

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

**Deliverable 8: «Collection of Working
Papers on Qualitative Research Findings»/
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All working papers are based on the qualitative research that was undertaken by the consortium partners in all participating countries in January and February 2004. The qualitative research consisted of 2 parts: Interviews with politically active young people and focus groups with politically non-active young people. Various approaches were taken to analyse the data. The national working papers follow a common structure (themes) that was designed prior to the analyses. National results will form the basis for a comparative analysis of the qualitative results across countries.

Table of Contents

1	Section 1: Data collection	4
2	Section 2: Summaries and observations of focus groups and interviews.....	10
3	Section 3: Theme 1 – Belonging and Identity.....	11
4	Section 4: Theme 2 – Organised Activities, participation, activities aside from political participation.....	13
5	Section 5: Theme 3 – Politics, democracy.....	15
6	Section 6: Theme 4 – Political Participation.....	22
7	Section 7: Theme 5 – Opportunity structures for participation.....	31
8	Section 8: any other topic - civic obedience.....	34
9	Section 9 Comparison of focus groups versus individual interviews	35
10	Section 10: Definition of key concepts and terms.....	36
11	Section 11: Stimuli for quantitative work.....	37
12	CONCLUSIONS.....	38

1 Section 1: Data collection

1.1 Description of sample

The sample for the qualitative work is made up of young people aged 18 to 25. Most of the participants live in Vienna or in villages near Vienna. Great effort was put into a proper distribution of gender and education. Below, the details of the participants are given. The names of the participants were changed to guarantee anonymity.

Focus groups

Focus group 1: 4 people, 18-25, male and female, graduated from an upper secondary school

Ella: 22, female, lives in Moosbrunn (Lower Austria), in education, has a partner, lives with her parents, no political activities, potential political interests: social issues;

Daniel: 25, male, in education, single, lives alone, no political interest or activity; hobbies: sports, computer;

Vera: 24, female, in education, has a partner, lives alone, no political activities, political interest: nature, environment;

Conny: 23, female, in education, single, lives alone, no political activities, political interests: animal protection rights and environmental protection; hobbies: dogs, music, dancing;

Dieter: 19, male, employed ("Zivildienst"), upper secondary education, has a partner, lives alone; no political interest and activities; hobbies: music;

Focus group 2: 4 people, 18-25, female and male, graduated from an upper secondary school

Sonja: 24, female, in education, has a partner with whom she lives together, her political activity is voting, her interests are in labour market and education policies, hobbies: literature, cinema, nature, reading about the economy;

Maria: 25, female, unemployed, upper secondary education, has a partner, lives alone, political activities: voting, interests: taxes, health system; hobbies: sports, Russian, Japanese architecture;

Heinz: 20: male, in education, upper secondary education, single, lives with parents, political activities: demonstrations, voting; potential interests: "depends on my own and society's situation", hobbies: music, sports, philosophy;

Focus group 3: 4 people, 18-25, male, no upper secondary school

Manfred: 23, male, in education, single, living in flatsharing community, political activity: voting, possible political interests: cooperation between the state and the church; special interests: youth work, computer;

Reinhard: 20, male, employed, lower secondary education, single, lives with parents, political activities: voting, signing petitions, possible political interest in the Green Party, hobbies: internet and parties;

Günther: 21, male, in education, single, lives alone, no political interest and no political activities; hobbies: culture and history;

Jürgen: 18, male, in education, single, living with parents, political activities: school representative; hobbies: music and friends;

Nick: 18, male, in education, single, living with parents, no political activities, potential interest in socialism, hobbies: ice hockey, football, music, volleyball, internet;

Thomas: 21, male, employed, compulsory school, single, lives with parents, no political activities, possible political interest: EU enlargement, hobbies: cars, music;

Udo: 18, male, in education, single, lives with parents, no political activities; hobbies: sports;

Peter: 18, male, in education, single, lives with parents, no political activities; hobbies: sports, music;

Igor: 18, male, in education, single, lives with parents, no political activities; hobbies: sports, music;

Arthur: 22, male, in education, single, lives in flatsharing community, no political activities, potential interest in social issues, hobbies: PCs, internet, books;

Focus group 4: 4 people, 18-25, female, no upper secondary school

Marion: 18, female, lives in Vienna, employed, lower secondary education, lives with partner; apart from voting and thus supporting one political party no political activities; possible interest in measures against unemployment and more opportunities for discussions; her hobbies are her friends, riding, and she is member of the Landjugend which is an organisation for rural youth associated with the National Farmers' Union.

Irmi: 18, female, lives in Wiener Neudorf (small town very close to Vienna), employed, lower secondary education, single, lives with parents; her political activity is voting, her interests are reading, shopping and walking;

Jenny: 18, female, lives in Biedermansdorf (small town near Vienna), employed, lower secondary education, is married and has a child; her political activity is voting; her hobbies are reading and going for walks;

Focus group 5: politically active young people

Rita: 20, female, in education, lives in Maria Enzersdorf (Lower Austria), is single and lives with her parents; she is member of Greenpeace, her interest is in environmental protection and her hobbies are dancing, travelling, sailing, reading and going out;

EUYOUPART

Political Participation of Young People in Europe

HPSE-CT-2002-00123

Christl: 21, female, employed, upper secondary education, single, lives in a flatsharing community; she leads a youth group of a religious organisation and is socio-politically very active; her hobbies are playing the guitar and languages;
 Barbara: 22, female, in education, single, lives alone, she is member of a student organisation; her political interest is in the UN and EU, her hobbies are travelling and Third World Aid;
 Manuela: 21, in education, has a partner, lives in a flatsharing community; she is president of the Catholic Youth Austria and socio-politically very engaged; her political interest is in NGOs; she likes reading, singing and travelling;
 Wolfgang: 24, male, in education, single, living with parents, political activities: he is interested in Green politics and works for the Green party; his hobby is climbing.

Individual interviews:

Interview 1: Rudi: 25, male, in education (Forest economy at the University for Agricultural Studies), single, living alone, political activities: worked for the WWF, for the Student Union, and is now active for the Green party; he is interested in environmental politics and higher education politics; his hobbies are sports, chess and environmental protection.

Interview 2: Christoph: 19, male, in education, single, lives parents, his hobbies are skateboarding, drawing and listening to music; he was chosen because he carried out a citizen's project to renovate a skater park in his neighbourhood; otherwise, he is not politically interested;

Interview 3: Margit: 24, female, she is originally from the most western Federal Region of Austria, lives now in Vienna as a student; she is single and lives in a flatsharing community; she is a representative of the sociology students in the Student Union, attends demonstrations and discussion events; she is interested in issue specific events; her hobbies are reading newspapers, discussions, working with minorities;

Interview 4: Alex: 19, male, in education, he has already founded his own company (event management), is single, living with parents, he is member of the Young Conservative Party; he is interested in economics, education, the Austrian convent, the EU convent and elections; his hobbies are swimming, cycling, travelling, politics and many more.

Interview 5: Lena: 18, female, in education, single, living with parents; hobbies: reading, listening to music, writing, friends, walking; Lena is not affiliated to any organisation; she was chosen for an interview because she is politically very interested and active in unconventional ways in the sense of life politics.

Interview 5: Dana: she was chosen because she has an ethnic background. Contrary to our understanding of the screening interview she turned out to be totally apolitical; the interview was nevertheless carried out and transcribed;

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Daniela is 19, employed, has a lower secondary education, is single and lives with her mother.

1.2 Method

The interviewees and discussants were searched for by staff members of the Austrian Institute for Youth Research who looked for young people with the relevant characteristics among their extended families and friendship networks. Also, political and non-political youth organisations as well as a community centre were contacted successfully. The young people were offered € 15,- for their contribution. The main part of the recruiting and management process was carried out by an assistant.

The recruiting process was very difficult and did not always end in satisfactory results. Firstly, potential interviewees were scared off by topic. When talking to potential participants it was emphasized that we were not interested in their knowledge but only in their attitudes and that we were not going to evaluate their opinions as right or wrong, good or bad. This was also repeated at the beginning of each focus group and interview. We had the feeling that especially young women with a low level of education did not want to participate because of the topic. The focus group with young women without an upper secondary education had to be postponed twice because of the lack of participants. However, even well educated young people felt nervous about the topic because they did not think they knew enough about politics. In the focus group with the activists we had one girl who had offered enthusiastically to give an interview. When we made contact with her she told us that she was a member of Greenpeace, very active in unconventional and partly illegal ways and had already been in prison because of her actions. However, in the focus group did not say much about her activities and her organisation. We concluded that her organisation had warned her to be careful. In addition to the problem of dealing with a difficult topic another issue was the experience with discussions. In some of our focus groups we had members of non-political youth organisations who were very good at expressing themselves and talking in a group. We believe that the prospect of having to talk to someone about an issue which is not familiar to them was also scary for some potential participants. In that way the whole sample may be slightly distorted to overrepresent people who are used to talking about issues that go beyond one's immediate personal concern.

A second problem was that the young people were not very reliable. Some just did not show up, others phoned up with a more or less plausible excuse an hour before the focus group. It also happened that if one person cancelled her/his participation her or his friend would also do so. On the other hand, in focus group 3 (male, no upper secondary education) students brought some of their class mates with them.

The focus group discussions were video taped as well as tape recorded to make sure that no information is lost. The individual interviews were tape recorded. All individual interviews and focus group discussions were fully transcribed. All the

interviews and discussions took place in the library of the Austrian Institute for Youth Research in February and March 2004.

All interviews and discussions were led/moderated by Reingard Spannring.

All sessions were started with a short description of the Austrian Institute for Youth Research and the project as well as the personal introduction of all participants. In the introduction great emphasis was put the anonymity of the information, the fact that the researchers are not evaluating political attitudes as good or bad and that they are not interested in testing knowledge. The latter seemed especially important since the young people were very nervous about this when they were first contacted. In fact, mentioning the topic of the interview/discussion scared off many potential participants.

The interview guide for the focus groups started with the question what citizenship means to them, what a good citizen is, what it means to be part of a community. This lead on to a discussion of what kinds of communities the participants belong to. With respect to belonging to politically defined communities (districts, Federal Regions, nation) the question was asked what kind of possibilities there are of getting politically active. Then groups proceeded to discuss what politics means, how the participants see politics and political parties, and how they assess different kinds of political activities. It was also asked whether and in how far politics has an influence on the participants' lives and whether they think that their behaviour and their decisions are politically relevant. The topic of hobbies came up spontaneously when talking about peer groups as the most important community they belong to. However, the question did not prove too fruitful with respect to links to the political realm, although the moderator tried to prompt in the direction of life politics. Individual interviews were structured by asking for the interviewee's political activities, how they became politically active and the meaning of politics (as in the focus groups).

The dynamics of the interviews/focus groups pointed to one important issue of qualitative research: the role of the interviewer/moderator. This problem is particularly relevant with these questions, since many young people had not given the topic much thought so far. That means, that some of them developed their opinion while discussing it with the interviewer or among themselves. There were two particular situations which are reported below in order to highlight this. In focus group 2 the participants talked about the question whether 16 year olds should have the vote. They were not too positive about it. Then they proceeded to say that the very old people should not vote either, because they are too old to be interested. The participants giggled when they said that and were not sure whether that was a good idea. The moderator did not react, neither in a positive nor in a negative way and so they switched to another topic. In one individual interview the respondent expressed her view that some countries need a dictator without elaborating it further. The interviewer involved her in a longer discussion and eventually it emerged that what she had really meant was someone who guards morality in politics. At the end of the interview she came back to this point and said how glad she was to have had the chance to think about it

twice, because she had not really meant “dictator” but could not think of a more appropriate word.

Despite the fact that many participants had felt nervous about the topic before the interview/focus group, almost all of them said afterwards how much they had enjoyed it and they would appreciate having more opportunities for discussions.

2 Section 2: Summaries and observations of focus groups and interviews

All of the focus groups revealed a broad range of opinions. This was not due to the particularly wide range of types of young people but to the fact that the participants often started lively debates taking on various roles just for the sake of broadening the discussion. Especially participants from youth organisations seemed to be used to discussions and were very much at ease in this kind of forum. Young men and women with an upper secondary school qualification also had no problems discussing our issues. Some of those with a lower educational background and no political interest, especially among the girls, tended not to say anything in the discussion but only nodded approval at some of the statements. There were no young people who appeared totally alienated. Although a lot of negative statements were made, there were no completely negative attitudes but rather differentiated views, even if it was only by saying “but there are also good politicians”. Among the better educated participants there was clearly an awareness of social desirability that “one ought to do something”.

With only two exceptions all participants could think of issues that bothered them and they were able to talk about them. What was more difficult for the less well educated participants was to talk about politics and democracy on an abstract level.

The individual interviews had a strong focus on biography and therefore cannot be easily compared with the focus groups. However, the main difference between the active people and the non-active people seems to lie in the formers’ experience with political processes and institutions and their embeddedness in networks of active people. Both groups display critical but differentiated views and frustration with the political system, although on different levels. 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 the activists the frustration lies in the complexity of the problems, rigidity of the system and its failure to respond to citizens’ engagement.

In the group of 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 thought of 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 adults and peer groups, to low threshold institutions supporting citizens’ initiatives (e.g. Agenda 21).

3 Section 3: Theme 1 – Belonging and Identity

Citizenship is a formal way of belonging to a country. Most participants and interviewees associated rights and duties with citizenship, but also “social citizenship” in the sense of access to social welfare, the education system and so on. Some defined citizenship in a negative way: someone who has not got the citizenship has disadvantages. He/she has no access to social welfare, no work permit and no political rights. Citizenship also implies a responsibility toward the community, which not only means obeying the law, paying taxes and voting but getting involved in the community. However, community work as such was never mentioned in the focus groups nor in the individual groups.

A good citizen is generally somebody who obeys the laws and does not abuse the social system. It is also someone who is “*a good man*”, “*watches the news every night and acts up nicely to what they say on TV*”, “*does his duties [voting] but is not extraordinarily active*” and “*puts up with everything*”. This notion points to civil obedience and subordination to authority and the opposite of civil courage. In two individual interviews it was said that political engagement presumes civil courage and that is not a trait many people possess.

Since the focus group discussions started with the question of citizenship the respondents talked about belonging to the nation and the region (in most cases Vienna). Belonging to nation or country means knowing the culture and tradition, feeling attached to it and being proud of it.

Belonging to smaller communities (districts, villages) involves knowing about customs, knowing “what’s going on there”. The borders of these communities do not always coincide with political borders. In Vienna the neighbourhood, which is no political unit, has some meaning. Some participants mentioned neighbourhood parties (“Grätzfest”) which are often organised by a political party or the district council. Beyond that borders are somewhat meaningless, since it is more important where friends live. Most young people have friends who live in other districts or villages.

Conny: ... you don't have to say, o.k., you live in the same district, now we have to do something together. It's rather like, who is interested, and then the rest happens on its own. ... one spends one's leisure time with friends and if they do not live in the same district, that [the district] is just not important.

Ella: The ball of the fire brigade in the neighbouring village is just as important.

Most important is the belonging to family and peer groups. In some cases, young people are members of formal organisations such as youth organisations, sports clubs and the parish, which are then also important reference groups. Belonging to peer groups and small territorial units was almost exclusively an issue of the focus

groups. Some activists stated explicitly that they are not interested in local events, in “petty problems”.

Ethnic groups did not seem a particularly important source of identity on the surface. The focus group members and interviewees with an ethnic background tended to understate this role. However, it does become more visible when they speak about ties to their parents’ country of origin or talk about other ethnic groups which they see as less well integrated.

4 Section 4: Theme 2 – Organised Activities, participation, activities aside from political participation

Activities aside from political participation, which were mentioned by the participants of the focus groups were mostly unorganised: reading (among young women), sports and computers (among young men), and spending time with friends. Hanging out with friends is the most popular activity among young men. For girls this means meeting at a friend's place talking, and shopping or window shopping with girl friends. The range of possibilities was somewhat narrow. A couple of students had a little more extravagant hobbies such as sailing or rock climbing. In the individual interviews there were more politics-related activities and interests such as reading newspapers, discussions etc.

Formal non-political organisations have a rather old-fashioned image among young people. It seems to be somewhat more important among rural youth while it does not fit into the picture (and self-image) of young individualised urban people. However, having friends who are members of an organisation increases the likelihood that oneself becomes a member. *“First, they make fun of you. But once they have seen what we do they actually enjoy it and then they join”*, says a young woman who is a member of the Rural Youth (“Landjugend”).

Non-political participation meant helping friends on the one hand and involvement in social activities on the other. For the latter activities, the border between the political and social is blurred. For some, it was already political in a broad sense. The better educated participants tended to have very clear ideas.

Sonja: I worked for the Red Cross because I felt an urge to do that. But later I did not have the time, so I had to stop. But I've really already planned to - I mean, it sounds stupid now – when I am older und have a lot of professional experience, then I will go to the non-profit sector, because I think they need my experiences and I can really give them a lot. I like these things very much, because I can connect them nicely with my ideology.

Maria: I would get involved in the health sector generally, because I am already active in this field as a health trainer. I do preventive gymnastics, relaxation techniques. I think that will be very important in future ... There is not that much promotion in this field [preventive health programmes], because it is not yet such a big issue. ... I have not really thought about it yet, but I think that one ought to speak up and present concepts, what the use of it is, present a plan what it would cost and then find support, sponsors Then start on a small scale. Then you have some data which you can show, how it functions and that you then get funding, that you can do it all over Austria, not just in Vienna.

Heinz: ... *somewhere, where there are real problems, I mean in a Third-World country, because there I have the impression that it is justified, because as I see it, they are in this situation really because of our wealth.*

5 Section 5: Theme 3 – Politics, democracy

There is no coherent definition or concept of politics and democracy. Even the politically active, better educated young participants and interviewees dreaded the question what politics was. However, the range of institutions and principles associated with democracy and politics is fairly broad.

Overall, democracy is seen in a positive light. It is something Austrian young people are proud of.

Conny: ... *there are certainly weaknesses in every system and democracy will also have its weaknesses, but on the whole I do not think it's so bad. At least one apparently has the feeling somehow that one can do something.*

Democracy is generally associated with “*the majority wins*”, “*people have a say in politics*”, “*power is derived from the people*”. For some young people this led to the demand that politicians make decisions “*which are good for at least half of the population*”.

Thomas: ... *the people delegate a representative who talks on behalf of the people. But ... this is not possible for everyone, but it should meet more than half of the needs of the people.*

Sonja: *I don't think that a party manages to do that. For this reason, thank god, a party has seldom more than 50% of the votes, because there are mostly two parties who have the 50% together. If not it would be rather critical, when one party has such a majority, then it already goes in the direction of fascism ... well, cannot say that quite so. I think if there are two parties in government, one manages to meet more needs than when there is only one.*¹

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.

Heinz: *Maybe also to stimulate a little. The opposition always scolds [the government] but they also stimulate changes, that they make gibes at them, that they exert such a pressure, the pressure that comes from the people, that something is done. Because if the opposition did not say a thing it would be worse.*

Democracy also means “*setting limits to arbitrariness, because democracy is linked to the rule of law*”.

¹ Austria has seen many years of coalition.

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.

Conny: *I think one should go, because why is there a democracy if nobody is interested.*

Ella: *Yes, if one has the opportunity to cast a vote, then afterwards one really feels well and one says, yes, I've done something.*

The discussants were quite satisfied with the range of opportunities for expressing one's view. Indeed, more opportunities were not always appreciated because it wasn't seen as an improvement.

Vera: *Yes, one votes for somebody hoping that he will represent one's interests, and what often annoys me, there are awfully many – how do you say – referenda and so, where the population must vote again. Then I sometimes think, if one has to vote 3, 4 times additionally per year, in reality I have already given my confidence to someone and he should get on with it. I mean they spend so much money on advertisements and propaganda and so, I don't see the point of that, that's too much.*

Heinz: *Well, basically, there are the elections. One can join a party any time and get active that way. There are enough NGO's. I do think that it is enough, especially for the aims which politics in Austria can have, because we are a small country and we are tied to the EU, have EU legislation, which means that there is little politics in Austria can disrupt*

Sonja: *I also think that the franchise and eligibility, plebiscite and referendum. ... What would it improve if we had more rights for codetermination? As it is, many people do not even go to the elections, so I cannot imagine that they would do anything else.*

However, there was some scepticism as to how effective they perceived political involvement.

Sonja: *What I would wish for really is on the lower level, district and regional offices, there I miss the interaction, that there is little will to service and that the citizen has less pull. That's what I miss.*

Maria: *With referenda it is often the case, if it makes sense at all. There is this right to a referendum, I don't have that much knowledge about how this works in politics, but to my mind, it is often just there, there is simply this referendum but it is never put into practice or even considered [by the politicians]. I have the feeling that has been decided beforehand, we'll do this. We will have the referendum so that the people are satisfied, but we have already decided on it beforehand how we will do it. And always these promises at the elections, no the people have spoken, and in the end all*

stupid, because it turned out to be very different from what they had promised.

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 stark contrast to the idea of democracy but people do not realise that. However, as mentioned in section 1.2. this may be because they have not thought about 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 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.

Wolfgang: In principle politics is very far reaching, so every citizens' initiative and things in the community council are to be understood as politics, or shop stewards, that need not only be for or against the state, that can also be within a company for example. But how you define it [politics] properly, I find this difficult, or yes, as I said, trying to get one's 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*”.

Maria: Politics exists to make sure that people in this state or country can get on together, and that people have the right to exercise something or do something and then the politicians are the craftsmen who take it on that it really functions. This reconciliation, those who firstly decide the laws and the positions which belong to this field. And that the people have a say, really. I think that that is not really realised. It is in the federal law that it comes from the people. I do not always feel it that way.

There were many critical statements during the discussions. The most frequent criticism concerned the quarrelling. For the young people, quarrelling is a very destructive way of dealing with political issues. It occurs between and within parties.

Vera: I often think that it is too much about being right, and that good ideas are often not acknowledged because they are from the other party. I often have this feeling.

Sonja: That's what really annoys me with the present opposition.... I do not think the opposition is constructive, that's always criticising and this is stupid and that doesn't work, but they never make constructive suggestions. That annoys me.

Conny: *Yeah, well, they should agree on a common line of argument, the whole party, even if some do not agree with it. I find it impossible when two politicians of one party bring charges against each other in public ... I mean, that is ridiculous, they should sit down together and discuss it thoroughly and then set the common opinion before the public.*

Quarrelling has negative aspects in that it is unproductive. Young people mostly prefer consensual politics where discussions are constructive and serve a purpose.

Christoph: *Because if you look at election campaigns or so, they quarrel, so they run each other down and so and then somebody else comes into office, and maybe it would not have been much different if the other party had remained in power, but before that they quarrel like hell and discuss for a very long time some stuff. ... I think this is part of a politician's life, that so much is being discussed. If there is nothing important, nothing interesting, then they just discuss anything, I don't know, they simply discuss all the time. ... No, I don't see it as unpleasant. I mean, I don't have anything to do with it. I mean, maybe it makes sense, if they have different opinions, like the population. So when different citizens have different opinions about a topic, that they discuss it thoroughly until something comes up, where everybody feels happy or something like that, where something sensible results, a common opinion.*

Heinz: *No, they [the parties] don't [work together], no way. Well, partly they work together, surely, but this is not always the case, that it is built on consensus. In principle that's how it should work, but as it is, those things which the government wants are pushed through and the opposition cries out.*

In some cases, however, there was awareness that political views are not always compatible and should not be, but there should be fairness.

Reinhard: *"I mean, the parties should not all work together, so, when the Greens and the blacks all had the same opinion then you would not have to vote ... everybody should have a different opinion and not work together, but they should not be counterproductive and trip the other party up or so."*

Conflicts and quarrelling contribute to the bad image of politics.

Christoph: *Yes, well, the image is somehow bad for me, because you only ever hear negative things. ... all those conflicts among them and things where politicians are presented in a ridiculous way. But even if they would especially highlight them in a positive way, it would be a bit ridiculous, I would say. If I say this one party is so super or something like that, yeah what does the party really do?*

Ella: *I also often have the feeling that it is really somehow like a Kindergarten, because they quarrel so much.*

Another major critique was that politicians do not know about the “real life” of people and make decisions against the interest of the people.

Dana: They only look at themselves. ... Yes, they see their own point of view. But not really that of a normal citizen. Where, because there are young people who have been unemployed for over a year, because they just cannot find anything. There are also people who have worked two or three years and then they do not find anything because they require a great deal of someone. The salary keeps getting smaller. You want to live on that? So I mean, an apartment on your own and a car on your own you don't manage that these days. ... Well, they really only see in one direction with their blinkers. They don't look further what really is. Because if they asked a man on a building site or a cleaning lady what they think of it, it would be different.

Maria: Politics would be the motivation that the concerns are issued by the people and not determined by the politicians. ... Well, I think with these cuts in pensions and rises in contributions for the health insurance, there I do think, well somehow it goes a little bit against the people or against the people who have worked for years.

Some young people recognise politics as something that lacks transparency. There is propaganda and non-information, talking Yiddish and power games.

Marion: Yeah, there is always an issue to discuss, but mostly you do not get information about it.

Vera: I think the whole thing is driven and 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. That does not even get through to us, that we are especially asked about it.

Dieter: Capitalism... for example if you look at the USA, if you look at all the oil companies and what they have done for Bush and now which people sit in the country [in power positions] ... that these used to be bosses of companies, or for example, the high level environment guy used to be in an oil company, like that.

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. However, in all the interviews it was only mentioned twice. Maria talks at length about the “ideological cleansing” in the police force after the black-blue coalition had assumed power:

Maria: I find it outrageous – what I wanted to add – that the police was ... red then, and when the change of government took place, all the red officers

were exchanged by black ones and I find this a real cheekiness, if politics is drawn into this so much. ...

Sonja: It's really bad that it is more important what kind of membership card you have than what qualifications you have.

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.

Manuela: I think one must be very naïve to really trust politicians and believe everything they promise.

On the other hand, it was acknowledged that it is a difficult job, making the right decisions and always being attacked by other politicians.

Ella: That is somehow so typical that politician are always being pecked at. I mean they are also only humans, but they have a lot of responsibility ... for the whole society ...

Maria: ... Well, it never suits you anyway. Opposition and governing parties, it does not matter anyway, how the constellation is, because something always happens which the people do not like. If it would had been better to keep black-red² as it was before, you cannot predict, it wasn't the optimum either.

In this sample there was nobody for whom politics was completely a bad thing with which they wanted to have nothing to do. However, since this is not a representative sample it is rather unlikely that there are indeed no such young people. What I did find in my sample were two or three people who had no opinion about this. They were not interested in politics and had no picture of that sphere. These people hardly said anything during the discussions and attempts to motivate them put a lot of unfair pressure on them.

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.

Maria: At the last election I did vote for Green, although I tend towards Red. But I then voted for Green because it also depends on the person, how they communicate the things and if someone is totally disagreeable to me, then I cannot vote for him, that was the case with Gusenbauer³.

² The young woman refers to the coalition between the Social Democrats and the Conservative Party which was followed by a coalition between the Freedom Party and the Conservative Party

³ Alfred Gusenbauer is the leader of the Social Democrats

Sonja: *Yes, well, I waver between Red and Green, but the Greens also have the protection of the environment, and that is also important for me, and the social. I quite like the combination between red and green, and the personalities standing behind it are also authentic for me. Van der Bellen⁴, because he has studied economics, he is also knowledgeable in economics. He not only has the environment and the social, but he also knows what consequences this has for the national economy. I like that and Eva Glawischnig. There I can, as a woman, totally identify with her. That's a figure I completely miss in other parties. Rauch Kallat, Ms Gehrer⁵, in the SPÖ Bures, I cannot relate to them. FPÖ nothing at all. So the Greens are really a party that you can vote for as a woman, because Glawischnig is among the leaders.*

Other participants were very well able to distinguish roughly between the parties despite claiming that have no interest in and knowledge of politics.

Christoph: *Yes, I do know that there are these various directions and roughly what these are trying to get at. ... I would somehow order them according to colours. The one which is the most pleasant to me and the least pleasant, really. They clearly have differences, everybody tries to say something different. ... Yeah, they are really roughly the same, but a wee bit they are also different. Green is more in the direction of standing up for citizens and experimenting more, to choose the best for all. Red is roughly neutral for me and blue and black, black is a bit more controlling everything and tax, yeah, I don't know exactly. That would be my brainstorming about the parties. And then there are the small ones, which would be quite nice but too small.*

Those young people with a lower education and/or no interest as well as those who have not voted before said they would gather enough information before the next election in order to be able to make a decision.

⁴ Van der Bellen is the leader of the Green Party. He used to be economics professor at the University of Vienna.

⁵ Both women are members of the Conservative Party.

6 Section 6: Theme 4 – Political Participation

Interest in politics:

In the focus groups two or three participants who were not interested in politics got away with not saying anything. However, others who were not interested still had something to say about politics and their interest in politics.

Christoph: Not really very much. Well, it depends, really. If they only do negative things that surely gets on my nerves. That I do not like, for sure. For example the hatred against foreigners or things like that. I am against that. I know that I would not vote for those, probably, if they do things like that, these parties that go onto the negative side. I try to be on the better side, the one that looks best. But as it is, I do not much about the administration in general, if one party or so gets to power, then I don't think I would notice much changes. Yeah, but I don't pay any taxes yet.

Dana: Yes, um, because of work, I don't know, when you sort of get older. And then it just started somehow, one looks into the newspaper and reads one thing or another. ... Suddenly, there was this thing about the finance minister and that was on the front page and so I looked and read. And yeah, little things really. It was the same with Milosevic in Yugoslavia. That's always like this, you start to read them. ... No I did not follow that up [the debates], so to speak. But it was the thing that interested me at least a little bit and that caught my attention. ... but if I have time when I sit in the underground train and have this U-Express⁶, and there it says anything, well okay, then I read it. ... But at home that I watch the news on telly or so ... only if I sit with my mother and she watches it then I watch it, but else ..."

As the two quotes above suggest, interest in politics largely depends on the perception that politics “matters”. In general, the young people found a number of situations where politics had an impact on their lives. The education system, social welfare and health care system were most frequently mentioned. Some went on to speak about how annoyed they feel that there is such a strong impact on their lives without having the possibility to influence the decision-making process.

Conny: But then you are still influenced by it, even if you cannot do anything about it. It does influence us, it is there. ... In the last resort politics decides on our future, and that is not completely unimportant, the pension system for example. ... I mean, it can't make no difference to you if you suddenly have no money at the age of 60.

⁶ Tabloid which does not cost anything and can be picked up when entering the underground; it is financed solely through advertisements;

Maria: ... *politics has up to now not been particularly important to me. I have always followed it through the media, but it's not so important to me, because the political decisions are not so important ... because it cannot meet all the needs and then you always meet people who are against it, and I have always associated something negative with politics, because it is really presented so by people, because they always moan about politics, they never say anything positive about it. That's why it has not been so important for me until now. But now, because I will become entrepreneur, it is indeed important for me, because it is about taxes and I have had to deal with tax law, and do not have a decided opinion about it yet. ... I am in the middle of doing that, I grapple with that, and there politics is really important because it is all linked, they decide how much tax you have to pay and what you are allowed to do.*

Others do not feel the impact so much.

Ella: *Maybe I simply live in the clouds. I have so many other things in my head and politics is somewhere there, it's not tangible. I am preoccupied with what is happening in my family and with what is going on my own education, with my job. Yes, politics, I would not feel annoyed about that.*

Christoph: *I feel rather little of any party or the government. ... well, probably soon when I start working, but at the moment, well the laws at what age you can go out for how long and alcohol consumption, what ever, these things. But I have nothing to moan about. ...mmm, it is rather well regulated. I mean you can still do what you like, really.*

Heinz, who is doing his civil service⁷ at the moment, says: ... *but what was really extreme was the calling up in the army, because I thought there the state really has a firm grip on you ... and that was relatively unpleasant. The whole story about civil service and military service, that's all very unpleasant. But on my personal life at the moment the influence is relatively small.*

Asked about possibilities to be politically active a broad range of activities was mentioned by the focus group participants. The most frequent activities were voting, demonstrating, signing petitions and talking to other people. Joining a political party or an NGO did not occur to them without prompting.

Voting: Voting is seen as a moral duty by most young people, only very few said that not voting is also a political statement.

Joining a party: There were a number of people who were not exactly opposed to joining a party. For them it only seemed a matter of being asked to join and contribute. However, the rest of the participants and also some of the politically

⁷ Civil service is an alternative to military service and involves working for NGO's such as the Red Cross

active young people gave a number of reasons why they would not participate in a political party. The most obvious reason was that they had not made up their mind as to which party was their favourite.

Marion: *Well, the organisations and the issues, I think every party has more or less issues which are appealing, so why should I restrict myself to one party?.*

Ella: *I cannot say 100 percent I am red or I am black, I always vote for a different party and this is why I would not join the SPÖ nor the ÖVP.⁸*

Young people obviously like to be flexible. For them political issues are not black or white but there are always several perspectives of a problem. Even if they feel close to one party they remain very critical of this party.

Margit (politically active): *...I would have the feeling, especially in political parties, that very often there is a kind of brainwashing, that you get stuck in a pattern and are no longer open for other things. And this I want to avoid.*

Several young people were afraid of being labelled as a party member which would make it difficult to talk to members of other parties

Christoph: *That would not be my wish or what I could imagine. ... [Because] one is then classified, one then only belongs to this one group. If, for example, you have a mass and it is divided into 4 pieces, for example, and then you belong to one piece and the other three are somehow different than you. This difference. Because of that I would not do it. ... It is rather in the way. ... For other people and generally when you want to do something together, as for example building the skater park. If I had gone to a party, then maybe the other party would have been against it or so, because I am a member of the party.*

Young people are often afraid that they would have to support their party 100 percent even if they did not agree with everything, that within a party structure their voices would get lost, and they would have to make compromises. It was also mentioned that values and ideologies are often sacrificed for power.

Wolfgang: *But for me there is a shocking experience and that was in 2000 I think it was, when the Germans had this vote whether to send troops to Afghanistan or not and the Greens then, you see I am not a pacifist, but I am sure many green MPs in Germany are pacifists, and for them it was more important to stay in power than to defend their ideals. And there I think what kind of people are they? I think I said then that I would not vote again because I was so shocked. Because it just runs down the [ideological] election line which should be defended somewhere. That is probably no longer existent in today's politics*

⁸ SPÖ = Social Democrats, ÖVP = Conservative Party

Several participants declared spontaneously why they would never **take on political responsibility**:

Sonja: *You can never please everybody. There is always someone who does not look so good then and I cannot do that.*

Heinz: *I can't see myself doing that. First, because it would probably be too much work for me and second because I would not want to declare myself unambiguously as a party member of one party and it's too much to do with money. That's also not very sympathetic, so no.*

Wolfgang: *I could not go to election campaigns and shake everyone's hand only to make him vote for me. I would be too honest for that".*

Similar arguments are voiced with respect to **NGOs**:

Vera: *Not really in big organisations. That is too rigid for me, there are these fixed aims which must be enforced ... I look what friends do, that's the best solution for me.*

Wolfgang: *Somehow I felt like getting involved with ATTAC[but] I did have a different idea of it, I must say. It was too much babble.*

Demonstrations: Most of the interviewees and focus group participants have already taken part in at least one demonstration, e.g. the anti-racism demonstration, the weekly anti-government demonstration, and the demonstration against tuition fees at universities. However, the young people feel considerably ambiguous about demonstration. On the one hand it is criticised that organisers often abuse the demonstration for other aims; some participants of demonstrations run down the good cause e.g. by throwing stones or crème cakes thus spoiling the effect of the demonstration. There was consensus that demonstrations are an acceptable form of protest if they are not off the point.

Conny: *The last one I went to was the anti-racism demonstration, because somebody I know well – that was in all the newspapers, anyway – was pressed to ground and eventually died. That was the last I went to. ... Well, if it's organised in a way and not somehow, I don't know, we just go the streets because we have nothing better to do.*

Vera: *I think it's also exaggerated, I mean, if people go and throw crème cakes.⁹ ... With that one gets nowhere, and one runs oneself down, because, I mean, that's childish. One must simply talk about such things. And, yes, well I am always when it is about demos I tend to be more reserved. I often ask myself, what profit does it yield?*

Dieter: *So, what I find stupid about demonstrations is that They are really often organised by extreme groups be they on the left or on the right. That is something that really annoys me, for example the anti-government*

⁹ This happened recently in a conflict between students and the director of the Vienna University which was about the new university organisation law.

demonstrations were organised by the Communist Youth ... and who immediately use the demonstration not for the original purpose ... but only for ...propaganda for their party or like that.

Sonja: Throwing stones and so, I am also against that. That was somehow exemplary, the anti-war demonstrations. I can remember the pictures of London, where there was a totally peaceful demonstration. I believe that that effects much more. I mean it did not change anything then. But in the person it makes such a difference than when I just throw something at somebody.

On the other hand, it was doubted that demonstrations impress and influence decision-makers. However, even those who are sceptical of the effect of petitions and demonstrations are convinced that is important to at least voice one's opinion.

Heinz: .. it did not effect anything, but that's something you can do anyway.

Tackled from various angles the discussions lead to further possibilities of getting active for certain issues/ideologies:

- ? talking to other people, motivating them to join a movement/initiative
- ? talking to influential people, politicians
- ? getting the media involved
- ? writing letters to newspapers and/or politicians
- ? starting or joining an initiative
- ? activism (tying oneself to a tree)

Christoph: Yes, one could do something in the direction of actionism. Yeah, to lie down on the street and yell what you want to get changed or that, I don't know, to spray walls or damage something, such things. ... It's not really so effective, I would say.

- ? boycotts of certain companies or products

Conny: Maybe it helps, if a company that has done something bad and everybody has heard about it somehow, even if one does not really know what exactly has happened, many other companies may think, okay, they have 10% less profit so we will consider carefully if we do the same.

The participants are quite positive about the effect of these boycotts and movements.

Vera: I think the vegetarians or so really have started the ball rolling. I mean I am not vegetarian, but I also only eat Schnitzel or so twice a week. Somehow you do start to think about it. I feel that this was a big step.

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Political Participation of Young People in Europe

HPSE-CT-2002-00123

However, information to base these decisions on is sometimes difficult to find and sometimes not reliable.

? displaying ideologies via clothing

Christoph: Yes, for example the kind of clothing, that is, yeah, well, I just dress somehow, not in a particular way, because for example, you can tell the far right by their jackets and trousers. They buy these things deliberately. And then there the Gabers] or like that, who are not so far right but still in this direction somehow and the Punks. ... The caps are open at the top and the trousers are really tight and very specific Nike shoes, fashion really, one expresses quite a lot with that, if you are seen at first sight. I mean afterwards, when you talk to this person, it's always different. One gets to know the person and does not pay attention to the clothing any more, but in the first instance it is clothing. It's telling, I really express something with clothing

? awareness raising/life politics

Being vegetarian, buying organically grown food, and buying only Austrian products is mentioned. These are “*small scale politics*” in that the participants do these things because it fits their personal conviction and they talk about it among friends and family.

Conny: ... I don't do it to influence other people, but because of myself. I am convinced that eggs from chickens in small cages are not good, so I don't buy them. ... I may ask around in my family and say that I think this is better, but since we get our eggs from my granny it really not an issue. I do it for myself and not because of a politician or because of anybody. It's about my own conviction.

Vera: ... you can move something on the small scale. ... this year fur was so fashionable and my mum got a fur coat. So I said are you crazy and she, I mean, had not thought about it that that had been an animal. So after that she did not buy fur again. ... She then told her friend about it and I think somehow in our small group, you cannot prevent it, but a little bit

Lena: “The simplest example is aluminium. For the household I never buy aluminium foil ... or aluminium cans. I certainly do not buy them, because I do not want to support that. .. Or separating different kinds of waste or these things. They think they don't feel like it or it's stupid, but I do it for myself, even if I were the only one in Vienna. At least I have done it and have not supported it [the waste of resources], even if it does not affect anything. I have a clear conscience.”

The participants list more things they would not buy such as goose liver or Shell petrol. They are prepared to spend more money on environmentally friendly products.

? Civic courage, standing up for one's opinion

Heinz, for example, has strong feelings against xenophobia and talks about some incidents. However, he did not feel able to help the foreigners.

Heinz: Not directly, really. There were a number of people and it was only me and a friend against them... Yeah, you don't always have the courage to do that in that moment.

? Civic engagement

When asked about possibilities to stand up for something that is important for them the participants talked about what could be called civic engagement rather than political engagement (as reported under section 4.2.).

Not mentioned were strikes and political violence.

Starting from the question about territorial communities the focus groups discussed what they could or would do if a local politician wanted to change something in their neighbourhood they did not approve of. The discussants mentioned talking to the major or district representative, talking to other people in the neighbourhood, distributing leaflets, collecting signatures, signing petitions, writing to a newspaper or talking to influential people. Some young people have already taken part in citizen's initiatives and campaigns; others were not interested in local issues.

Conny: If, I don't know, if ... they decide to cut down a tree in my street and I think no, then maybe I would go there, but else I don't know, I am not really moved [by what is going on in the district].

Among the less well educated some felt that this was far out of their daily experiences. They did not read local newspapers ("Bezirksblatt") and could not imagine examples where they would feel annoyed about something. They also said that they "would not know who to turn to" or that it would be "a bit scary to go to these places". Others "confessed" that in the end they would be "too lazy", "that other activities like working or leisure activities were more important".

Conny: Yeah, where you have to bring yourself to do it, to go to an office where you've never been before and you've never had contact with, if you go there at all.

Vera: Getting started is the most difficult thing, the initiative, I mean. When I get a letter asking me to write something positive for this tower for example, I am all for it, but if I think, I must go there so that something gets done, then it's really hopeless, because being on your own taking the first step that is rather difficult.

Irmi: *Well, it does make a little difference if you are stuck in working life, whether you have a 40 hour week, there is simply the evening and the decision how to spend it. But if you are free to schedule your time yourself you can also do other things.*

Local involvement depends on various other factors:

- ? perception of importance of issue for the person and/or the community (how close is it geographically?)

Maria: *It always depends. If you take Vienna, if this is in Simmering and I am in Ottakring¹⁰, I don't know, if I would lay my hands on that, but if it really happens in front of my house I would definitely do something about it. I would talk to the people to organise a citizens' initiative and collect signatures. But it really depends on how far away this is and what the use is. Because when I see that the motor way makes sense and the motorway is an advantage for all, then you don't need to do anything about it.*

- ? perception of impact of issue on the person and/or the community
- ? feeling of having access to decision-making process (knowing who to turn to)
- ? feeling of effectiveness of initiative/protest

Involvement on the national level was seen as more difficult. There are more established ways of participating such as voting, petitions and demonstrations. However, the young people also see more difficulties in these possibilities. With elections, there was the argument, that “*your vote has no real impact*” and “*even if your party wins, you are not sure whether you are satisfied with the outcome*”. This refers on the one hand, to the charge that parties never actually do what they promised before the elections, and on the other hand it refers to the possibility that the winning party forms a coalition with an unwanted party. As for petitions and citizens' initiatives there was commonly the argument that politicians do not take it seriously.

Another line of argument was the powerlessness of people “like you and me”. Often, the participants perceive an enormous power gap. On the one hand, this gap exists between politicians and themselves, because politicians do not know what it means to live in the discussants' situation and they can't be bothered to talk to these people. On the other hand, there is awareness that only certain social classes or social positions have influence.

Maria: *If you do not have an academic title – in this country you still have the distinction between academics and non-academics – at least that's how I see it. ... if he had a doctor title he would have to be addressed by it and counts more, is worth more. In Austria you do notice the distinction of social*

¹⁰ These are two districts at the far ends of Vienna, one in the West and one in the East.

classes: civil servants, academics, then the normal worker, employee. That is somehow a class system and one is treated accordingly or one has the right to speak up or not. If you are not a doctor, then you do not really have much to say in the political sphere, I think.

Dana: In the end everything turns out the way the politicians want it just because they are higher [higher status, more power]. ... the more powerful get their way and the weaker cannot say anything.

This latter line of argument was stressed by many other participants who said that one has to talk to influential people if one wants to change something.

Dieter: If you know people ... yeah, I do not see many more possibilities that I can really move something as an individual.

In general, frustration was expressed with not being able to influence anything by non-activists as well as activists.

Dieter: Politics is something that terribly enrages me, but as the man in the street one cannot do much. ... for example the thing with Grasser¹¹ ... taxes for the industry ... for the self-employed. But what does one want to do about it. There one can really only do something, if one has founded a trade union or something like that, because otherwise ... if at all."

Wolfgang: ... It is mainly the feeling, once you get interested in politics, that you can do nothing about it. It would be good if parties started to, any MP or you know, more issues of young people, but that is no question at all. You are only seen as adult when you are 26, 27. I could not remember that politics would have addressed me when I was 18, I mean really issues that would have interested me ... and in the end the young people are again the losers of the pension reform, because they have no lobby. There is this Young Conservative Party or so, I think the Socialists have something like that, too, but they have no voice in their own party. The decision-makers are 60 plus with some exceptions ... Probably they should really start letting young MPs into parliament or listen more to the youth organisations. There, even the student union is powerless, represents 200 000 people and has no voice. ...

¹¹ Finance Minister

7 Section 7: Theme 5 – Opportunity structures for participation

Among the structures and conditions for political interest and participation the availability of models (parents, grandparents, as well as active and supportive teachers) is one of the most important.

Margit: Yes, my mother. I have always experienced my mother as very open and liberal. My father maybe more strict. ... Then I also talked a lot with other people like relatives and acquaintances ... adults. And then at the time of grammar school have already discussed a lot and went on strike a lot. ... Yelling at the Blues¹² and such things sometimes. Or also, going to political event, even of the Freedom Party, when Haider once came, I called out against him. So, I mean, it just developed. It was part of puberty to be against everything. I was rather radical then. I then became school representative. I also went to meetings of the Socialist Youth, I was interested, but I never joined. And then, when I came to Vienna I got to know people, maybe also critical in all directions...

None of the focus group participants has parents who are interested in politics. Politics generally only comes up briefly in conversations with family members or peers when there is something specific on television or before the elections. However, on the one hand, politically minded parents were not there for all those interviewees who are politically active, and on the other hand, one girl remained apolitical despite her political mother.

Dana: It was like this because my mother really always watches all the news, even the German news. It started to get on my nerves because they always talk about the same things, anyway. Well, I never heard anything new, it was all the same to me, the content. They only use different sentences. ... Maybe because she actively watched it, so therefore I did not get interested. So, I did not do it as well, because my mum did it anyway.

The role of schools figures prominently in the young people's discussions. Many bemoan the lack of political education or the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the teachers.

Conny: ... that really somehow they should already go into the matter of Austrian politics at school, because I can only talk about what we did at school and that was, I mean, maybe we talked about politics hundreds of years ago ... in history classes...I do think that at school they should at least read newspaper articles together and consider whether they are plausible. Okay, there are enough people who are intelligent enough, who can figure this out by themselves or so, but there are also people, who do not easily

¹² members of the Freedom Party

see through... that students can make up their own mind and not only hear what they hear at home.

Dieter is worried that most people are not interested in politics and he links this lack of interest to education: *“well, that the people learn to look at complex interrelations and to recognise them, that is politics, and at least that they then make better decisions and because of that are more enthusiastic about politics. Because the less education the more xenophobia and I don't know what else. I think education should not be cut as is being done at the moment.*

Dana: *Well, I had to study it for the test, if there was a test. But afterwards I did not know anything about it anymore. That's really this learning by heart for this one day and afterwards it's gone. ... Because it's all the same. I have never seen a teacher for example who spoke with enthusiasm and that there had been discussions. So that the students would be interested. ... We only had history on the first two levels and that was about Hitler. And Hitler, you know I was fed up with Hitler then because the schools take it too intensively. So because from the third level of the Hauptschule¹³ until the second level of Handelsschule¹⁴ we only learned about Hitler really.*

Experiences with democracy at school are not always good.

Dana who was a class representative at school: *They [the teachers] always say, if you want, but you must. And if you don't do it you'll get bad marks or a difficult exam. So really there was always this kind of blackmailing.*

School climate and ideological style of a school and students

Rudi: *“I used to be more right wing.. I have never sympathised with the FPÖ, but still, probably it has to do with the environment, because in a Hauptschule¹⁵ in Vienna, there you get different people, I would say.”*

Friends who take one to meetings and events

Alex (member of the Young Conservatives): *“Via a friend of mine. He is a member of the JVP¹⁶ and he took me along to the sailing beach in summer. That is in Vienna, along the Old Danube. There, the JVP has a sailing beach und during summer there is so to say open house. I was there several times and got to know the people. I collected information and 2 months later I joined.”*

¹³ compulsory school for age 10 to 14

¹⁴ the period the interviewee is talking about spans 4 years

¹⁵ A ‚Hauptschule‘ is a compulsory school for young people aged 10 to 14. It is attended by students who normally go on to apprenticeships or lower secondary professional education.

¹⁶ Young Conservative Party

Availability of information network

Margit (politically active): *“Firstly, I’ve got quite a lot of colleagues who are organised either in left groups or in political parties. Or the Student Union or like that, who organise [the political events]. And apart from that? There are leaflets.”*

Alex (member of the Young Conservatives): *“Of course you always get to know new people and they call you on the phone or send an e-mail, or you say actively that you want to participate. That’s always different, but mostly, they send an SMS or e-mail asking who can help, there and there is something going on. Yes, that’s how it works.”*

8 Section 8: any other topic - civic obedience

In nearly every interview/focus group the issue of standing up for one's ideals is discussed, not only in the context of political participation but also in the context of everyday life, such as helping marginalised groups or simply living one's ideal life. In the first two and the last focus groups this issue was discussed as civic courage and civic obedience. In general, it was felt that civic courage is not honoured and encouraged in society.

Christoph: *"Not directly, really. There were a number of people and it was only me and my friend against them."* He does talk to people he knows about this problem but not to foreigners: *"Yeah, you don't always have the courage to do that in that moment."*

Wolfgang: *"I think what is rather bad in Austria, that's the consciousness of democracy. Because in Austria demonstrating is still something that is regarded as something totally negative. My relatives in the Waldviertel¹⁷, for example, when I demonstrated against the Iraq war, they were totally [astonished], 'you go demonstrating', and I mean I demonstrate against the war, and in the demonstration there were 60 year olds just demonstrating against the war. Demonstrating in Austria, especially in the countryside, is seen totally negative, 'the loony left, put them in jail'. That's simply this subservience to authority."*

Manuela: *"I see the whole problem beginning ... at primary school. All children come to primary school, are terribly creative, probably want to participate and then the first thing they learn is to sit quietly and to talk only after having raised the hand. That means, from the beginning they are disaccustomed of co-determination and self-reliance..."*

Rita: *"The courage to see one's responsibility in society. The courage to realise it and not just have it in your head, yes, that would be my dream to live and be. To actually do it, to stand up for yourself and your ideals."*

¹⁷ Rural area in Lower Austria, north of Vienna

9 Section 9 Comparison of focus groups versus individual interviews

See section 2

10 Section 10: Definition of key concepts and terms

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;

11 Section 11: Stimuli for quantitative work

- ? Awareness of conflict lines in society (employer/employee; citizens/foreigners; academics/non-academics; men/women, young people/old people; rich/poor; ...)
- ? Solidarity:
 - 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 in family/peer group/school/work place/
e.g.: "Do you have the feeling that your opinion is considered in decision-making in your family?"
- ? Getting adequate information about political issues on local level/regional level/national level/European level/international level
- ? Materialist/postmaterialist goals in life

12 CONCLUSIONS

All young people – active and non-active – reported frustration with politics. The sources of frustration ranged from the lack of influence on decision making, and inefficient political structures to the lack of ethics and morality among politicians.

However, there were no signs that they are alienated from politics. There was generally a strong feeling of moral duty to participate in elections, but also – to a lesser extent – to have a view and express it in an appropriate way.

All young people had very differentiated views on politics and politicians. There was no black and white but 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”.

All 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.

Individualism in the context of this sample does not mean selfishness. There is 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-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 peers in the 70s and 80s. 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.