Social contexts of political (non-)participation among Slovenian youth

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INTRODUCTION

The youth population has proved to be one of the most sensitive seismographs of social change. Especially in the 1960s and 1970s, young people were key players in student and other social movements. Researchers have explained the extent and universality of these movements as an unconscious reaction of the youth to the social changes that were on the horizon. The students' movements were claimed to herald the beginnings of a post-industrial society, an information society or a "knowledge society", where knowledge, innovations, information and communication would become crucial strategic developmental indicators instead of mass industrial production and consumption (Keniston 1971; Inglehart 1977; Ule 2008). These movements brought many changes in the lifestyle and value orientations of modern societies: liberation of sexuality, liberalisation of inter-gender, family and generational relationships, development of ecological consciousness, the change of relations between the dominant culture and subcultural trends, etc. (Ule 2008; 2012).

There have been numerous protests and movements in many European countries in recent years where young people have been protagonists or very important actors, among others in France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Croatia, Finland, the UK, Greece, Portugal and also in Slovenia. There are some parallels with the 1960s tradition: the emphasis on democracy, addressing inequalities and poverty and often also grassroots forms of participation as an alternative to the contemporary "post-democratic" representative democracy (Crouch 2004), where institutions of democracy have increasingly become a formal shell. The energy and innovative drive have passed away from the (deliberative) democratic arena into small circles of a politico-economic elite (Crouch 2004). However, in the 1960s the economy in Europe was ascendant and many opportunities were open to young people. Today it is the opposite; the young are entering a future that seems to be worse than the past and the present of their parents, a future that holds threats rather than promises (Galimberti 2009). The transitions from education to employment, from the family of origin to independent life and family formation, have become prolonged, less predictable in their timing and sequencing and more uncertain and diversified than in the near past (e.g. Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Wallace and Kovacheva 1998; EGRIS 2001; Ule and Kuhar 2003; Leccardi 2005).

It is beyond the scope of this text to ask ourselves whether contemporary movements and protests are not only a reflection of contemporary conditions but are paving the way for future changes in the political and economic landscape. The aim of this contribution is limited to analysing the recent trends in political and social participation of (the representative samples of) youth in Slovenia in the European context. Participation is not easy to define: generally it is understood as the involvement of people in issues that touch them, whereby participation may cover different types, ways, degrees of participation and decision making. In the European context, in a very broad sense, participation takes place in a framework of democratic structures and political institutions (of daily politics) and civil society or community life.

Why would the case of Slovenia be interesting for the European readership? In this article we show that youth participation in Slovenia takes place within an intense "process of retreat to privacy" (Ule 2002). In such a process two contradictory forms of seeking privacy are intertwined: a personal drive toward traditional privacy and a personal wish for individuality. The first aim implies a withdrawal of individuals into their own private world, their trust in authority and traditions, avoidance of risks and is often related to consumerism; the second aim is on the contrary revealed by the personal care for everyday life and good personal relationships, by a wish to be different from others and to be creative. The results of different studies in Slovenia support the thesis that the first "private" trend has become stronger since the 1990s (Ule et al. 2000; Lavrič et al. 2010). The Slovenian youth has retreated from public and from places associated with youth into a micro-world of their supportive and trustful families. Similar findings have also been provided by other studies carried out in western Europe in the mid-1990s (e.g. Chisholm et al. 1995).

Our thesis is that the turn towards a narrow family and friendly circle, this "connection inwards", does not mean at the same time a connection with public life, rather the opposite – it seems to inhibit young people with regard to the participatory practices and becomes an important barrier to the more critical stand and alternative youth culture, especially compared with the politically committed youth in Slovenia in the 1970s and 1980s.[10] We assume that an understanding of political and socio-cultural participation among the youth demands more thorough knowledge of their private intentions, as in their relations within the family climate as well as their ambitions in the educational process and potentials for employment and future realisation in public life.

The Slovenian case is of special interest since it shows how the classical youth transition to adulthood, exemplified by such things as finishing regular education, starting a job and moving out of the parental home, is one of the most prolonged in Europe; while the relationships between parents and youngsters seem to be one of the closest (Health Behaviour in School-aged Children – HBSC – studies; more in Pokrajac 2006). The above-mentioned thesis is not directly tested in the empirical sense; instead, drawing from the representative data on Slovenian youth from different

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10. Youth movements in the 1980s were important factors in a different political culture and subcultures. Young people were very critical of the existing institutions, governance and ideology. This led to a needed psychological modernisation as a basis for further political modernisation (Ule 2012).

time periods, two issues are shown: first, in what sense the retreat to privacy within the broader European context is above average; and the second how different forms of participation in Slovenia are changing within time.

A RETREAT INTO PRIVACY: THE CONTEXTS OF MODERN YOUTH IN SLOVENIA

The length of co-residence of young adults with their parents in Slovenia is among the longest in Europe. As shown by the EVS (European Voluntary Service) data (Table 1),[11] up to two thirds of 18 to 34-year-old Slovenes lived with their parents in both 1999 and 2008, including those who also shared the same household with their partner/ spouse and/or child/children. The latter phenomenon of living in an extended multi-generational household accounts for only around 10% of the sample. The corresponding percentages from the Slovenian Public Opinion survey 1980[12] indicate a considerable increase in this form of co-residence in the post-socialist period: in 1980, 40.1% of 18 to 34-year-olds had been living with parents and spouse/partner or/and child; 25% only with parents. Among the EU15 countries (those members of the European Union before the accession of ten candidate countries in May 2004), on average just over a third of young adults aged 18 to 34 lived with their parents in 2008. Among the post-socialist member states of the European Union (EU postsoc) the percentage is also far below that of Slovenia.

Table 1: Percentage of young people living with their parents
(answers of 18 to 34-year-olds)

	WVS/EVS 1999/01 With parents, including those with partner/ spouse/child	WVS/EVS 1999/01 With parents only	EVS 2008 With parents, including those with partner/ spouse/child	EVS 2008 With parents only
Slovenia	64.6%	56.8%	63.8%	53.6%
EU15	37.6%	36.1%	34.0%	31.1%
EU postsoc	47.0%	38.0%	51.8%	42.1%

Many studies have demonstrated the impact of the welfare state on the nature of family ties and thereby on the length of co-residence. For example, Reher (1998) associates the so-called northern cluster of countries (Scandinavia, Belgium, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and to a large extent also Austria and Germany) with early moving away from the family home, which is connected with "weak" family ties and a sense of social (state) rather than family solidarity; as opposed to the southern cluster of Mediterranean countries that are characterised by later

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11. The EVS 1999 sample of 18 to 34-year-olds in Slovenia included 352 respondents; the national sample of this age group for 2008 was 362.
12. The Slovenian Public Opinion survey in 1980 encompasses a sample of 703 18 to 34-year-olds, which can be considered as representative for this age group.

moving away from home, "strong" family ties and family-based sense of solidarity. Besides that, in the post-socialist countries extended cohabitation with parents is often interpreted as one aspect of the growing importance of primary relationships and networks to survive in the (economic) uncertainty of the transitional period (e.g. Kovacheva 2006; Tomanović 2002). Iacovou (2010) recently demonstrated that the link between the family of origin's financial condition and the young person's tempo of moving away is far from being one-dimensional: the better the financial situation of the family, the sooner a young person obtains independent housing. She has proved that this is a cause and effect relationship only in the countries of northern and western Europe, while in south-eastern and some eastern European countries it is the other way around.

In Slovenia, unlike in the other post-socialist countries, the prolongation of young people's co-residence with their parents cannot be interpreted only as a survival strategy (although it is connected with an unfavourable housing market and a lack of stable jobs); it is also a cultural practice, a chosen lifestyle, connected with the comfort offered by the "mama hotel" (Ule and Kuhar 2003). The socio-economic transition to the capitalist society with a pluralistic political system in Slovenia was comparably smooth, and the changes that followed were relatively non-traumatic for young people and their parents. Also Western trends in lifestyles, value orientations and family arrangements were already common to Slovenian society during socialism, as the first youth study in 1986 (Ule 1988) was able to reveal.

In spite of such trends – especially the pluralisation of family forms, which in Slovenia was unlike other post-socialist and southern European countries and from the 1960s onwards was more in line with the West, as seen for example in the prevailing trend of cohabitation instead of marriage, birth decline, later births, etc. – the patterns of leaving home resemble those in southern Europe. Namely, from the 1970s onwards in the northern and western European countries, leaving home has become less linked with the creation of young people's own families, and patterns of leaving home are diversified (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1993). Data show that a stable partnership, not the young person's employment status or the family of origin's financial condition, is the main force affecting home-leaving dynamics in Slovenia (Kuhar and Reiter 2014). Leaving home in Slovenia is strongly connected with partner cohabitation,[13] just as leaving home in the southern European and Balkan countries is strongly connected with marriage (Kuhar and Reiter 2010).

But above all, the prolonged co-residence of parents and their adult children in Slovenia is generally associated with exceptionally supportive and relatively high-quality relationships between young people and parents, especially the mother (Ule and Kuhar 2003; Rener 2006), by international comparison (Pokrajac 2006). The majority of young Slovenes report that they are well provided with parental and emotional support. According to the Youth 2010 survey, only approximately one tenth of 15 to 29-year-olds report that they do (did) not feel comfortable at home (Oblak and Kuhar 2014). Young people enjoy, on average, a fair amount of autonomy in the parental home (Ule and Kuhar 2003).

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13. In 2011, 67.3% of first-born children were born to unmarried mothers in Slovenia, and also on average more than half of all children are born to unmarried mothers (SORS 2012).

Comparing the retreat of contemporary youngsters in Slovenia into the private small family world and their dependence on the paternity of adults with "the socially, culturally and lifestyle-defined generation of the 1970s and 1980s", Ule (2002) labels young people of today as domesticated and socially infantilised. According to empirical evidence a strong relation with family, private life, peace and social stability is in important positive correlation with the other set of variables that exemplify socially conformable and traditional youth. As a consequence, most of these young people follow clichéd forms of identities and lifestyles, which are expressed also in passive commercial and media trends (Ule 2002).

In such a context another trend of this retreat to privacy should not come as a surprise, as it is very specific for Slovenia and is related to prolonged education. In Slovenia, the percentage of schooled people at all levels is above average for European countries, as well as the educational aspirations of young people and their parents (Živoder 2012). The number of young people aged 15 to 19 enrolled in secondary education in Slovenia is among the highest in Europe. The rates were already high in the first years following the transition to post-socialism; for example, 80.5% of the 15 to 19-year-old population 1993 were enrolled according to UNICEF data. In 2011, 94.1% of this age group were enrolled, while the OECD average was 84% for girls and 82% for boys (OECD 2012). The participation in higher education increased significantly in the period after the transition and is one of the highest in Europe, from 23.1% of 19 to 24-year-olds in 1989 (UNICEF data), to 77% in 2011 (OECD 2012). But the tertiary education attainment rates are relatively low. According to the OECD (2010), the completion rate at the tertiary education level in Slovenia was 65% in 2008 compared to 70% in the EU15 countries. What is more, according to Eurostudent (2010), Slovenian students who do finish their studies have the longest average duration of study, 6.9 years.

Despite the high dropout rates of students during study, the labour market in Slovenia cannot absorb the highly educated young people entering it. The yearly inflow of people with secondary education is already one and a half times higher than the number of available workplaces (Kramberger 2007, p. 98). If they get a job, it is likely that this is only for a fixed term or that the job is unstable and relatively low-paid. The solid base for a young educated labour force in the employment system is eroding everywhere – no European country can stem the deep structural problem of rising unemployment. So the transition out of education and into employment remains largely uncertain and the troubled entry into the world of work has serious welfare repercussions for young people.

Parents in Slovenia vigorously encourage and support their children's prolonged education in order to postpone the confrontation with unemployment and precarious jobs, in the hope of improving their chances of obtaining full-time, permanent, and well-paid employment. High (or as high as possible) formal education has become (almost) a necessity, but not a sufficient "ticket" into the Slovenian labour market. Education, which in Slovenia is free of charge, is also attractive because it is (for the time being still) connected to many direct advantages like social insurance, inexpensive and available places in student dormitories, cheap coupons for meals and student work. On average, every fifth student in Slovenia is granted a scholarship and every third the state's financial assistance (Eurostudent 2010). However, such prolonged

education and orientation towards personal relations within the private sphere and relatively affluent conditions would, according to the postmodern theory of R. Inglehart (1977), intensify the civic engagement of youth. The Slovenian situation nevertheless is in contrast to such theses, as they reveal some negative aspects of this long education and protective parenting.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION: BETWEEN POLITICAL APATHY AND INDIVIDUALISATION OF POLITICS

Youth researchers in Slovenia and also in other European countries often point at disinterest, passivity or even apathy among young people with regard to the (conventional) political topics and the inclusion of young people in social organisations in a variety of areas (Kovacheva 2005; Spannring 2009). At first glance, passivity seems hard to understand because it is the young who must confront more and more challenges, especially those related to the employment crisis. However, the uncertainty and precariousness can make young people retreat from public life into privacy and focus on coping with their own lives and personal problems (Walther et al. 2009, p. 78).

The purpose of this article is to show trends in the field of political and social participation of young people in Slovenia and their involvement in public and community life, and seek the eventual activation of young people as citizens.

Young voters without political ambitions? Trends in youth participation

Stable (dis)interest in politics

The Youth 2000 survey has already showed that the level of political interest among young people in Slovenia is low: more than half of respondents (57%) between 16 and 29 said that they had no or low interest in politics. Only 9% of respondents said that their interest was big or very big. Disinterest declines slightly with age and is also gender dependent: boys were slightly more interested in politics than girls. Also, when it came to rating values on a scale, the same survey showed that interest in politics among the respondents came at the bottom – in contrast with the importance attributed by the young to the values of a private nature, such as health, family life or friendship.

In addition, the survey "Socio-economic situation of students in Slovenia" (Ule et al. 2008), conducted in 2008 on a sample of students, showed a below-average interest in politics. As that research showed, 73% of students have no or little interest in politics and only 6% of the students are very interested in politics.

However, the Eurobarometer 2007 – Youth Survey,[14] showed quite different data for Slovenia and also for European countries in general, although it was done

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14. Eurobarometer Survey 2007 was carried out on a representative national sample of 15 to 30-year-olds in the member states of the European Union. In the EU15 (the original 15 member states of the European Union) 11 770 young people were surveyed, 7 855 in NMS12 (12 newer member states of the European Union), 500 of them in Slovenia.

among virtually the same age group as Youth 2000. In the Eurobarometer survey respondents specifically answered "how much interest they have in politics and at the same time also in current affairs at the level of the country, city/region and the European Union".

The answers show (Table 2) that young people in Slovenia as well as in the EU15 and in the countries which joined later – the 12 so-called new member states, 10 of which are post-socialist (further NMS12) – have most interest in national politics and current affairs (around 80%), followed by an interest in politics and current affairs at the urban/regional level and in politics and current affairs in the EU (both around 70%). Nevertheless, the interest in politics and current affairs of their own country and city/region is lower among young people in Slovenia than the average among young people in the EU15 and roughly the same as in the NMS12. The results of the socio-demographic analysis of these data confirm that with age the interest in politics and current affairs at all levels grows.

Table 2: Interest of 15 to 30-year-olds in politics and current affairs (in percentages)

Total "interested" or "very interested"	In your country	In your city/region	In EU
EU15	83.3	73.5	66
NMS12	79.4	70.7	67.3
Slovenia	**78.8**	**68.2**	**68.3**

Source: Eurobarometer 2007 – Youth Survey

The results from the latest survey Youth 2010 show more clearly how the interest in politics in Slovenia and the EU is consistently low over time: the data shows no increase in interest, but the share of the surveyed 15 to 29-year-olds who are not at all or only marginally interested in politics is more than two thirds (66%), while the share of those who are very interested in politics is only 5%. As in previous research, however, the interest slightly increases with age.

An interesting insight into indirect (dis)interest in politics is also given by the indicators about where or how intensely the young consume politics. Does the interest in politics perhaps increase during private consumption of news and during family get-togethers or encounters with friends? The Youth 2000 study highlighted the lack of interest among young people in the dominant politics in Slovenia, demonstrated by the data on the frequency of talking about politics (which is considered to be an indicator of the direct expression of political interests).

About three quarters of the respondents stated that they rarely or very rarely talk about politics with their parents, friends and intimate partners, as well as with classmates or colleagues. In Table 3 we show information on the frequency of monitoring political matters in the media for the year 2010 and changes from 2000 to 2010 with regard to the placement of political topics within the primary groups (family and friends). As the results show, the Internet is becoming the most common window into the world of political topics for young people in Slovenia, at

least according to the survey from 2010, where the electronic media is prominent. Parents and friends are, by contrast, at the bottom of the scale and a comparison with the year 2000 shows a general decline in discussing political topics in the private sphere.

Table 3: Indirect interest in politics among young people in Slovenia, 2000 and 2010

	Average frequency (Youth 2010, 15 to 29-year-olds)	Average frequency (Youth 2000, 16 to 29-year-olds)
Internet	2.48	No such data
TV	2.37	No such data
Radio	2.02	No such data
Newspapers	1.88	No such data
Parents	1.29	2.14
Friends	1.29	2.10

Mistrust in the established political sphere

The same trends (only to a slightly lesser extent) are also typical of the general population. A major proportion of the citizens of the different age groups shows no interest in getting information on the basis of which they could possibly function politically; much less in the operation itself. For example, data suggests that politics is followed by only about 15% of Europeans (Van Deth and Elff 2000). Most people feel that they do not have the power of political influence and are disappointed with political processes. Politics is considered pointless and exclusivist (Wahl-Jorgensen 2002). A very important structural context consists also in the changes in the level of confidence in political institutions and practices of the citizens. The Slovene Public Opinion survey of a representative sample of the Slovenian general population in 2002 (Malnar et al. p. 52-53) shows, for example, that the confidence of citizens in the selected political actors and institutions was low, but nevertheless larger than today: in 2002, one quarter of respondents (25.2%) expressed mistrust in the National Assembly, while in 2010 that figure was 43%. Mistrust in political parties was in 2002 expressed by 38% of respondents; in 2010, however, the share of those expressing mistrust was already a majority (57%). In 2002, the politicians could not be trusted by 41% of respondents, while in 2010, 57% of respondents did not trust them.

Since the Slovene Public Opinion survey does not cover the population under 18, we have to look for potential specifics for young people in youth studies. Data from the year 2000 (unfortunately there is no comparable data for 2010) demonstrates a diametrical contrast between a very high confidence in the friendship ties and parents on one side and a high mistrust in the established political power and political institutions on the other side (see Table 4). Leading politicians and political parties were already in 2000, among young people, the least trusted institutions, right behind the EU and the president of the country. Parents and friends, on

the other hand, have a high degree of confidence, confirming the importance of the already discussed private relationships (and at the same time indicating the dependence on them).

Table 4: Youth's trust in institutions and primary groups, Slovenia, 2010

Trust	Average on 1-5 scale N=1262
Friends	**4.11**
Parents	4.07
Courts	2.89
Schools	2.85
Slovenian Army	2.81
Ecological movements	2.75
President of Slovenia	2.65
EU	2.59
Leading politicians	2.00
Political parties	**1.90**

Source: Youth 2000

Decline of conventional forms of political participation

Research among young people in various European countries suggests that interest in the conventional and traditional form of politics built on authority and power is in decline. But interest in politics encompassing sensibilities and commitment to social, moral and ecological problems in their environment is growing (Norris 2002; Hoikkala 2009). In short, most young people do not reject politics per se, but mainly existing structures and forms of organisation in modern democratic countries. In particular they feel a dislike towards politicians and parties (Hurrelmann 2007). However, the distance from politicians or parties is similar to that for other organised social institutions, such as trade unions and youth organisations (Hurrelmann 2007). One of the indicators of the decline of conventional forms of participation is the level of voting or abstention in elections.

Following the results of the Eurobarometer 2007 survey, more than 70% of young people in Slovenia participated in at least one election or referendum in the period 2004-2007, while it is also necessary to mention that in the same period 18.2% of respondents (15 to 30-year-olds) were still without voting rights (Table 5). The percentage of participation in the elections is higher than the percentage in the EU15 and the NMS12 countries, however here the average percentage of those who were still without voting rights is also higher. The socio-demographic analysis of the whole European sample shows that the less educated are half as likely to vote as the more educated.
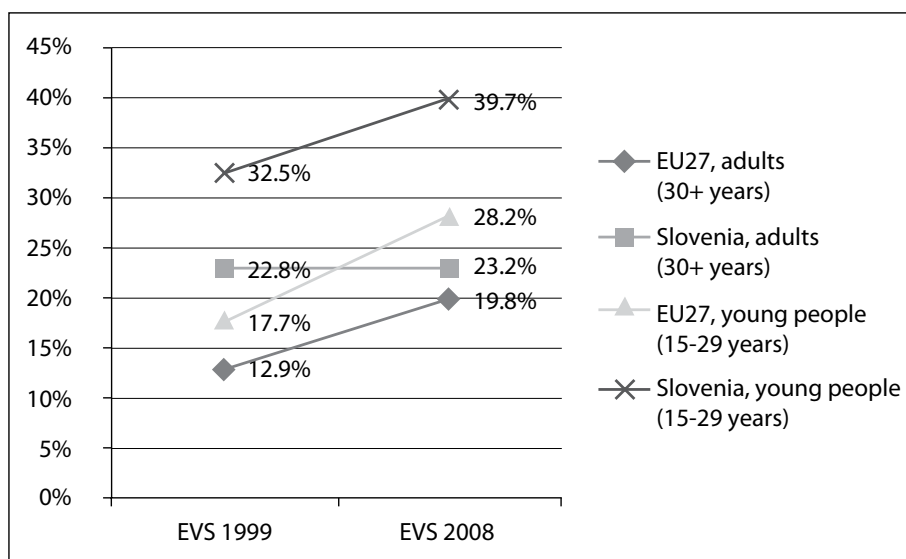
Table 5: Participation of 15 to 30-year-olds in (any) election or a referendum in the last three years (in percentages)

	Yes	No	There were no elections/ referendum	Without voting right at the time of last election/referendum
EU15	61.8	12.6	1.4	23.6
NMS12	64.3	12.2	0.7	22.4
Slovenia	**71.3**	**9.8**	**0.3**	**18.2**

Source: Eurobarometer 2007 – Youth Survey

As graph 1 illustrates, the share of young people between 15 and 29 who did not take part in parliamentary elections increased in the decade from 1999 to 2008. The same trend also applies to the same cohort within the EU. Adults above 30, by contrast, do not show these tendencies in Slovenia, unlike Europe, where abstention also gradually increases.

Graph 1: Share of (young) people who would not attend parliamentary elections, Slovenia and EU27, 1999 and 2008

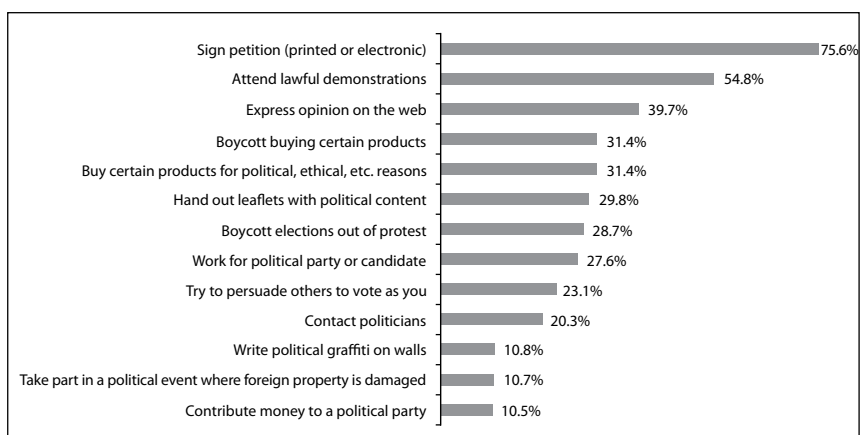*Source*: Lavrič et al. 2010, p. 147

The attractiveness of unconventional participatory practices?

Research from other European countries suggests that young people feel closer to the ad hoc forms of participation on an "on-off" basis with short-term effects (Roudet 2009; Hurrelmann 2007; Spannring 2009) that are compatible with their lifestyles and are relevant to their lives. In particular at the local level, participation is not

happening necessarily through formal institutionalised channels (e.g. at polling stations or in youth organisations/clubs), but in many informal, more individualised contexts and shapes.

As shown in graph 2, signing a petition, a simple form of expression, is among the most common practices for young people in Slovenia, which has been significantly simplified with the Internet and has spread among online users, since it does not require any serious commitment, just a click on the appropriate link and a signature. Percentages of the remaining activities are, on average, relatively low. In conclusion, political activity is a rather infrequent practice and not a widespread phenomenon among Slovenian youth.

Graph 2: Share of young people in Slovenia who probably would be or have already been politically active, 2010
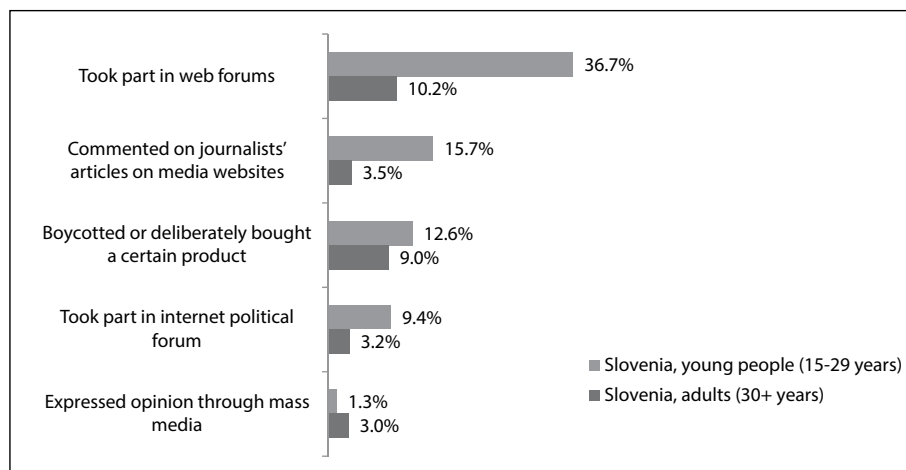

Source: Youth 2010

The Internet nowadays often plays the key role in unconventional participatory processes. Graph 3 illustrates clearly that the Web is "the space for young people" in Slovenia – more than a third of young people often participate in online forums and 16% of them comment on the contributions in media portals. However, these spaces are used substantially less for the expression of political views or opinions.

The Eurobarometer 2007 Youth Survey gives insights into participation in organisations. In 2007, almost a fifth of 15 to 30-year-olds in Slovenia enrolled in an organisation, which is a slightly lower percentage than the average for the EU15 (a quarter), but higher than the average of the last 12 member states to join the EU (one tenth). Correlations with socio-demographic variables indicate that members of organisations are, on average, more often male, higher educated or young people from rural areas. Manual workers are, however, very rarely members of organisations. Answers from the same survey show that where young Slovenians belong to at least one organisation, the majority of those organisations are sports clubs or federations. The proportion of young people in youth organisations in Slovenia is less than one eighth of 15 to 30-year-olds, which is higher than the average in the EU15 but

lower than the average in the NMS12. One eighth of young people in Slovenia can be found in clubs connecting people based on their hobbies or special interests, and one eighth in cultural or artistic organisations, both higher than the averages for the EU15 and NMS12.

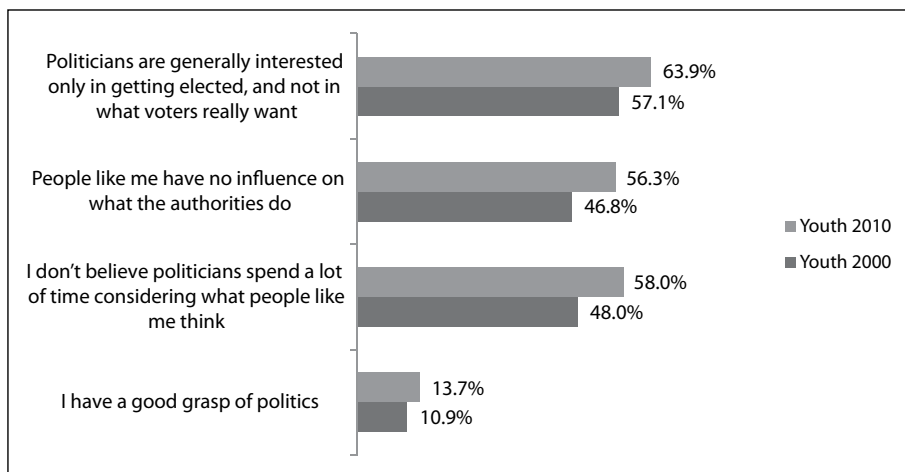**Graph 3: Individualised forms of political participation, Slovenia, 2009**

Source: Lavrič et al. 2010, p. 163

Low activity as a reflection of perception of (non-)power?

How do young people perceive their influence on political events and social changes? The indicator of the attitude towards conventional politics is the sense of the political (in)efficiency, which is defined as an individual's belief that with his or her effort he or she can (not) affect the political events or the political process. It is measured as the belief of people that they can have their voice over authority and that the government is receptive to those voices.

Low subjective political efficacy is associated with feelings of alienation from politics, distrustfulness to it and helplessness in influencing in any way. The data from the Youth 2000 survey pointed out a high degree of subjective feelings of inefficiency. Most young people did not have a feeling that they understood politics and that they could have an impact on the political decisions and actions of the political elites (Miheljak 2002). In the Youth 2010 survey, two thirds of young people (61%) agreed that they do not understand politics. However, graph 4 clearly illustrates that the sense of inability to affect political decisions among youngsters in Slovenia increases over time. More than two thirds of young people are sceptical about the goals and intentions of politicians, most believe that they do not have any impact on power, however even more see political affairs as quite distanced from their own views. Less confidence in politics and a greater sense of powerlessness in relation to established institutionalised politics continue even in a negative perception of one's own power for impact on social change in general.
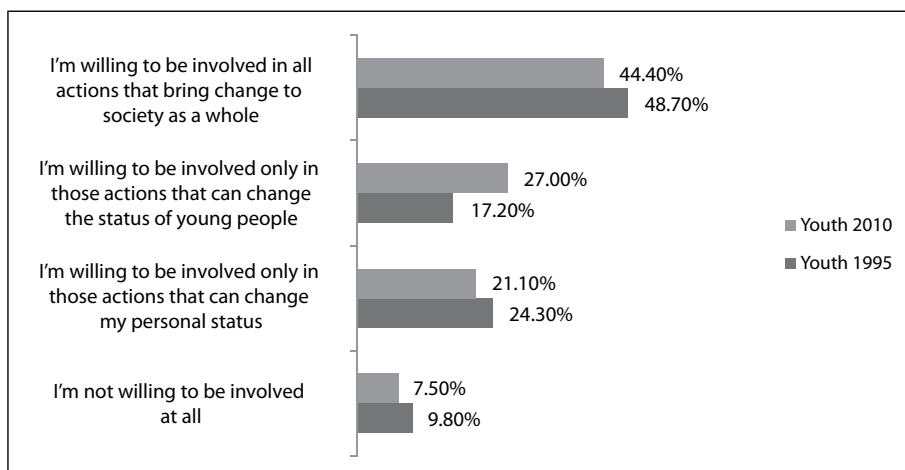
Graph 4: External and internal political efficacy of young people in Slovenia, 2000 and 2010

Politicians are generally interested only in getting elected, and not in what voters really want — 63.9% / 57.1%

People like me have no influence on what the authorities do — 56.3% / 46.8%

I don't believe politicians spend a lot of time considering what people like me think — 58.0% / 48.0%

I have a good grasp of politics — 13.7% / 10.9%

■ Youth 2010
■ Youth 2000

Sources: Youth 2000 and Youth 2010

Figures from 2010, compared to those from Youth 1995,[15] show that the proportion of those young people in Slovenia who are willing to become involved only in narrow limited "adolescent activities", that is for the interest of the young, is growing – this percentage increased by 10% (graph 5).

Graph 5: students' readiness for action for social change in Slovenia, 1995 and 2010

I'm willing to be involved in all actions that bring change to society as a whole — 44.40% / 48.70%

I'm willing to be involved only in those actions that can change the status of young people — 27.00% / 17.20%

I'm willing to be involved only in those actions that can change my personal status — 21.10% / 24.30%

I'm not willing to be involved at all — 7.50% / 9.80%

■ Youth 2010
■ Youth 1995

Sources: Youth 1995 and Youth 2010

15. The Youth 1995 survey (Ule et al. 2005) was carried out in 1995 on a sample of 1 829 higher education students in the second and third year courses of (the then two) Slovenian universities.

DISCUSSION

What is happening with the political and social participation of Slovenian youth in the context of their radical retreat into privacy, which has been part of a (albeit relatively unproblematic) shift from socialist to capitalist system and which has been intensified with the recent economic crisis, with the young generation being even more dependent upon parental economic, social and emotional support? The above-mentioned trends should be understood within the context of the broader Western trend of increasing individualism and disintegration of the old structures that gave a solid orientation to previous generations. The old perceptions of collective obligations and loyalties are disappearing, while – in the best-case scenario – the "individualised ethics of everyday life" are being enforced (Ule et al. 2008). In addition, young people nowadays are flooded with marketing and media-oriented culture and entertainment.

The data from national youth surveys in Slovenia proves a clearly declining trend of conventional forms of political action, which, however, does not mean that young people are politically completely disinterested. The analysis shows the retreat from the classical institutions and engagement, in which new and different forms of action flourish: the tailored, predominantly electronically transmitted political, temporary activation and socio-cultural practices, directly related to the lifestyle of young people. Youth engagement is caught in a strong perception of citizens' helplessness, which is why young people find their own youth environment or topics associated with them as the most reasonable field of potential "work" for politics.

Young people are – broadly speaking – activated in different ways: they are online, mobile in their technologically mediated relationships and in their social network contexts, where they take (individual) care for their own digital image, friends and consumption. This has been the characteristic also for other European countries, but in Slovenia it has been very much stimulated by the safe comfort of the home, and also the Slovenian education system functions as a safe social system. As demonstrated by the latest political protests in Slovenia in 2013, in our country it is mostly the generation over 30 that is activated: the educated, predominantly working but precarious population – so the one that has awakened from the (safe) extended youth moratorium sleep and dreams. However, considering the current course of these events, one cannot say that this generation, which is just over the age of 30, is characterised by being more tolerant, dialogic or collaborative but rather by having more egocentric value orientations. And younger people are, at most, struggling for existing apparent benefits of extended youth (which are, in fact, traps), such as low-taxed student work and free mass tertiary education. Nevertheless, the hope that new social movements, also in Slovenia, (could) represent a renewed framework for articulation of youth interests, for reflection on societal challenges and collective efforts for change, is not to be abandoned.

In order to better understand the current participatory phenomena, we undoubtedly need more comprehensive studies. So far we have, in Slovenia as well as across Europe, mainly analyses of general practices, which deal insufficiently with the question of what politics is to the young, analyses which insufficiently take into account the changes in the lifestyles of young people, such as their attachment to home and

the impact of the media and social networks. Furthermore, youth politics at the national and European level should be more relevant to everyday youth culture and the media consumption by a digital generation. We need to understand young people's everyday practices in today's society of mediated relationships and we also need to recognise the changeable media world that is becoming intensely mobile and digitised. As a consequence this means we need to focus also on the level of digital content and on the question of how do the most important institutions for younger generations activate (or deactivate) them through their online and mobile representations. If we aim to have an active youth that speaks publicly about their own problems, ambitions and aims, then we also need to interact with them in their own language, in their own communication style and according to their own media tastes (Livingstone 2005).

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