

**Political Participation of Young People in
Europe – Development of Indicators for
Comparative Research in the European
Union (EUYOUPART)**

**Deliverable 9: “Comparative report on
qualitative research findings”**

**Kari Paakkunainen/ Finnish Youth Research
Network (FYRN)**

James Sloam/ University of Birmingham

**Reingard Spannring/ Austrian Institute for
Youth Research (ÖIJ)**

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Lead partner for WP6: Kari Paakkunainen/ Finnish Youth Research Network (FYRN)

Lead team:

Kari Paakkunainen/ Finnish Youth Research Network (FYRN)

Reingard Spannring and Reinhard Zuba/ Austrian Institute
for Youth Research (ÖIJ)

James Sloam/ University of Birmingham

Scientific and administrative coordination:

Günther Ogris, Ruth Picker

Institute for Social Research and Analysis (SORA)

Vienna, Austria

Consortium members:

Austria:	Institute for Social Research and Analysis (SORA) Austrian Institute for Youth Research (ÖIJ)
Estonia:	Institute of International and Social Studies (IISS)
Finland:	Finnish Youth Research Network (FYRN)
France:	Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques (FNSP)
Germany:	German Youth Institute (DJI)
Italy:	Fondazione IARD (IARD)
Slovakia:	University of St. Cyril and Method in Trnava (UCM)
United Kingdom:	University of Birmingham

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research strategy, triangular data and methods

In the Technical appendix of EUYOUPART we stressed the crucial objectives for the research project: *“Qualitative research should lead to a better understanding of cultural differences in the meaning of key concepts related to political participation, European Identity and EU enlargement. Based on qualitative research, the theoretical foundations and the experiences of prior research, an international questionnaire is to be prepared and pre-tested. Surveys about political participation and related attitudes are conducted in all participating countries. This enables the analysis of cultural differences between regions in Europe.”* Here we need a qualitative data, transcribed interviews of young people and research strategy where the quantitative survey will be developed by qualitative learning process.

Figure 1: RESEARCH STRATEGY: REFLECTION AND LEARNING BETWEEN MAIN SURVEY AND TEXT CORPUS BASED ON INTERVIEWS

Interviews of individual persons (biographies) and focus groups	LEARNING VIA TRIANGULATION OF EMPIRICAL DATA	Survey data based on Gallup interviews (basic empirical material)
QUALITATIVE DATA	*****	QUANTITATIVE DATA
“Lebenswelt”: everyday life and discourse on politics among various youth groups”	TERMINOLOGICAL, CONCEPTUAL AND CULTURAL REFLECTION	“Conventional and scientific standards and commenturable categories of participation in Europe”

At the same time focus groups could be pre-testing audiences and commentators with the project key words and ideas on political participation developed in a preliminary form. It will be fascinating to get the basic feelings and arguments from young people – where they belong to, why or why not they are engaged in conventional political life, what their

'narrative selfs' and stories of participation are? The personal data (individual biographies) and collective interviews (focus group) complement each other. The political group dynamics of focus groups produce a dialectic of themes and data.

The individual interviews could emerge as deeper personal 'I' and 'her/his' reflections/narratives of political socialisation. The personal biography method emerges through the construction of 'scarlet threads', identity work and bridges of meaning for today's youth. The focus group is a popular approach to get data from young people's discursive roles, communality and collective roles, contradictions and rhetorical political conventions. Thematic interviews imply an idea that there is a 'clean slate' at the beginning of the interview and young people are filling up this slate with their 'own logic', meanings and arguments. This is the point where the later reported learning process of researchers begins.

Thematic interview means for EUYOUNGPART the fact that researchers/moderators have beforehand some general themes or sub-themes and during the interview she/he makes sure they are all covered (see EUYOUNGPART: Summary guidelines in qualitative work WP6, 2003). But the breadth and running order of the themes may vary. The topic guide below represents a skeleton list of supportive issues/themes to be actualised in the dialogue, not a set of strict questions. First-hand, the interviews must be recorded on tape for which we need the permission of the interviewees. The whole dialogical act can only function on the principal of confidentiality.

A general definition of our strategy of analysis for thematic interviews is that a qualitative and soft way to collect empirical material (text corpus), perspectives of the analysed young people, qualitative-inductive analyses of collected data, action without clear hypotheses, the reporting of results as a learning process and a narrative structure with several meanings in the report. The research process and its stages are a uniform and consistent unit. The basic premises of the fieldwork lie in the aim to catch the perspectives of the objects of the research and their own realities ('fieldwork naturalism', vision of 'emic' in anthropology). The researcher has to try to recognise her/his presuppositions and "*leave them aside*". The correct and 'scientific' logic of research is based on this recognition of subjective/biographical presuppositions (cf. 'Vorurteile' in the Gadamerian tradition).

The role of the interviewer/moderator is active and in many ways participatory. In the dialogue process she/he tries to act in the open and free space of conversation, learn from the interviewed persons and find new hypothesis/answers to the research questions, deepening the focus of the thematic structures. In the above mentioned Summary guidelines and their larger background paper (p. 7-13; Discussed in Milan Meeting, autumn 2003: BACKGROUND PAPER: EUYOUNGPART. Guidelines for Qualitative Research (WP6)) the fieldwork conditions and discursive and interpretative strategies for individual interviews and thematic groups interviews where written in a well-reflected and correct way. Those guidelines where part of the disciplines' best practices.

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2 THE REALISED SAMPLE (composition of focus groups and individual interviews)

2.1 Objectives

Pursuant to our Milan Meeting the eight partners in this project agreed to a set of clear and carefully considered guidelines, put forward in two separate documents, as to how interviewees for qualitative research were to be recruited. By and large the main principles, outlined below, were realised.

A. Focus Groups – with non-active young people

Groups 1-4: Age: 18-25 years for all groups

	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
<i>Low level of education</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>High level of education</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>

(extra /optional):

Group 5: age 15-25, female and male, participants in “new politics” (e.g., anti-war protests)

- 1. 18-25 year old, males, high level of education*
 - 2. 18-25 year old, males, low level of education*
 - 3. 18-25 year old, females, high level of education*
 - 4. 18-25 year old, females, low level of education*
 - 5. 15-25 participants active in ‘new politics’/ unconventional forms of participation*
- A group should not be a collection of people working together in the same organisation/ for the same cause – we are trying to encourage diversity of discourse (no “real” groups – preferably participants who do not know each other).*
 - The first four focus groups should be comprised of “non-activists”: This means we do not want young people in these groups who are regularly or for long periods of time actively involved in politics (regardless of whether this is “conventional” or “unconventional” participation) i.e., not people who describe themselves as “politically active”. In sum, the first 4 groups may contain people who vote or even have participated in a demonstration, but not who regularly go to demonstrations/meetings, write or are politically organised etc.*

B. In-depth Interviews (“biographies of participation”):

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For the composition of the individual interviews, you could use the following suggestions. The purpose is to talk to a variety of active young people who perhaps represent several types of activists. These ideas for the individual interviews should provide a 'guide' (not strict sampling rules).

1. *A young person active in conventional party politics*
2. *A young person active in unconventional ('new') politics*
3. *A young person active on school's council*
4. *A young person active in community group*
5. *A young participant with a unique perspective on particular aspects of the country's political culture (e.g., Roma interview in Slovakia)*

IMPORTANT: *Be sure that your interviews show something of a gender balance (e.g. 3 interviews with female activists, 2 with male activists.)"*

As can be seen from the following tables (I-II) describing the contexts of the interviewees, two national sample groups conformed very closely to these guidelines. Our transcribed text corpus contains the voices of 266 young people, speaking through and in 38 thematic groups. We hear the tensions, rhetorical moves and situation-bound comments of youthful discourses! There are divergences in the national samples, but most often they are well-chosen and justified by particular national situations and individual discursive cultures. With slight exceptions diverse aspects of gender, education and age are well-represented in the national samples. A large portion of interviewees live in the capital areas of their respective countries, but a significant portion of those persons have moved from other towns and rural areas into these urban centres. The 'centre-periphery' dichotomy is a crucial element in countries such as Italy and Finland, where broad regional diversity among informants formed an additional selection criterion.

It is important to remember the fact that a large quantity of the national texts (transcripts) does not necessarily guarantee an inspiring or adequate text corpus. We are dealing with qualitative informants, not the representative random sample of partner countries. We are looking for a rich dialog with young people and well-articulated interpretation of the voices of youth. The structure of the interviews, open to common European thematisation and interpretation, is also extremely relevant here. The scarlet thread of the qualitative research in EUYOUPART was to assemble different youth groups in discourse on the same themes and problems in order to form comparative analyses; but at the same time we had to consider the variety of unique national contexts involved, e.g. the particular politics of immigration and relations with ethnic minorities for the country in question – Russian speaking people in Estonia, civic activists in France and Roma people in Slovakia.

TABLE I: Contexts of the individual interviewees in the Partner Countries¹

	Inter- view- ees	Fe- male	Male	Con- ven- tional	Uncon- ventio- nal	Coun- cil	Spe- cial	Under 22 years	22 years & over	Capi- tal area	Out- side capital
Austria	6	3	3	2	2	1	1	4	2	5	1
Estonia	5	3	2	4	-	1	-	2	3	4	1
Finland	5	2	3	2	2	1	-	-	5	2	3
France	6	2	4	4	2	-	-	2	4	6	-
Germany	4	3	1	2	1	1	-	3	1	3	1
Italy	5	1	4	1	1	2	1	2	3	3	2
GB	6	4	2	4	1	1	-	4	2	4	2
Slovakia	4	2	2	2	1	-	1	1	3	3	1
TOTAL	41	20	21	21	10	7	3	18	23	30	11

¹ The attribute 'conventional' refers mainly to political participation in conventional, institutional and organisational activities. 'Unconventional' participation includes protests, consumer action, informal activities and 'life-political' contributions. Those active in schools' and students' councils or community groups are included into the category of 'Council'. The column of 'Special' indicates participation in a group unique to the country in question.

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TABLE II: Contexts of the interviewed focus groups in the Partner Countries

	Groups	Pers.	Fem., high educ.	Male high educ.	Mixed high educ.	Fem. low educ.	Male low educ.	Mixed low educ.	'New politics' ²	Unique national factors considered
Austria	5	21	-	-	2	1	1	-	1	New and old politics mixed
Estonia	4	27	1	1	-	1	1	-	-	Russian speaking minority
Finland	4	19	1	1	-	1	1	-	-	New and old politics mixed
France	5	42	1	1	-	1	1	-	1	Demonstrators against Iraq-War
Germany	5	36	1	1	1	1	1	-	-	
Italy	5	29	1	1	-	1	1	-	1	New Social movements
GB	5	20	1	1	-	1	1	1	-	
Slovakia	5	31	1	1	-	1	1	-	1	
TOTAL	38	225	7	7	3	8	8	1	4	

The main objective in focus group sampling was to have four main groups composed of political non-activists. In practice, however, it was not always so easy to categorically distinguish in advance between active and passive – political and non-political – youth. Young people have elastic behaviour and discourses concerning political problems and 'games'. Many of them are quite politically aware, having rather colourful opinions, but avoiding full collective commitment. Many formally/conventionally passive persons are, surprisingly, involved in every-day political cultures and powerful opinions on political affairs or sometimes in relation to specific issues they have special political commitments. Although in the two tables above we find only ten individual and four group interviews featuring young people active in unconventional/'new-political' ways, the actual interview process was far more rich and contradictory. Especially in France and Finland, many interviewees which were not strictly so categorised had experiences of new social movements or unconventional political action. Personal means and aspects of political participation are variable and 'momentary' (situational).

² Majority of the members in the group are active in the unconventional politics.

2.2 Recruiting, dynamic and methods in partner countries

As the advice in our guideline documents was rather open-ended, the means of recruiting interviewees varied from country to country. The contact networks and experiences of the researchers in different partner countries are heterogeneous, and thus it is natural for recruiting methods to reflect national differences. Some partners used institutional or network contacts; some operated through informal personal contacts or address lists of youth organisations or their members. Sometimes a small cash payment or fringe benefit (such as coffee and muffins) was used to motivate potential participants. The essential principle here is that each partner has openly presented and problematised their concrete means of selecting, motivating and mobilising interviewees in their national reports.

Politically uninvolved young women in particular tended to be evasive in the interview situations. Sometimes it was hard to motivate young people to speak at the 'attitude level' since young people often identify the interview situation with school oral examinations. Often researchers heard dubious discussions on an unknown theme! But this was part of our research problem: Why are young people distanced from conventional political arenas and cultures? Their knowledge and experiences of political landscapes were distinctively heterogeneous. Some of the participants were not aware of the basic political facts of their country (e.g., the role of government or the name of prime minister); some of the participants were capable of historical irony or individual personal contributions to the political situation in their countries. One might move freely in and out of various political activities, another might only be involved in an issue-specific project for a limited period and another might be seen as a typifying "*life politics*". Despite their rather diverse biographies, there seems to be one key experience which boosts political awareness: *empowerment*. Many different factors can increase the feeling of empowerment, ranging from a social background rich in cultural and economic capital, active adults and peer groups, to low threshold institutions supporting citizens' initiatives

Some activists in anarchist or illegal movements (e.g. Greenpeace) were a bit cautious because of the secretive nature of their action programs. Some young people were not very reliable. Some just did not show up; others phoned up with more or less plausible excuses an hour or so before their focus group was to gather. The most passive members – not familiar with social, ethical and political arguments – conformed to the more active discussants opinions or built consensual narrative structures, ironic styles and mutual support groups. The interviewers faced many challenges both with frozen silence and overheated dynamic situations involving the interplay between morally dogmatic and/or rhetorically skilled discussants, but most of these were anticipated in the guidelines and in basic literature analysing the thematic interview process, popular in the social sciences in recent years.

Especially during the individual interviews and discussions in well-educated groups, the scarlet thread of the thematic guidelines snapped and unanticipated themes, reflections and unique landscapes arose in the discussion – and the interviewer's

role changed: she/he was, surprisingly, a pupil – learning new political arsenals and virtuoso game skills and rhetorical arguments/tricks. The methods and styles of national working cultures, syntheses and reporting varied too. The common premise of the textual interpretation was based on text corpus-centred (*“data on a clean board”*) intention and *“grounded theory”*. The intellectual, academic and practical means to synthesise or interpret the more abridged summary or textual application were thoroughly discussed in the partners’ meetings and guiding documents. Almost all of the partners were logical and rhetorically competent to express their interpretative method. The strategies varied from the systematic approaches of the French, Estonian and Italian partners to the more historical-analytical cultures in Great Britain and Slovakia – and from the clear textual-analytical strategy in Austria and Germany to the Finnish rhetorical and hermeneutical approach.

3 BRIEF NATIONAL SUMMARIES

3.1 Austria

The Austrian discussants had pluralistic arguments, landscapes and rhetorical roles – a broad range of opinions. Austrian researchers were successful in building a rich sample, full of dialectic between genders and opinions from new political cultures, many of them lived in a flat-sharing community. Participants (especially from youth organisations) often started lively debates, taking on various roles for the sake of broadening the discussion. Young men and women with an upper secondary school qualification also had no problems discussing issues present in interviewing process. Some of those with a lower educational background and no political interest, especially among the girls, tended to be silent conformists and they had problems with abstract concepts like democracy. Although a lot of negative statements were made, there were no completely alienated or negative attitudes but rather differentiated views, even if this was only acknowledged by saying, *“but there are also good politicians.”* Among the better educated participants there was awareness of social imperative that *“one ought to do something.”* All interview groups displayed critical but differentiated views and frustration with the political system, although on different levels. A lack of ethics among politicians and problems in the effective influence structures of the political system were often mentioned. While for the less educated focus group participants the biggest frustration was that *“people like them have nothing to say and are not listened to,”* for activists the frustration lies in the complexity of the problems and rigidity of the system

Among the individual interviews there was only one young man who is permanently working for a political party and one who has just started working for one. The others are not politically active in the traditional sense. One moves freely in and out of various political activities, another was only involved in an issue-specific project for a limited period of time and one can be seen as a representative of “life politics”. Despite their very diverse biographies there seems to be one key experience which boosts political awareness: empowerment. Many different factors can increase the feeling of empowerment, ranging from a social background rich in cultural and economic capital, active adult influences and peer groups, to low threshold institutions supporting citizens’ initiatives (e.g. Agenda 21).

All young people had very differentiated views on politics and politicians. There was no black and white, but reflection and recognition that there are always several sides to a problem. Even those who had clear ideological attitudes were critical of “their” political parties. They did not want to give up their independent mind by becoming “party soldiers”. There was, also, a moral aspect to this rhetoric: the young people were very consensus-oriented. Their ideal were politicians (or institutions, for example corporatism) who discuss problems in an open way in order

to find a constructive solution. They were critical of quarrelling politicians and party discipline which does not allow for flexible solutions.

The basic interpretations are in the line with risk-societal foundations: altruistic individuality and “new politics” on the other side of old left/right polarisation. Among the individualists we could find a feeling of responsibility and solidarity. In this sample there were no hints of expectations of selective benefits. Discussions did not run along traditional lines of conflict (capitalist vs. labourer), but there was talk of collective benefits and empathy with certain groups of the population, such as “*those who work on the building sites,*” foreigners, old age pensioners, the Third World, and animals/nature.

There may be two elements that differentiate today’s young people from their counterparts in the 70s and 80s. First, political movements and cultural movements do not coincide. In those few events like the “*street party protest,*” where protest is linked with fun and socialising with peers, the political component of the event is completely denied by the adults. Second, young people at the beginning of the 21st century are “disenchanted” – there is an acute awareness of the limited effects of one’s action even as part of a mass protest.

3.2 Estonia

The Estonian sample was organised in a nice and systematic way according to the guidelines. The regional selection of informants was appropriate and the representation of the Russian speaking minority was also in trim. The main feeling in the analysis was the somewhat sceptical observation that Estonian youth holds a view that participation is something extraordinary, not a natural part of societal life. This might be symptom of radical modernisation process of Estonian political institutions and, especially, a reflection of their accepted civic virtues and self-discipline – a result of the extreme economic liberalism and the concept of a minimal state. Some form of modern meritocracy and cultural/social capital are the overriding considerations for young people. These are also part of their interest in politics. Personal characteristics like interest in social interaction, an interest in organisational work, leadership qualities and communication skills obviously play a significant role in social activism. These factors override such objective constraints as living in a periphery or insufficient language skills.

Educational level explains much in terms of young people’s social and political activism. More educated people are better equipped for analysing social and political events and developments. But what is even more important, they are more likely to be in touch with other people who are socially active than those with lower educational attainment. In the hectic building of modern democracy after the long-term break in civil society and its mobilisation it is easy to see that educated people have concepts and connections reflecting missing structures of active civil society, international examples and civic spirit. Many poor people have enough problems to deal with in terms of coping with their day to day struggle to get by. The more

educated have opportunities to participate in school or university self-government that are among the main channels of youth social activism. There was a major difference between political attitudes of Estonian and non-Estonian youth. Non-Estonians were markedly more cynical and distrustful; they were much more alienated from their country of residence. They also displayed signs of ethnic hostility.

Participation in organisations is an alternative channel of education. In various organisations young people learn interpersonal communication, get to know each other (i.e. gather social capital) and learn how to work collectively. Through organisations they get their first contacts with people in positions of power and learn routines of (political) decision making. There were no significant differences between young men and women without children, but young women with children were in a different position than both young men and other young women – child-rearing as well as on work life placed additional pressure on their time allocation. Thus they could not use their time as freely as other boys or girls.

The economic situation of one's family/household evidently plays a significant role in youngsters' activism. Poorer families tend to equip their offspring with less social and self-management skills, which in turn reduces participation. Youngsters in small communities mentioned lack or absence of opportunities for spending free time. They longed for well-equipped sports facilities and interesting places for going out with friends. Employed persons obviously were under much more stress than youngsters in education. This is seen in their frequent reporting of total exhaustion at the end of the workday or workweek. Students did not have similar experiences.

3.3 Finland

The Finnish sample of groups and individual informants wasn't outstandingly large, but the dialog and debate between young persons was active and the analysing researchers learned much in these active discourses. In general, the young people in the Finnish sample were relatively well-educated and active in the social world and late-modern individual cultures (including life-politics) were well-articulated, but one focus group from a Finnish prison also provided an interesting view from the margins of Finnish society

It is impossible to speak of 'youth' as a collective singular in the sense of a subject adopting more or less uniform positions. The internal divisions among young people are at least as strong as among older folks, both in their attitudes towards politics and in the figurative language they use to describe the phenomenon of politics. Firstly, the majority of young people had no other message for politicians than their passive, pejorative or cynical style and symbolic movement. This includes both moralistic anti-politicians and those who want to replace the present dirty game (of politicians) with their own sense of fair play. This latter group, however, tended to reject playing as such – because of its many intrigues and immoral conduct – in

favour of binding politics to substantial moral rules of conduct which are assumed to prevail in other areas of life (sport, erotica, school, even economy).

But surprisingly many of interviewed informants had open doors to political expression and participation. The lower educated focus group interviewees compared political activities to everyday fair games and practices, and often laughed at institutional politics. Furthermore they had their own discursive traditions in politics and some means of participation (e.g. demonstrations) and they were principally open to conventional participation in matters like voting. Two of the political activists interviewed individually criticised politics from the rhetorical horizon of individual and rational fair play. They cited 'the new right' and the enlightenment project of Scouting in Finland as alternative 'non-playing' programmes in this regard.

But there is also a growing tendency towards individualistic civil competence that threatens older people's political establishment. These critical actors consisted of both 'democratising' potential players and play-breakers which see the current crop of politicians as bad ones and are intent on becoming better players themselves – not so much restricted to formal arenas and ready to take what political opportunities they can find.

The alternative orientation was rather towards changing the rules of play, in the sense of opening and democratising the chances for all citizens to become players, as well as in the procedural sense of changing the rules to be closer to the ideal of 'fair play'. They believed in new kinds of opportunities for political action and play (Spielraum), seeking new forms of communities and alternatives to the present 'risk societies'. Most of the activists and well-educated persons interviewed were thinking along these lines.

These individualistic and elastic tendencies are a new phenomenon. They involve stylistic and symbolical experimentation and shameless ways of breaking up the conventional political ideologies and collectives. Political participation is a chance to potentially actualise a situation or theme bound discussion. The majority of the interviewed young people were open-minded; dogmatic 'either/or' attitudes were out and 'yes/but' orientations were in. Though most of the discussants avoided formal membership in political organisations, three of the individually interviewed activists were ready to influence matters from inside political institutions, networks and parties. Life-political activities, from consumerism to professional politicking, were open to almost all partners in the discussion.

Among the young discussants we find a small group of play-breakers who have joyfully accepted the playful character of politics and are ready to use it as a chance to alter the whole style of politics. Some of the well-educated young people, one of the less educated young women and two of the activists could be labelled as play-breakers, ready for radical and illegal debates and participatory means. They wanted to act politically by breaking away from the established games and by inventing new forms of play. It was among these young people that the rhetoric of earnest belonging with to traditional organised, institutional and collective forms of

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politics is most clearly rejected. These young people had artistic or literary heroes such as Milan Kundera and Antonio Negri, whose playful or anarchistic style of acting 'destructively' they want to transfer into politics. And they will not leave their work unfinished. In their action programs and back pockets we could find an alternative that points beyond the old democracy founded on the "*power of collectives*."

3.4 France

The French interview process was very systematic and professional. In this sample the French specialities and social-historical movements are well-articulated. Also, the interpretation of the texts was very systematic and easy to follow. The world-view of highly educational women was mostly preoccupied with day-to-day issues, implying a position "*outside of the political system*" – politics is seen as necessary but too complex for them. Institutional participation (voting) was a duty for these well-educated females, but they had contradictory attitudes (mainly mistrust) concerning unconventional participation. They were interested in voluntary and humanitarian actions – not political ones. The men of high education had a feeling of being privileged and they were quite globally oriented. Their sense of the political world is that it is adequate and the researchers found that some of them even had trustful feelings towards political actors – perhaps in some years voting might even work. Demonstrations were taken as a symptom of crises in political responsibility, but these well-educated men were not open to unconventional civil resistance. Political involvements are constructed more in terms of individual and situation-bound acts which are part of one's individual biography.

Girls and women of low education were mostly preoccupied with social and economic issues (unemployment) and often they had deep feelings of depression, protest and distrust towards politicians and even the media. It is easy to notice a uniquely French feature here: young people of low education are looking for dramatic alternatives (fundamentalist polarisation) in voting extreme right or extreme left. Demonstrations were an open possibility, but deep involvement in political affairs is not a realistic horizon because of their many-sided problems in their everyday life. Young men from less educated contexts – who were mostly preoccupied by global issues – had sceptical and passive attitudes towards political actors, arenas and involvements; although demonstrations provide a viable way to express opinions, in terms of effectiveness they are not very useful.

The individual biographies of young activists interviewed completed the rich and cultural-historical portrayal of the French political culture of civic action: spontaneous drama in civil society drawing on the tension between political institutions and civil society. There is a dramatic difference between France on the one hand and consensual Austria and negotiating Finland on the other hand! Global orientations, idealism, human rights movements, intellectualism and spontaneous (semi-anarchist or autonomous) movements and ideologies are living in the late-modern landscape of young Frenchmen. Surprisingly often, the active French young

people interviewed trusted in a conventional means and cultures in politics; they associated new demonstrative cultures mainly with stronger expressions of the conventional body of the political system!

3.5 Germany

The German sample for interviews was mobilised in the experienced fashion of Deutsches Jugend Institution (DJI). Already in the informant collection phase, it came clear that the number of politically active young people in Southern Germany is not that large. To compensate for this, the social activities of some young people are also present in the German data. Researchers from München also applied a method of their own in gathering and interpreting their data: association test (of political terms).

In the minds of the young people interviewed, "politics" is a male domain, predominantly influenced by party politics. On balance, it could be seen that the interviewees were interested in discussing politics but that the majority of them did not see any incentive for political participation. "*Politics*," parties and politicians are viewed sceptically. Active participation in an area that is considered "*dull*" and "*boring*," and associated with abuse of power and lies, seems to hold little appeal. Most of the young people interviewed did not have a strong desire to change the criticised structure and situation either. Most of them, for instance, consider it too "strenuous" and "time-consuming" to inform themselves about political matters. The blame for their knowledge deficit, which serves as an excuse for non-participation, is quickly laid on schools. They believed the political enlightenment and training they received at school.

The differentiation between old and new politics frequently found in literature in this field could not be seen in relation to the German young people interviewed. NGOs, for example, which are part of new politics, were not mentioned by young people within the scope of these interviews. In addition to NGOs, differentiation in the literature mostly also includes demonstrations among the new forms of political participation. Although young people regard demonstrations as a possible form of participation, they do not differentiate between demonstrations and voting as forms of participation, especially in terms of their effects. Interviewees assess the impact of their possibilities for action as very small. Nor did illegal actions or violence, for example, which are also frequently defined as new forms of political participation, come up here – although in surveys conducted by DJI ten years ago it was easy to find left-green and extreme right motivation to violently defend world-views. These forms of participation were now out of the question for interviewees. It could be assumed that young people might consider this kind of behaviour if the forms of participation they consider to be conventional were unsuccessful.

Gender-related differences tended to be marginal and diffuse. The group discussion among young women with a lower level of education, for example, showed a lot of empathy with people suffering from war and its consequences. A glance at the politically active young women and their motivations for political participation also

reveals more empathetic, emotional factors ("*help those who are weaker*") as compared with the politically active young man interviewed. In the individual in-depth interview conducted with the male participant, however, a single-mindedness can be seen that is not evident in this form in any of the interviews with female participants. Female interviewees want to "*do a good job*" but they are not thinking, or at least not openly, about improving their own (career) prospects thereby. One "typically German feature" might perhaps be named here: In Germany, right wing is more frequently put on a par with right-wing extremism.

3.6 Great Britain

In the coherent and fabulous synthesis of the report from Great Britain it is easy to see the above mentioned, familiar Janus-Faces of the text corpus. The focus groups – despite the obvious lack of experience/expertise among 'non-activists' in talking about 'political' issues – were particularly informative. Participants in these groups appeared to have similar levels of 'disconnection' with regard to their conception of 'politics' (the political system) and political participation. In short, these *non-activists* are interested in politics (issues) but alienated and disconnected from the political process and the political system. The in-depth interviews cannot be summarised in much detail as they followed the distinct, individual narratives of the interviewees. The personal narratives were more interesting to read as they had immediate relevance to subject in hand. The main contrast with the focus groups was their feeling of 'empowerment' – the 'activists', not unsurprisingly, thought that they could *make a difference*. They nevertheless showed consistently high levels of frustration with conventional politics and politicians and their inability to relate to young people.

The idea of *responsibility* on the part of young people is worth noting here, because it illustrates the point that any lack of engagement is not only to do with the political system but also society as a whole. Perhaps not all young people are interested in getting involved in their local community and that sort of thing. As the issue of value change is indicative of society more generally – increasing *individualisation* and waning *solidarity* – some of the remedies need to be addressed to society as a whole. Distinctively, only the 'non-activists' were keen to argue that they lacked the power to put things right, because they could not see any tangible benefits from any action. In many ways their arguments are approaching the rational choice theory. For 'non-activists', 24-hours media is, likely, their only real contact with politics upon which they can form their opinions and evaluate their own role in the political process. It was therefore also interesting to hear 'activists' generally negative views of the role of the media: "*the media is so sensationalist now, it picks out all the negative things... the media and sensationalism, it gives people a bad outlook on politics in general.*"

This is not, however, to deflect attention away from young people's view of the poor state of politics today – the poor performance of politicians and parties to fulfil their representative duties – described in detail throughout the English report on qualitative interviews. Young people themselves have attributed much of the apathy

in their generation to the way politics is conducted. One interviewee related personal experiences of campaigning for a political party: *“there is bad apathy and, as I say, the responses I got from visiting people [was] that they liked to have someone knocking on their door but they don’t like having someone knocking on their door just one time of the year.”* In other words, the engagement of politicians should not focus so heavily on the campaigning period when they want young people’s votes. They also made the point that politicians, particularly at the national level, do not seem to be listening, even when people do make their opinions clear (e.g. on the Iraq War; unclear differentiation between political parties; processing of information; or a concrete and rational change encouraged via the political system and its responsibility). As a part of new openness and responsibility of the political culture, young people ask for more honest, trustworthy and even survey-based professional feedback practices: *“Politics is about listening to people, and what policies they want to implement... I think politicians need to engage more with the public and get a bit more focused on that aspect.”*

Engagement was advocated overwhelmingly at the local level, to address local issues that mattered in the everyday lives of young people: *“You have to put it at a local level. Like, take Boscombe... we know this is a bad area. We know it and there is a problem, but what do you think can be done about it?”* One interviewee offered a detailed suggestion about how this might take place: *“What I think needs to happen, needs to happen on a more local level. MPs have to become more accountable to the people in their constituencies... We need to have more... local debates. Local press needs to take more of an active role... Local communities need to take more of an active role in what MPs are up to.”* Politicians must knock on the doors! They must ask about the political horizons of grass roots; *“What they want their taxpayers money being spent on... people are not seeing where their money is spent because it’s being wasted on stupid projects!”*

Some young people argued, just like in texts of the enlightenment spirit in Germany, that the key to young people participating more was ‘education’ and ‘citizenship’: ‘Let’s make people participate in these things. Let’s raise people’s awareness... I’d like to have checklist of 20 things [‘little cut-out-and-keep cards’] which students have to do... [e.g.] get a reply from an MP on an issue you feel strongly about... going to a surgery’. They furthermore highlighted the virtuous circle created by such an educational approach: *“Education is really important... If we inform and educate one person, they’ll go and inform and educate another person and you start a cycle of change.”* Even for ‘non-activists’, making them think about politics and discuss issues important to them might increase the chances of engagement. One participant commented about the focus group in which they were taking part: *“Coming here today has made me think about a few things... maybe it is time that, you know, I sat up and thought about what I’m going to do.”* Yet engagement or the mobilisation of young people should not just be encouraged between political actors and young people, but – more importantly and more realistically – between young people and the various strands of civil society.

The hypothesis of the English report must therefore read that young people are interested in politics, but not in the political process, though their interest is not

matched by a deep understanding of how things work. This hampers both debate and discussion of the issues, but also directs participation in politics and democracy, and adds to a feeling of powerlessness and disconnection from the political process and the organised elements of civil society more generally (fuelled by popular perceptions of parties, politicians and the government). The answer lies in a combination of better information and education, greater integrity and more engagement from key political and societal actors, and more effort to engage young people at a local level (and listen to issues that really concern them), which should add up to a more general effort to mobilise both the concept of politics and political participation itself.

3.7 Italy

Two researchers from IARD were active in the interviewing process in Italy. They followed the basic guidelines, found some special sub-themes and concrete questions, and succeeded in gathering a many-sided high school based sample. Thus the positions of representatives of Lega Nord, school councils, community groups and 'new politics' are clearly represented. As in Germany, it was hard to find young people who were openly and actively speaking on political themes. Since the end of the Cold War and disintegration of the conventional Christian Democratic and Communist mobilisations of the political narrative (structure) in Italy (in the 1980s) the political landscape for young people has been a bit chaotic. New European identities have not provided a new lifeline of political culture.

Analysing how young Italian people conceptualise politics and how they construct and experience it on a social level, the researchers found out, as first, that many of the data confirm previous national research results. The studies carried out by Fondazione IARD have highlighted a strong and increasing lack of interest in politics among young people, some of whom are even so disgusted by politics that it has even been termed "*the eclipse of politics*". At the same time Caniglia reported a lack of interest and activism. As to the lack of interest, he defines the current generation as "*invisible*", according to the political behaviour and participation of young people since the '60s. Lack of relationships between young people and institutions should be seen as the consequence of the growing distance between traditional politics and social needs – and on the hand, of unstable and populist political 'bodies' and parties in the country. Young people perceive political participation as a personal choice instead of a result of the social environment in which they live. The fracture between ideals and reality still represents the disillusion towards traditional politics and its distance from the social needs.

In the present research the most recurrent images basically concern confusion about the concept of politics and a heightened negative connotation of politics as such. Reasons underlying such representations are manifold: politics is conceived as purely abstract, without any effective impact in real life – just an instrument of social control which in fact is used to dupe citizens, since its aims are shady, dirty and undeclared. It is worth noticing that the most negative judgements in this regard were expressed mainly by females. To get closer to politics, young people need to perceive concrete goals and to notice clear results of political actions. Also values

and people's needs represent key elements on which to focus the possible input of political participation.

Thus the interviewees, whether activists or not, stressed the importance of political actions being concrete and anchored in everyday life; every single individual can thus personally contribute to the community, through a form of politics "from below," which is close to the people. Somewhat paradoxically, it emerged that as forms of political participation, demonstrations and marches are very popular, but sometimes they don't seem to rest on political motivation. Other variables are often at stake, such as a strong need for affiliation with a group of peers. Only a few activists find stimuli for activism in actual social analysis, but they still look out for their own interests or problems such as school issues.

3.8 Slovakia

Based upon historical experience of older generations, young people in Slovakia perceive current economic and social problems (unemployment, homelessness, poverty) as a burden that can be overcome, but they patiently tolerate these challenges. Political scandals are considered to be a natural part of a pluralistic, democratic society. They are popular topics of people's discussions. Life optimism is supported by their life experience of "*high politics*" (the state-centred and federal period) – "*the brown years*" (1939-1945) and "*the red years*" (1948-1989) - which had only indirect impact on everyday life of apolitical citizens in local conditions. For this reason we have to conceptualise the political culture and empirical text corpus of youth not only according to the (media-based) integration into Europe, but to the on-going tradition in civil society and older generations. Researchers from Slovakia interpreted their interviews by historical-analytical conventions and in doing so they successfully produced a text corpus full of relevant informants. This systematic method of analysis reminds us about how troublesome Western categories can be in relation to present day Slovakia.

For this reason politics is perceived mostly as the "*monkey-business of masters*," and consequently as a game of party politics or as its influence, but it doesn't bring to mind anything that ordinary people should care about. Young people in Slovakia connect traditional cultural values of originally rural areas (family and relatives, neighbourhood and friends, solidarity and self-help) with a modern orientation towards integration into the EU which is the only alternative for Slovakia to remain a legal state and to guarantee the economic prosperity of its citizens. They hope that Slovakia's membership will bring them more social justice and labour opportunities. The political '*rhetoric of necessity*' is present. People are speaking via imperatives, not opening up individual or group spaces for political rights and open games!

Interviews with selected groups of young people in Slovakia at the beginning of 2004 on the themes of politics and political participation indicate young people's preparedness to freely express their opinions about a wide range of questions and problems of public life. At the same time they showed how originally high and

obligatory, but simultaneously passive, participation in the legitimation of the Communist party – the system they were born into – contrasts with the current situation. Non-participation in presidential elections or referendums is perceived as an “*indicator of high political culture.*”

The political culture of the current youth generation as a whole is significantly different from generations socialised under socialist political regimes. At the same time, traditional norms and values are still present in the political culture of youth. The pluralism of the current political system and the deepening of social differentiation of originally homogeneous social structures have had an impact on the political culture of young people. Paradoxically, this situation may be the beginning of a new political period in the country. The qualitative analysis of four focus groups has enabled researchers to define two types of young people with different views on politics and political participation.

The first group is comprised of young people (mostly young girls and women) *with lower education* (24-25 years old), who have small children and which have to solve the everyday social problems of their families. Many of them (young males) cannot find a job or long-term work. They get information about politics mostly from TV and electronic media. They compare politics to a drama series on TV. They spend a similar amount of time watching sporting events, pop concerts, quiz shows, etc. In the West, social scientists refer to this culture as “*Tissytainment*” (compensatory everyday life full of cheap beer and soft porn). Politicians as actors on these shows are often discussed among their parents, relatives or friends. Their political vocabulary on is rich in pejoratives (“*dirty business,*” “*liars*”) and cynical expressions.

The second group is comprised of young people with higher education or students, most of them still single, who understand the ideas of politics, including its ‘professional’ and realistically reflected dimensions. They distinguish between party politics and civic politics, and use political science terminology. Many of them participate in public life and activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). They have moved beyond the ‘rhetoric of necessity’ to European contacts and cultural capital, individual choices and feelings of ‘*carpe diem!*’

4 BELONGING AND IDENTITY

4.1 Austria

The young people in the Austrian sample feel primarily attached to their family and peer groups. Especially those with a low level of education have a very limited range of communities they belong to. Young people with higher levels of education as well as rural youth are also integrated in local communities (village, neighbourhood, and district) or voluntary organisations such as sports clubs, hobby clubs, youth organisations and church-related organisations. Belonging to smaller territorial units means knowing the traditions and customs, feeling respected and comfortable. However, local involvement such as community work seems to play a subordinate role, especially in urban areas.

Citizenship is the formal way of belonging to a nation state. It is accompanied with the feeling of attachment and pride, although the latter is not too pronounced and often ambiguous. Citizenship implies legal rights and duties such as paying tax and voting, but also moral obligations and responsibilities toward the community or communities (e.g. caring for others, getting involved in communities). A major point of concern among the young participants is social citizenship and the exclusion of non-citizens.

A good citizen is generally somebody who obeys the laws and does not abuse the social system. It also means being obedient in the sense of succumbing to authority. In the context of political participation it is often criticised that obedience is overemphasised in the education system and society in general at the expense of self-responsibility and the courage to stand up for one's values.

4.2 Estonia

The sources of identity mentioned in the Estonian focus groups and interviews were, above all, family, friends and acquaintances, followed by socio-economic status and activity (being a student or employed). Ethnic background and language play an important role in the identity construction and the emergence of a feeling of belonging and security, for young people who or whose parents have migrated to Estonia as well as for those who consider visiting other countries. For both groups cultural and language barriers mean that it is safer and less costly to remain in one's own cultural and language milieu. The feeling of belonging to a place (local identity) is connected with the quality of living. There must be a network of friends, possibilities to work and study and offers for entertainment.

Values and life styles are important elements in the identity construction, both among the active and the non-active participants. In the case of the politically active young people this, of course, includes ideologies and actual political activism. For many focus group participants citizenship did not have any meaning. They were characterised by a detachment from the state and socio-political agendas. In general, citizenship means belonging to a political unit (state or local community), obeying laws, paying taxes, and voting. Activity in public life, being critical and forming one's independent opinion is one characteristic of a good citizen. However, a good citizen may also be someone who is polite and nice to other people.

4.3 Finland

The Finish report focuses on political identities. The politically active young people exhibit a more or less stable political identity which often has its roots in their parents' ideological tradition. However, young people do not simply adopt their parents' values and world views but actively appropriate them thereby changing and adapting them to their own social environments and experiences. The better educated young people reflect upon their identities and playfully patch together ideological, gender, regional and cultural identities in a fluid process that might be called "identity politics" (cf. Beck/Giddens/Lash, 1995).

Some of the less educated, non-active young people are more concerned with establishing a stable identity rooted in family and peer relationships. Yet another sub-group of the non-active young people does not completely lack political values and ideologies. However, there is no continuous thread in the form of a stable political identity. This forces the young people to reconsider and renegotiate their political identity on each occasion.

Only few young people are ready to define a "good citizen". Citizenship in general is associated with voting, spirit of the entrepreneur, individual responsibility, human rights and social welfare. However, the normative expectations toward a good citizen are difficult to define in the context of a multicultural, pluralistic, and post-modern world. Communities are only experienced on a small scale, i.e. in local communities, family and peer groups. The experience of a community of citizens on the national level is thwarted by the fragmentation and polarisation of society, as well as by processes of globalisation and the decreasing importance of the nation-states. Accordingly, the young people's statements are like a kaleidoscope reflecting a whole range of ideals. Some activists are mobilising their ideological, social and organisational resources to defend themselves against or via the state. Others experience powerlessness in the face of the hegemony of the international economy and/or perceive civil society as an arena for new struggle.

4.4 France

In the French interviews considerations of the young people's living conditions and life management played an important role. These factors have a strong impact on their perception of society and politics. On the one hand there is group of well-educated young people who are either still in (higher) education or working and have a comfortable social background. They experience freedom and a range of opportunities for their studies, work and leisure time as well as career plans. They have the economic and cultural basis to negotiate their transition to adulthood in a playful and light-hearted way. These young people express general political worries such as war, social conflict, European integration etc. Although these young people are the potential winners of risk society they are also confronted with anxieties concerning their own future (e.g. job market, social security and pension schemes). On the other hand, there is the group of the least qualified young people.

They are the potential losers of risk society in danger of being marginalised or excluded. Their issues are dominated by anxieties about their material security and psychological well-being. Feelings of insecurity and powerlessness are coupled by the experience of not being respected and taken seriously by politicians and the public administration. The reaction to their precarious circumstances differs between women and men. While both, men and women, are pessimistic, men tend to withdraw or express feelings of bitterness and fatalism. Women, on the other hand, tended to explain their opinions.

Another gender difference across the educational levels is that men talk in a more detached, abstract way, whereas women are more concrete and at the same time take their and their children's problems more seriously. The types of concerns differ between politically active people and the non-active. While in the latter group concerns are more tightly linked to personal problems and everyday experiences the former express more general issues and concerns (economic, social, global visions of society).

With respect to territorial identities the nation is the first and most important point of reference. In this sample, right wing individuals have a stronger national identity than left wing individuals and immigrants. With only one exception all interviewees have a European identity to some extent, which may be an indicator that the EU is becoming more and more tangible for them. Local identities, i.e. attachment to regions, districts and towns, do not play a role in the interviews.

Political involvement is part of the young activists' identities. For some interviewees it is something that makes them special and sets them apart from the average young person. All politically active young people are well integrated in French society and are advantaged with respect to economic security and educational level. In the context of political involvement the social background and social identity is explicitly referred to by only one of these interviewees. However, in other cases, too, the experiences and perception of social structures and processes influence the young people's political identity.

4.5 Germany

In the German interviews and focus groups the young people were asked about citizenship. Many participants found it difficult to define a citizen because “*Bürger*” is such a common word. Some used the term “*Mitbürger*” (fellow citizen) and associated it with foreigners. In this context the term opened up an area of tension between the responsibility to integrate foreigners and the demand that foreigners adapt to local customs. For other young people citizenship refers to communities, equality between the members of a community and responsibility toward others. Yet others see the citizen in the context of the nation-state where he/she has rights and duties such as paying taxes and voting. While for the German young people citizenship has no meaning in everyday life, for migrants this is an important issue. They are well aware of the fact that on the one hand they have to fulfil the duties but on the other hand they do not have the same rights.

In the context of political participation the question of belonging not only evolves around the nation state but also around smaller political or social units as for example local communities and school communities. On the school level students feel uninformed and therefore unable to participate. They criticise that teachers and parents (parents’ associations) make decisions without consulting the young people. It is clear that there are similar processes of exclusion at school as on the level of “proper” politics.

Another aspect mentioned in the focus groups was the difference between rural and urban areas. On the one hand, it is easier to get access to political forums in rural areas because people know each other personally so that the inhibition threshold to contact a politician is lower. Also, in small communities it is not so much the party programme but the personality which is decisive for political success. On the other hand, the participants recognise that in rural communities the political elites are more closed while in urban setting access is easier for young people because people and political networks are more open. There are also more opportunities to get involved in towns. Some of the participants are active members in non-political organisations because there are no possibilities to get politically active in their villages.

Equally important is the difference between “big” national politics and local politics. While talking about relevant issues on all levels ranging from the closure of a library in the neighbourhood to tuition fees and foreign affairs the non-political participants have the impression that it is easier to move something on the local level than on the national or even international level. Some activists also prefer the local level because they are more directly concerned with the issue, and can move something more easily. Other activists, however, find national, EU or international politics more exciting and worthwhile.

For the activists a political identity can be stated in that politics is either an important factor in their career planning or in their ideological self-understanding as striving to improve the world.

4.6 Great Britain

The British interviews revealed the multi-level, fluid and context-dependent identities of the participants. Identities are formed by membership in informal or formal social groups as well as membership in geo-political units. For most of the participants in the focus groups and interviews their local communities are the first point of reference, followed by the nation. On the national level, Britain is referred to as the nation state while the reference to England has a cultural meaning. Even the offspring of immigrants defines himself as British. Only a minority expresses a European identity. For the majority, Europe is something external to England/Britain and the European integration is not welcomed very much. Identification with a certain category obviously also depends on the category one's interaction partner belongs to.

The most meaningful information is conveyed by stating the category below the one which is shared by both interaction partners. Referring to a local community is no meaningful information for someone who does not belong to the same nation/region and referring to the nation does not convey much information for someone who comes from the same country. Activists tend to be more aware of the higher level categories such as Europe and the world and to identify with a more multicultural nation than with English culture. Compared with the territorial identities the integration in family and peer group is much more important for the young people. Especially the non-active interviewees strongly identify with these social groups. The activists, on the other hand, are also well integrated in local communities and often involved in community work and local issues

4.7 Italy

Among the Italian interviewees national identity is mainly based on culture, tradition, customs, language and history. In everyday life, however, regional identity is often more important than national identity. Regional identity means primarily belonging to the place where one was born. The concept of regional identity is not in conflict but rather compatible with national identity. For some, national identity is a prerequisite for identification with larger political and/or geographical units such as the EU or the world. Yet another group of young people denies a national identity because Italy is culturally too fragmented, especially because of the North-South divide. The denial of a national identity either leads to a strong regional identity or a strong cosmopolitan identity. However, territorial identities are not the most important identities for young people. Families and peer groups play the most important role in their identity construction and for some young people identities do not go beyond that.

A European identity was only observed to a very limited extent. Where it was present at all it was based on the perception of a common European culture and the existence of an out-group, the USA. Especially for those young people who have been abroad the abolition of physical and symbolic barriers and frontiers has also contributed to a decrease in mental barriers making them feel more European. However, the majority of young people in the Italian sample did not feel European. They stressed the cultural, political and historical diversity in Europe. Further, the European Union is regarded as based on an economic union which has no direct implications for everyday life. The demand that EU citizens should have a European identity is seen as imposed from above and met with suspicion and resistance. Most of the interviewees have no interest in the European integration process. For many the topic is connected with anxieties concerning the cultural and economic compatibility between Western and Eastern European countries. There is widespread fear that the new member states or future member states would further destabilise the already precarious economic situation in the EU. On the whole, the Italian research team stresses that the European integration processes is too distant for young people who are still unclear of the meaning and implications of their own EU-membership.

The relationship between feelings of attachment and political engagement is difficult to detect where political interest is very low. In this sample the young people tended to talk about opportunities for engagement that arise on the local level, such as town councils and social centres or within the context of peer groups.

4.8 Slovakia

In Slovakia, as in the other research sites, young people refer to their home town, region and their friends as their primary sources of identity. These are followed by school mates, colleagues at university and fellow members in organisations. Especially the young women talked about their family status. Everyday concerns such as employment, living arrangements and studies, play a further role in the construction of an identity. For those who have travelled in Europe the European identity becomes relevant.

4.9 Summary

Summarising the national findings it can be stated that families and peer groups are the most important communities young people belong to. They are particularly relevant, if not of exclusive relevance for the identity construction of young people with a low educational level, poor socio-economic background and risky life trajectories. In their lives, which are characterised by anxieties and insecurities, intimate and stable relationships are a psycho-social anchor. Other important sources of identity are occupational and socio-economic status as well as ethnicity.

A range of political issues – in a broader sense - arises in the context of living conditions, life management, life styles and career plans. On the one hand there is the constant struggle for material security and psycho-social well-being to a greater or smaller extent depending on the individual's material and social resources. Politically, this includes questions about labour markets, education systems and social welfare schemes. On the other hand, one finds "life politics" which aims at the opportunities to lead one's life according to one's own ideals. This aspect not only refers to the material basis of an individual or group. It also implies a dispute over norms and values in society as well as a struggle for access to cultural and ideological goods. Even if many young people do not define these concerns as political, talk about them in very idiosyncratic ways and never come near a collective political action, these concerns are at the heart of the political realm.

Beyond the family and peer group there are a number of communities which might also be considered crucial factors in the identity construction and at the same time important intermediaries between the individual and society. Among these are schools/universities, work places, voluntary associations and local communities. While none of these communities play a dominant role in the young people's narratives and discussions, there is ample evidence of some common elements which can strengthen group identity and facilitate involvement.

In the positive accounts of these communities a feeling of safety and mutual respect - resulting from knowing the people, speaking a common language, knowing the rules and customs, being informed about what is going on in the community, and being taken seriously. Keeping in mind the potential for involvement in these institutions it is surprising to find either very little or negative comments about them in the focus groups. Experiences range from boring political education, not being informed and included in decision-making processes at school and work, to alibi activities on the part of politicians.

Territorial identities are a dimension which is not prevalent in everyday life. It only becomes tangible when there is a necessity to distinguish between in-group and out-group. The identification as someone belonging to a certain region or country is dependent on where the interaction partner is from. It is not informative to describe oneself e.g. as German to another German. On the other hand, it is probably too much information for an American if told that one is from Bavaria. The relationship between regional and national identities varies across Europe and seems to depend on cultural, historical and political circumstances. Contrary to France, for example, the Italian young people emphasise the cultural differences between the Italian regions.

Historical and political reasons are responsible for strong regional identities in Scotland or the Basque country and a lack of national identities. In general, however, there is a positive relationship between identities, i.e. a strong regional identity correlates with a strong national identity and a relatively strong European identity³. The European identity is only slowly emerging. There is more scepticism in some countries than in others and the speed with which European identities develop differs between the well-educated and politically interested, on the one hand, and the lesser educated, non-political young people, on the other hand. In the context of political participation several concerns are relevant. First, the EU is seen as an economic union which lacks competencies in the social and political sphere. Second, there is too much nationalistic struggle in the EU institutions and third, there is fear that one voice counts even less on the European level than on the national level. A strong counterbalance against the interests of the economy in the form of a powerful European trade union and lively grassroots movements and citizens' initiatives on the European level is not yet visible.

Linked to national (and European) identities is the question of citizenship since it is a formalised way of belonging. Citizenship is a very abstract notion for many young people who are not aware where and how the state impinges on their lives. Even very youth specific laws such as the youth protection law is hardly ever mentioned because these young people never come in contact with it in everyday life. However, there are also a substantial number of young people for whom citizenship does have a meaning. They primarily associate it with political and social rights and the problem of inclusion and exclusion.

Citizenship also implies obligations, ranging from legally defined duties to socially defined norms and responsibilities. Voting and community involvement are standard examples for moral obligations even among the non-politically active pointing to an interesting gap between normative ideals and actual behaviour. Discussions about the definition of a good citizen open up another field of tension. On the one hand, a good citizen is a law-abiding, polite, obedient and submissive individual and on the other hand, a critical, politically interested and active individual. The discussions can thus be characterised by two positions: civic obedience and civic courage. Civic disobedience is not an issue in any of the national reports.

Political identities are an important element in the identity construction of the politically active young people. What distinguishes them from their non-politically minded peers is that there is a more or less stable ideology or world view which runs like a red thread through their lives. It can be twisted, changed or adapted but it provides a basis to judge new events and integrate new information. Further, these young people are integrated in political communities or networks which motivate, support and teach the individuals. What is true for identities in general is especially true for the political identities of these young people. They are fluid and ever shifting. The number of young people who simply adopt their parents' ideology and remain faithful to one party is very low in our samples. Rather, young people

³ <http://www.sociology.ed.ac.uk/youth/index.html>

actively appropriate ideologies and world views and adapt them to their own individual use. For them, there is no black and white and they deliberately take a detached view on party ideologies and political processes. This attitude is mirrored in the refusal to accept strict borders between the political in-group and out-groups. In practice this is achieved by not joining political parties and/or efforts to maintain bridges between groups. Among the non-active young people one may certainly also find political interest and political or socio-political values and attitudes. However, in most cases these values do not form a major element of the young people's identity.

5 POLITICS AND DEMOCRACY

5.1 Austria

Even the active young people have no coherent definition or concept of politics and democracy. However, the range of institutions and principles associated with democracy and politics is fairly broad and democracy is seen in a positive light. It is something Austrian young people are proud of. Democracy is generally associated with *“the majority wins”*, *“people have a say in politics”*, *“power is derived from the people”* (*“die Macht geht vom Volk aus”*).

For some young people this led to the demand that politicians make decisions *“which are good for at least half of the population”*. The role of the opposition is to *“represent their ideology which is against the governing party’s ideology”* and thus make sure that there is political balance. Democracy also means *“setting limits to arbitrariness, because democracy is linked to the rule of law”*. Means of democracy are voting, petitions, citizens’ initiatives and demonstrations, and the right to express one’s opinion more generally. Voting, in particular, is often seen as a moral duty.

However, there was some scepticism as to how effective they perceived political involvement. Sometimes, they criticized by competent arguments the conditions and politicking possibilities of the referendum in Austria. In many cases there was no awareness of the *“reasoning”* behind a democratic system in the focus groups, not only among those who have a lower educational level. They would easily do away with the President, with general franchise (*“Why should the old people vote?”*) and favour *“expert decisions”*. All these suggestions are in distinctive contrast to the idea of democracy but people do not realise that. Maybe, they have never faced in their every day discourses these issues. They might have developed a more critical view had they had the opportunity to discuss the issues more often or in more detail.

In general, politics was associated with ‘real political arenas and actors’ - national politics, political parties, the government, voting, petitions, and demonstrations, but also civil service. The more educated and/or politically interested the broader the definition of politics – it was present at the levels of working places (shop stewards), citizens’ initiative and community. Some of well-educated people were aware of the many-sided and politically open nature of the concepts like democracy and politics. They tried to find their *“own way”*! Politics also means that someone has the responsibility in society by making laws and *“determining pathways”* and regulations *“which hold the country together”*.

There were many critical statements during the discussions on ‘real politics’. The most frequent criticism concerned the ‘quarrelling’. For the young people,

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quarrelling is a very destructive way of dealing with political issues. It occurs between and within parties. Quarrelling has negative aspects in that it is unproductive. Young people prefer consensual and co-operative politics where discussions are constructive and serve a purpose. According to the interviewees the conflicts and the quarrelling contribute to the bad image of politics: “...*like a Kindergarten, because they quarrel so much.*” Most of the young persons haven’t found a classical and realistic focus of politics: asymmetry, conflicts and contingency – problematic and unsecure basis of affairs (even truth), perspectiveness of the real/factual world. But as we are aware this little bit naive relationship to the politics is alive among (popular) people in every generation.

Another major critique was that politicians do not know about the “*real life*” of people and make decisions against the interest of the people. “*They only look at themselves*” ...” *what we can decide on are really the unimportant things, which they let us decide on, like that, and the really important things they come to a decision among themselves...*” This moralizing and criticizing attitude is more realistic and it seems like elite theoretical hypothesis or basic politological cynicism, where the gap between people and own-ruled political elite is relevant. Sometimes young people are, postmarxistic way, emphasizing the undemocratic consensus between the ‘capital’ and the political power. Some competent interviewees are aware of the hidden or silent power: they recognise politics as something that lacks transparency. But when the judgment on ‘rel politics’ have no arguments, only feelings and everyday observations, young people are speaking by black-and-white terms about “*propaganda and non-information, talking Yiddish and power games*”. Some young discussants presented remarks on the influence of one’s party membership on every aspect of life such as career prospects and access to council housing has always played a substantial role in public debates in Austria. This remark is near by the common and quite universal slogan: “*The politicians are fighting for their own interests...*” For example Weber defined modern politics in a way where the politician’s own interest and collective needs could work together!

On the whole, there was quite a differentiated picture of politicians. On the one hand, they were seen as unreliable, not listening to the people and doing whatever keeps them in power. On the other hand, it was acknowledged that it is a difficult job, making the right decisions and always being attacked by other politicians. The better-educated participants of the focus groups and interviewees have a rather clear idea of party profiles. Many elements are important when the young people make up their mind who to vote for. Among them are competences of the candidates, ideology, sympathy, the ability to identify with these candidates. Other participants were very well able to distinguish roughly between the parties despite claiming that have no interest in and knowledge of politics.

5.2 Estonia

In two groups – high education young men and women – participants were asked to write down meanings for the following words: politics, politician, democracy.

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Other two groups skipped this exercise, the main reason was that the moderator assessed them incapable of producing any significant results, they were assessed to lack independent thoughts on the topic. But the results are rich and the researcher learned many new interpretations and horizons on politics. Active discussants have modern, many-faced and analytical views on politics. The cynical but open-minded metaphors over politicians speaking with empty promises have acquired into the Estonia popular culture. The manipulative and business-dependent aspects of politics are present in the analysis. Modern ambivalencies of media-politics, missing aspects of participation and responsibility in political democracy and democratic-economical ideals in the context of more dirty politics are reflected in the modern way sceptical interviews. The Western orientation and the modernisation process of petty-state Estonia need stability and sophisticated, open political reflection. The Russian-speaking minority was dissatisfied on real politics and democracy in Estonia.

In the group of young well-educated men in Tallinn, democracy was associated with freedom and one's opportunity to exercise freedoms. Discussion revolved around the topics of exercising power and taking political decisions. Youth's picture of democracy was unbalanced in the sense that they discussed mainly 'rights' side of the democracy and virtually did not mention obligations of members of a society. One might conclude fairly surely that premises of open and democratic society – interest and participation in politics – were not represented in discussants' representations of democracy. Another impression from the interviews was that 'democracy' had a disfavoured connotation. Several participants' view was that political power was misused too often and that there was high probability of misuse of power in democracy. They perceived that people's control over political decisions was too weak and political decisions did not follow needs of the people. The metaphors of post-socialist society were present, too: *'Economic freedom, freedom from constraints to engage in various activities' / 'Freedom to choose.'* Democracy for young educated ladies meant primarily opportunity to exercise various freedoms, like in the case on young educated men. The most important among freedoms is obviously opportunity to participate in political decisions. Democracy did not have negative meaning for participants in this group. One discussant associated mass media and democracy by mentioning that people are relatively easy to manipulate. Some ironists refer to Orwell's 'Animal farm' and '1984' for a good description: *'Power of brainless people, based on the principle of "all are equal, some are more equal".'*

The group of less-educated Estonian youth as a whole was somewhat more remote from the notion of democracy. They did not give much explanation of what democracy means for them. It is quite likely that they had relatively little ideas about the concept. This situation in turn can be attributed to somewhat lower educational level and higher strain in terms of employment stress. Though democracy was not very familiar term, they did not attribute negative meaning to it. With democracy, the idea of freedoms was associated in this group. Meaning of freedom was fairly vague, discussants did not specify what 'freedom' means for them. My interpretation would be that people think democracy is foremost about securing freedom of choice in the post-socialistic arguments: *'Opportunities,*

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freedom to choose'. In the Russian-speaking group the democracy meant most often abstract 'freedoms' (which were poorly reflected or defined) or 'equality' of all inhabitants. And in the same time they expressed an unsatisfied feeling towards Estonian situation (e.g. civil rights, politics on nationality) by saying that *'Our democracy has no smell of equality'*. A boy continued by saying that democracy was *'an invention of 19th, 20th century when everyone can become anyone'*. This implies an idea of open meritocracy.

Young socio-political elite, individual interviewees, perceived democracy differently – more pluralistic and intellectual way - from 'ordinary' persons. They had spent more time to reflect about the concept and as a result developed more sophisticated understanding of the concept. They did not stress 'freedoms' as the central, defining feature of democracy. Interviewees clearly saw the difference between representative and participative forms of democracy. The same distinction was present in the interview given by Karel. Activists saw the importance of mass media in democracy. Mass media has two roles: on the one hand it is a channel of communication from elites to the people, on the other hand it is a means of manipulating the people. Political parties belong naturally to the concept of democracy; parties are also associated with political campaigns. Democracy meant mechanism of choice of leaders. Regularly recurring elections had several functions: they would prevent political leaders from becoming corrupted, would ensure inflow of fresh ideas into governing system and would select most capable individuals for leadership positions. Activists associated democratic leaders' with certain patterns of political culture, with decision-making. In particular, it was caring about public opinion when preparing political decisions: democratic leaders would take people's opinion into account. Political leaders were also credited with the burden of political responsibility, which essentially meant working for the wellbeing of the entire nation. Politics was not fun; on the contrary, it was a very hard work to keep the society balanced and progressing. The debate was full of anecdotes and remarks connecting democracy to the Western and American world and metaphors of 'hard-working' petty-state (cr. to similar ideas in Finland 30-50 years ago) in constructing economically and politically balanced project to a managed future. For some activists the political democracy meant an open chance, contingent space to do something, decisions!

Politics and politicians were associated in the well-educated group of young men with society as a whole as well as with different social categories (in general) without specifying any particular social category or interest group. Politics and politicians were associated with power relations, with exercising power and making important decisions that were abiding for the entire society. Politics and politicians was also associated with mass media and communication. Communication is an indispensable characteristic of politics, politicians should be skilled in the domain of interpersonal communication, they should be highly persuasive when they strive for their goals. The image of politics and politicians was quite vague and abstract. 'Power', 'power relations', 'political decisions', 'common good', 'social progress', 'communication' were the central concepts that discussants employed. General image of politics was not necessarily negative. On the contrary, majority of discussants hold opinion that politics was a really complicated domain of activities

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and politicians were under multitude of pressures when they would prepare political decisions that would satisfy different interest groups and the society as a whole.

The ideas are moving from the institutional and legitimating metaphors to modern moralism in front of the modern two-faced political culture: *'Politicians are people who are interested in national affairs and they want to make other people's life better, they take responsibility for progress in society. Politics are the actions performed by politicians.'* / *'Politics is an art of communication, an art of realising one's ideas and ambitions. Politicians are 'the best', exemplary citizens who represent community interests'* / *'Politics is some principle which guides all actions /'principle' not specified/.* *Politician in Estonia is a two-faced person, his/her 'keep-smiling' is faked.'* *'Politics is a terrain of word-games, politician is an individual highly capable in these games. 'Politics is a form of regulating human society. Politician is a citizen, somewhat more vainglorious than an ordinary citizen and less than an actor.'* / *'Politician is somebody who is thick as a brick and represents interests of other people who are even more dull than s/he. Politician is a negative phenomenon that inescapably comes with democracy.*

The group of educated women was split into two sections, where this modern black-and-white picture of politics is distinctively present. Here, also, the media is the field for politicians. One part stick to negative and another part to positive view of politics. Negative view associated politics with giving empty promises, corruption, taking incompetent decisions, fight for power and money, scandals, playing down other politicians. Politicians' high position in social hierarchy was attributed negative meaning. Positive view related politics to carrying the function of maintaining and accelerating progress in society; they were made responsible for that. Politicians attempt to achieve balanced development and well-being of all categories in a society. Politicians were expected to possess individual characteristics such as being determined about his/her goals, being attentive to other people, being caring about other individuals' concerns and wishes, being highly skilful in communication, and so on. Politics was associated with mass communication, campaigning and scandals in mass media were drawn attention. Several quotes describe discussants' thoughts about politics and politicians: *'Politics is something that is offered to cover empty promises and talk, it has negative meaning anyway. Politician is most likely a very incompetent individual. Politician carries more negative meaning than politics: it is 'politician' that gives negative meaning to 'politics'.* / *"Permanent struggle or power, corruption, fight for money, permanent scandals in mass media."* / *"Politics serves for balancing society, carrying out primarily functions of regulation and supervision. Law-drafting, legislating, representing nation abroad. Protection of weaker members of a society. Integrating the society. Politician is somebody who either sincerely attempts to protect people's interests or who attempts to achieve possibly high living standard by being actively involved in politics. Should be capable of compromises while staying determined about his/her aims.*

Words 'politics' and 'politician' obviously were not the concepts that discussants in the groups of less-educated people had employed frequently. The group reacted very modestly to moderator's initiative to discuss 'politics'. Politics and politicians

were associated with central institutions of political system: president, government, parliament. Politicians were associated with placing and accomplishing social development goals. Mobilising, motivating (or manipulating...) people was not explicitly associated with achieving social goals. The central characteristic for evaluating politicians' performance was assessing the degree to which a politician had been able to fulfil one's promises, promises given during election campaigns. One discussant held an opinion that good politician does not need to achieve any political outcomes if she/he has a good-looking appearance. *'It does not matter who has the power, nothing depends on their will.'* *'I think good politician is a handsome man or women, it does not matter much if s/he has accomplished much.'*

Among the Russian speaking group the discussion started with rather unequivocal opinions: *corruption, bribing, selling oneself...* Though boys said they were absolutely uninterested in politics, one of them mentioned the idea of decision-making: *'Nobody never ever asks from me. We might think whatever we like but they just take the decisions ... Somebody has to take decisions'*. One can see, his expressions were vague. My interpretation would be that he expressed a rather general negative attitude instead of bringing rational arguments to the fore. The third mentioned idea was law-drafting: *'Politics is there where laws are drafted and adopted'*. The discussant used words that normally were used for denoting physical location of some object (contextualistic rhetorics). This view of politics was essentially that politics was an activity that took place in very concrete location. Obviously such picture inadequately reflects processes how society is steered and how legislative processes operate.

In the individual interviews the concept of 'politics' was perceived as a domain of making major social decisions and politicians were perceived as the decision-makers. In this context, interviewees differentiated between 'public politics' – things that were told through mass media to the people and 'undisclosed politics', which basically was the process of political decisions. Though much of how political decisions were taken remains behind curtains, it is not necessarily bad for the society. Politics was not perceived as filthy. On the contrary, politicians were given leading role in a society, they were the persons who were responsible for placing appropriate social goals and motivating people to realize the goals. Activists' view was that in some (or in most) cases there was no need to make all phases of decision-making open to the people.

In the context of placing social goals and making political decisions, politicians were associated with the responsibility for the progress of the society. Politicians' professionalism would manifest itself in balanced political decisions, which take into account interests of different social categories with an aim of securing stable progress of the entire society. Politics was associated with mass media, political campaigns were considered as a natural part of politics. Likewise it was considered normal that politicians have at least 'two faces' – one that appears to the people through mass media and another one that is used in other situations. Political campaigns were perceived as necessary elements of representative democracy. Politicians would communicate their views to the people who then has the

opportunity to choose. The process was not given negative connotation of manipulating the people.

As one interviewee mentioned, there is a possibility that a campaign attempts to manipulate public but in the long run it would be impossible to continue with empty promises. Politicians have to accomplish what they promised. *'Politics is different from democracy. Politics is leadership, management. Actually, politics is everywhere – how much one pays for electricity, for studies.'* / *'Politics is very tightly connected with mass media and business. There are numerous cases where politicians fulfilled wealthy businessmen' goals. Political campaigns in mass media are frequently financed by business-men and politicians do advance their interests. Politicians also manipulate public opinion with political campaigns, financed by businessmen.'* / *'Politics is about political campaign in mass media. Though people will understand real 'face' of a politician – if s/he is giving empty promises or if s/he indeed fulfils the promises – in the short run, during media campaigns, those politicians are more successful who advertise their ideas and organisations better.'*

5.3 Finland

'Black and white' thinking on politics and democracy isn't a very popular orientation any more in Finland: global ideals, readiness to fling oneself into institutional and playful activities and facing the solutions of political contradictions are present rhetorical attitudes. At the same time they mean the expansion of reflective playing and action spaces ('Spielraum') – even the Beckian 'ironical pacifism' (ironical scepticism and youthful dialog instead of the truth and it's armies during the Cold War) has new supporters. The scepticism concerning one's own truths leaves room for political dialog and a new kind of understanding. On the other hand, the unreflective and non-active groups of young people disputed the chances of political democracy, solutions and pluralistic situations. We might consider the polemical groups and contradictions of young people's own rhetorical landscapes. The stabile and counter-political attitudes sketch in front of us a picture of politics as "unfair and dirty game of old fogies based on Monastic Latin" and in global terms "the unfair power game". But this moral attitude to bring moral discipline into the political cultures, and meanwhile to stay out of the dirty arenas of politics and simply leave them to the dirty players, is not watertight and straight-faced as in the early 90s.

According to these recent interviews, youth groups who have pejorative and cynical concepts in their political discourse are nowadays more open to political participation; even though they are not confident in voting as a political instrument. The interviewees of less-educated groups, for example, had pejorative and moral stands on politics, but in their discussions of some themes they are participating in concrete ways and they were in principle open to the idea of voting! These groups are able to make fun of politics in their language games and media formats. Their cultures are developing from the strict and 'totalising' aesthetics (moral fundamentals) towards ironical fun and distinctions. In Finland the basic 'new right'

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movement and its charismatic front man, Tony Halme, give hope to young populists. Now they could hear their own voice in political arenas and the parliament. All the active and well-educated young people in the text corpus have their own elastic and reflective spaces, concepts and styles of (life)politics. All of the interviewed persons were some way (at least little bit) aware of or open to life-political action or stylistic expression, from consumerism and dressing to professional global networks. Especially activists are no longer distancing themselves from the political arenas through easily anticipated rhetoric and naive morality.

The well-educated young people and even the prisoners are ready to acknowledge the relative positive situation in Finnish democracy and the welfare state in comparison with totalitarian, American or Russian versions of political and social systems. In open democracy we have more than just on/off opinions concerning democracy. We are living in an idyll, but perhaps this is the very place to say that our democracy has problems. Most often the democracy just means the “conversational democracy”, where having room to discuss and influence some affairs of the society is the main point of the discussion in question, whether or not this system is, strictly speaking, a democracy. People don't need universal or national audiences or effects for their democratic performances. People require meaningfully and socially mutual positions in cultures of political discourse; sometimes this implies a position on the other side of the democracy, e.g. illegal initiatives, cross-national positions or the informal power resources of certain professions.

Even the interviewed anarchist is several ways acting in the collective bodies of the democratic system (sometimes in parties, the media and trade unions), but his main idea is working “against the Power of political system (or ‘Empire,’ as stated by the famous historical anarchists Negri and Hardt) by syndicalist and self-made political spaces”. For the anarchistic learning processes democratic institutions and publicity are necessary contexts. By his anarchistic acts he is trying to propagate the emptiness and structural repression hidden in the economical and political institutions. He provokes the ‘violent structure’ of state (e.g. police) into the media-dramatised game of political polarisation. The main task in politics is to get people involved in politics. The relatively small groups of anarchists are, by the ‘innovative destruction’ strategy, provoking people into life-political and self-regulating participation. Autonomy and having one's own political space is an absolute value for anarchists. All the present ideologies (and –isms) are somehow producing new power structures; people have had enough of these ideological initiatives. They want to have more politics against real existing political institutions and the state. The media is fine, or at least the inevitable condition and means in this “struggle”. The anarchist active in text corpus is often seen on Finnish Television.

An interviewed ‘Christian with social ethos’ has well-argued distance to self-ruled party-democracy. He was concentrated on globally and project-oriented ‘empowerment’ of people. He had the distinctively sensitive and sophisticated view of (life)political aspects of social structures and values. Indeed his first (word)association in dealing with politics is “the parliament house” but after this reference

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he laughs, and his next comment is more serious. "I have a rather negative attitude here. Politics today seems to be an individualistic, even egoistic, activity around the politician's own interests." Anton has a dualistic comprehension on political landscapes. On the one hand there is this party-centred real politics which isn't transparent and open. On the other hand he has special life-political views regarding political issues and aspects, e.g. interesting observations on the political dynamics between generations. He is aware of the decision-making and resolution moments in politics but as part of his social-ethical world view he constantly emphasises the common good and public interest. It is realisable to overcome the Beckian 'either-or' politics by 'yes-but' speculations and synthesis in the direction of the common good and universalities. The struggle aspect of politics is not on his list of favourite things. This means global and Christian-social responsibility. The media-democracy is a modern and constant fact for interviewed Christian, and he tends to grin at the conservative and stabile role of the media, which is "commercial and superficial." He speaks like a careful new-leftist at the end of 60s, when 'all the flowers were flourishing'!

The group of less-educated young women had a collective feeling that they are in several ways outsiders. It is possible to refer to their rhetoric as a program: "small community and symbolic action against the big economic game of so called democracy in the power centre." The democracy doesn't take shape among girls trying to have political influence through some political test and demonstrations. The young women from Kainuu spoke about "the speed and rhythm of the media game" which points to the self-ruling character of the game in politics. Somehow the girls from Kainuu feel powerless in the face of this sort of media game. A more dramatic and skilful game in the political arenas isn't a solution here; the activities of the politicians must be simple, focused on 'rules of fair play' and concrete themes. The public light of the media is an extremely "decent control over this game arena". The media gives stigmas, selects, speculates and itemises issues and agendas. It has a lot of power. "Money works out a lot of things, in the media business as well." Speculations on media power come back to the issues of centre vs. Periphery (the group were from afar, Kainuu) and local activities. In this context the representatives of democracy at the communal level are "fair players of the game and counsellors in common matters".

The young, pejorative and sceptical less-educated boys, prisoners, have contextual and fragmented speeches on democracy; it is too abstract a word for their everyday use. They discuss possibilities to have political influence, which resembles democracy reflection in the world of well-educated. When they build up their life-meanings they use social-ethical metaphors and symbolic terms aiming at human rights and their own subjectivity, and this reflects the basis of democracy. These reflective and cynical lads have realistic and diverse repertoires in their participatory worlds. Their cynicism implies sceptical distance from seriously interpreted formal democracy and its expansion: many kinds of acts and speeches may be part of a conversational democracy. Scepticism means game space for these boys and powerful contributions to democratic publicity. The group had quite 'anti-theoretical' attitudes, but they presented some sensitive ideas in the discussion of 'what is political in the world?' They criticised the power of money in

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politics and recognised the dirty aspects and corruption in the rules of the game. The popular analogy for politics among the prisoners is working life. “Politics means the heart of Finland; they have to decide on Finnish affairs. And I have to say... you that they must have more and more tasks... they have to do something about the social problems of poor people. It is a stupid fact that they are only articulating the interests of rich people and establishing schools for the engineers.” It is hard to know what the meaning of media drama is in the discourse of the prison boys: what is fiction and where the real documentary begins? The boys are little bit afraid of media power, “it is difficult to know what’s really happening behind the media, which manipulates important things around us!”

Conservative activist among individual interviews thinks that the democracy is an open system in Finland, but she doesn’t take it as a contradictory public space. Her view of democracy is dominated by “the fight for rational and economic interests arising from organic civil society in the spirit of Scandinavian welfare and American pluralism.” The main subject here is the rational liberal individual relevant to the whole growth-society and its development full of economical ‘ratio’. Her self-understanding and concept of politics is, surprisingly again, flexible and aware of the television paradigm. An essential part of her speech is image-building; her performance is a fascinating demonstration of the ‘New Public Management’. She names the institutional traditions and compromise-centred traditions of Finnish political culture as the main problems in the era of media. That’s why she tries to build up polarised dramas in the political arenas and “clear alternatives to the overly tolerant Greens.” You have to break up the dirty and stable picture of established politicians by courageous involvement of politicians into the social movements in the right and left directions.

The interviewed scout in the data, underlines the same aspects in a democracy: the democracy assumes the will of the people, “self-disciplined learning towards responsible and effective life-management and productive citizenship”. She sees a dialectic between an individual and a social being, but she puts individual responsibility before social values like freedom. Even the scout is active citizen she has no contacts with politicians or social media; she doesn’t need them. Her life-project is a process of enlightenment and maturation where politics, “especially hard contradictions and fundamental world-views,” are some kind of momentary disturbances. This classical and careful attitude of conservatism is conceptualising politics in the context of a need for order and natural development – especially at the individual level and sovereignty. The term “social influence” is a more correct way for Tutta to describe the political dimension in Finnish Scouting and its functions: “The Scouts are a powerful social actor without links to group politics.” The first association concerning politics in her mind is “having a social and global influence.” This nice metaphor tells us of the strong legitimacy of global issues in the present political scene.

The non-ceremonious and socially imaginative educated young women think that the democracy is “a common ‘crack’ of social and gender interest and political imagination.” A continuous discussion on the nature of social problems among well-educated ladies seeks the political moment of decision in different kinds of

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questions and situations. The discussants do not naively believe in the democratic model but democracy is a way of life while trying to develop the Finnish democracy as a whole towards its constitutional ideal. In a sense they are playing with democracy and teaching modern media. Women believe in self-made articles in media and young radicals' (feminists, the so-called Fox Girls organising attacks in the name of animal rights, and anarchists) skilfully play with media editors. The empathy of media is often insufficient: "Sometimes they have no interest to know what the concrete and fair purpose of a politician is." Behind the media are working real human beings. It is an abortive question to ask for right or objective information: "We have several media, and politics means just this: questionable realities." But it is easy to find main tendencies in dominating commercial media, e.g. the attempt to bring Finland into NATO. Through charismatic personalities it is easy to grasp distinctions in the late modern era. But sometimes the popular images, such as sportsmen coming from outside the social and political arenas are too dominant, without any substance in their messages: "It may be the warning of our Zeitgeist!"

Although the well-educated male group had no party members these 'reflective and cynical boys' had realistic, deliberated and many-sided 'democratic' and life-political activities (even international projects). The well-educated young men are open for most part to the political concepts present in the modern world. We may comprehend them as the researchers and critical editors, the political ideas and life-political roles are living hand in hand. Their argument is that the individual's responsibility is a central idea in politics and political media. The journals and public forums of provinces and parties are nostalgically present in the discussion, but according to discussants sitting in the faculty of social sciences, nowadays the power of choice is in the hands of individuals and editors. The role of the individual isn't an easy one; e.g. the Helsingin Sanomat Corporation (the biggest media and journalism conglomerate in Finland) has a lot of power. Sometimes the main journals have a lot of trivial headlines, but they have a silent power in agenda-setting. One member of the thematic discourse group condenses the issue: "The best propaganda consists of those themes not analysed in the media!" And they have this modern paradox; media relations are also the main political relations. You cannot have political stands without television and you cannot act via the television room of your home: "No one will have enough time for analytical and contextual reading of several producers of news." The basic feeling of the well-educated guys is critical; they have no general belief in objective materials or analyses: "There are always subjective interpretations and ways of illuminating things."

A male activist in the Social Democratic Party, claims that "all the people have a chance to live and manage common matters, conscious of their expressed rights not to take part." For him democracy is a serious business; a kind of social-collective objectivity for development. The human being is a political animal: 'Zoon Politikon' (by which Aristotle meant a person living in a 'Polis'). At the background there is an idea that in order to live, you have to be social and recognise the necessity of political solutions. He defends the social responsibility of the conventional parties in several ways. He has been involved in party politics for ten years and he has "in principal been outside.... of the dirty cabinet games of the communal politics." Somehow he is defending the social prestige of politicians'

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virtuous skills and the relative independence of the politicians! We have to remember that this is part of the rhetoric of almost all successful politicians nowadays! All the time politicians have to cultivate and improve their awareness of individual needs and interests in the direction of social benefits, collective actions and common will. Mr. Hobbes is close by in his speeches. The late-modern media-connection between the average people and party-political activists is mainly a positive point for our Social Democrat: “the quick and intimate relationship is... a resource of knowledge... for critical political culture.” In Finland people have many-sided public forums, reference groups and knowledge sources. “We have critics and pedagogies of political media, too.” One crucial Scandinavian tradition defending pluralism in Finland is the strong autonomy of local communities; “it influences hand in hand with universal democracy” and keeps our political discussion open. He is speaking in the realistic terms of a skilful old politician.

5.4 France

The key words shown in the overview tables emphasize a very individualized, situation-based and biographical way of looking at politics. Activists were well aware of the cultural traditions and conventions in a debate *“What’s the real meaning of democracy and politics?”* In spite of semantic variations from one group and a individual to another, we can see transversal principles in each case: the refusal of a biased statement or giving value to tolerance and the expectation of a consensus. The basic attitude on politics of group-interviewees was pejorative and cynical and they saw a big gap between own-ruled elite and people, but democracy appeared more trustful way than any other mechanism on political dialog. The basic view on politics in the individual interviews of activists were constructive, media-active and democracy was open for them. In the text corpus we could read only some voices of the ‘new-politics’ and total ‘life-political’ styles, the basic needs of the active informants could be articulated via conventional democracy and even by parties. The radical and sophisticated civil mind of French tradition (tension-centered – not negotiative body - of the political culture) is not well represented in the text corpus.

The disrepute of the political world is unanimous. The parties are relatively spared from this point of view. At most they are presented as being nebulous: *“multitude”/ “it’s an illusion”/ “Lots of noise for not much impact”*. The parties are depicted as being numerous and harmful, confusing matters rather than contributing much to the political debate. The political game that results from this organization is boring because it is assimilated with rhetoric. The young respondents lose interest in this because they find it very sterile. *“I don’t like talking about politics because talking about politics is always the same” / “They brainwash you. The result is the same. They promise a lot. It’s always the same. It serves no purpose whatsoever.” / “It doesn’t serve much purpose, I turn the sound down on the TV every time the subject comes up. Because it’s always the same thing.”*

Political confrontation is distracting and wastes energy that could be used to solve real problems. "What they say doesn't mean anything." Here we could find, again, an affiliation of the critics to quarrelling, rhetorical and unconcrete aspects of the political phenomenon. "Rhetoric, politician's language is often vague." In addition to the way politics works, the issues themselves appear to be detached from any of the actual difficulties mentioned by the young people. This is why they do not view the parties or politicians as credible spokespeople. They seem to only focus on concerns which are not the same as those of young people or more generally of the population: *"It's good in itself, but politicians confuse matters and then have fun in the background. They are no longer interested, they have won."* The distinction made by young people between day-to-day reality and the political sphere is very deep rooted: *"They are a long way from us."* But the problem doesn't concern only the distance between people and politicians, there is a gap and political elite is own-ruled. The detachment of politicians also takes a more personal dimension, through an admission of the fact that they have lost respect for politicians. *"Politicians are above the law (Sarkozy who was caught on a speed camera) There are no results so they lack creditability."*

The parties and the power games that they play are considered to be autonomous. The motivations that politicians are considered to have end up discrediting them. *"I often had difficulty distinguishing between general and personal interests for politicians. You wonder about the balance between these aspects in these people."/ "I find all the bickering between politicians is ridiculous. Promises they don't keep."/ "What's strange is that people follow somebody"*. Some respondents insinuate that there are no differences between the parties. They challenge the parties' need to maintain distinctions with one another. This challenge is a strong criticism of the parties' identity and therefore their very existence, with political representatives being perceived as *"all in the same class"*: *"There are no longer too many parties, they all look the same"*. The debating of ideas definitively loses any legitimacy when young people emphasize that the parties themselves do not formulate their own theories. This is in opposition with the free forming of opinions which prevails in the way that they take their own position. The quality of an analysis is less about its relevance than the fact that the statement has been thought of by yourself. For these young people, this bias is a reflection of a lack of tolerance.

And yet politics is not totally condemned. A distinction is made between basic political activists who are loyal to their convictions and leaders who are basically compromised. These unbiased political activists are respectable personalities for the young respondents. And yet they are not models to be imitated. This would mean breaking with their principles of tolerance, something that is incompatible with their conception of politics, as well as having the complete lack of bias that must be part of any commitment to public action. *"There are two levels: those at the top who are seen on TV and those who are at the bottom sticking up posters. Many people would like to be a member of a party but they don't want to stick up posters. There is a splitting of tasks."*

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Almost constructed from a counterpoint of their perception of how politics currently works, young people aspire to the spontaneous emergence of a consensus on the major issues that concern them. A certain number are spontaneously mentioned during the interviews (racism, the veil, jobs, school, individual freedoms). This consensus appears to be a definition of politics that corresponds more to the principles that they want to see appear in their own personal paths, like 'Tolerance', 'Freedom', 'Respect', 'Helping one another', 'Harmony' and 'Honesty'. They talk about a vision of politics in line with these principles which would allow them to take part in the public debate without betraying themselves. Distinctively often these comments are a little naive and they aren't aware of the classical antagonisms and asymmetries of real politics – or its moments of 'compromise', 'solution' and 'twist' in the middle of contradictory information and needs: *"The point of politics is to avoid conflicts."*

However, some of them are conscious of the difficulties that exist in politics, and especially the complexity of choices: *"Actions that are difficult to judge. In political debates they spend their time criticizing one another"*. However, given the current way they see things, it seems that they are not convinced about the effectiveness of making a commitment to a party. The right/left divide appears to be completely artificial. This characteristic has to be put in perspective relative to the massive rejection of the party-based approach in politics.

Lastly, a group of young working Parisians tend to fall back on nostalgia, harking back to a world of small villages and communities in which shared interests are incarnated by the King, a figure of consensus and enlightened benevolence. *"Before, only the King decided. Today they don't all agree and they're not all together. If everyone had the same ideas then they could take decisions."*

A division appears between the various respondents according to their level of qualifications and the radicalism of their observations or solutions. Beyond their ability to conceptualize a universe that is still foreign to most of them, we can notice that higher education students are more inclined to offer moderate solutions for changing existing institutions. As opposed to this, younger or less educated ones more frequently propose radical solutions. Certain respondents even go so far as imagining the emergence of a new political force entering the traditional political fray, but with the specific vocation of defending the interests of young people. The subversion of these ideas refers back to their own perception of themselves as marginal. The women respondents in Dijon are mostly in temporary jobs. Their chances of acceptable social integration in the system, such as they currently perceive them, are low. In the same way, whilst college students have more chance of becoming properly socially integrated, the range of possible social paths is also wider considering their lower age.

Individual Interviews reflects the political views and arguments of very well informed young people. All the interviewees are convinced that it is very important to be informed on social, political and economical topics. Even persons, who are less interested in news and actuality, think it is important to watch TV news, to read newspapers and to analyse these sources. All the others regularly read

newspapers and try to diversify their sources of information. They read different newspapers, magazines and reviews, they go on the Internet... Their choice is naturally influenced by their political orientations. Pierre is the only one who has a very bad opinion of the French press, whose – he says - media coverage is not very objective.

All the five distrust television: for us, it is not a good media, the information content is not enough elaborated and suffers from a lack of political debates. *“I read the Monde Diplomatique and, with more perspective, Charlie Hebdo which I find amusing but not politically enriching and constructive. So I stopped subscribing, I think Politis is good. If I could work there, I’d like that but I do find their approach to certain subjects a bit predictable. You can tell in advance what they are going to say. Regarding Attac, it’s often a bit similar. I prefer things like Alternatives Economiques, things which are a bit in between, allowing the reader to be a power participant and at the same time, to be constructive, preserve a certain liberty of margin and criticise. I watch the TV news occasionally, now I even force myself to watch the TV news to hear what the journalists say and know what they are talking about. However, I don’t recall having discovered a subject or having learnt more about it by watching TV. On the whole, I don’t watch TV a great deal to be informed. I listen to the radio, for example RF1 . Some time ago, I even listened a lot to RF1 information concerning the Côte d’Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Africa and other topics. But I can’t say I really found matter for thought in these programmes. That’s way I would like to do written journalism.”*

The activists were modern way aware of the political grounds of knowledge (sources) and the political perspectivism of the world (Rorty). All the interviewees read the paper or the magazine published by their own movement. They say it is a good way to be informed of what happens in the organization, to be aware of the party (or trade union) line. But they remain critical and do not necessary buy the political propaganda.

The young people the skilful and sharp-eyed French researchers met in individual interviews are very different from the non-activist young people met in focus groups. Except Pierre, they all have a relatively good image of the politicians. Of course, there are some degrees in their “positive perception” of the political body, but on the whole, they are trustful in the political system. Pierre is a real exception, he is the only one who does not trust the politicians and who have a very negative perception of the political system. His membership in the National Front clearly explains why. Because he considers that the French political men are corrupted, opportunists, that they do not care of French people... he has chosen the National Front and his involvement in the National Front has reinforced this conviction. Corruption and incompetence are the main themes developed by the extreme-right in France, and we can clearly find them in the discourse of Pierre: *“They are incapable, incompetent and corrupt all at the same time... too tainted to govern a country... They are incapable of governing the country, if at all they may be capable of management but between management and government there is a difference. The political class in France is, on the whole, corrupt. Corruption has been the subject on everyone’s lips in France for twenty years what with the*

various affairs including Carrefours du Développement, Urba, the Paris HLM's, the financing of the RPR, and the Elf case."

The other young people (individually) interviewed in France have a more positive vision of the political system. The more they are involved in a traditional political organisation, the more they are trustful in the politicians. Some of them believe that the vision of French politicians as corrupted and inefficient is a caricature... They do not deny the fact that some of them are corrupted, but they say it is a minority. They believe that politicians are very competent and dedicated to their work, which is very difficult. Sometimes it seems that they even have an idealized vision of politics...

A person, who has chosen a new political movement, has a more moderate opinion. He is optimistic but he understands that the citizens can have a negative image of the politicians, which can explain electoral abstention: "At Sciences Po, I met a lot of MP's and politicians and saw the job they were doing. Politics was their livelihood, what they lived for and their purpose in life. It's what they do. It makes my blood boil when people say « Politicians do nothing at all ». I find this a shame if you have an idea of what politicians really do. If you're honest with yourself, you can't say they do nothing; Just think about it, they spend their whole life in their office; that's something to think about. To say they are all "rotten" is something I don't agree with at all. I agree that problems have arisen, we can't deny that, but I think they concern a small minority of the political class. These problems do not have to be splashed all over the front pages of the newspapers systematically because this harms the entire political class whereas most politicians do politics by conviction and because they want to things to change ... It's true there have been problems ; particularly problems such as the covert financing of the RPR. It wasn't a good thing, that's for sure but it does not scandalise me that much concerning that it was meant to finance the RPR and not for personal enrichment. On the other hand, I find personal enrichment extremely shocking."

An other pair of interviewees had a contrasted vision of politicians : they are relatively trustful and recognize that it is a very difficult job, but they do not give "full power" to the politicians. According to them, citizens must be vigilant. A female interviewed person had a negative image of them before the Tour, but her meetings with some mayors and deputies change her mind. Now she is more inclined to trust them. A male in the text corpus is a little bit over-pessimistic: politics and power generate some compromising.

All the interviewees in self-biographical data are trustful in the political party system. Except Manuel, they have some difficulties to consider that politics can be something else than political parties and politicians. Even Mathieu and Loubna, who have no traditional political involvement, believe that politics is handled by politicians and parties. This can be explained by the fact that they all believe things change, when you have a strong and influent representation, and only political parties are enough powerful to ensure this representation and achieve significant results. Some of them barely recognise that associations or civil society can play a political role, but only have a role of setting some problems on the agenda. An

association can not solve a political, social or economical problem. In fact, these young people are very faithful in the system of the representative democracy: *“Citizens need to take part more in politics, perhaps through adapted channels to be set up... Now this is a very good idea in my opinion, but hard to put in place. In my opinion, participative democracy would be an alternative to parties but cannot really work. It can only be a complement to traditional politics. What I think is that the traditional mechanisms such as the vote and political parties need to be restored.”*

The level of representation as compared to participation must be kept consistent. But politics can also mean commitment to fully specific and well-defined themes, as in an association. To fight for our demands is also a way of making politics evolve, globally speaking... But we still come back to the same point, political parties are the best means of getting these demands met. *“Is there any other way of doing politics? I mean, taking into account the present context, without being member of a party... Not easy. It would hard to be all alone in one’s corner facing the « bulldozer » political parties.” / “Finally, everything goes through the parties because to do politics, resources are required. You need people to arouse the masses, broadcast programmes, diffuse ideas and you certainly need good will. All this has to be given a structure through a party. The party also provides a setting for reflection. Can politics be done without parties? We can get politically involved in associations with left leanings such as SOS Racism, to handle politics otherwise. But SOS Racism cannot call on people to distribute tracts on the Socialist Party’s arguments and it’s not its role, it’s the party’s role... [...] It is true the civil society has its part to play in the debate on ideas and in the evolution of society itself... And it is true that associations bring problems to light and pinpoint them. But after that, the political parties can cash in on all that, bring these matters before parliament and laws can be passed.”*

Manuel is the only one who believes that something different can be done and this is why he is involved in Attac, which is a new political movement, with new political methods. Nevertheless, if he has chosen a different kind of involvement, he thinks of getting involved in the Green Party. He measures the advantages and the disadvantages of both kinds of involvement. *“...take me, for instance, I have been taking part in politics without being in a party, it’s obvious that politics goes well beyond party politics ... yes, it can be something else. Take the case of the Greens of Colombes, since I was interested in the Greens. I never did take a membership card but then again, I almost did, I had thought about doing it while I was on my way back from London. But their post 21st April reactions were a bit disappointing. It seemed to be that they were on the same wavelength and full of hopeful ambitions but they handled things badly. It wasn’t very clear to me what I could bring to this movement. It seemed to me that Attac had more dynamics. [...] So I attend Green meetings occasionally but I must say they are rather boring, they consist of whole sessions based on electoral tactics, how to ally with the Communist Party or the Socialist Party, it is all very tactical. So I might just as well be active within Attac where things move and ideas are brandished ...”.*

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5.5 Germany

The first thing that strikes one, when one is analysing the interviews is that the young people interviewed used the terms "politics" and "politicians" almost synonymously. They thus define politics and political action almost exclusively as "party politics". Even large, internationally known and active non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as Greenpeace, Amnesty International or Attac, were not seen as vehicles for exerting an influence on politics, or only after prompting. Informal groups and new social movements, such as civic action groups and peace initiatives, are not recognised as political players at all. Additionally, politicians, as such, are associated exclusively with male persons –by both male and female interviewees. In view of the fact that young people, as mentioned above, are fixated on the party scene, as far as the term 'politics' is concerned and in view of the parties' personnel structure, this is hardly surprising, however. The self-ruling political elite, the flexible and persuading language of politicians, economical power operating in the political fields and the two-faced character (elitism/participation chances) of the political phenomenon are comments in German data familiar with above presented judgments of young people in partner countries. It is hard to catch the 'political' but it is hard to live without it!

Most of the young people interviewed expressed quite negative characteristics when asked about politics. In their eyes, politics is boring and dull, incomprehensible; half-truths, if not even lies, are told; politicians tend to manoeuvre, lack a clear stand to achieve re-election, benefit from their positions and feather their nests. *"...I regard politics, political, as something that cannot really be tied to clear statements etc., as something where you're actually sometimes led astray..."* / *"Because politicians do have to cheat people to get into power."* / *"Well these blokes, um, they just want to be elected and they say, yes, I'll do this, that and the other for all our citizens and for blah, that's why the word lie is very appropriate. Most of what they say never gets done anyhow."*

Those of the young people interviewed who are active members of a political party confirm this impression literally from the inside. *"...all this power struggle in the background. The fact that you constantly have to re-position yourself, that you always have to be careful what you're saying, it's the same in business and industry, but ...Yes, above all, the matter is, seen from a purely pragmatic point of view, if you back the wrong horse, let's say politician A, for example, who is then ousted by politician B, then other troops come into power, and you're left out in the cold..."*

Even young people with a higher level of education criticise the fact that political statements are often incomprehensible and resignedly compare "politics" with the deliberate deception of citizens in order to maintain one's own power. These textual fragments are familiar from text above from other partner countries (Universal scepticism on 'real politics'): *"Because mostly you don't even understand the words they use, well, in my case anyway, they use words where I haven't got the faintest idea what they really mean, what they really want to say with these words."* / *"The sentences spoken by politicians are mostly open to interpretation, I mean, a sentence open to twenty different interpretations, there are always gaps*

where different people, persons have understood different things, I think politicians do this intentionally, they don't want us to know what they actually mean, so that it's always unclear, what they want to say". / "Again and again I'm fascinated by what goes on, when you see them sitting in talk shows, etc. and they're asked a very clear question, yes, they could simply answer with one sentence but then they waffle on and on, and talk for five minutes, but they don't really give an answer, I don't know, somehow this is..."

Self-critically, the young people interviewed admit that the comprehensibility of politics also depends on how well one is informed oneself. Insufficient knowledge of political facts and varied contexts without objective basis, in particular, is referred to as one of the key barriers to political participation by many of those interviewed. *"Yes, I also think the fact that politics is boring is very closely connected to the fact that you don't really know anything about politics. You sometimes learn a few things here and there and if you then hear something about a highly complex tax reform, that you don't understand anyway, and then you hear ten politicians talking about it, and each of them says something different, then it's always the same and I also think, okay, it's not really very exciting, but if you always stay on the ball and keep up things and consequently also know about, or know more about, what's going on, then it's not so boring, I reckon."*

The interviewees also criticised the "ageing" of politics, which does not offer any topics for young people. However, the young people do not draw the obvious conclusions from criticism, viz. they do not become active themselves. Instead, they assume the role of passive observer. *"I think, they have difficulties in identifying with politics, because, after all, well let's say roughly 90% of politicians are no longer young and you only see them on television and then you hear again and again from your parents or you read in papers that this or the other reform has failed and you think "Um, what's going on there?", and you don't really find a point where you think, yes, I need to do something here or I'd need to be more interested etc., there are simply no incentives..." / "Politicians should be a bit younger, perhaps, younger people would be more committed, more enthusiastic and more ... somehow, I don't know, perhaps they would get more involved than those who are a bit older (incomprehensible) but younger people may have a few more ideas and may identify more with younger people... because we don't really have much of a say. We read about it in the newspaper and watch it on television, well, I don't know a lot about politics."*

High moral standards are expected of politics, which are not satisfied in the young people's eyes. Disappointed, the young interviewees describe how former idealist principles are sacrificed to stay in power. Parties thus become shapeless. *"Power also means, above all, that principles are lost, because you simply have to pursue completely different policies, political goals, when you're at the forefront, on top, well, then you can no longer ... your former principles...then you can't go on governing somehow. You can see this effect in the Green Party, the Green Party now simply engages in the same kind of politics as everybody else, how, that has nothing to do with it, only that somewhere underneath there is still a principle, yes, we're still 'green' somehow, but, in a way, I think when all is said and done, it doesn't really matter anymore "*

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The fact that the young people interviewed saw themselves as having little scope for influencing politics was clearly evident across all levels of education. The negative image of politics is also partly due to the idea that it is open to corruption and can thus be manipulated and roped in. According to the young people interviewed, influence can only be exerted by people with sufficient financial resources. *“Yes, well, I think that's a very good point; it has already been mentioned that business and industry are incredibly powerful and, well, I think, considering what one hears and reads, their influence is really, really unbelievable, the individual citizen, after all, does not really have such a strong lobby, he cannot really get to see politicians, he cannot directly influence anybody or anything, he has voted and that's it...”*.

"Getting to see" politicians, direct communication, is desired but obviously so inconceivable that it is put on a par with *"a conversation with God"*. Politics thus becomes something very abstract and unapproachable. *“...Yes, but even if a decision remained unchanged, it would still be good if reasons were again provided for it..., to explain why one considers this the right way. So that there was really a kind of interaction..., somehow there's no communication any longer.”* / *“That's just as if you asked, um, how can I now talk to God, it can't be done. So it's not possible for us to sit down with politicians and talk to them.”* The idealistic need of these direct or 'home-door' contacts to politics resembles the situation in the interview data from Great Britain.

The group of young women with a lower level of education displays more resignation than any other group in its appraisal of the situation. And their special ideology of 'consensualism' is dealing with the term 'war': *“(Someone, researchers)...has already said that the fact that you, or very many of you, almost everyone, jotted down the word 'war' is rather striking. What's behind this?”* / *“That's (war, researchers) the first thing that comes to mind when you hear "politics". "Because war is associated with politics, because war, in fact, takes place because of politics. You can see it everyday in the newspapers and on television.”* For these ladies the term 'war' or 'enemy' don't mean anything classical or inseparable element of the political phenomenon (von Clausewitz or Carl Schmitt). Instead of that the synonym refers to unstable and non-managed rules!

Nevertheless, politics is regarded as something that provides structures, as something necessary and filling special 'synthesis'/'solution' function in society, despite the following comment: *“... it's poorly organised...”* / *“Somehow, however, I also think, if there was no such thing as politics, if everybody did whatever he or she likes, then there would be chaos, everybody would steal, shops would be open 24 hours...”* / *“That would be pure anarchy”*.

5.6 Great Britain

In the Britain text corpus the pejorative and dissatisfied relation to 'real politics' and politicians rised up in foreground. Especially the national politics was living faraway from their everyday life. The local politics was crucial level for young people's positive judgments and in their critical fire-line. Although young people had moral

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connotations in whole discussion on politics, they had several and warm issues and situation-bound themes in their political debates. The concrete listening relations and touches to the politicians were relevant elements of effective responsibility in political systems acting in different levels. Iraq War inspired dissatisfaction and critical political mentality among the young discussants in the Great Britain.

The focus group participants had very conventional views of politics – for instance, *'international and national affairs, things like that'*. 'Politics' was only once or twice related to other types of activity such as 'petitions' or 'demonstrations'. This had more to do with 'non-activists' very narrow perception of politics than their knowledge of/ or even participation in, these 'alternative' activities. A central feature of these 'non-activists' views of politics and democracy was their complete lack of trust in politicians. On this issue, there was a numerous amount of commentary – the text corpus was full of pejorative and 'petrified' dogmas and metaphors: *'I couldn't trust any politician'*; *'they are known for lying; they're always lying to make the other ones look worse'*; *'politics? – Bigwigs, running things. Government. Lining their pockets'*; *'cover stuff up... stealth taxes'*; *'I'm not interested in politics massively because I feel let down by them all'*; *'they are really dull'*; *'They just lie to you, just give you that illusion, an ideal world'*.

They also showed a general lack of interest in, suspicion of, and frustration with politics. They were particularly adamant that politicians did not listen or were not engaged with people like them: *'I think politics is a waste of time... they want to be right and don't want to listen to anyone else'*; *'it's all common sense, it's something politics lacks'*; *'how many times have you been asked by the Government what you want?... I've never during the last general election where I lived, we weren't even counted. So we didn't see an MP or anything like that which I think is terrible'*; *'all the parties really before an election need to actively tell people what they're about. Because really everybody should vote'*; *'my opinion on like the political broadcasts is generally they're not saying what they're going to do, but what's bad about what the other parties are arguing'*. The key themes here, therefore were a lack of appreciation for young people's views, a lack of politicians' involvement at a local and personal level, a lack of information, and a general lack of belief in the integrity of politicians and political parties. With regard to the question of integrity, the Iraq conflict was cited a number of times as a key example of politicians' *moral bankruptcy* (though support for the conflict itself was fairly evenly mixed).

A further problem from the perspective of political participation was that the focus group participants thought that the parties were all the same. Political arena of conventional parties is like porridge, we could find the tendency and the conclusion of the parties in the Centre! – a tendency political scientists have spoken at least two decades: *'They're all saying the same sort of thing just working differently and nothing ever changes. So you're voting for the same person who just stands there and talks'*; *'there isn't much difference between the parties really... it all seems to be the same'*. Therefore, these young people were not only disaffected with individual politicians and parties, but saw the all the parties and the system itself as tainted with the same or similar characteristics. They complained that politicians didn't represent them and were not representative of them: *'I know a lot of people*

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don't like them'; 'It must be the same with all the parties, you just don't get the youth element'.

Most focus groups respondents had little interest in or time for politics, and many got all the information they needed or wanted from the TV news. Nevertheless, the problem of a lack of information was actually something that concerned these 'non-activists', who – on the whole – felt that politicians were not engaging with them enough: *'We need more information about political groups in our area, we don't have any information like flyers or anything' ; 'I wouldn't say I'm not interested... I don't go out of my way to know everything about... You don't get any information'.* This suggests that young people might still be receptive to politics and political ideas, if they were presented in a different way, in a different spirit, and in a different tone.

This is evidenced by the fact that they showed a great deal of interest in a number of political issues and situation-bound themes. The focus group participants were mostly concerned by local or personal issues that were tangible and had some real (and clear) meaning for their daily lives: for example, *'there's going to be loads and loads of people out there that need the benefits that need the help... they should be more strict on who gets benefits'; 'If you need time off, you're allowed time off [for pregnancy]... If you do need childcare, have a little crèche'; urban regeneration of bad areas; 'We just see councils put in a million speed bumps down a little road, six months later take them out and yet still not fix the road around the corner that's the main road full of pot-holes'.* There was a general feeling that politics and government did not cater to their needs and was not working for the little people: *'if they [politicians] are going to support everyone, then they should support everyone not just big communities, big businesses who have enough money'; 'they don't care enough because it was just Bournemouth'.*

Although the 'non-activists' oriented towards these local issues, they had a wide range of strongly-held views on a number of national, political issues – on the minimum wage, taxes, education, employment, welfare benefits, university top-up fees, and immigration – which they related to local/ personal experiences: *'I feel strongly about education, employment and stuff'; 'there are people who sit at home and say "Oh yeah, yeah I'm disabled and really claim money for it" and they're not... they're tightening up... but it's not going quick enough'; 'I'm paying so much tax I can hardly afford to pay it. And yet I don't see any benefit from it'.* On the European level, only one issue was present beyond vague comments about the merits of European integration, and that was the question of Britain's (non-) membership of the Single Currency, yet only in terms of simple support or rejection of the Euro. The one international issue that appeared was the conflict in Iraq. Given the in-depth media coverage of this event (and – as we found out above – the TV media was where most of the focus group participants received their information), strong feelings were observed on this issue (often against British involvement): *'I don't think we've justified going to Iraq'.*

The in-depth interviewees provided more varied and analytical views on politics, but nevertheless also carried a generally negative message about politicians and

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the political system. This was despite the fact that a couple of the interviewees were actively involved in party politics themselves. Interviewee One claimed that *'It used to be more content. It's presentation and content'* now. They also articulated their frustration with the general perception of conventional politics: *'I don't like the word politics anymore, I've got really fed up with it. It immediately implies it's a negative word. It's now seen as a negative word because of politicians... the reputation of politicians... for breaking promises, for lying, which I don't see a massive [amount]... I think you have to find a new word, politics doesn't work anymore. An alternative word. I think representation is a good word'*. They particularly disliked the way partisan politics was practised in Britain today: *'Our political party system is failing very, very badly... you need to go back to independents'*. Again, the point was raised that politicians are not audible over local issues: *'How can I elect an MP in that constituency there on the manifesto, and elect him on local issues?... People should not be able to hide behind political parties'*. Interviewee Two similarly had a poor opinion of politicians in general: *'they should be doing what they said they'd be doing... not what they're doing for themselves... I do think they're all in it just for the power'*. On a personal level, however, this interviewee got on well with local councillors (from all parties) who they worked with, because these local politicians were able to identify with issues closer to home.

Interviewee Three – an active participant in local politics – agreed with the case made frequently in the focus groups that politicians did not listen: *'that's one thing that really annoys me about local politicians, I don't think half the time they actually listen. Councillors as well, they don't really listen to what the public want... people don't listen to them, and they tend to feel that all the large political parties are all the same, when there are differences between them'*. They stressed, furthermore, that the way politics is conducted turns young people off: *'I think there is a lot of back-stabbing in politics – you just have to look back at two of the previous cabinet ministers'*.

In terms of young people's views of politics and democracy, Interviewee Five stated that *'People just see politics as people just getting paid well, and doing nothing but arguing about things that aren't even important'*. For this reason, they argued convincingly: *'I'm definitely much more into local politics, cause you meet and see the people there and aren't influenced by the media so much...'*, emphasising – once more – the importance of the local level. To this interviewee, national politics *'seems so much more bigger and more confusing, messy and catfighty'*. The 'activists' had more sophisticated views of what politics meant – rather than just vague notions or buzzwords – but still had big problems with politics as it is conducted on the national level: Interviewee five, for instance, saw politics as *'changing things through policies and laws'* about *'decisions that affect us directly'*; Interviewee Four saw politics as *'Mainly at the moment... Iraq and tuition fees and things like that'*. Perhaps because of the negative connotations of the term 'politics' for young people, there was a reluctance to contaminate anything beyond the conventional party system and government with this word. Interviewee Four, for instance, would not describe her work on the school council as 'political'.

All the in-depth interviewees were concerned with political issues of one form or other. Whilst their positions on the issues – like the ‘non-activists’ – tended to relate to a local level, these views were not as clearly linked to direct benefits for the young person themselves, but to a broader ‘*common good*’. Interviewee One, for instance, while having nothing to gain personally (in a direct manner) emphasised the need for nurseries in the university.

5.7 Italy

From the answers given, it basically emerges confusion about the concept of “politics”, and a very little comprehension of the practical role played by politics in a democratic society. In any case, the indirect fact in common between almost all the answers is a negative connotation attributed to politics by young generations. The deep rooted disinterestedness and dislike of young generation toward politics it is not surprising, as a matter of fact this data agree with a survey carried out some years ago by IARD foundation. From the Italian quantitative data it emerges that about the 60% of young Italian generation was not interested in politics, and of this 60%, the 44% had a shocking experience in politics! In general, the integration (cr. old ‘Risorgimento’) and successful live of the political system in Italy is, also, a present problem in Youth’s discussion. Disintegration of old historical traditions, the role of the ‘honest’ parties in this process varying from leftist and grass roots to the integrating parties are discussed. The role of the traditions, myths and symbols are well problematized in the debates of Italian data. Extremely nice fact in Italy is the crucial role on the “new-politics” and its role as a challenger of old political conventions. They are not only cheering for the “new social movements”.

As a matter of fact politics is considered as something purely abstract, with no practical effects on real life, as something that cannot be define in practice; this experience lead us to the perception of a politics based on good purposes rather than actions and results. It is also noticed the perception of politics as an instrument of social regulation, nevertheless it is a negative instrument, seen quite as a ‘cheat’, as it is moved by mechanism and aims not declared (for instance, economic interests) rather than by real ideals. *“Under my point of view it is an instrument of social regulation while in regard to its connotation...it has a quite negative connotation, precisely because it should be an instrument based on ideals and then in the actual facts it became more like a matter of power concern with economy”*. These remarks remind us not only from historical disintegration of the Italian political culture and “historical compromise” between catholic and leftist block, but also about Habermasian theory, where the system of power is instrumentally using largening power (colonialism) in the ‘Lebenswelt’ of people and its social meanings.

Furthermore, to damage the idea that young generation have on politics is the strong influence of the Catholic Church; in this occasion the problem is also settled on the dichotomy between ideal/reality: *“the Church is more concern with the power that can exert rather than people spirituality”*. / *“Under my point of view Italian and European politics in conditioned by...the Catholic Church...by the presence of the*

Vatican in Italy, I think it's a strong conditioning that influences...the Catholic Church has a political value". In the end, it is not to be underestimated the binomial politics/corruption often found in young people opinion; in particular it is denounced the alliance, and in some cases the total overlapping, between organised crime and political choice (for example kickback, contract work, etc.). a "Particularly for what concern Italy, our History, it seems to me that political action has then been invalidate by economical questions, and also by mafia problems, by those things that are free from the idea of politics, from what politics should be and thus become just a mean for power, a mean to grant favouritism, thus for me this idea that flutters on the Italian politics gives an extremely negative connotation. Because then, in the actual fact, it does not pursue interests, ideals...but rather economical interests of power management that are taking hold. If there was less corruption it would be better."

It is evident that from the meanings of politics shine the disillusion toward the democracy concept and its real meaning. For some, this negative connotation does not result from the disillusionment due to incoherence between ideals and reality, but it is implied in the concept of politics in itself. What leads human beings to aggregation is actually the necessity to improve their own personal condition, thus a sort of 'egoism' that determines the clash between interest of different categories of people. The most part of the answerers have 'naturalistic' stand to the old political question concerning particularistic (selfish, own interest) and universalistic interests in politics. In the realistic tradition the theorists are combining these intentions (eg. Max Weber). *"Under my point of view mankind is basically selfish and tend to join a group that has a common ideology. This shared ideology it's the beginning of politics in itself that leads to improve the current situation of the individual and of the group, which is also completely different from the ideology of another group and thus are created parties. Anyway is the will to promote an action that would improve more and more our own condition."* Furthermore it is not clear neither coherent the meaning of 'political action'. According to what has been referred by some of them, a social action has a political meaning when it comes from a party decision; according to others it is motivation that improves society and this is what can be defined political action; finally political action is identified with the realisation of an ideal.

Finally, to better comprehend the vision of politics by young generation, we asked them to express their opinion using a metaphor (or if too difficult, using a brief sentence) as instrument of important significance to put into light the social building of behaviours and opinions. As it can be pointed out, the main contents refer to confusion, hypocrisy, manipulation, lie, cunning, cheat, utopia, danger and mistrust. In the answers which give a positive connotation, politics it is associated to the idea of comparison, co-operation, energy, strength, starting up and real differences articulated by political lines (right/left/green). As young generations in other partner countries the perception of the incompatibility between everyday life and politics is crucial fact behind the political disappointment,

Just a few concrete examples of conventional political activity emerged in the discussion. Most of the young people talked about taking part in demonstrations, in

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parades; just a few answers referred to vote; at last, someone has recognised that being simply informed is a possible form of political activity. Generally speaking, for what concern demonstrations, it emerges little conviction, and little consciousness about the social and political significance involved, and so for the values, ideals, objectives. Actually it seems that the main motivation for joining them is to conform to the spirit of the group, the perception, although vague, to express a human right and to share a general common ideal, however free from concrete real data. Since it is thought that this instrument of political activity has not large possibilities of success in real life, demonstrate is considered more as a way of being together with the people that share more or less the same ideals, value, lifestyle, and thus affirming behaviours and strengthening the sense of belonging to a group. We could speak about 'life-political' projects, even identity-political' involvements. Old political arenas and collectives are not enough here: *"Go to a demonstration...yes, yes, there was a bit of identification, I mean, the idea was that it could be our own right to demonstrate, that this can also be incisive, that's another story"*.

In some cases it is not shown any political implication in the choice of going to a demonstration, and here, because of the group norm, it is problematic to speak of life-political dimension. Some of them declare to take part just because 'every one does', thus not to feel different or marginalized by the group of peers; some others even confess as sole motivation the possibility of not going to school. Because of the scarce political motivation/consciousness ascribed to whome takes part in parades or demonstration, in certain cases, it is perceived as an important instrument in the hand of politicians in order to 'manipulate the masses', spread ideas, build up behaviours.

About the voting behaviour and representative democracy it seems that participate to elections it is mainly a way to maintain an historical memory or responsibility and exert a proper right rather than the real possibility to influence the political life of the country. *"To say 'I won't vote, I'll leave the paper blank', it is anyway a fact not to forget our history : the right to vote has been obtained fighting, people that hide and do not vote are, in my point of view, people that ignore completely their own past"*. The Italian researchers have tried to understand which are, according to young generations, the main ways of access to political participation offered by our society. The main fact is dealing with the 'being informed' (knowledge and risk-societal reflectivity) on what happens in politics, it's an important way of activation for the single citizen. *"To take part is first of all to be informed, information about what is happening in the world, and thus try to understand things"*. All the answers gave importance to the sources of political information, meant as opportunities of awakening, of comparison, where ideas, opinions, behaviours are born and are reinforced, as essential instrument for political activity and motivation.

The school is recognised as an important way of access to information about politics. Group discussions with teachers and schoolmates set up the main form of political awakening, of agreement/ disagreement with others. Besides, as it can be seen in the discussion about the singular interviews developed, precisely school represent the primary environment for political 'initiation'. *"At school we use to talk a lot, lay into each other, but I found it interesting."* / *"In my last years at school I*

was involved in things about Europe, that also have contributed." None the less, there are also negative opinions about the role played by school in the building up of a 'political opinion' in the students. Some young people believe, actually, that often those moments of discussion were inconclusive and pointless as they were aimed to miss hours of teaching, and above all, to 'create a social look', some of them talk about the 'fashion of being *alternative*'; *alternative* means a category of people of the left wing, that usually goes to social centres, student collectives, organise squatting and takes over the running of the school, and is recognised by a way of dressing, by the kind of music listened, lifestyle, etc.- some others feel like victims of teachers that instead of helping the students to understand the world of politics and form personal opinions, were used to comment news stories imposing their own vision of reality.

Another approach to politics is represented by '*friendships*'. To be connected with people, with whom share ideas and experiences in the political field, it seems to be the only possibility of connection between the everyday life and the abstract reality, distant and confused of a party. Mass media is also considered relevant institution (television, newspaper, radio, etc), and above all the modern mass media (Internet). In fact these transmit a large amount of information about politics; however it is necessary to develop a strong critical skill to selection the information and be conscious that neutrality and truthfulness can be lacking. *"Under my point of you, we should use the information channels that may sometimes be informal or not updated, but are very good."* / *"Internet is one of the ways of access, then if information is true or false, that's another story...of course, tv is not probably the best choice, as it cannot be too exposed, it does not have many spaces, but if someone is interested he can just write a name on a search engine in the Internet or buy a newspaper, I think we have the possibility to be informed, of course one has to work on that."*

We could assume that young generations, even those closer to politics, are more motivated by the sense of belonging to a group and the perception of the sharing of ideals rather than by an actual consciousness of the complex political mechanisms or by the knowledge of concrete replies. Some of the replies obtained link the possible political commitment to the achievement of ideals, whether global, abstract, utopian; for instance, the subjects talk of the achievement of peace in terms of universal value, rather than refer to behaviours or actions undertaken to furnish concrete replies to precise problems. According to some, the commitment and the interest for politics seems to come from the influence exerted by representative of juvenile culture - singers, actors, television star- as, often, they propose political myth, ideals, symbols (Che Guevara, for instance), in some cases to express their own convictions, in other cases to earn a slice of the market. Particularly, this behaviour is often related to the representative of the culture of the left wing. According to some, the huge use, superficial and sometime contradictory of certain political message, leads young people to identify with myth, symbols, ideals without the support of a real consciousness or knowledge of the real historical and political context.

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Some other, instead, thinks that the so-called juvenile culture is not such a decisive influence on political behaviours. Consequently it's not the messages sent by singers, or famous star, etc. to mould the opinion of young generations, but, on the contrary, it's the pre-existent political orientation to determine what music to listen to, which figure to identify with. *"To me it is not so direct the thing, that is, there aren't myth, or representative of political ideals...if there are it's a very soft thing. Then usually it is quite the contrary, if you are on a political side, that is, for instance who is leftist listen to certain songs, but this doesn't mean that if you listen to Guccini you become a member of the left party; you already have some ideals if you listen to him."*

We can now examine the replies given by our interviewed dividing to categories: those that are for the 'new politics', and those who, on the contrary, does not express positive judgements. Thus, we can soon notice that the two sides are equal, in fact, about the 50% of the subjects, among which 60% male and 40% female expresses positive judgements, while another 50%, among which 60% are male and 40% are female, expresses negative judgement. One of the main reason consists in taking a distance from traditional parties, that is to say from the classical form of making politics, which, as already argued, is perceived by young generations in a negative way. The matter of 'new politics' it is out of the classical logic of parties, espousing indirect values; young people prefer to follow movements that permit to join universal values, rather than precise and ready-made practical ideologies. *"Also because it is new, it has a new image, it is detached from parties, from the old attitude...just that's positive."* The new political forms are noticed as closer to people, more 'within reach'; each single individual can bring about his own contribution, in a concrete and direct manner, for instance through a reasoned consumerism (buying in fair-trade market or trying to boycott some multinational). Such actions are perceived as a real political act, different from the traditional ones, but of the same importance. Furthermore, those who support such a politics, do not perceive it solely as a way to contradict and deny the traditional politics, on the contrary, they feel the strong valences of new politics.

Some of the people interviewed do not give much importance to the 'new politics' because it is considered essentially a matter of fashion; finished the fashion of the moment, all these movement little by little will be incorporate by classical parties. Some others believe that these 'new social movements' are distinguished by confusion, little clearness and inconsistency; for this reason they will hardly make something in concrete. Some other interviewed still deny that all those forms of new politics can have a real identity, which movements would born just as opposition to traditional parties. Thus, they would not contain any proposal, but only opposite - destructive values; in this way they would also loose their political role and character. *"These new political movements should act inside the system and not out of it. You must prostitute yourself, in a sense, you must choose how much though..."*? Some young people believe that integration is absolutely possible; institutional parties are able to gather the request coming from 'new politics'; even the individual, beginning from unconventional politics can, afterwards, starts a political path more structured. Furthermore, someone highlight that nowadays some of the left parties are already supporting and sharing the

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expressions of unconventional politics. Opposite situation is represented by those who, even affirming a substantial incompatibility, declare that what will disappear will be 'new politics'. The current democratic system, based on the present representative political system, is ultimately the most desirable form of democracy. Some others think little profitable a possible integration, since thus the movement linked to the new politics would lose their peculiarity. A group of interviewees, agreeing that a possible integration would deprive 'new politics' of its peculiarity, state however that a sort of co-operation is necessary, even keeping each its own individuality and autonomy.

5.8 Slovakia

Those young people who are not politically active usually have strong negative views of politics. Especially, this can be seen in spontaneous reactions of young women in both categories (levels) of education. In post-socialist Slovakia the analytical use of polit-terms hasn't got up; young people have only sometimes means to separate their immediate experiences and conceptual alternatives (contextualistic problems by the terms of rhetorical theory).

When the moderator asked among the focus group of low educated women a question „*What is the first thing that comes to your mind when I say word politics?*“ The answers were concise and accompanied by laughs and ironic looks: „*Only few things*“ / „*High taxes, money*“ / „*Catastrophic economy*“ / „*Just the worst*“ / „*Perhaps. In my opinion, nothing positive*“ / „*Certainly nothing positive*“ / „*More negative than positive issues*“ / „*Sometimes absolutely useless things*“. Maybe, the style and language horizons have the clear hints here: positive and negative utopia – Fortuna and Chaos - are living together in Slovakia; the promises of the real politics could be read us symptoms of the nexts breaks and unsuccessful tries; the political situation means not only the open challenge for life-political avantguard but the mark of danger someway to take cover. Sometimes, the poor and negative style and rhythm of the answers indicates a fatal historical attitude and a ‚line‘ into the future – a heritage from older generations.

A discussion with more educated young women opened more horizons: „*TV news*“ / „*Those clowns in suits. Yes (laughs). Absolutely all of them there. Coats, serious faces, shallow speeches and nothing ever happens*“. / „*Empty promises (quietly)*“. / „*I watch news, I criticize it together with my mom, then we just watch the next program.*“ / „*I am not interested at all.*“ / „*Me neither (laughs).*“ / „*I am not interested in that, it is not okay what is happening there yet it is not what I am thinking about all the time ...*“ Here the political situation according to the Television paradigm and feelings of politics as the distanced own-ruled ‚theatre‘ (comic opera) or ‚game‘ (cr. situation eg. In Finland), disillusion of modern politics, metaphor of ‚empty promises‘ as a politics and dissatisfaction are present.

Especially politically active men and those with a higher education, are able to develop their own understanding of politics into greater details and conceptual

reflection. They use relatively sophisticated political terminology. Politics is, according to them, a state management, political system, power tool, given rules and contentions. Democracy is perceived as a freedom of an individual by the modern masculine rhetorics full of powerful, technical and institutional means and connotations. For the most sophisticated discussant political democracy doesn't mean only glorious freedom, but a historical idea open for continuing development and sub-political and social dimensions. This intellectual is open for new social movements and risk-societal reflections.

The Slovakian political activists (focus group five) present evidence of this modern orientation: *„Politics means some kind of state management ..., to me democracy certainly means freedom, a man can achieve what he wants if he gives some effort ... when he decides to achieve something, he should achieve it ... society or a system, which exists in a given state, should not create obstacles for him. This is what I mean when speaking about politics.“ / „In my opinion, it is some kind of system of setting rules. It is a good thing, there should always be rules given. There are many dirty tricks in our politics..., when someone has a chance to enrich himself, he always takes a chance. Democracy always means freedom of speech, freedom of movement, I can think freely, I can say what I want to say, I can go wherever I want to go.“ / „To me, politics does not mean governmental programs only, we can speak about politics in terms of sub-topics, social topics. Democracy is just one system among many others, yet this one has existed for a long time, it has worked for millenniums and it seems to be the best political system ever, it is a government of the people..., politics is something more than just politicians and political parties.“*

5.9 Pejorative, conventional and life-political fragments (summary)

On the whole, in the national text corpuses were quite a differentiated pictures of politics, politicians and democracy. It is not possible to present general and collective picture of basic political terms used among youth in Europe. They are culturally contextual, situational and theme-bound views. The major participants in group interviews were non-active persons: most of them had cool or sceptical distance to (real)political arenas. But also non-active discussants presented and analysed nice ways the 'bottleneck-problems' in political legitimation and responsibilities. But the activists (mainly the participants in individual interviews) had, besides their surprisingly strong scepticism, open-minded ideas and critical reflections on conventional and 'new-political' cultures of participation and concepts of politics and democracy. On the one hand, the political participation chances and democracy were seen by pejorative and cynical terms as unreliable; politicians are not listening to the people, they have their 'own'ruled' game of an elite and they are doing whatever keeps them in power. On the other hand, it was acknowledged that the democratic and political functions are difficult jobs and responsibilities, it is hard to make the right decisions and always be ready for attacks made by other politicians. Democracy appeared, in general, more trustful way than any other mechanism in political dialog; the democracy is an indispensable way to face

another person and group – for to find the third chance over the asymmetries and contradictions and it will be the way to name the ‘smallest common denominator’!

The concepts of ‘politics’, the (real) ‘politicians’ and their ‘political activities’ were, most often, in use as the synonyms. Democracy referred sometimes to legal institutions and realistic problems in democratic conventions of politics in each country, but some discussants understood it broad way understanding it as an open chance to take part in the decision-making process, real responsible moves and ‘conversational democracy’. Concrete touches to the political processes, media and politicians especially at the local level were crucial almost in all countries. A group of interviewed persons were aware of their bad knowledge on political world and democracy. Some of their (unreflected or naïve) suggestions were in distinctive contrast to the idea of democracy (refusal of the political rights among senior citizens, consensualism, power of the specialists, premises of truthfulness in democratic discussion etc.), but people do not realise that. Maybe, they have never faced in their every day discourses these issues. They might have developed a more critical view had they had the opportunity to discuss the issues more often or in more detail.

Another major critique was that politicians do not know about the “*real life*” of people and make decisions against the interest of the people. “*They only look at themselves*” ...” *what we can decide on are really the unimportant things, which they let us decide on, like that, and the really important things they come to a decision among themselves...*” This moralizing and criticizing attitude is more realistic and it seems like elite-theoretical hypothesis or basic political cynicism, where the gap between people and own-ruled political elite is relevant. This remark is near by the common and quite universal slogan: “*The politicians are fighting for their own interests...*” For example Weber defined modern politics in a way where the politician’s own interest and collective needs could work together! The more educated and active discussants were risk-societal way ready to politicize and politick with all kind of problems and tensions actual between civil society and state or between groups and individuals (consumerism, direct action, ecology, risks of everyday life, Iraq War). Despite this active orientation they were not ready for collective mobilisation in political participation.

The Austrian remark on participatory landscape where there may be two elements that differentiate today’s young people from their peers in the 70s and 80s is widespread. First, political movement and cultural movement do not coincide. Even in those few events like the “*street party protest*” where protest is linked with fun and socialising with peers, the political component of the event is completely denied by the adults. Second, the young generations at the beginning of the 21st century are “disenchanted”. There is an acute awareness of the limited effects of one’s action even if it is mass protest.

In the British text corpus several ‘hot’ issues of dissatisfaction rose up and local democracy, experiences of ‘empowerment’ and Iraq War were crucial themes. In France discussants emphasized tolerant, constructive and consensual values – ‘a tradition of civic demonstration’ doesn’t dominated the text corpus. In Finland

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young people ignore the moralistic differentiation of 'black-and-white' in political debate and they are open-minded to democratic and political projects in conventional and life-political levels when "*the time is ready*". The interviewed group in Germany became by no special way inspired in new social movements and many discussants show their bad knowledge on democracy and politics. In the Italian data we could find interesting and contradictory analysis on 'new politics' and historical views on political disintegration, corruption and church. In the texts of Slovakian interviews live together the negative and positive political utopias, and some young intellectuals are describing future visions inspired in Europe and successful experiences. The Estonian youth is thinking that the Western orientation and the modernisation process of petty-state Estonia need stability and sophisticated, open political reflection – a Russian-speaking minority have to be integrated into the process.

6 YOUTH'S ACTIVITIES AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

6.1 Overview

This section will provide a comparative overview of the activities (organised or otherwise) that young people undertake in their spare time across the eight countries investigated in the EUYOUNGPART project that do not fall into the category of what can be described as *political participation*.

This comparative analysis provides a somewhat eclectic study of young people across the eight countries, given that the purpose of the qualitative research was to describe as broad as possible a range of young people's responses to the idea of *activities* or *organised activities*. Whilst most countries delimited these areas to lists of freetime activities, some examined in more detail the reasons behind young people's freetime activities, and how this interacts with the concept of *participation*.

This section provides a snapshot of the sorts of activities undertaken by young people listed in the national reports. The research has shown that the individual interviewees ('the activists'), as expected had much larger and broader ranges of pursuits than the focus group participants ('the non-activists').

Austria

- Reading among women;
- sports and computers among men;
- more politics-related activities were found in the individual interviews e.g. reading newspapers (Austria: 11).

Germany

- 'partying and playing music', 'singing and dancing' (Germany: 33);
- groups of educated women stressed the limits of participation in local area;
- church and sports clubs remain key areas of participation often leading to political engagement;
- the well-educated also read newspapers.

Great Britain

- A distinct characteristic of UK focus group participants was their lack of participation in organised activities (UK: 8), and their activities centred around a few common leisure-oriented pursuits: going to 'pubs and clubs', 'socialising with anyone my age', 'going for a drink', going to the cinema, playing sport.
- The in-depth interviewees had a wider range of activities that included sport, music, dance, watching TV and reading books.⁴

⁴ The 'activists' were, furthermore, sometimes involved in arranging these activities for others. They also participated in a greater number and variety of organised activities and groups (environmental groups, youth clubs, community groups). This is to be expected as most of

Italy

- mainly reading, sport and music;
- also movies, theatre, travel and dance (Italy: 80).

Estonia

- 'sports and recreational outdoor activities' were almost the sole organised activity in Estonia for focus group participants.
- The individual interviewees had broader interests in 'sports and recreation', 'cultural activities' (a choir, movie-making), 'social interaction' (both participating and organising).

Finland

- Membership of NGOs (e.g. Amnesty);
- organisation of student activities;
- sports;
- photography.
- Individual interviewees – cooking, youth work, church work, Greenpeace.

France

- Young people's activities were seen in very 'modest' terms for the focus groups (France: 30) and – in their small way – related to family and friends/ local community.

Slovakia

- enjoying nature;
- music;
- social events/ going out with family and friends;
- watching TV.

6.2 Activities: Conclusions

The National Reports made it clear that Young People in general and the 'non-activists' in particular, did not participate in many freetime activities, and when they did participate in these activities they related very much to leisure-time pursuits – what we might call 'hobbies'. These activities also tended not to be organised group activities, but unspecific social gatherings with friends and family. The lack of participation in these activities made this a very thin section, but this lack of participation is important in itself, demonstrating the lack of connection of young people not only to political groups but also to groups in civil society. Most countries therefore reported young people's activities as 'unorganised'. This is illustrated by the quote in one of the national reports that: *'The general opinion from the focus group interviews is that young people are devoted to work and studies. They rarely participate in organised activities.'*

theses interviewees were not just activists in one group or organisation, but were involved in a number of activities that constituted a large proportion of their free time (UK: 8).

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A key issue here, cited a number of times in the national reports, was young people's perceptions of a lack of time and resources to engage in freetime activities (organised and unorganised): for example, many participants in the UK complained about a general lack of 'time and money'. This was mirrored by the views of young 'activists', some of whom stated that: it *'that takes up a lot of time and effort – but it's all fun'*. In Estonia, work was seen by young men as almost a substitute for civic engagement in the context of the country's transition from Soviet rule, and here the lack of freetime due to work was emphasised. In Finland, equally, a number of young people expressed the point that they had *'no special free time'*.

Given the pressures on time and resources, the preferences of young people in their freetime is extremely important (Slovakia). A number of countries stressed the differences between men and women in terms of freetime pursuits. In Slovakia, young men saw freetime activities as an escape/ relaxation from social strains, young women saw freetime as a space for communication with family and relatives. In Tallinn, the importance of voting was stressed by men, and non-political non-profit organisations by women.

In some countries, the focus groups of 'non-activists' displayed a strong, though not overwhelming, feeling of individualism and scepticism about participation in organised activities: e.g. aside from small groups of friends, *'I wouldn't join an organised club, I'd just do it myself'*. But the levels of individualism and solidarity varied strongly from country to country in these small sample groups.

As the target group for the focus groups was young people over 18, it is impossible to estimate their engagement in activities in schools, but – as a guide – the participants who were university students took advantage of the large selection of organised activities in their institutional settings (something most 'non-activists' lacked).

Some countries defined what they meant by 'non-political participation': it means *'helping friends on the one hand and involvement in social activities on the other'*. Here, 'the border between the political and the social is blurred' (Austria: 11) – 'non-activists' would not recognise their activities as political, and some 'activists' would not recognise work they did as political so as not to taint it with the negative view of the political process (UK). In Italy, irreconcilable differences between conventional and non-conventional politics were highlighted, explaining the fact that young people's organised activities were so oriented towards civil society vis-à-vis politics (Italy).

In Germany the idea of interaction was held up to be important – especially among highly educated men (something young people were be tempted to term 'political'): 'it is politics in so far as one must defend their own viewpoint against other arguments' (Germany). This was nevertheless tempered by the young people's general disillusionment with politics and the political process recorded elsewhere in this report. In terms of engagement/ interaction over politics – differences over how young people were informed about politics were highlighted in Germany, as the

better educated read newspapers, listened to the radio, surfed the net for news, whilst the less educated got their information 'on the street' and in the 'U-Bahn'. German young people also displayed scepticism towards the role of the media in informing the public (e.g. they had their own agenda).

Young people – in the focus groups in particular – were sometimes reluctant to 'own up to' their volunteer work/ social activities, as it exposed them to the criticism and cynicism of their peers – 'this work is a personal thing' (France). This form of social activism was rejected mostly by those with fewer qualifications in France (Ibid.). If such activities were scorned by their peer groups, this provides an important barrier to participation.

6.3 Political participation: Overview

This section provides a comparative overview of the political participation of young people in democracy across the eight countries investigated in the EUYOUNGART. Given the fact that the focus groups participants were *non-activists* (not regular participants in politics - at least in conventional forms), their levels of participation were low. Most attention is therefore given to the *activists* (interviewed individually), who accordingly had most to say about their more diverse and more numerous participatory acts (vis-à-vis the focus groups).

The comparative analysis, given the size of the qualitative study, can only offer a brief snapshot of political participation in the different countries, but seeks to highlight some emerging trends that may form the basis of (and therefore give added-value to) more extensive quantitative research in the style of the forthcoming EUYOUNGART survey. The reasons or motivations for political participation are addressed elsewhere in this report.

This section provides a summary of the type and nature of political participation undertaken by young people, as listed in the national reports. The research has shown that the individual interviewees (*activists*), as expected, engaged in a much larger and more diverse range of participatory acts than the focus group participants (*non-activists*).

6.4 Austria

In the focus groups, a broad range of participatory activities were mentioned: the most frequent were voting, demonstrations, signing petitions and discussing issues with others.

- Voting was seen as a '*moral duty*' by most young people – a few said that abstaining from voting is also a political statement.
- Many people said that they were not opposed to joining a political party (if asked – here mobilisation could potentially play a big role), though a number (even the politically active young people) gave reasons why they would not join:

they had not made up their mind, were afraid of being labelled as a party member, their voice would get lost in the party organisation etc.

- Most *activists* and *non-activists* had already taken part in at least one demonstration, but young people were ambivalent about this mode of participation. Despite their participation in demonstrations and their view of them as an acceptable form of political action, to get the issue *on the agenda*, they criticised organisers and other participants for sometimes abusing the aims of the demonstration, and also doubted the impact of these protests on policy-makers.
- Other means seen as effective for achieving political goals were: talking to other people, talking to influential people, getting the media involved, writing letters to newspapers or politicians, starting/ joining an initiative, direction action. Strikes and political violence were not mentioned as forms of political action.

6.5 Estonia

- In Estonia, voting – essentially in national parliamentary elections – was seen as the minimum level of engagement in social/ political life, as was obtaining information and staying informed about society (i.e. voting should be informed).
- To be informed, people should follow the mass media and discuss politics.
- All the young people agreed that individual action was likely to be ineffective, and that group action was necessary.
- While informed voting was seen as the key form of participation, NGOs and political parties were seen as important actors between elections.
- Demonstrations and strikes were actions unlikely to influence policy-making to any great degree, and were considered only as a complementary form of action.
- Direct action was also viewed as ineffective and unattractive to young people.

6.6 Finland

- Whilst *activists* participated for – essentially – ideological or ‘ethical’ reasons (for the good of society), the *non-activists* were more focused on ‘moderate’ activities e.g. peace movements.
- The *activists* took part in a broad range of participatory activities. For example, one interviewee was an active member of Greenpeace, made consumer decisions, was an active discussant inside and outside the church, and had been a member of the governing council of the University of Helsinki student union. A second was chair of her town council and an active member of ‘Nuclear-Power-Youth’ – a group supporting a ‘responsible’ acceptance of nuclear power.
- Most of the *non-activists* saw voting as a minimum participatory act, although the well-educated groups saw it more strongly as both a right and a duty. Many of the non-participants had a conventional view of participation, and were ready to participate in ‘realistic’ political acts, such as ‘peace demonstrations’.

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6.7 France

- Voting appeared to be a ‘foreign concept’ to most of the focus group participants in France in that it does not correspond to young people’s own approach to politics.
- Unconventional forms of political participation, such as demonstrations and boycotts, seem more in line with the ‘volatility’ of young people’s commitments. The appeals of demonstrating are spontaneity, flexibility of commitment, and group belonging.
- Young people’s experience of the value of demonstrations was nevertheless expressed in a more ambivalent manner.
- Violent forms of activism appeared to be unacceptable.
- Alternative movements as whole only appealed to a minority of male graduates, or those who had become politicised.
- The *activists* considered voting to be both a right and a duty, and voted in every election, and most – furthermore – believed abstention to be a mistake/ a wrong strategy. They, in general, believed participation in conventional forms of politics to be most effective.
- All the *activists* saw demonstrations as acceptable, and had taken part in one themselves, and the willingness to participate increased for those on the left of the political spectrum.
- Petitions and strikes were more differently perceived, with those on the left more in favour than those on the right. Strikes were, in general, seen as a ‘last resort’.
- These unconventional forms of participation were seen as effective only in voicing discontent or getting an issue onto the political agenda.

6.8 Germany

- In Germany, all the young people interviewed had taken part in some form of political action, be it signing or even starting a petition, demonstrating or voting.
- As in other countries, though the importance of demonstrations was supported as an expression of opinion, its effectiveness was doubted.
- In Germany, another form of political participation was ‘being prepared to inform oneself’ – above and beyond the questionable reporting in the media.

6.9 Great Britain

- The number of ‘political’ activities that focus groups activists in the UK were involved in was – as expected – quite limited, but there were examples of participation in petitions, charity work, community work, student union work. These *non-activists* generally saw participation as a ‘chore’.

- The *activists*, on the other hand, had a much better opinion of conventional political activities (particularly voting). They also not only participated in a relatively wide and diverse range of political activities, but also had a much richer history of participation.
- One interviewee had worked for the student union, in an environmental group, and was now involved in a ‘massive number of things’, including a ‘free education campaign’, writing 20 or 30 letters a year to MPs, lobbying local councillors (UK: 14).
- A second was a member of the Youth Parliament, of a community project and steering group (working to set up a community centre), of a church based youth-project (night café, youth club), was chair of a local youth forum, attended local councillors’ meetings, and worked with the Tear Fund and Fair Trade (UK: 15).

6.10 Italy

- The Italian study found that young people ‘for the most part tend to identify with unconventional political forms’ (Italy: 27).
- They, for instance, see taking part in a demonstration as more ‘economical’ and less binding than joining a political party.
- The study confirmed that young *non-activists* are disinterested in politics, and they attribute much of the supposed activity of this section of young people to reasons other than a genuine political interest e.g. peer pressure, desire to protest (‘typical adolescent behaviour’).
- For *activists*, the desire to participate is informed by the desire to help/ include marginalised/ disadvantaged groups in society. This is perhaps a result of the fact that the main trigger for activity is ‘ethical’ concern.

6.11 Slovakia

Young people see their own political participation and its outcomes in terms of satisfying the needs of – in particular – the youth groups they work with in their free time.

- Activities included work with local councils, social activities and charity work.

6.12 Conclusions

Although, by the very nature of these qualitative reports their strength lies in the diverse picture they paint of young people’s relation to political participation and personal biographies, a few general comments can be made.

First, concepts of youth participation in politics and democracy cannot be limited to evaluations of their participation in conventional forms of politics. The research

found both conventional ('old') and unconventional ('new') forms of participation to be relevant to the young people of today. The Finnish report characterises the findings of the EUYOUNGPART research across Europe in the following way: although traditional forms of participation remain *'alive... in the late-modern era we need a broader vision of the landscape of young people's political participation' to include activities such as consumer action, civil resistance and global movements.'*

Another important finding, with regard to political participation (and the motivations behind it), was its very high dependency upon the 'saliency' or 'tangibility' of a particular issue. In short, young people have a sense of 'realism' – of *'objectives and the matching of resources to ends'* (France). This is the crucial factor in the chain of events that leads to participation. First of all, *'interest in politics largely depends on the perception that politics "matters"'* (Austria). If the channels of participation are open for the expression of these interests, then participation *may happen*. Finally, as noted elsewhere in this report, young people's evaluation of effectiveness is key: 'the likelihood of any participation would be greatly increased if the young people could feed a real impact from their participation' (UK). If young people's evaluation of the efficacy of the channels of participation is positive, participation *is likely*.

In the national reports, there were some contrasting results on the importance of individual versus group participation. While some noted young people's belief in the insignificance of individual action and the futility of trying to influence politics (e.g. Estonia, Germany), most noted that alternative forms of participation are becoming more popular. Therefore, although young people are sceptical about their ability to influence the political process, there is nevertheless increased enthusiasm for these alternative forms of participation. This probably relates to the fact that young people are turned off by the political process yet have strong views on political issues.

Finally, it is worth noting a few differences between *activists* and *non-activists*. First, *activists* can be characterised not only by the relative frequency and intensity of their participation, but also by the breadth of activities and their personal biographies (history of participation). Unlike the *non-activists*, their participation is spurred by *ethical concern* for some issue(s) or groups(s) in society. In sum, the *activists* are different *social animals*, who – for whatever reasons – value solidarity despite the increasing individualisation of society in terms of values (Inglehart) and life-styles (Giddens).

7 OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES

7.1 Austria

Most of the active young people in the Austrian interviews have politically interested or socially active (in voluntary organisations) parents or grandparents. Being able to discuss political and social issues, thereby learning about the political structure and developing one's own political views is a valuable basis for involvement. However, there is no determinism: some young people develop political interest without their parents being interested and some do not despite their parents' interest.

Friends and acquaintances are also an opportunity structure providing motivation, support and information. Some young activists join political parties because they were asked by their friends. Activists who are not members of formal groups are constantly alerted to upcoming events through their networks of like-minded people. Formal as well as informal groups are also socialisation agents.

Schools were mentioned a number of times in the interviews. While the active young people were often encouraged by individual teachers the non-political focus group participants bemoaned the lack of political education and the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the teachers. Further, there is no "lived democracy at school". Students are often not informed and involved in decision-making and the system of class and school representatives is somewhat thwarted by teachers who do not take students' wishes and opinions seriously, sometimes even blackmailing them. In the context of schools the general school climate and ideological style of the school also has an impact on the development of political mindedness.

7.2 Estonia

Estonian activists follow a rather traditional route to political involvement. The initial steps are taken because of personal interest and motivation. Most of them get involved in organisational activities at the school level when they are about 15/16 years old. Many join political youth organisations and later political parties. Membership in political communities as mediators between the individual and society is crucial in activating young people. Some factors impede participation such as precarious economic situation and difficult life management. The feeling of political disempowerment is often linked to the feeling of not being able to cope with one's own life. In this context, long working hours also bind physical and mental energies and lead to a focus on the most individual and elemental needs. Not living in the capital city but in a rural area also decreases to likelihood of political involvement.

Non-Estonians particularly lack political interest because of their citizenship status and language barriers. They also have a much weaker sense of attachment to the region and nation. Some members of minorities are politically more oriented towards their country of origin. There is a general feeling among non-active young people of not being adequately educated and informed about political structures and processes and of lacking the relevant skills and personal characteristics which are necessary to get active.

7.3 Finland

In Finland the sample was, maybe, the collection of young people having the most nice opportunity horizon in their life. Most of the discussants had some kind of conventional or 'life-political' visions in their career and (political) participation. The following presentation of two group 'males from prison' and well-educated women from Helsinki district are demonstrative examples of participatory landscapes. Young prisoners represent a marginal reaction to politics and 'young women' represent talented young women having a political initiative and dominance among young generation in Finland!

18-25-year-old males, low level of education (four members interviewed and recorded by myself at a jail): Far less-educated, somewhat marginalised young male prisoners, from fragmented home and living contexts (mixed regions), which have recently arrived at the new "high-tech" Prison of Vantaa – a jail for those still awaiting trial. These young men are not close or steady group even though they are classmates in trying to pass their Finnish grammar school (O-level) examinations (compulsory only for people under 16). They need to have a certain sort of self-discipline for this education, "so they have hope!" *Niko*, mainly from Lohja (100 km from Helsinki), is 17 years old, and has "hobby histories only relating to crime". That means that he has no clear adult authorities, social community or safe peer group identities in his background. *Karri* is a 19-year-old young man from Helsinki with the history of "...no hustle and no hobbies". *Karim* is 20 years old and he is from Brazil; and it is a "natural fact" for him to be interested in football.

Markus (19 years) has been basketball player and without school education he was competent to repair the European cars. *Dimitri* (17 years), a jolly Roma boy, cannot mention any special interest or activity in his biographical view. For all participants the prison situation was not an accident; loneliness and fragmented life-stories are present in the context-bound, extremely masculine 'situation-ironical' but fragmented and hectic speaking culture. It is easy to say that their political participation acts (there where some) have these same attributes. They are aware of the opportunity structures or concrete chances in their lives, but it is hard to leap at an opportunity. Often they had a sarcastic smirk on their missing opportunities.

18-25 year old, females, high level of education: The group is composed of sophisticated young women with nice academic careers. *Marita* (22 years) is living together with her partner in Helsinki and she is studying Finnish language at the University; and she has no special free time activities. *Pauliina* (26 years) is studying pedagogy, living together

with her partner in Helsinki and interested in photography. *Nanna* (26 years) has a life partner and she is living in capital area. She is working in well-developed and traditional library; in her free-time she documents various kinds of sources representing everyday life and histories. *Hanna* (26 years) also has a life partner and lives in Helsinki. She had recently worked as a researcher in the faculty of social sciences (University of Helsinki) analysing questions of equality between genders and female cultures. This sophisticated group was full of surprising turns: hot debate and different and contradictory standpoints - but not dogmatic and collective tensions. *Young well-educated women* were speaking about the difficulties of how to be present in political arena, take or not take part in action! E.g. nice aspects in discussion on gender roles arose, even if all the participants were women. Political participation was a well-reflected part of identity work and broad-minded portfolio or CV.

7.4 France

In France, the politically active interviewees had difficulties explaining the sources of their involvement because they saw it as a very personal and individual act. However, some factors can be identified which were crucial in their political socialisation despite the fact that the young people only rarely explicitly recognised them as such. First of all, the family is an important institution for value transmission and a model of political behaviour. It has an important impact on the development of a political identity and often encourages or supports young people's activities. Even if the parents do not discuss politics or express political views they can encourage their children through certain educational styles. Second, friends are an important key to motivate young people to join. Knowing somebody in an organisation or network reduces shyness and anxieties about trying something new. Peers are also crucial for young people to remain in the movement. Their presence guarantees fun, a common language and the feeling of belonging.

Opportunity structures are also given by age and education. In the French sample, most activists became involved in political movements after reaching the age of 18 and graduating from school. Here, it seems that although interested from a much earlier age, students in secondary schools do not consider themselves as mature enough to join. All the politically active interviewees have a high level of education which confirms other empirical findings that education increases political participation. For the young activists participation is an important means of expressing themselves and of distinguishing themselves from others. Thus, it is a meaningful part of their identity. Political events or disrupting social events can be catalysts for the decision to get active, such as certain election results, demonstrations, or as a particular event which happened in France in 2002, the burning of a 19 year old girl by boys. These events especially trigger less formal and more spontaneous action.

Many barriers to political involvement are mentioned by the non-activists. They are cited as the reason for non-involvement by the young people in the focus groups.

They are also mentioned by the activists, but the activists have found solutions to deal with these barriers and disadvantages. For example, time constraints are often given as an explanation for political inactivity. However, the young activists are prepared to make compromises, even sacrifices in order to be politically involved. Many people also shrink from being labelled a member of a movement or political party. Even activists do not want to be labelled since it means being judged by one's membership and not by one's personality. Being labelled also means having to stand up for the mistakes of one's movement or for opinions in the movement one does not subscribe to. Even among the activists, only few are prepared to submit themselves to a party discipline. One solution is to create space for oneself to voice one's dissent; another possibility is to join an informal network or an NGO rather than a political party. For the non-active young people this disadvantage weighs much more heavily. They want to remain in total control of any decisions taken in their name and demand total agreement between themselves and their movement. Both requirements cannot, of course, be met in political or social movements and processes. Finally, a barrier experienced by activists is that young people tend to be excluded from discussions and decision making by the adults. Instead they are often used for boring work such as sticking posters and distributing leaflets.

7.5 Germany

In the focus groups the reasons for non-participation are in the foreground. Many participants feel that they know too little about political structures and processes to be able to participate and fulfil their duties as an active citizen. There seems to be a lack of self-confidence which inhibits them in judging political facts and to draw conclusions for their own activities. Often, school is made responsible for this lack of knowledge. Further explanations for their inactivity are based on their negative image of politics and the feeling that they cannot do anything about it. Not being listened to, not being taken seriously and not being able to change anything leads to feelings of helplessness among all groups, independent of gender and education. This pessimistic attitude nips good ideas and first successes in the bud by depreciating their value.

The tension between wanting to do something politically and the lack of influence is often solved by claiming not to be the "right type" for political activism. The necessary personality traits are the ability to speak in front of people and to present oneself well. Structural barriers are made out in the rigid party system in which young people have nothing to say and in the alibi function of youth organisations which are, in fact, not taken seriously. Another problem is seen in rural areas where there is no such broad range of opportunities to get involved and where "the old men in local councils" do not listen to the young people. Time constraints are also referred to by the participants with the more self-reflective and self-critical participants admitting their laziness.

In the narrative interviews the parents and other adults play an important role either as promoters of political activism or as object of demarcation and protest. However, most of the interviewees see their activism as a coincidence and cannot remember of conscious decision to get engaged. For the active women their empathy, desire to help others and their communication and organisation skills is decisive for their political career. The active man, on the other hand, plans his occupational and political career very purposefully.

7.6 Great Britain

In the UK focus groups the barriers to political participation mentioned were information deficit and lack of knowledge, disillusionment with the political processes and feeling of lack of power. The latter applied to conventional forms of participation such as voting as well as to unconventional forms such as demonstrations and petitions. Attitudes towards voting are often based on a negative view about politics that first, one individual cannot make a difference and second, that it is difficult to distinguish between the parties. The activists, on the other hand, do have a feeling of empowerment and of responsibility toward their communities and/or society. This difference in empowerment does seem to be a difference in real power but a question of attitude.

The barriers to participation seem to be lower on the local level and local engagement is seen as more stimulating and more rewarding since it has to do with the local community and yields more direct results.

Activism is often the result of mobilisation, of being actively encouraged to get involved. Mobilisation sparks interest and curiosity; mobilisation programmes boost self-confidence, transfer knowledge and experiences and confront young people with a range of new ideas.

7.7 Italy

In Italy, the activists trace their involvement back to friends and fellow students, the school and university environment, and the parents – both, as supporters and adversaries. One interviewee points out how important the contacts with local politicians were to get active in the town council.

For all activists it is their values and ideals which motivate them to get active. They enjoy friendship and mutual support in their political communities, being able to express their own ideas, working for a better community and/or society and assuming responsibility. The mobilisation of civil society is pictured in various ways. One member of a political party would like his peers to get more interested in politics and stop seeing it as something 'dirty'. He suggests getting involved through the conventional political channels improving the system from within. An activist in non-conventional politics does not think that conventional and non-

conventional politics are compatible and promotes direct action. The Lega Nord activist want to strengthen the role of the regions assuming that politics based on a culturally homogeneous community would attract more participants and activists.

The young people's efforts and enthusiasm is not matched by a feeling of efficacy. On the one hand, it is very difficult to change anything, and on the other hand, there is a general lack of interest in public affairs. Only few young people would like to be appointed to a public office. For those who do not plan a political career, a public office would mean losing contact to the community, ceasing with grassroots activities and being subjected to party discipline.

7.8 Slovakia

The Slovak report stresses the importance of political knowledge and skills as preconditions for political participation. Some young activists join a movement or organisation in order to apply their knowledge which they have gained at university. Others are encouraged to join by adults or friends and then proceed to develop knowledge and skills in the course of their engagement. Political knowledge and skills are developed by dealing with concrete issues and problems, getting to know the structures in their organisations as well as the environments of their organisations, such as clients, town councils, ministries. Another dimension is that of social capital, which refers to connections to other people. Being encouraged to think about politics, to join a political movement or being promoted for a political function always depends on knowing people. Especially for young people whose socio-economic and/or educational background does not provide political knowledge and social capital, the involvement in civic and political organisations yields great benefits for their political participation.

7.9 Varied opportunity structures (summary)

Summarising the findings of the individual in-depth interviews several factors can be distinguished with respect to opportunity structures.

Many interviewees believe that involvement is a very personal act and therefore have difficulties to explain what factors influenced them, put it down to "chance" or claim having made no conscious decision to join. Active young people see the reason for their engagement in their intrinsic motivation. Political participation is a means to express one's ideology and political identity, a way of self-realisation and a chance to improve society according to one's ideals. Active young people, although they also experience frustration with the political processes, belief in the power of politics, of mobilisation and the empowerment of citizens. Many young people, especially women, are driven by their altruism and desire to help the weaker and disadvantaged, but there are also young people, for whom political engagement is part of a career plan. For most activists, having fun with friends and the integration in a community of like-minded people is also an important part of their motivation.

Even if motivation is the primary explanation for their political participation, it is obvious that there are several other factors supporting or impeding political participation. One such factor is social capital⁵. Parents, siblings and other relatives, teachers, and peers play an enormous role in sparking the interest, passing on political knowledge and social skills, offering political socialisation and encouragement for activities. Very often, however, young people do not simply take over their parents' views but take them as a starting point to build up their own political identity and world view. Sometimes, parents and teachers even represent opposing views against which the young people develop their own attitudes. Peers often have a special function in that they pave the way into political organisations and activities. They reduce anxieties for the newcomers and integrate them quickly into the new communities, thus providing the psycho-social basis for any commitment. Friends are not only important for young people to get involved but also to remain involved.

One special case of social capital is the contact or ease of contact with politicians and administration staff. The less known it is who young people can turn to, the less open and approachable local communities and politicians are for youth issues the less likely they will get politically involved.

Other important factors are institutions such as schools and universities. On the one hand, schools provide citizenship education and political education, which teach the young people the principles of democracy as well as the structures of and procedures in the political system. This knowledge is a necessary precondition to be able to understand what is going on, to interpret political news, to judge political events and to form one's own opinion. On the other hand, schools and universities "live democracy". There are class and school representatives as well as student unions which are intended to give power to the students. However, schools and universities are not always mentioned in a favourable way. Many young activists just happened to be encouraged by one enthusiastic teacher rather than by citizenship/political education or by the democratic system at school. Quite on the contrary, a lack of citizenship education with appropriate methods and the exclusion of students from information and decision-making processes is relatively often mentioned, particularly among the non-active young people but not only among them.

⁵ See for example Putnam, R. D. (2000) *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York/London/Toronto/Sydney/Singapore: Simon & Schuster; Lin, N. (2001) *Social Capital. A Theory of Social Structure and Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Gabriel, Oscar W.; Kunz, Volker; Roßteutscher, Sigrid; van Deth, Jan W. (2002) *Sozialkapital und Demokratie. Zivilgesellschaftliche Ressourcen im Vergleich*, Wien: Wiener Universitätsverlag; Offe, C. (2002) "Sozialkapital". *Begriffliche Probleme und Wirkungsweise*. In: Kistler, E./Noll, H.-H./Priller, E. (Hg.), *Perspektiven gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhalts. Empirische Befunde, Praxiserfahrungen, Messkonzepte*. Berlin: Ed. Sigma

Lastly, involvement depends on opportunity structures such as the availability of political organisations, projects, programmes and events which are willing to motivate and integrate young people. There seems to be a difference between rural and urban areas in that it is easier to get in contact with local politicians of small communities than in big towns and cities, whereas organisations and networks in urban areas seem to be more open to young people than in rural communities.

The focus group discussions in many ways reflect the lack of these preconditions and opportunities: lack of contact with politically interested or active adults or peers; lack of education which furthers their understanding of political processes, their ability to make informed decisions and their interest in social and political issues. There are many accounts of the failure of teachers and local politicians to respect and react to young people's wishes and suggestions, and of the resulting feeling of powerlessness and apathy. On higher political levels there is an acute awareness of a lack of system responsiveness, something which the non-active young people share with the active young people. The fact that many political organisations and projects have a psychologically high threshold to join especially discriminates against those young people are disadvantaged with respect to self-consciousness, political knowledge and experience as well as social capital.

8 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMS

8.1 Overview: National Contributions

This section will offer a brief analysis of the key concepts and words found in the *language of young people* through the qualitative analysis in the partner countries. This section provides into the key themes surrounding the participation of young people in democracy that have been dealt with in more detail in the earlier, thematic sections of this report. These *insights* should act as reference points for the dangers and opportunities presented by the quantitative analysis.

The key concepts and terms used here are drawn from the national reports, and have tended to originate from the focus groups, because the ‘activists’ in the in-depth interviews were more analytical and varied in their responses. Furthermore, the aim of the in-depth interviews was to record ‘personal narratives’ more than to examine the language of young people (which was a greater priority in the focus groups). The following, terms, phrases and concepts therefore reflect important trends found among young people in the qualitative research, defined in their own language.

Austria

- *Democracy*: power is derived from the people; freedom to express one’s opinion; voting; petitions; demonstrations.
- *Politics*: government; political parties’ bureaucracy.
- *Politicians*: do not keep their promises; do anything to stay in power; don’t know anything about the situation ordinary people are in; do not listen to people like you and me; some are good and try to do something beneficial for the country.
- *Quarrelling*: something that politicians do, ineffective way of dealing with political issues.
- *Political interest*: means interest in political parties and government; does not mean interest in specific issues.
- *Trust*: did not really come up in the interviews; there is trust in the political system but not necessarily in individual politicians; an electorate that is too trusting is probably not good for democracy; often, people get active because they do not trust the people in power.

Italy

- *Politics/ Democracy*: distance; abstract concept; lack of interest; individual disillusionment; fracture between ideals and reality; private interest outside public interest; politics as a dirty world.
- *Political Participation*: moved by young people's private/ individual values and ideals or by a sense of social discomfort; attitude and behaviour conditioned by peer groups, and – sometimes – 'fashion'.
- Young people need to find their own political identity through concrete political actions, anchored in everyday life.

Germany

- *Citizen*: for some the concept was too day-to-day in its use and referred to all people; for some it had to do with the idea of foreigners and immigration; for others it was related to the community.
- *Democracy*: the more educated participants associated this with the Greek concept of 'people power'; some found it harder to describe and associated it with keywords from politics e.g. 'the majority', 'capitalism'.

France:

- *Politics*: responsibilities; ideologies; makes society work; corruption; disillusionment; laws; relationship between people; privilege; hypocrisy; lack of choice; boring; repressive; not listening; managing France; globalisation; democratic rights.
- *Democracy*: majority; representatives; freedom of expression; separation of power; no better system; justice/ rights; equality; voice of the people; the right to vote; having a choice; having a say; democracy works badly; more referenda.
- *Citizenship*: respecting common rules; general interests; civil duty – voting; citizen = worker; participating in the country's life; respecting other people; being socially active; being free to choose your future; living in a community; playing by the rules.
- *Involvement/ Participation*: sharing your time to make things move forward; giving a helping hand; you can't do it by halves; you are part of group; an association doesn't necessarily fulfill your goals; showing a good example; being a good citizen; wanting to make things happen; being useful; being committed to a cause.

Slovakia

- *Politics* means some state management; some system for making rules, but something more than politicians and parties.
- *Regional politics* means something less, but creates possibilities for normal people.

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- *Democracy means freedom*: freedom of ideas, freedom of movement, government of/ by the people, human rights (non-discrimination, equality before the law, the right to life).
- *Participation*: conventional – involved in public process e.g. congress, assembly; non-conventional – protest, citizen action.

Finland

- *Politics*: Getting information; debating and participating in the political system; trying to solve international and global problems; unavoidable way to manage common matters; struggle between social classes and groups; building a better and ecologically sustainable world; unavoidable way to solve problems and conflicts, dishonesty and empty promises; 'Monastic Latin'; action of individual/ group/ network; arena for old fogies; repulsive/ dirty game for politicians; personal/ life solutions are political.
- *Democracy*: working against the power of the political system; small community and symbolic action against the big economical game of so-called democracy in the centre; political influence; open system; the fight for rational and economic interests rising up from organic civil society in the spirit of Scandinavian welfare and American pluralism; will of the people; self-disciplined learning towards responsible and effective life-management and productive citizenship; serious business; social-collective objectivity.
- *Citizenship*: social and political identification; good citizenship; disapproval of non-voting; norm-destroying citizen; ready to suffer on behalf of others, active in voting and social organisations; mobilising civil society; civil society as an arena for struggle.

Estonia

- *Democracy*: associated with different 'freedoms' and rights, foremost with freedom of choice. Other ideas include elections and choosing leaders, power of the people, representation and participation, NGO/NPOs, public initiatives, political parties, participation in state governance and in important decisions, social order.
- *Participation*: included several activities such as voting, keeping oneself informed – following the news in the mass media and discussing politics, participating in organisations and in a political party, involvement in protest actions in extreme causes.
- *Citizenship*: associated with being a member of a political community, obeying laws and paying taxes, being informed about events in society, performing well in a job, initiating cultural and other projects, being kind to other people.
- *Political/ Politician*: includes leadership in society, responsibility for social development, balanced political decisions and professionalism, power relations and power misuse, corruption and scandals, mass media campaigns and

interpersonal communication, empty promises and accomplishing goals, political institutions.

UK

- *Belonging*: ‘friends’, ‘family’ (primary level of attachment); ‘Bournemouth/ Poole’; ‘England/ Britain’; ‘European’.⁶
- *Organised activities*: ‘going for a drink’, ‘playing football’ (leisure based activities – main/ frequently sole area of activities for ‘non-activists’); ‘community activities’ (common among ‘activists’); ‘time and money’ (barriers to participation for all young people – ‘activists’ think it is worth the sacrifice).
- *Politics/ Democracy*: ‘parties’, ‘politicians’, ‘government’ (all these key actors in political system were conflated by ‘non-activists’, but – to a far lesser extent by ‘activists’); ‘lying’ (very common charge from ‘non-activists’ – lack of trust in politicians and political system); ‘arguing’ (common view of bickering politicians among all young people); ‘don’t want to listen’ (very common charge again among ‘non-activists’ against politicians); ‘all the same’ (very common among ‘non-activists’, refuted by ‘activists’); ‘benefits’ (‘non-activists’ don’t see any benefits for themselves in participation, ‘activists’ obviously view participation differently, but also in a less individualistic sense).
- *Participation*: ‘demonstrations’ (one of the two forms of direct action identified – but seen as ineffective by – ‘non-activists’, barely mentioned by ‘activists’ – not major part of participatory life?); ‘voting’ (seen as a key participatory act by all – whether viewed negatively or positively); ‘representation’ (politicians don’t represent young people, according to ‘non-activists’ – ‘activists’ hold similar, if less vociferous opinions on this); ‘local community’ (something stressed in their participatory acts by ‘activists’).
- *Opportunity Structures*: ‘I can’t change anything’, ‘our voices don’t count’ (feeling of powerlessness of ‘non-activists’); ‘I don’t know a thing about it’ (lack of information conceded by ‘non-activists’ and ‘activists’ like – would like this to be improved); ‘protesting doesn’t work’ (feeling of ‘non-activists’ in particular – seemingly illustrated by well-known examples e.g. Iraq); ‘politics can change everybody’s lives’, ‘I’m definitely listened to’ (feelings of empowerment of ‘activists’); ‘don’t get involved... don’t moan’ (frustration of ‘activists’ with their peers); ‘I’ve learnt a lot’ (‘activists’ positive experience from participation – cases of snowballing from original ‘mobilisation’).

8.2 Suggestions for Further Research

The terms and phrases described above should act as ‘signposts’ both for the content and the ‘phrasing’ of questions to young people. The common definitions set out above should contribute to the creation of the original questionnaire, while the more country-specific features might be brought out in the national versions of the survey. With this

⁶ Note: multiple levels are not only found in terms of attachment but in all areas of participation, so must be included in the quantitative analysis.

purpose in mind, the following suggestions represent a synthesis of common and country-specific findings:

1. The nature of 'democracy' both varies and is ambiguous both within and between countries. The concept, furthermore, is abstract in its meaning for most young people, and is only really used in a *normative* sense to express their views about society and politics.
2. It is therefore more relevant for the questionnaire to be asking 'what is politics?' rather than 'what is democracy?', and to view the term 'democracy' – as used in the title of the EUYOUNG project – as a functional term referring to the political systems and societies in which we live.
3. If we must tackle 'democracy', it would be better to use it as an umbrella concept to delimit young people's perceptions of politics e.g. 'How important do you consider the following institutions/ practices to be to a democracy?'. This formulation relates very closely to questions of citizenship.
4. 'Politics', we have discovered, is generally seen by young people to be the 'conventional' political process. It is still necessary, however, to find out what young people consider politics to be in the survey (i.e. does it include NGOs? does it include other civil society groups?) to study the way they connect civil society to the political system.
5. Among young people, furthermore, there is unmistakably a general disaffection with the political systems of Europe. We have to investigate this disaffection, looking at levels of 'trust' in institutions, but also at whether young people think they can influence the political process (opportunity structures) i.e. their sense of 'empowerment'.
6. Perhaps even greater levels of disillusionment are reserved for politicians, who are generally viewed in a very negative light. We must therefore again evaluate 'trust' - in politicians (in general, and then of particular parties), as well as whether young people feel they can 'relate to politicians' and/ or 'influence them' i.e. 'do politicians listen?'
7. A key point here is that our research has tended to show that young people are interested in political issues, but not the political system. We should therefore clearly differentiate the two by assessing how important young people feel specific political issues to be.
8. The term 'citizen' produced varied responses in different countries and across different cultures. In the UK, for example, it is not a concept used by young people (rarely used by people of all ages); in Germany the term is seen as too 'day-to-day', referring merely to 'people in general'; while in France (as in a few other countries) it represents people's sets of values.
9. For reasons of diversity of meaning across countries and within countries, it would therefore be better not to ask direct questions about what citizenship is, but to use it to determine young people's values vis-à-vis society.
10. In addition, citizenship in some countries refer to young people's relationship to the state rather than society (especially at a local level). Here, it might be better to ask 'which of the following activities makes someone a good member of their community?'

11. The definitions of the term 'participation' support the position taken by EUYOUNGPART all along that we must adopt a broad interpretation of the modes of participation.
12. As above, the level of participation is important (e.g. national, regional, local) and should be registered in the survey.
13. Another point is that 'participation' is strongly connected to 'socialisation' through friends, family and/ or society as a whole, so this must also be integrated into the questionnaire.
14. Finally, it is important to remember that – as mentioned above – young people perceive 'politics' in conventional terms. We must therefore make sure to *decouple* the term 'participation' from the term 'political' or 'politics'.

On a more general level, the national partners found that many young people struggled with some of these terms and concepts, so we should make sure that the questions are clear and concise (i.e. not too complex!) in the final survey

9 FOCUS GROUPS VERSUS INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

9.1 Overview: National Contributions

This section looks at the differences and similarities between the focus groups and the individual interviews carried out by national partners in the EUYOUPART qualitative fieldwork (summer 2004). The focus groups were held with *non-activists* and the in-depth interviews with *activists*, but – for almost all countries – the differences between the two formats went somewhat beyond the use of different interview techniques and participatory acts, but also shed light on participants' attitudes towards politics as a whole, as reflected in their behaviour.

Despite the nature of the qualitative work – seeking a broad variety of responses from young people *in their own words* – it was possible to make a number of judgments about their relationship to politics, democracy and participation, which will be followed up in more extensive quantitative fieldwork.

Austria

- The focus groups offered a lot of negative statements about conventional politics, but there were no 'completely negative' attitudes – e.g. *'there are also some good politicians'*.
- Among the more educated focus group participants, there was evidence of social desirability – that one *'ought to do something'*.
- Whilst most of these *non-activists* were able to talk about issues that bothered them, it was difficult – especially for the lower educated among them – to talk about politics and democracy on an abstract level.
- The main difference between the *activists* and the *non-activists* was the former's experience of the political process and political institutions, and their *'embeddedness in networks of active people'*.
- Though both groups displayed frustration with the political system, this was clearly differentiated between the lower educated focus group participants and the *activists*. The former thought that 'people like them... are not listened to', while – for the latter – the *'frustration lies in the complexity... and rigidity of the system'*.

Italy

- The Italian study argued that, aside from activism itself, the differences between the focus groups and individual interviews were characterised by faith in the political system and differing concepts of politics.
- The *activists* had a more positive attitude towards politics, which was seen as 'the genuine expression of democracy' and an *'expression of civil society'*.

Thus, even if the *activists* had a low opinion of politicians, they still believed in politics (the system).

- The *non-activists*, on the other hand, had a deep lack of interest in politics and tended to abstain from any form of political activity. This was reflected in their view of politics as a dirty business that had nothing to do with common people and civil society.

Germany

- The German report noted that the *activists* were hard to 'find', but more readily prepared to take part in an interview on a political theme, compared to *non-activists* who had to be 'persuaded' to take part. Young *non-activists*, particularly in a focus group held at a school, '*were very sceptical, and appeared to scared by the theme "politics"*'.
- The *activists* were much more interested in the subject and prepared to express their opinions. They could relate the discussions to their own experiences and felt comfortable with this subject area.
- For the focus group participants, however, discussing such issues with their peers appeared to be a new experience.

France:

- The study in France showed some clear differences between the focus group participants and the individual interviewees, but also – within the focus groups – between lower and more highly educated young people.
- With regard to politics and institutions, the lower educated *non-participants* were distrustful of politicians, the more highly educated *non-participants* recognised the importance of politics and trusted political institutions (though the female group thought it was too complex), while *activists* both had faith in the political system and how it worked in practice.
- On conventional participation, the lower educated *non-activists* were very cynical about voting, the more highly educated *non-activists* were relatively cynical about voting but recognised its importance, while *activists* saw voting as a duty (even if they had differing levels of tolerance towards abstentions).
- On unconventional participation, the lower educated *non-activists* saw demonstrations as an easy way to participate (even if views differed on its usefulness), the more highly educated *non-activists* were quite negative about demonstrations as a source of conflict, while *activists* considered demonstrations to be a legitimate but – on the whole – not very effective form of expression.

Slovakia

- *Non-activists* saw politics as dirty business.
- *Activists* distinguished clearly between party politics and civic politics.
- Young people with lower levels of education saw politics in a negative light, as self-serving and dominated by personal interests.
- Young people with higher levels of education saw politics as means for achieving common public goals or group interests.

- The male participants were able to speak about politics in a more abstract way than the female participants, who saw politics more as a spectacle (theatre).

Finland

- In Finland, the *activists* were articulate people with strong and convincing views on politics, while most young people (as a whole) had no clear message besides their cynicism and apathy.
- Many of the *non-activists* in the focus groups had a sceptical approach to politics, political activity and political institutions, although they were – in principle – open to conventional forms of participation such as voting.
- The divisions between the young people, however, were just as much due to levels of education as levels of participation. *Activists* (in addition to some highly educated *non-activists*) showed signs of a growing individualism, with a wide variety of interests and orientations, some of whom were intent on *democratising* the present system by becoming better politicians than the current ones.
- The group of *activists*, furthermore, had specific aims, and wished to *change the rules of the game*, and were willing to participate in *new kinds of opportunities for political action*.
- While alternative forms of participation were open for almost all of the young people, only the *activists were ready to influence matters from inside political institutions, networks and parties*.

Estonia

- The Estonian national report states that the individual interviewees (*activists*) were more detailed in their answers, using a wider range of terms to describe the political and social environment. Their argumentation was also more sophisticated and took into account factors that were not mentioned in the group interviews.
- Education played an important role, as people with lower levels of education showed less enthusiasm during their discussions. Their arguments were also bound to personal gains and losses, and they rarely '*moved to an analysis of society as a collective entity*'.

UK

- Both focus group participants and individual interviewees had a negative view of politics, politicians and the political process, though the feeling for *non-activists* was much stronger.
- The *activists* had a much greater degree of knowledge of politics.
- The values and goals of *non-activists* were more individualistic in that *activists* were far more likely to see their political views in relationship to what they thought was good for society as a whole (*solidarity*).
- The central difference between the focus group participants and the individual interviewees was a feeling of 'empowerment' – the *activists* unsurprisingly felt that they could make a difference.
- Both sets of participants had strong views about political issues, though the *activists* were able to articulate their views more convincingly. The focus group

participants were particularly concerned with tangible issues that represented the *here and now*, like Iraq, while the individual interviewees had a broader, more extensive, and more holistic view of political issues on local, national and international levels.

- Another important finding among all young people was the attachment to local issues – not only for *activists*, for whom local politics was the principle level of engagement, but also to *non-activists* who found local (tangible) issues to be the most pressing.

9.2 Conclusions

The national reports illustrated a number of common findings with regard to the differences between the focus groups participants (*non-activists* with mixed levels of education and gender) and the individual interviewees (*activists*). The main point to bear in mind is that: 'it is impossible to speak of "youth" as a collective singular... the internal divisions among young people are at least equally strong as among older folks' (Finland: 84).

The first issue was the general negativity among young people in general about conventional politics and political institutions. However, it is possible to say – across the eight countries – that this cynicism and disillusionment was far greater in the focus groups, and greatest among those lower educated focus group participants.

A second recurrent theme was the prevalence of individualism and individualistic attitudes among young people. On one level, young people as a whole were not bound to the political process, so were attracted by alternative forms of participation. On the other hand, the *non-activists'* political *wish-list* reflected their desire for more personal gains (and fewer losses) from politics, while the *activists* supported political issues that they thought would benefit society as a whole (thus, reflecting their greater *collective* identity).

A third issue that came up – as elsewhere in the national reports – was the issue of 'empowerment'. Although this is a simple rational choice explanation for participation, it needs to be recorded. In simple terms, *activists* felt that they could achieve something through their activities, while *non-activists* believed that people like them could not influence the political process.

Finally, in almost all countries, the level of education of participants proved as important a dividing line (in the focus groups) as whether the young person had *participated* in politics and/ or democracy (between the focus groups and the individual interviews). These differences were observed across the whole range of issues, from perceptions of politics and society to trust in institutions and politicians, and also strongly determined the level of articulation and ability to talk about politics in more than mere symbolic terms.

10 STIMULI FOR QUANTITATIVE WORK

This chapter lists the suggestions which were made by the partners following their experiences with the qualitative interviews. They served for further discussions on the questionnaire at the consortium meeting in Paris.

10.1 Austria

- Awareness of conflict lines in society, suggestion:

“People sometimes talk about conflicts between certain groups in our country. Can you please tell me for each of the following groups whether you think that there is very strong, a strong, a little or no conflict between them.”

Employer/employee; citizens/foreigners; academics/non-academics; men/women, young people/old people; rich/poor; ...

- Solidarity, suggestion:

Agreement with something like the following items

It is the task of the state to guarantee a job for everyone

Everybody should be responsible for his/her own retirement arrangements

The state must redistribute wealth from rich to poor

It's people's own fault if they are unemployed

- Feeling of empowerment, suggestion:

“Do you have the feeling that your opinion is considered in decision-making (or: taken seriously) in?” in family/peer group/school/work place

yes, very much not at all

- Getting adequate information about political issues has several dimensions
 - on local level/regional level/national level/European level/international level
 - source of information (TV, newspaper, radio, friends, parents, school, work, internet,...)
 - quality of information (is there enough background information, is it superficial information, too complicated, too boring, no trust in sources,...)
- Materialist/postmaterialist goals in life

- Suggestion: informal activities (*often, sometimes, rarely, never*)
 - helping friends
 - helping family members
 - helping neighbours
 - organising social activities or events in the neighbourhood
 - organising social activities or events in the peer group

10.2 Estonia

- In the questionnaire there should be a distinction between active and non-active respondents and there should be more detailed questions for the active respondents
- Nationalism, patriotism, xenophobia
- Distrust, disempowerment, alienation from politics
- Knowledge of politics
- Sources of information
- Discussing politics
- Communication and social skills

10.3 Finland

- ‘What does “politics” mean to young people?’
- Preferences for various types of political activity, e.g.: “Issues that are important to me can be best advanced by... political parties/trade unions/NGOs/citizens’ movements/local networks/friends/....”
- Attitudes towards
 - Politics, politicians and political participation
 - Solidarity/individualist
 - Authoritarian/liberal
 - Class conflict
 - Old and new forms of political participation
 - Consumerism
- Belonging

10.4 France

- perception of politics, political system, politicians (trust) see e.g. World Value Survey
- perception of institutions (police, media) see e.g. World Value Survey
- value questions: Schwartz scale
- new cleavages
 - universalism/nationalism
 - authoritarianism/liberalism
 - attitudes toward globalisation
 - attitudes towards Europe
- attitudes to voting, suggestions:
 - I feel a moral obligation to vote
 - Political parties are so similar that I cannot make up my mind who to vote for
 - My vote does not make a difference
 - Politicians never keep their promises, anyway
 - I am interested in elections
 - If you don't vote, democracy does not work
 - It does not matter to me who is in power
(*totally agree – do not agree at all*)
- conventional forms & unconventional forms of political participation, for example:
 - voting
 - signing a petition
 - collecting signatures
 - participating in a demonstration
 - joining a strike (lawful?)
 - occupation
 - attending a political event/meeting
 - contacting a politician
 - writing e-mails or letters
 - joining a political party/ being member of
 - joining an NGO/being member of
 - boycott of certain products
 - talking to other people to raise awareness on a certain issue
 - wearing specific clothing to express a political attitude
 - spraying on walls to express a political attitude
 - breaking things to protest
(*once, twice, more often/regularly*)

- political socialisation, for example:
 - political interest of parents
 - discussions on politics with parents
 - discussions on politics with friends
 - discussions on politics with teacher(s)
 - being encouraged to express one's opinion at school/work place
 - learning about constitutional law at school
 - "living" democracy at school
 - having had the chance to talk to a local politician, organise a students' or citizens' initiative, hear about party programmes
- background variables (gender, education)
 - ISCED code for education of respondent and her/his parents
 - Occupational status of parents
 - Has respondent left full-time education, if yes at what age
- nation-specific questions
- open question
- EU-elections

10.5 Germany

- Left-right scale in Germany seems to have no meaning in the everyday-context of young people's lives. Some even had a completely wrong understanding of it; many did not feel comfortable with it. The conclusion is that we do not really know what we are measuring with this scale.
- NGOs are not considered as political
- Topography (size of home town and rural/urban)
- leadership functions in organisations

Suggestion:

For each of the following organisations could you tell whether..

- a) you are a member
- b) you do voluntary work
- c) you have a function (president, leader of a sub-unit, treasurer, ...)

10.6 Great Britain

- "Levels" of belonging, involvement, participation are important:

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- local
 - regional
 - national
 - European
 - International
- Disconnection from (conventional) politics
 - Trust in politicians
 - Politics is a word with negative connotations
 - Empowerment
 - Mobilisation
 - Engagement a) on the part of the young people and b) on the part of the politicians
 - Which issues are young people interested in?
 - Information

10.7 Italy

- Motivations to get politically active
 - To be with friends
 - Playing moderately transgressive roles
 - Identity formation
 - Expression of one's ideals and values
 - To be closer the people's needs
- Goals of political participation
- Political knowledge
- Distance between young people and political and administrative institutions:

Suggestion: How much do you feel the following institutions are of any help in people's lives?

town council, civil servants, courts, ministries, parties, major, district representatives, unemployment services, trade unions....

10.8 Slovakia

- The level of political participation depends on the political situation in a country, i.e. if country has a stable or chaotic political situation, if the government functions and has a stable parliamentary support
- There is some fear of expressing one's political views or speaking in public

10.9 Summary – Overview of relevant topics for questionnaire

- Interest
 - Interest in what is going on in society, in local community, among friends & family
 - Interest in politics on various levels (regional, national, European, international)
 - Reading/watching news
 - Talking to other people about politics
 - Actively searching for information
- Socialisation, Experiences, Exposure
 - Do parents, teachers, friends talk to you about politics
 - Who influenced your political views?
 - Are you encouraged to express your own view in your family, peer group, school, work place?
 - Are your views taken seriously by your parents, teachers, friends, employers?
 - At school, did/do you have the chance to change things you disapprove of?
 - Did you ever have the chance to talk to a politician?
 - Have you learned about ... at school? (citizenship, constitutional law etc.)
- Information, Mobilisation
 - Sources of information
 - Satisfaction with information
 - Reliability of sources
 - Mobilisation (e.g.: „Have you ever been asked to join a political activity by your parents, friends, teachers, by a politician?“)
- Efficacy
- Behaviour (conventional, unconventional, legal, illegal, in communities, individual)

-
- Comprehensive list of activities (never done, done once, done several times)
 - Questions on voting & not voting, why not, if yes, which party and why
 - Attitudes
 - Individualist/collectivist
 - Materialist/postmaterialist
 - Authoritarian/liberal
 - Conflict lines in society
 - Stability of political views
 - Ideology
 - Problems of democracy (Politicians do not listen, too much power of economy, politicians do not keep their promises, spend too much time on destructive quarreling, too few chances to influence decision-making in between elections, ...)
 - European identity and attitudes toward European politics
 - European identity
 - Attitudes toward European politics, e.g.
 - too little power of European Parliament,
 - has nothing to do with my life,
 - too nationalistic,
 - do not really know what is going on in Brussels,
 - Europe is only about a common economy, ...
 - Social capital
 - Contact with and getting help from...family, friends, club members
 - Membership in voluntary organisations... (member, voluntary work, function)
 - Context
 - Satisfaction with present general economic situation in country
 - Satisfaction with general economic situation in country in 10 years
 - Satisfaction with present general political situation in country
 - Satisfaction with general political situation in country in 10 years
 - Satisfaction with present personal economic situation.
 - Satisfaction with personal economic situation in 10 years
 - Social background

11 SUMMARY

11.1 D9: “Comparative report on qualitative research findings” (August 2004)

It is hard to say anything precise about the relations of present-day young people to politics without letting them voice their own views. Just here we have the qualitative objective of the EUYOUNGPART-Project. In the media the youth and its political engagement is attributed by the word „sceptical“ and politicians speak about passive, well-being generations. But if they lack interest in politics, how would they even speak about it? Of course, it would be possible to critically analyse publications written and read by young people, trying to detect 'between the lines' what is said about politics, even when it is not explicitly discussed. The crucial point here is the fact that we have to turn around the conventional research setting: we are not analysing young people's political concepts and participation only in conventional or institutional political terms. On the contrary, we are analysing, also, 'political' participation and institutions through the terms and discourse of young people's own culture! Some way we began the work in the research situation of the clean board and tried to listen by the 'grounded theory' young people and inductive way built up the picture-horizons opening in the interviews.

The common writing of guidelines, samples of interviewees, eight national research practices and reports as well the comparison of national interpretations and this comparative report constitute a nice reflective ensemble in qualitative work of EUYOUNGPART. All the phases, selection of the informants and levels in the analyses as well as national contexts had to be kept track of this interpretative game. We were successful, but the process took long time – from the winter 2003 to August 2004. We have produced the deliverables of EUYOUNGPART: D7: “Guidelines for in-depth interviews and qualitative data analysis” (December 2003); D8: “Collection of working papers on qualitative research findings” (June 2004); D9: “Comparative report on qualitative research findings” (August 2004). Step by step persons found themselves as the reflecting researchers and they had a common focus in their work.

The samples of interviewed informants in each partner country fared well after long-lasting and hot discussion determining the complexion of object group. The present samples forms many-sided groups of informants discussing in the appointed main contexts by nationally dynamic styles. The interpretative means/methods and the styles to write the national reports varied. The analysis by 'paraphrasing', classifying by types, hermeneutic-rhetorical reading-ways, historical-cultural intentionalism (in the spirit of Quentin Skinner) and systematic textual analyses were in service. It was possible to understand the contexts and interpretative language games beyond the national cultures and methods. And in front of the appearing problems, the partners inspired and helped each others.

Above mentioned theses suggesting a de-politicisation of youth appears less convincing today. Not only because they are, as mentioned above, often put forward by those who have 'vested interests' to defend. Far more important is that claims of this kind can in general hardly be opposed or defended without specifying one's standpoint: one's criteria and the thematic or temporal respects of the argument. Furthermore, those presenting such

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arguments do not realise that such concepts as politics are nowadays susceptible to opposing and even contradictory interpretations. The issues and solutions in everyday life (social capital in Estonia, professional projects in Finland) and strong and pejorative attitude of dissatisfaction and opposition (In Britain, crucial groups of young people are criticising Iraq War and the unresponsiveness of the politicians) are relevant political acts of young people. These interpretations in particular should be studied, not the positive or negative appraisals of such labels as 'polities' by various audiences.

11.2 Three participatory landscapes

Our analysis refers to some important conclusions. First of all, it is impossible to speak of 'the youth' as a collective singular in the sense of a subject adopting more or less identical positions. Rather the internal divisions among young people are at least equally strong as those among their elders – both in their attitudes towards politics and in the figurative language they use to conceptualise politics. As a tendency, however, we can detect a more or less clear generation-bound shift from one paradigm to another. This shift appears to be explicitly negative. It is a rejection of the collective and institutional paradigm of the established forms of politics. Instead, young authors present a wide and colourful spectrum of 'nefative' views and participation cultures. The way to collect the group interview sample among the 'non-active' youth produced a rich text corpus over this 'non-active' world. Here the use of 'political'-words proved quite tautological. We can speak of a collective tautology, of a common caricature of the young peoples' political dissatisfaction. Some of the discussants avowed their ignorance or 'fool's paradise' of society and political system, but a major part of 'discontented' discussants spoke about politics in an extremely shameless manner.

This group of young people have a clear message to politicians: their passive, less-reflected or cynical style and symbolical movement. This includes both moralistic anti-politicians and those who want to replace the present dirty play with the young people's own fair play (similarly as in sport, school, friendship, erotics or even in economy). This group, however, tends to reject playing as such - because of its many intrigues and immoral conduct – in favour of binding politics to substantial moral rules of conduct which are assumed to prevail in other areas of life. After the analyses of transcribed thematic interviews it is easy to conclude that this group lives in every partner country but it has diverse relevance in each country. For these youngsters It is hard to find any responsive connections to conventional policy/polity and difficult to understand the special nature of the political phenomenon and system full of contradictions, rhetorical tricks and lack of common (honest) language; the politics means here, most often, an own-ruled (moral way) dirty game (somewhere there, up) and the situation where a politician retracts her/his promises. But all of these people aren't totally incapable or living in a political vacuum. Sometimes they are voting and demonstrating, sometimes they have debating on hot political issues. Sometimes the main problems of political participation are bound with hopeless contexts (less-educated, small social capital) and here the basic and 'small' experiences seeming firstly unpretentious act could be the way to 'empowerment'. Some way politicians have to take cognizance this problem in

their integrative programs – that is to say, mainly by media living dissatisfaction, pejorative attitude and potential opposition.

The second group is rather oriented towards changing the rules of playing, in the sense of opening and democratising the chances for all citizens to become players, as well as in the procedural sense of changing the rules to be closer to the ideal of 'fair play'. This group has experienced the rise of stable democracy as a chance for a real and competent individualism and theme- and situation-bound chances in politics. They believe in new kinds of opportunities for political action and play (Spielraum), seeking new forms of communities and alternatives to the present 'risk societies' assuming their own responsibilities. Most of the activists and well-educated persons in interviews are thinking this way. These people in the common text corpus are carefully entering into the life of political institutions and, especially, collective parties and their youth bodies. In many countries just this group experienced also in conventional political arenas and groups had the most sophisticated critics on political establishment and ineffectiveness of political channels and responsibilities. The political floors are open, new and old political cultures are mixed and the means of political participation (concept of politics) is reflected by the theme, contexts and situation. In the politics they see many levels from local to global.

Among the young discussants we can detect a small group of play-breakers, a third group who have joyfully accepted the playful character of politics and are ready to use it as a chance to alter the whole style of politics. Some of the well-educated persons, the feminists, activists in consumerism, the anarchist, (left or right) extremists, members in global movements (Atac, Greenpeace, actual movements), members in strong youth sub-cultures and social-ethical professionals are play-breakers, ready for radical and illegal debates and participatory means. They want to act politically by breaking away from the established games and by inventing new forms of play. It is in this group that the rhetoric of earnestness belonging with the traditional organised, institutional and collective forms of politics is most clearly rejected. This group of interviewed persons have artistic or literary heroes and references, such as radical liberal or social economists, stars in popular culture, national charismatic (historical) figures, Milan Kundera and Antonio Negri, whose playful or anarchistic style of acting 'alternative', 'charismatic' or 'destructive' ways they want to transfer into politics. Often these persons are active in projective way, autonomous and independent social-ethical networks and themes are relevant for them or they get more power and motivation at the level of light-way-collective experiences of „empowerment“. And they will not leave their work unfinished. In their action programs and back pockets we could find an alternative that points beyond the old democracy founded on the power of collectives.

11.3 Individual, collective, life-political – sliding limits of commitment and identity

The National Reports made it clear that Young People in general and the 'non-activists' in particular, did not participate in many freetime activities, and when they did participate in these activities they related very much to leisure-time pursuits – what we might call 'hobbies'. These activities also tended not to be organised group activities, but

unspecific social gatherings with friends and family. The lack of participation in these activities made this a very thin section, but this lack of participation is important in itself, demonstrating the lack of connection of young people not only to political groups but also to groups in civil society. This is illustrated by the quote in one of the national reports that: The general opinion from the focus group interviews is that young people are devoted to work and studies. They rarely participate in organised activities. Sometimes the hobby and the political judgments and politically inspiring debates meet (eg. movies of Michael Moore, sci-fi and cultural products). In general, young people living their hectic everyday have no resources and time for 'free time'.

Especially the discussants in post-socialist countries stressed the differences between men and women in terms of freetime pursuits. In Slovakia, young men saw freetime activities as an escape/ relaxation from social strains, young women saw freetime as a space for communication with family and relatives. In Tallinn, the importance of voting was stressed by men, and non-political non-profit organisations by women. Distinctly often the 'non-activists' displayed a strong, though not overwhelming, feeling of individualism and scepticism about participation in organised activities: e.g. aside from small groups of friends, *'I wouldn't join an organised club, I'd just do it myself'*. But the levels of individualism and solidarity varied strongly from country to country in these small sample groups; the social way to operate is somehow a (light way) collective skill in political world. But it is not popular issue among young people, although the business trainers are enthusiastically speaking on (collective) team work!

Some countries defined what they meant by 'non-political participation': it means *'helping friends on the one hand and involvement in social activities on the other'*. Here, *'the border between the political and the social is blurred'* – 'non-activists' would not recognise their activities as political, and some 'activists' would not recognise work they did as political so as not to taint it with the negative view of the political process (UK). In Italy, irreconcilable differences between conventional and non-conventional politics were highlighted, explaining the fact that young people's organised activities were so oriented towards civil society vis-à-vis politics. In Germany the idea of interaction was held up to be important – especially among highly educated men (something young people were be tempted to term 'political'): *'it is politics in so far as one must defend their own viewpoint against other arguments'*. This was nevertheless tempered by the young people's general disillusionment with politics and the political process recorded elsewhere in this report. In terms of engagement/ interaction over politics – differences over how young people were informed about politics were highlighted in Germany, as the better educated read newspapers, listened to the radio, surfed the net for news, whilst the less educated got their information 'on the street' and in the 'U-Bahn'. Young people – mostly youth with fewer qualification in France) were sometimes reluctant to *'own up to'* their volunteer work/ social activities, as it exposed them to the criticism and cynicism of their peers – *'this work is a personal thing'*.

Families and peer groups are the most important communities young people belong to. They are particularly relevant for the identity construction of young people with a low educational level, poor socio-economic background and risky life trajectories. In their lives, which are characterised by anxieties and insecurities, intimate and stable relationships are a psycho-social anchor or 'capital'. Other important sources of identity

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are occupational and socio-economic status as well as ethnicity (ethnic identity). A range of political issues –in a broader sense - arises in the context of living conditions, life management, life styles and career plans. On the one hand there is the constant struggle for material security and psycho-social well-being to a greater or smaller extent depending on the individual's material and social resources. Politically, this includes questions about labour markets, education systems and social welfare schemes. It hard or idealistic to build independent political projects on the social meanings and alternatives living independently from economy and schooling system.

On the other hand, one finds "*life politics*" which aims at the opportunities to lead one's life and build self-constructed biographies according to one's own ideals. Here the risk-sonetal reflection (consumption, life-standards, profession's social-ethical aspects) mediates structures and 'personal'. This aspect not only refers to the material basis of an individual or group. It also implies a dispute over norms and values in society as well as a struggle for access to cultural and ideological goods. Even if many young people do not define these concerns as political, talk about them in very idiosyncratic ways and never come near a collective political action, these concerns are at the heart of the political realm.

Relevant, but someway secondary, intermediaries between individual and society are, also, schools/universities, work places, voluntary associations and local communities. While none of these communities play a dominant role in the young people's narratives and discussions, there is ample evidence of some common elements which can strengthen group identity and facilitate involvement. In the positive accounts of these communities a feeling of safety and mutual respect - resulting from knowing the people, speaking a common language, knowing the rules and customs, being informed about what is going on in the community, and being taken seriously. Keeping in mind the potential for involvement in these institutions it is surprising to find either very little or negative comments about them in the focus groups. Experiences range from boring political education, not being informed and included in decision-making processes at school and work, to alibi activities on the part of politicians.

Territorial identities are a dimension which is not prevalent in everyday life. It only becomes tangible when there is a necessity to distinguish between in-group and out-group. The identification as someone belonging to a certain region or country is dependent on where the interaction partner is from. It is not informative to describe oneself e.g. as German to another German. On the other hand, it is probably too much information for an American if told that one is from Bavaria.

11.4 Furthermore crucial contexts, identities and belonging-relations

The relationship between regional and national identities varies across Europe and seems to depend on cultural, historical and political circumstances. Contrary to France, for example, the Italian young people emphasise the cultural differences between the Italian regions. Historical and political reasons are responsible for strong regional identities in Scotland or the Basque country and a lack of national identities. In general, however, there is a positive relationship between identities, i.e. a strong regional identity correlates with a strong national identity and a relatively strong European identity.

Although there is a lot of activities with cross-national interactions as tourism and the Internet (freedom without spatial narrowness into an place) and these contacts mix and develop new international consciousness and skepticism towards nationalism and other kind of particularities, the European identity is only slowly emerging. There is more scepticism in some countries than in others and the speed with which European identities develop differs between the well-educated and politically interested, on the one hand, and the lesser educated, non-political young people, on the other hand. In the context of political participation several concerns are relevant. First, the EU is seen as an economic union which lacks competencies in the social and political sphere. Second, there is too much nationalistic struggle in the EU institutions and third, there is fear that one voice counts even less on the European level than on the national level. A strong counterbalance against the interests of the economy in the form of a powerful European trade union and lively grassroots movements and citizens' initiatives on the European level is not yet visible.

Linked to national (and European) identities is the question of citizenship since it is a formalised way of belonging. Citizenship is a very abstract notion for many young people who are not aware where and how the state impinges on their lives. Even very youth specific laws such as the youth protection law is hardly ever mentioned because these young people never come in contact with it in everyday life. However, there are also a substantial number of young people for whom citizenship does have a meaning. They primarily associate it with political and social rights and the problem of inclusion and exclusion. Citizenship also implies obligations, ranging from legally defined duties to socially defined norms and responsibilities. Voting and community involvement are standard examples for moral obligations even among the non-politically active pointing to an interesting gap between normative ideals and actual behaviour.

Discussions about the definition of a good citizen open up another field of tension. On the one hand, a good citizen is a law-abiding, polite, obedient and submissive individual and on the other hand, a critical, politically interested and active individual. The discussions can thus be characterised by two positions: civic obedience and civic courage. This last element is rising up together with the requirements of the economy and school, a need of entrepreneurial ethos and flexible risk-taking individual. Civic disobedience is not an issue in any of the national reports. Political identities are an important element in the identity construction of the politically active young people. What distinguishes them from their non-politically minded peers is that there is a more or less stable ideology or world view (sometimes, active biographical attitude) which runs like a red thread through their lives. This attitude will have power in the individually and politically open places and crossroads of the life. It can be twisted, changed or adapted but it provides a basis to judge new events and integrate new information.

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What is true for identities in general is especially true for the political identities of these young people. They are fluid and ever shifting. The number of young people who simply adopt their parents' ideology and remain faithful to one party is very low in our samples. Rather, young people actively appropriate ideologies and world views (of their homes' cultural capital, in general) and adapt them to their own individual use. For them, there is no black and white and they deliberately take a detached view on party ideologies and political processes. This attitude is mirrored in the refusal to accept strict borders between the political in-group and out-groups. In practice this is achieved by not joining political parties and/or efforts to maintain bridges between groups. Among the non-active young people one may certainly also find political interest and political or socio-political values and attitudes. However, in most cases these values do not form a major element of the young people's identity.

The involvement is a very personal act for many discussants in our text corpus and therefore many of interviewed persons have difficulties to explain what factors influenced them, put it down to "chance" or claim having made no conscious decision to join. Active young people see the reason for their engagement in their intrinsic motivation. Political participation is a mean to express one's ideology and political identity, a way of self-realisation and a chance to improve society according to one's ideals ('new' politics, identity- and life-politics). Active young people, although they also experience frustration with the political processes, belief in the power of politics, of networking mobilisation and the empowerment of citizens. Many young people, especially women, are driven by their altruism and desire to help the weaker and disadvantaged, but there are also young people, for whom political engagement is part of a career plan. For most activists, having fun with friends and the integration in a community of like-minded people is also an important part of their motivation remembering us "*long-lived informal*" aspects of social life and group traditions: "*I'm joining political study group because of meeting a nice girl/boy!*"

Even if motivation is the primary explanation for their political participation, it is obvious that there are several other factors supporting or impeding political participation. One such factor is social capital. Parents, siblings and other relatives, teachers, and peers play an enormous role in sparking the interest, passing on political knowledge and social skills, offering political socialisation and encouragement for activities. Very often, however, young people do not simply take over their parents' views but take them as a starting point to build up their own political identity and world view. Sometimes, parents and teachers even represent opposing views against which the young people develop their own attitudes. Peers often have a special function in that they pave the way into political organisations and activities. At rhetorical level it is easy for young people to explain the political participatory acts by saying "*my lads drew me in...!*" They reduce anxieties for the newcomers and integrate them quickly into the new communities, thus providing the psycho-social basis for any commitment. Friends are not only important for young people to get involved but also to remain involved.

11.5 Social capital – opportunity structures

One special case of social capital is the contact or ease of contact with politicians and administration staff. The less known it is who young people can turn to, the less open and approachable local communities and politicians are for youth issues the less likely they will get politically involved. Other important factors are institutions such as schools and universities. On the one hand, schools provide citizenship education and political education, which teach the young people the principles of democracy as well as the structures of and procedures in the political system. This knowledge is a necessary precondition to be able to understand what is going on, to interpret political news, to judge political events and to form one's own opinion. On the other hand, schools and universities "live democracy". There are class and school representatives as well as student unions which are intended to give power to the students. However, schools and universities are not always mentioned in a favourable way. Many young activists just happened to be encouraged by one enthusiastic teacher rather than by citizenship/political education or by the democratic system at school. Quite on the contrary, a lack of citizenship education with appropriate methods (eg. idea of school as an action-centre supporting independent and political world-views and knowledge basis of young people) and the exclusion of students from information and decision-making processes is relatively often mentioned, particularly among the non-active young people but not only among them.

Lastly, involvement depends on opportunity structures such as the availability of political organisations, projects, programmes and events which are willing to motivate and integrate young people. There seems to be a difference between rural and urban areas in that it is easier to get in contact with local politicians of small communities than in big towns and cities, whereas organisations and networks in urban areas seem to be more open to young people than in rural communities. The focus group discussions in many ways reflect the lack of these preconditions and opportunities: lack of contact with politically interested or active adults, generations or peers; lack of education which furthers their understanding of political processes, their ability to make informed decisions and their interest in social and political issues. There are many accounts of the failure of teachers and local politicians to respect and react to young people's wishes and suggestions, and of the resulting feeling of powerlessness and apathy.

On higher political levels there is an acute awareness of a lack of system responsiveness, something which the non-active young people share with the active young people. The fact that many political organisations and projects have a psychologically high threshold to join especially discriminates against those young people are disadvantaged with respect to self-consciousness, political knowledge and experience as well as social capital. Fortunately, interviewed representants of influential groups or youth councils are aware of these recruiting problems and they are testing various action cultures. As it best these youth councils means autonomous action of youth, consciousness of the chances of this action and visions on decision-making positions striving for extension of these action chances. As we have heard, young people will easily recognize the one-sided integration strategies and projects of 'game-democracy-and-election'.

11.6 Political and democratic self-understanding – premises of political participation

The ideas on democracy and politics among discussants were culturally contextual, situational and theme-bound views. The major participants in group interviews were non-active persons: most of them had cool or sceptical distance to (real) political arenas. But also non-active discussants presented and analysed nice ways the 'bottleneck-problems' in political legitimation and responsibilities. But the activists (mainly the participants in individual interviews) had, besides their surprisingly strong scepticism, open-minded ideas and critical reflections on conventional and 'new-political' cultures of participation and concepts of politics and democracy. On the one hand, the political participation chances and democracy were seen by pejorative and cynical terms as unreliable; politicians are not listening to the people, they have their 'own-ruled' game of an elite and they are doing whatever keeps them in power. On the other hand, it was acknowledged that the democratic and political functions are difficult jobs and responsibilities, it is hard to make the right decisions and always be ready for attacks made by other politicians. Democracy appeared, in general, more trustful way than any other mechanism in political dialog; the democracy is an indispensable way to face another person and group – for to find the third chance over the asymmetries and contradictions and it will be the way to name the '*smallest common denominator*'!

The concepts of 'politics', the (real) 'politicians' and their 'political activities' were, most often, in use as the synonyms. Democracy referred sometimes to legal institutions and realistic problems in democratic conventions of politics in each country, but some discussants understood it broad way understanding it as an open chance to take part in the decision-making process, real responsible moves and 'conversational democracy' at the civil society and its plural debates. Concrete 'touches' to the political processes, media and politicians especially at the local level were crucial almost in all countries. A group of interviewed persons were aware of their bad knowledge on political world and democracy. Some of their (unreflected or naïve) suggestions were in distinctive contrast to the idea of democracy (refusal of the political rights among senior citizens, believe in consensualism and power of the specialists, premises of truthfulness in democratic discussion etc.), but people do not always realise that. Among the groups assorted in the qualitative data were only few 'fundamentalist' authoritarian/totalitarian way overturning the democratic rules of the game. Maybe, those young discussants who didn't respect democratic norms have never faced in their every day discourses these issues. They might have developed a more critical view had they had the opportunity to discuss the issues more often or in more detail.

Another major critique of less-active discussants was that politicians do not know about the "*real life*" of people and make decisions against the interest of the people. "*They only look at themselves*" ... "*what we can decide on are really the unimportant things, which they let us decide on, like that, and the really important things they come to a decision among themselves...*" This moralizing and criticizing attitude is more realistic and it seems like elite-theoretical hypothesis or basic politological cynicism, where the gap between people and own-ruled political elite is relevant.

This sceptical remark of elite-theorists doesn't mean the fact that there are no political means in the hands of 'many' against the 'the chosen few' (Machiavel): already the embittered and ironic eye of the ,many' implies political control! This remark is near by the common and quite universal slogan: "*The politicians are fighting for their own interests...*" For example Weber defined modern politics in a way where the politician's own interest and collective (particular) needs could work together! The more educated and active discussants – ready to political game or the restructuration of the rules in political game - were risk-societal way ready to politicize and polititick with all kind of problems and tensions actual between civil society and state or between groups and individuals (consumerism, local problems discussed in different networks, direct action, the lack of standards to solve problems in neighbouring communities, environment, risks of everyday life, Iraq War). Despite this active orientation they were not ready for collective mobilisation in political participation.

The Austrian remark on participatory landscape where there may be two elements that differentiate today's young people from their peers in the 70s and 80s is widespread. First, political movement and cultural movement do not coincide. Even in those few events like the "*street party protest*" where protest is linked with fun and socialising with peers, the political component of the event is completely denied by the adults. Second, the young generations at the beginning of the 21st century are "disenchanted". There is an acute awareness of the limited effects of one's action even if it is mass protest. The 'new-atheistic' nature of the on-line media influences into the same direction. Amoral and scandalous news of media aren't encouraging idealist mobilisation of young people.

In the British text corpus several ,hot' issues of dissatisfaction rose up and local democracy, experiences of ,empowerment' and Iraq War were crucial themes. In France discussants emphasized tolerant, constructive and consensual values – a 'tradition of civic demonstrations' doesn't dominated the text corpus. In Finland young people ignore the moralistic differentiation of 'black-and-white' in political debate and they are open-minded to democratic and political projects in conventional and life-political levels when "*the time and situation is ready*". The interviewed group in Germany became by no special way inspired in new social movements and many discussants arow their bad knowledge on democracy and politics. In the Italian data we could find sophisticated and contradictory analysis on 'new politics' and historical views reflecting the alternatives for political disintegration, corruption and one-dimensional church. In the texts of Slovakian interviews live together highly political way the negative and positive political utopias, and some young intellectuals are describing future visions inspired in Europe and new successful experiences. The Estonian youth is thinking that the Western orientation and the modernisation process of petty-state Eastonia need stability and sophisticated, open political reflection – a Russian-speaking minority have to be integrated into the process.

11.7 Freedom's children

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Although, by the very nature of these qualitative reports their strength lies in the diverse picture they paint of young people's relation to political participation and personal biographies, a few general comments can be made. First, concepts of youth participation in politics and democracy cannot be limited to evaluations of their participation in conventional forms of politics. The research found both conventional ('old') and unconventional ('new') forms of participation to be relevant to the young people of today. The Finnish report characterises the findings of the EUYOUPART research across Europe in the following way: although traditional forms of participation remain 'alive... in the late-modern era we need a broader vision of the landscape of young people's political participation' to include activities such as consumer action, civil resistance and global movements.

Another important finding, with regard to political participation (and the motivations behind it), was its very high dependency upon the 'saliency' or 'tangibility' of a particular issue. In short, young people have a sense of 'realism' – of 'objectives and the matching of resources to ends'. This is the crucial factor in the chain of events that leads to participation. First of all, *'interest in politics largely depends on the perception that politics "matters"'*. If the channels of participation are open for the expression of these interests, then participation *may happen*. Finally, as noted elsewhere in this report, young people's evaluation of effectiveness is key: 'the likelihood of any participation would be greatly increased if the young people could feed a real impact from their participation'. If young people's evaluation of the efficacy of the channels of participation is positive, participation *is likely*. Although the conventional means of participation (voting, collective mobilisation and the spirit of one-dimensional enlightenment) have abated, the situation-bound, individualistic and unconventional projects (realistic reflection on ends and means) have replaced them.

In the national reports, there were some contrasting results on the importance of individual versus group participation. While some noted young people's belief in the insignificance of individual action and the futility of trying to influence politics (e.g. Estonia, Germany), most noted that alternative forms of participation are becoming more popular. Therefore, although young people are sceptical about their ability to influence the political process, there is nevertheless increased enthusiasm for these alternative forms of participation. This probably relates to the fact that young people are turned off by the political process yet have strong views on political issues.

Finally, it is worth noting a few differences between activists and non-activists. First, activists can be characterised not only by the relative frequency and intensity of their participation, but also by the breadth of activities and their personal biographies (history of participation). Unlike the non-activists, their participation is spurred by ethical concern for some issue(s) or groups(s) in society. In sum, the activists are different social animals, who – for whatever reasons – value solidarity despite the increasing individualisation of society in terms of values (Inglehart) and life-styles (Giddens). As we have seen among young people in eight partner countries the idea of 'social care' is living and we could speak about individualism with risk-societal reflection and altruistic attitude.

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This is how and where “*freedom’s children*” display an unarticulated ‘double strategy’. They are an actively un-political younger generation because they take the life out of the self-involved institutions and thus force upon them the “*Hamlet question*”: “*to be or not to be?*” “*This Western variant of ‘anti-politics’ (Gyorgy Konrad) , which also opens up the opportunity to enjoy one’s own life with the best conscience in the world, is supplemented and made credible by a self-organized concern for others which has broken free from large organizations. Freedom’s children practice a seeking, experimenting morality that ties together things that seem mutually exclusive: egoism and altruism, self-realization and active compassion, self-realization as active compassion. Ultimately this amounts to questioning the monopoly of the custodians of the public interest on defining the public interest.*”(Beck, Ulrich – Beck–Gernsheim, Elisabeth 2002, p. 159; “Individualization. Institutionalized Individualism and its social and Political Consequences”. London: SAGE.)

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