into who exactly is participating, and how.

Challenging a pillar of the European youth sector, the Erasmus+ programme, the chapter "'European citizenship' and young people's democratic participation: a case study of Finland" calls on us to look critically at the European Commission's flagship youth exchange programme, now in its 35th year. What type of European citizenship emerges from this programme? While Erasmus+ is ostensibly based on democratic values, and aims to foster young people's participation in democratic life, the chapter asks us to consider how its focus on accumulating competences, activities and mobility actually frame democratic practice as an essentially neoliberal exercise.

Political participation thus has to be recognised as a dynamic social phenomenon revealing that while young people are becoming increasingly detached from traditional politics and structures (Riley, Griffin and Morey 2010), this does not translate into the age of political apathy and the withdrawal of young people into the private sphere, but rather a diversification of the range, forms and targets of political expression (Rosanvallon 2008; Norris 2002). This reinvention of politics demands that one considers the relevance of new agencies that started to emerge in the form of (new) social movements, which differ from traditional political organisations such as political parties, unions and pressure groups in terms of more fluid membership and contentious politics (Marsh, O'Toole and Jones 2007: 9). Likewise, the new politics has diversified its repertoires – or actions used for political expression – either by reinventing older forms of activism (for example, economic boycotts) or making use of new ones, such as internet activism, social media and blogging (ibid.). Furthermore, the changing targets of political action reflect the change in political power and authority in contemporary societies, where the nation state, as the primary target of action, is losing its primacy to a variety of transnational and supranational public and private agents (ibid.: 10). While taking this into consideration, we must not forget that the traditional structural factors are probably just as relevant as ever for young people's political participation. That is why they have found their place in this publication alongside the new and innovative forms of participation. Also, the acceptance of young people's various forms of expression, grievances and interventions and their translation in mainstream social and political processes depends on the windows of opportunity created by various events and actors that remain closed to most young people and their advocates throughout their lives.

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Beatriz Henriques Peixoto Capão has a degree in political science. From an early age, she merged her will to learn with her desire to help, leading her to become involved in various volunteer and local development projects. She is currently a member of the national team for gender equality of the CNE (Portuguese Scouts), and is also co-ordinator of an academic group on environmental protection and gender equality. She likes to get her hands "dirty" for what she believes in – and hopes to continue to do so throughout her life.

Pooja Kishinani is an undergraduate student pursuing a degree in politics, philosophy and economics at the University of Manchester. She is the co-author of the 2020 "Student guide to the climate crisis". Her research interests include urban climate governance, intersectional environmentalism and institutional and non-institutional forms of climate justice.

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Narcis George Matache is a former youth leader and politician turned journalist. He is the executive editor for the only multilingual publication in Denmark (*Last Week in Denmark*) and political columnist for *The International*. Alumnus of Aalborg University (master's in international relations). Author of *The European Citizen* graphic book and contributor to *Europe 2030 – Local leaders speak out* and *De Engagerede* ("the engaged ones"). First European transnational to be elected into a Danish regional council.

Dan Moxon is a researcher and practitioner specialising in inclusive youth participation with over 20 years of experience working with children and young people in the voluntary, public, for-profit and academic sectors. His research focuses on how children's and young people's participation can influence policy and practice, as well as the development of participatory structures and processes. In 2017 he was invited to re-develop the consultation process behind the EU Youth Dialogue. This engages nearly 50 000 young people from across the EU and was instrumental in developing the new European Youth Goals. Originally a youth worker at local and regional level in the north-west of England, he now leads People Dialogue and Change, an organisation working throughout Europe and beyond, supporting a variety of organisations to develop their approach to youth participation.

Zoran Pavlović, PhD, is a social psychologist and an associate professor at the department of psychology, faculty of philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia. He has participated in numerous national and international projects and qualitative and quantitative surveys on youth political activism. He has published extensively both locally and internationally. His research interests include human values, ideology, political behaviour, political socialisation and political culture.

Sarah Pickard is a senior lecturer and researcher at Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris. Her holistic research on youth political engagement (policy, electoral and non-electoral participation, communication and policing) focuses on environmental activism and "do-it-ourselves" (DIO) politics. She is a convenor for the Political Studies Association specialist group "young people's politics" and vice-president of the ISA Sociology of Youth Research Committee (RC34). Sarah published her book *Politics, protest and young people* in 2019 (Palgrave).

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Marion Smith is a writer, musician and master's student in ethnomusicology at the University of Manchester. Their research interests are largely concerned with musical activity among marginalised communities, with a particular focus on Manchester and the north of England, as well as the role of musical and artistic movements within the spheres of social justice. Alongside Pooja Kishinani, Marion is the co-author of the 2020 "Student guide to the climate crisis".

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Nora Marion Wilhelm is a social innovator dedicated to a world where people and the planet can thrive. She co-founded "Collaboratio Helvetica", an initiative that catalyses systems change towards the 2030 Agenda in Switzerland by cultivating a cross-sectoral innovation ecosystem, running different capacity-building programmes and open knowledge sharing. She is an international speaker, guest lecturer and consultant. Her work has been recognised by Forbes ("30 under 30" list), UNEP, UNESCO and the Swiss Government.

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Youth political participation is taking place within a context of democratic transformation, including a global decline in the state of democracy, shrinking space for civil society, polarisation of the political and social space, economic crisis and precarity, rapid digitalisation, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and, most recently, war. In this setting, we are witnessing a lack of trust in political institutions, an increasing disengagement from the political system and a decline in youth participation in institutional politics.

This Youth Knowledge book reminds us that while the context might be changing, young people's participation is crucial for shaping and transforming democracies. Moving beyond the traditional binary of "conventional" and "non-conventional", the authors ask the question: "How are young people engaging with democracies in transformation?", seeking to understand the ways in which young people are defining their own participation.

This volume includes seven chapters, ranging from the mapping of young people's involvement in environmental justice movements and climate strikes, dissent and radical kindness, explorations of the understanding of the concepts of liberal democracy, youth voice and European citizenship, as well as the importance and role of values and the context. In addition to the chapters, four personal essays, written by young people themselves, give a glimpse into the ways young people are engaging in political participation to shape their schools, communities and Europe, but also the broader systems on which our current politics is built.

Young people's political participation, citizenship and relationship with democracy remain a complex topic for youth research, policy and practice. While this publication does not claim to answer all the questions or represent the realities of all young people across Europe, it gives a glimpse into the landscape of youth engagement in a changing world, highlighting realities, trends and main issues.

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