

**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»/
ESTONIA**

Marti Taru

**Institute of International and Social Studies
Tallinn Pedagogical University**

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**Project Coordinator: Institute for Social Research
and Analysis/ Vienna, Austria**

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

Lead team:

Kari Paakunainen/ Finnish Youth Research Network (FYRN)
Reingard Spannring/ 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

Authors of national working papers:

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.

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1 Composition of interviewed persons

1.1 Focus groups

Altogether four focus groups were conducted. Attempt was made to assure representation of different social categories in the focus groups:

- ? employment status: employed, unemployed and in education,
- ? education: higher and lower educational attainment,
- ? both genders,
- ? age: people below 20 and people above 23,
- ? ethnic and citizenship: Estonians and non-Estonians, citizens and non-citizens,
- ? regions: geographical dimension and centre-periphery dimension: capital and smaller towns.

The groups were moderated by professional public opinion researchers, with more than 10 years experience in focus group interviews. Marti Taru followed the interviews via video, located in another room.

Participants were offered a gift card of one major Estonian stores worth 200 EEK (approx 13 EURO); interviewees were aware of the remuneration before interview.

Social composition of the groups:

- ? Tallinn, men
 - Andres, 25, employed, secondary education, currently last-year student
 - Elari, 22, employed, bachelor degree, currently in master program
 - Jürgen, 24, employed, bachelor degree, currently in master program
 - Lauri, 23, employed, bachelor degree in social sciences
 - Mart, 24, employed
 - Raul, 24, secondary education, currently in bachelor program
 - Olev, 24, employed, secondary education, currently in education.
- ? Tallinn, women
 - Mai, 21, employed, secondary education, currently in bachelor program last-year student,
 - Tiina, 22, secondary education, currently in bachelor program last-year student,
 - Kerli, 22, employed, secondary education, currently in bachelor program last-year student
 - Annika, 23, employed, bachelor degree, currently in master program
 - Anu, 23, employed, bachelor degree, currently in final stage of second bachelor degree,
 - Monica, 23, employed, bachelor degree, currently in master program,
- ? Jõhvi¹, men, non-Estonians
 - Boriss, 21, employed, secondary education
 - Oleg, 21, unemployed, secondary education

¹ Russian speaking county centre some 130 km away from the capital

- Aleksei, 18, employed, primary education
 Vitali, 23, employed, secondary-vocational education
 Ilja, 18, primary education, currently high-school student
 Raimond, 20, unemployed, in part-time education
 Dimitri, 21, in secondary-vocational education
 ? Viljandi², women
 Kadri, 21, currently in secondary-vocational education
 Ly, 23, employed, currently in secondary-vocational education
 Heitlin, 23, employed, primary education
 Maria, 18, currently high-school student
 Reelika, 20, unemployed, primary education
 Kristi, 18, currently high-school student
 Anu, 23, employed, secondary-vocational education

1.2 Individual interviews

Individual interviews were conducted by Marti Taru. Interviewees were selected amongst politically active young people. The potential interviewees were contacted via e-mail and the interview date, time and place was agreed. The interviewees were not offered remuneration for their participation except for fruits, tea/coffee and snacks during the interview.

Background of interviewees

- ? Oksana, 20, member of board, youth organisation of Estonian Centre Party³, member of Tallinn city district council; employed, finished secondary education, currently in bachelor program
 ? Janika, 18, member of board, Estonian Association of Student Self-Governments, currently high-school student
 ? Maria, 23, member of Tallinn city council, member of Tallinn city district council, president of Estonian Union of Youth Organisations, finished secondary education, currently in bachelor program
 ? Karel, president of youth organization of Estonian People's Party, finished secondary education, currently in bachelor program
 ? Sven, 25, deputy major of Tartu⁴, member of Estonian Reform Party, bachelor degree

² a small town in the centre of Estonia some 130 km away from the capital

³ one of the largest parties in Estonia, which several times collected highest number of votes in parliamentary elections

⁴ second largest town with some 100 000 inhabitants

2 How to read the text

Analysis and interpretation of the interviews is given in 'normal', like this text. Notable ideas and concepts that emerged during discussions and interviews are given in **boldface**. Quotes are given in italics: *this is a quote*. Brief comments to quotes are given in 'normal' and between slashes: /comment text goes here/. Please accept apologies for some inconsistencies in the text. In some sections quotations are given without referring to the person. In some sections quotations are separated from the body text, and are given immediately after analysis results and interpretations.

Most of the text is structured so that a section is presented for each of the focus groups and a separate section for individual interviews. This format is not followed in section Theme 4. Political Participation. In that section focus groups are not distinguished from each other but are distinguished from individual interviews.

3 Theme 1. Belonging and Identity

3.1 Tallinn, men

The most important 'belongings' were related to **family and friends**. These were the bonds that connect individual with his present place and style of living. As one participant mentioned, if there were no friends around, he would immediately leave Estonia for some other place.

In addition to friends and family members, discussants related their identity to what they do most of time: **studying (being a student), working**. The activities get them connected with fellow students and with colleagues. However, importance of such bonds was not stressed and this let an impression as if discussants were relatively shallowly involved in the contacts.

All agreed that one has to carry some responsibilities, total leisure would spoil a human being. In words of one discussant: *'Yeah, our ancestors were right when they concluded that one gets spoiled without duties, responsibilities and daily routine'*.

One participant related his identity to what he would like to do or be – he wish to be(come) a nobleman in France, to read books in his library and to write books about 'WHY' questions not about 'HOW' questions. The idea that one should possess and stick to his/her **internal principles** and make every attempt to live in his own way was present also in sayings of other group members. Another participant expressed opinion that a thief who sticks to thieves' code of honour ('a honest thief') is worth more than a person who has got no internal guiding principles.

While talking about studies or work life, they did not mention feelings of belonging to either a student corporation/organisation, either to a professional organisation or to the company they were employed by. On the contrary, participants brought to the fore a viewpoint that socio-economic differentiation in the society has developed to the degree that it would be meaningless to talk about identity and belonging based on being a student or an employee of company. Interests based on **socio-economic standing** would override feelings of belonging to an organisation. My interpretation would be also vice versa – if one would belong to an organisation, then the affiliation would be based primarily on economic interests. (Later in the document it becomes evident that membership in a professional society was considered as the appropriate form of organisations since the organisations unite people with similar (economic) interests and in similar conditions.)

One participant clearly identified himself as an Estonian. Identification through **ethnic background** was present also in the case of other participants though it was not very prominent. Their approach was rather pragmatic/instrumental – several participants mentioned that they would experience difficulties in other countries, primarily because they would have to speak different language. It would be more convenient to live among people who share cultural patterns and speak the same language. In Estonia it is rational to be Estonian – it means less problems

in everyday life since one knows the language and cultural patterns. Nationhood as a source of identification is rather a rational choice than emotional feeling.

Language is an important source of identity. Seems it is a rational attitude – we think (that is, our brain operates) in terms of the language we use daily, therefore moving over to another language environment would cause additional strain. This Sapir-Whorff hypothesis based explanation was presented by one discussant (Lauri). Naturally, one would attempt to reduce strains in everyday life & one would make every attempt to live in his/her language milieu.

Most of participants did not mention attachment to any **voluntary organisations**. Probably the main reason is that awake-time is crowded with work and studies: *'I am permanently on the run, I'm in hurry all the time. Haven't have had opportunity to take time for meditating – as one activity comes to its end, another one starts at the same moment'*. Lauri was the only person who said that he was active in two charity organisations. One project was associated with cinemas /he did not specify his activities in the project/ and another was associated with providing free meals to primary school pupils.

Citizenship

For two participants, citizenship denoted belonging to a **political community**. One discussant mentioned that *'A good citizen never ashamed his/her state'* (Olev), another that *'Citizen represents his/her country abroad'* (Jürgen).

Other participants associated Estonian citizenship with obeying laws and paying taxes, behaving politely, being kind to other people (Elari, Lauri). An opposing view was that a good citizen should be critical and take independent decisions, not influenced by mass media (Raul). It was noted that a good citizen should be active in public life, f.e. should initiate cultural events (Andres).

Citizenship was only partly associated with state and nationhood. To a larger extent it was associated with **local community** and people in immediate social environment.

3.2 Tallinn, women

All group members had moved to the capital Tallinn from smaller settlements in different parts of the country. Educational goals were the main reason for moving to Tallinn – they could not obtain desired schooling in places they came from.

The most important bonds were close **friends and family members** – mother, father, brother, sister. Even when they had moved away from the family (in geographical sense), they continued to think and care and communicate with close relatives. Obviously the connection was of emotional nature. Discussants mentioned that they still missed places where they lived in childhood.

Acquaintances were important agents of social bonding. Discussants had made new friends in Tallinn and lost old friends who stayed in the place where they came from. As one discussant characterized her way of life in general: *'My home is where I put my bag. Soon acquaintances appear and I start to forget about my past friends'*. New friendships appeared through common hobbies, through studies and through participation in voluntary organizations. Connections to old friends had weakened primarily because of different educational career. As it was mentioned, all members of the group had moved to the capital Tallinn precisely because they

strived for better education; some had moved already to obtain better secondary education.

However, though education certainly changed their views on life, it would be too much to attribute all change to formal educational attainment. My interpretation would be that change of social surroundings was another major agent of change. Discussants now live in an environment that very much differs from their childhood home. And this is the reason why: *'There just isn't no topic of common interest to discuss with friends from the past'*, as one of the group members put it. They were concerned with different things, different events, they were confronted with different choices. Moreover, they probably used different logic to make sense of the world and they deliberated differently about choices they were confronted with.

Participants did not mention either nation or language as sources of identification. They did not mention any concrete or generalized organizations, voluntary or business related, as sources of their identity. Nevertheless, their narratives – when they speak about communicating with different people – tell the story that institutions play significant role in structuring relationships.

Citizenship

The group was not very eager to discuss the concept of citizenship. Only two group members expressed their thoughts. They associated citizenship with cultural environment, with people whom they knew already. Kerli and Annika had an idea that one should establish herself at first and only then start to think about more general things like state or 'other people'.

In general, citizenship seemed to be a quite meaningless concept for most of the group. Discussants remained silent or continued discussing other topics instead of reflecting over citizenship.

3.3 Viljandi

All group members were 'native' inhabitants of Viljandi, had lived there since birth. They were not patriots of their hometown. When two of the discussants said they would rather live in another place, nobody expressed an opinion that Viljandi was the town to live in. 'Another place' meant one of Estonian towns, either Pärnu or Tartu. There were several reasons for changing place of living.

First, numerous **friends** in those towns. Friends and acquaintances played important role in assessing quality of living environment.

Second, **availability of jobs**. Viljandi is much smaller town than Pärnu or Tartu, and so is the number and variation of job vacancies. The idea that one would move to a place where s/he can find a job, was not mentioned in groups conducted in Tallinn. My explanation would be that Tallinn is the most active city in economic sense and one can relatively easily find a job there.

Third, **possibility to continue studies**. In Tartu, an old and renowned university is located; in Pärnu, one branch of the university operates. This is the repetitive argument of moving to a place where one can accomplish studies. All members of previous focus group had moved precisely because of that reason.

Fourth, opportunities to **'feel good'**. Viljandi does not have places to go out, but the discussants had a wish for entertainment. Also, the town is small so that nearly everyone knows every other person and interviewees perceived that this puts strong pressure on their behaviour.

There was no wish to live in some **other country**. Discussants had visited Germany, Denmark and Sweden, and had acquaintances from the USA and they were quite determined that they would stay there only for a short period (a tourist trip, or for some period necessary to go through an educational course). The reason mentioned by several group members was that they would feel insecure in other places.

No organisations were mentioned – they did not possess feelings of belonging in an organisation. Most likely it is so because the only organisation they had connections to was the company which employed them. That bond was a rational, financial relationship.

Citizenship

The group was quite similar to other earlier mentioned groups. When the moderator asked about the meaning of citizen and citizenship, a symptomatic thing happened. No discussant picked up the proposed topic, instead they continued talk on the topic of staying or leaving hometown. Finally, two members explained in a couple of words their understanding of a good citizen. **Good citizen** is interested in social and political events, good citizen knows anthem, good citizens participates in elections, good citizen always wears neat clothes and always is nice to other people.

My interpretation would be that citizenship was a rather alien concept to discussants. Nearly no thoughts associated with the concept. As a measure of 'enlightenment' of a citizen, this result would indicate a rather low mental involvement in social and political affairs. State, nationhood, citizenship are the concept that do not appear parts of their discourse, they never use the words when they attribute meanings to individual, social and political events.

3.4 Jöhvi

Members of the groups were socially passive – none of them was member of any **club or society**. They did not spend their free time in organised way – in a hobby club or in some other organisation. Their leisure was spent predominantly individually: **sports and outdoor** recreational activities, **going out** with friends (visiting **nightclubs**), and surfing in **internet** (Boris, he was the one who reported spending a lot of time in internet). One discussant said he liked to do reconstruction work and **refurnishing** at home ('break walls' as it was in Russian) and he spent his free time to it. Only one discussant was involved in a social affair – during summertime, he helped to organise **training camp** for children (Boris, again).

Three main reasons for social passivity can be outlined. First, total or partly **absence of interest** in activities in organisations. Most participants clearly stated that they were uninterested in socio-political activities. Instead, they liked going out with friends (Alexei, Boris, Ilja). Second, **shortage of opportunities** in their hometown. Discussants repeatedly mentioned that if there were youth centre in their town or more hobby clubs they might be interested in participation. Third, **employed persons were exhausted** by the end of the workday so that they would not think of anything else but getting to sleep.

One discussant expressed the idea that too much activity in a society would be unhealthy: *'If all were active, then the whole point of participation and politics would get lost'* (Ilja).

Social bonds were sustained primarily in 'friendship' circles. For group members, **friendship** meant *'mutual understanding and common thinking'* (Oleg), *'common memories and frequently spending time together'* (Boris).

Citizenship

The group discussed the theme of political membership quite extensively. There were a couple of main ideas. First, detachment from Estonian state and second, **disinterest in socio-political activism. Disinvolvement in Estonian political community** was both behavioural and attitudinal. Behaviourally, they did not follow Estonian mass media, did not talk about Estonian politics. Their factual knowledge was rather limited – they could name only two political figures: one was President (Rüütel) and another was leader of the largest political party (Savisaar) (Ilja, Vitali). Out of some 15 Estonian political parties, Raimond and Ilja could name three (Res Publica, Centre Party and Pro Patria), other discussants did not add any parties. Even parties with Russian background were not mentioned. They had not voted and did not intent to vote. Instead of following Estonian politics they followed Russian politics in Russian TV-channels (Raimond). They did not trust Estonian political system and politicians (Boris: *'Of course I don't trust politicians'*) to the degree of irrationalism and also hold opinion that one can not change anything in society (Ilja). Irrationalism was expressed in the saying that results of EU referendum were faked: *'56% percent? I just don't believe it! Seems to me the figure was below 50% /.../ The figure must have been faked'* (Oleg). Aleksei declared that he was not patriot of the country.

The focus group in Jõhvi clearly brought to fore the point that **non-citizens and non-Estonians experience certain hardships in society**. They can not find job so easily, they can not travel around very easily and they need to be in contact with Estonian Migration board. Nearly each employer requires good knowledge of Estonian before offering a job. Travelling to other countries is somewhat problematic for people with Russian citizenship or without citizenship of any state. Estonian Migration Board monitors life of people with non-Estonian citizenship status and issues residence and work permits to them. Interviewees perceived that the whole situation was somewhat constraining their life, how they would like to live it.

However, it still remains unclear whether these were citizenship status and/or language skills, which prevented them from socio-political activism. Several other candidate-reasons can be pointed at. First, **personal inactivity and shortage of interest** that leads to insufficient knowledge and lack of social skills. The latter two certainly impede participation. Second, **living in a place remote from the capital**. Intensity of socio-political life and participation opportunities are much smaller than in the capital, making it less likely to be politically active. Third, **living in non-Estonian environment**. Friends as well as mass media are oriented toward Russia and not toward Estonia: they are informed about what goes on in Russia not in Estonia and they also talk about Russia not about Estonia. Fourth, **cultural-historical background** causes feelings of alienation from Estonian state.

Discussants mentioned feelings of attachment to Russian state and society but not to Estonian state and society.

And most likely it was a mix of the factors that could explain their inactivity and hostility toward Estonian state and society...

3.5 Individual interviews

In individual interviews the theme of identity and belonging was not discussed in detail. Interviewees' political affiliations and reasons for that (their organisational identity) were revealed in their accounts of how they became what they were at the time of interview (in socio-political activism sense). The most repeated theme was **personal activism** in organisations since early years in high school. They actively participated in school self-government (on a leadership position), organised various events, educated themselves in some particular topic, communicated with people in politics and in public service. **School-centred activism** continued on university level where they became members of university student self-government. At that period (being a student at a university) they also established contacts with youth organisations of political parties.

Ideological considerations were of minor weight and played important role only in the case of Karel. He was quite determined about the right way of leading society. His viewpoint was that golden midway in economics and social policy and a strong element of nationalism would be the best way. Other interviews did not stress their ideological preferences when they talk about their selection of a party. Joining a party was rather not motivated strongly by ideology: Oksana joined Centre Party because she ran into an old friend who asked her to join the party and because she liked image of the party leader. Janika took part in Reform Party's parties because there was no other party organisation in the small town where she lived. Sven *'just started to visit Reform Party's youth organisation's gatherings and meetings...'*. Later he joined the party because he wanted to accept the offer of becoming a deputy mayor and he had to be member of the same party where the mayor belonged to.

My interpretation would be that **political organisations played a role of channelling young peoples' activism and energy rather than mobilising and motivating them**. Personal characteristics were of primary importance and organisational structure of secondary importance when we try to understand interviewees' activism and feelings toward political institutions.

4 Theme 2. Organised activities aside from political participation

The general opinion from focus group interviews was that young people were devoted to work and studies. They rarely participated in organised activities. Sports and recreational outdoor activities were mentioned.

4.1 Tallinn, men

Discussants, except for one, were not members of any non-political club or association. One young man was involved in a charity project which organised free lunch for pupils from families that experienced economic hardships. Some of them mentioned playing ballgames sometimes. However, **workouts** occurred more occasionally than regularly and certainly did not carry the meaning of organised activism in a non-profit organisation. One discussant used to go jogging/running but as he said, he used to do it alone. He also liked reading books, which again was not a collective, organised activity (Raul).

The group generally supported the view of Lauri: *'Passivity is not necessarily negative. For instance, there is no obligation to participate in a singing choir, be a member of a NGO or watch news broadcast in TV. But there should be some minimal level of activism. Certainly people should vote and be informed about candidates and parties'*.

My interpretation would be that this answer reflects the opinion that **voluntary activities** are something that one can adhere to if one has a feeling for some particular hobby but that these activities do not constitute a natural part of social life. Members of this group stick to an opposite opinion – that one can **contribute to the society through his/her work, by performing perfectly in the job**. Raul: *'In present days working is popular. If it weren't maybe people wouldn't work so hard. Everyone strives to leave a good impression to others. For instance, during Soviet time loafing was fully accepted, it was something one would boast about. Stealing was also OK, was fully accepted'*. Lauri: *'I think, the question is not whether working is popular or not but rather what occupation/position is popular'*. The last quotes express opinion that working is something worthy, socially desirable.

And the young men themselves devoted their time to studies and work, which is fully in correspondence with their opinions about obligations and voluntary activities...

4.2 Tallinn, women

Participants were positive about **non-political and non-profit associations**. Several ideas were associated with activities in non-profit organisations, which can be classified into three categories: **recreation** (hobbies, enjoying oneself), **social bonding** (contacts in organisations, communication between professionals) and organising and **achieving interests of a social category**. Mai: *'Clubs unite people, give them opportunity to spend leisure meaningfully and pleasantly, to restore their energy'*. Another participant, Tiina, said that *'I have a dream to create*

a dance group for young people so that youngsters can express themselves through dance. This would offer an opportunity to spend time enjoyably. Of course, there are numerous other groups, opportunities for workout and training...'

Professional societies were perceived as important arenas for creating pressure groups: *'One voice does not count. I think there should be certain similar opinions, viewpoints that bring people together. /.../ Professional background is a meaningful bases for creating a group. /.../ Some groups – teachers, nurses – feel they need to make themselves heard in the society'* (Anu).

In general, participation in groups was perceived as an important 'tool' for integrating people into various societies (from small hobby-group through professional societies to society in general). For achieving certain ends, organisations serve directly as pressure groups and somewhat more indirectly as arenas for creating and maintaining social contacts. Discussants perceived professional societies relatively important for solving social issues.

4.3 Viljandi

Participants did not mention participation in any hobby club or in any other organisation. The group nearly ignored the question about spending free time. One reason probably was that the group of young women in Viljandi just did not have much free time. All their time was allocated to **work and/or baby-sitting**. They carried the double burden of feeding themselves and their child; since wages were low in this small town, they had to work a lot and had virtually no free time. Another reason that was mentioned was that there were very few opportunities to spend leisure time in Viljandi: *'There are **no opportunities to spend leisure and to go out**'* (Anu).

4.4 Jõhvi

There is nothing to report in this section. From the previous section it should be clear that **young men in Jõhvi were not involved in organised activities**. Only Boris helped to organise a holiday camp in summertime.

4.5 Individual interviews

Since individual interviews were conducted with people who were politically active, they did not use their free time for extra social, political activities. There were three main areas that consumed activists' free time:

Sports and outdoor recreation. Both young men (Sven, Karel) liked hiking, fishing, hunting. They also occasionally played ballgames and did other sports, like swimming. One of girls liked snowboarding (Janika). All these activities were clearly of recreational nature with an important aspect of fun and social interaction; sports as an activity was not an aim in any of the cases.

Cultural activities. One of the girls sang in a choir (Janika), another was involved in movie making (Oksana).

Social interaction and entertainment. All interviewees mentioned that social events were of great importance. They did not talk about it as if it were a sturdy obligation to go to a party and to communicate with people. On the contrary, they

were positive about going to meetings with other people, and having fun in the meetings. Two kinds of social events were mentioned. First, there were events that were organised purely for entertainment. For instance, recently a VIP disco was organised where MPs and other significant public figures served drinks in a bar and performed as DJs. Second, social part of a work meeting. For instance, seminars are usually organised to endure for at least two days precisely because then there is one evening free for games and other entertainment. Young people get to know each other in informal settings and these experiences are very useful also in 'business' relationships.

5 Theme 3. Democracy

In two groups – high education young men and women – participants were asked to write down meanings for the following words: politics, politician, democracy. 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. The moderator has significant experience of conducting focus groups (also on political themes) and she based her decision on first 15 minutes of group conversation.

5.1 Tallinn, men

In the group of young 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**. The following quotes from participants' notes describe their view of democracy:

'Social order, whereby everyone has right to participate in decisions' /decisions not specified/

'Rights – right to have a job, right to be free (not imprisoned); freedom to speak freely'

'Freedom, bounded with (social) rules'

'A form of social organisation and ruling that entails free elections to bodies of representatives'

'Economic freedom, freedom from constraints to engage in various activities' /the interviewee did not specify which activities he had in mind/

'Freedom to choose' / the interviewee did not specify the alternatives to choose amongst/

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 following quotes characterize interviewees' opinions:

'Illusion, an attempt to leave the impression as if the people could participate in state governance.' *'Democracy would exist when all decisions would be adopted and approved by acts of plebiscite.'* /the wording in Estonian means that there actually was no democracy/

'Power of brainless people, based on the principle of "all are equal, some are more equal". Refer to Orwell's 'Animal farm' and '1984' for a good description.'

5.2 Tallinn, women

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. The following quotes describe representations of democracy:

'... whereby one can freely express his/her thoughts without choosing words. And there is hope that your voice counts.'

'People have a choice to participate in important decisions. However, it is another matter whether they succeed'

'Freedom of speech, taking others into account, a form of state/governing, there is no monarch'

'Existence of various freedoms /not specified/, progress in society, opportunities and threats to all members of a society /not specified/, high living standard in general.'

'Freedom, state officials should stay in Estonia' /do not understand what she meant/

'Power of people. However, people's decision are right not always because public can be influenced and masses follow actions of each other' /the sentence remained unclear to me; its meaning might be that groups follow actions of other groups/.

5.3 Viljandi

The group 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:

'Should be freedom' /not specified/

'Opportunities, freedom to choose' /not specified/

'Estonia is democratic because the basic freedoms are there /not specified/; however, freedom of speech should be more constrained – in some cases it turns to making a mock of other people, that is not nice at all.'

'Don't know, not interested at all. But there are people who are interested /names the name of the leader of the most popular party in Estonia/. And Estonia is a democratic country – because there are many political parties and competition between them.'

5.4 Jõhvi

The group discussed the theme quite shortly, they just did not have much to say about the concept. For Oleg, democracy meant '**equality**' of all inhabitants. Raimond expressed diametrically opposite opinion by saying that '*Our democracy has no smell of equality*', Ilja agreed with Raimond. Ilja continued by saying that democracy was '*an invention of 19th, 20th century when everyone can become anyone*' /by the latter expression he meant that any individual can potentially occupy nearly any position in a society/. My interpretation would be that democracy for him meant **freedoms**. Also Vitali, Sergei and Boris equated democracy with freedom in general, they did not specify meaning of 'freedom'.

The concept of **political party** was also discussed in the group. Political party in their view was a constellation of people who shared similar ideas about resolving issues of social progress though their opinions on certain issues might be different (Raimond, Sergei, Vitali). 'Ideas' would mean **national goals** but not ways how to realise the goals (Raimond).

5.5 Individual interviews

Young socio-political elite perceived democracy differently from 'ordinary' persons. Perhaps the most important difference was that they used **more elements** to describe the concept. My interpretation would be that 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 (Maria, Janika) 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 (Sven).

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.

Janika: '*Democracy is **power of majority**; for instance, if there were 10 people here and 8 of them would wish to have coffee and 2 tea, then we would make coffee. Democracy is **representative democracy** – people elect representatives who will make decisions for them. Democracy is related to **political belonging** –*

only citizens can vote and run for the position of national representatives. **Direct democracy** – all decisions by plebiscite – is not a good way because most people never neither understand nor bother themselves with thinking over social issues and their choices would be based on irrational, inadequate grounds. Even many members of parliament don't understand much of the issues and problems that they are deciding.'

Karel: 'Democracy is power of people /the interviewee was quite hesitating/. People elect **representatives** who are expected to protect people's rights and to increase their living standard. In reality, however, the goal is rarely achieved. Democracy is associated with political parties and electoral campaigns, campaigns in mass media.'

Sven: 'Democracy is power of people, a common form of governing in Western-Europe and in America. It is opportunity to change leaders – this is the main advantage of democracy over other forms of government. And democracy entails possibility for every individual to take the leadership position. The procedure of changing leaders assures that more intelligent and capable individuals become leaders, which in turn is essential for social progress. The period between elections should be relatively short, in this case people can exercise their power to change representatives and there is no threat of monopolistic concentration of power in the hands of 'enlightened monarch'. Political parties are important since they bring together like-minded people and they provide organisation to realize the ideas. Political campaigns are important since they provide information on parties' and politicians' ideas and plans.'

Oksana: 'Democracy is **political culture**, attitudes of political leaders. This is the mechanism, which would be in operation when it comes to taking important, major decisions in a society.'

Maria: 'Democracy is about elections, elections are important /reason not specified/. Democracy should not be confined to representative democracy, democracy should include a strong element of participative democracy; in democracy there should be an institution of public initiative /in Estonia, there is no such institution on national level/. That would balance and discipline elected members of parliament.'

6 Theme 3. Politics and politicians

6.1 Tallinn, men

Politics and politicians were associated 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 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 following are some quotes from the discussion:

'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 a system of government based on organised power relations; politician is somebody who participates in politics.'

'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.'

6.2 Tallinn, women

The group of educated women was split into two sections, 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 is responsibility, decisions, people who stand for their ideas and attempt to make nation's life better in accordance with their vision /.../. Politician is a representative who carries huge burden of responsibilities; politician must stand firmly to accomplish his/her goals while being attentive to other people's ideas.'

'Permanent fight for power, unexciting, presentation oneself, corruption, struggle between parties. Politician has handsome appearance, s/he is a skilful interpersonal communicator, well educated, highly competent, vainglorious person 'Dull, corruption, struggle for power, advertising, reforms, playing others down, ... Politician is a lying person, who makes promises during election campaigns, stands for his/her own interests not for people's interests. Few politicians are OK – they do not make empty promises but attempt to fulfil what has been said.'

*'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.'*

6.3 Viljandi

Words 'politics' and 'politician' obviously were not the concepts that discussants in the group 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 s/he has a **good-looking appearance...**

The following quotes give an overview of discussion:

'Don't know, I'm not interested – it is so complicated, full of foreign words; sometimes when I feel I would like to know more about our world I ask my brother who has political science master degree but it is too complicated. I think, it is sufficient when I know what is president and ministers, and what party reigns. I think they work hard and take very important decisions. But no-one's decisions are perfect and nobody can be liked by everybody – so they will be painfully punished. Good politician should have a vision, should be moving forward permanently. Politician is good if s/he already has accomplished something, that you can see that s/he is capable of doing something for people.'

'Those who work in our parliament Riigikogu, they are politicians; others are rubbish not worth to be called 'politician'.'

'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.'

6.4 Jõhvi

Discussion on what politics was, started with rather unequivocal opinions:

corruption (Oleg), **bribing** (Boris, Vitali), **selling oneself** (Ilja, Boris)... Though boys said they were absolutely uninterested in politics (Boris, Alexei), Alexei 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. My interpretation would be that his 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.

The group did not pick up any other perspectives on politics.

6.5 Individual interviews

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 the 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 which 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 (Sven). Politicians have to accomplish what they promised.

Quotes from active young people:

Oksana: *'Politics is different from democracy. Politics is leadership, management. Actually, politics is everywhere – how much one pays for electricity, for studies.'*

Janika: *'Politics is when 'uncles' gather together and make important decisions; later they might tell absolutely different things to mass media here the young interviewee talked about her experiences when she was minister's 'work-shadow'/. Politics is that important decisions are taken somewhere behind closed doors. Politics basically is not filthy though the more one has power the more one gets in touch with 'grey', secret people and decisions. Politics is about money, about diplomacy, it is – I don't know ... it is governing. Politicians are leaders, they have goals and they motivate other people to strive for those goals. Politicians, when compared to high state officials, have more freedoms /freedoms' not specified/. Politicians are public persons, they are daily discussed on pages of yellow newspapers.'*

Karel: *'Politician is a very experienced person, one can not just learn to be a politician by graduating from a university. Young person never can be a good politician since s/he lacks life experience. Politician has a drive to change something, to make life better in a certain region or for a certain category of inhabitants. A good politician never takes decisions in favour of / on behalf of one narrow interest group. A good politician is an independent person so that pressure groups can not influence his/her opinions and decisions; s/he is independent in economical sense, s/he also feels secure about his future.*

Good politics means taking decisions to advance electorate's interests, to make better their living standards. Good politics comes through balanced view of society: there are many groups in the society – young people, businessmen, retired, ... – with their vision of just social order. Good politicians decision take different views into account while making decisions.

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 businessmen and politicians

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do advance their interests. Politicians also manipulate public opinion with political campaigns, financed by businessmen.'

Sven: '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.

Maria: Political culture is how politicians take into account opinion of people – they should take the decisions which correspond to opinion of majority of people. In politics, public initiative is important, the institution of public initiative should be legislated.'

7 Theme 4. Political Participation

7.1 Focus groups

In focus groups, **voting** was mentioned as a standard or minimal engagement in social and political life. It is important to add that discussants discussed voting in connection with being informed about social and political events. **Obtaining information** and staying **informed about society** as well as about political parties and key political institutions were considered a normal or at least minimal ingredients of political participation.

Importance of an issue was one key factor, which was associated with protest actions. Focus group discussants considered it possible to participate in protest actions when other means seems to fail. One discussant mentioned that there should be a good reason for that – the issue should be really critical to mobilise him to protest. What reason would be good enough? For instance, a discussant in Viljandi said that if the system of higher education would become fully paid (it is now partly free), then she would go and protest against it.

Discussion of the **might of a single person** versus **might of an organisation** was another noteworthy idea. All discussants shared opinion that a single individual would achieve really nothing. Only if s/he succeeds to organise and motivate other people to act in unity, then one might expect positive results. Professional background was considered as a proper basis for bringing people together. People doing similar work probably experience similar problems and they also share similar code of behaviour and ethics to some extent. Therefore professional associations and trade unions were considered as the most proper forms organising socio-economic interests.

7.2 Individual interviews

In the individual interviews, four forms of participation were considered important. **Voting**, of course, was considered an indispensable form of participation for an ordinary citizen. An interesting fact occurred: when considering elections, the talk was about voting in national parliamentary elections. In social and political life, these are only one type of elections. In addition to voting in parliamentary elections, one has opportunity to vote in local elections, in organisational elections and in supranational elections. This obviously reflects the situation where different elections carry dissimilar salience for individuals. Parliamentary elections were considered the most significant elections, more important than organisational, local elections or elections to international bodies.

The mere fact of casting a ballot would not be good enough – **voting should be informed**. Voter should be well aware of issues and potential solutions as well as of politicians' ideological viewpoints to make a good/rational choice. People should **follow mass media and discuss politics** to become and stay informed about politics and society.

Though informed voting was considered perhaps the most important way how to influence society, the period between elections could be fulfilled with activities in voluntary organisations, including political parties. One interviewee, Maria, considered **participation in local and other voluntary organisations** (NPO/NGO) extremely important. Her viewpoint was that in the future, NPO/NGOs will start to provide many services that currently are provided either by government or business solely (e.g. care for elderly people, local security). People can make life much better when they act in an organised and targeted manner.

A feature attributed to organisational participation was that in organisations, individuals gather **social capital**. They become to know other people with similar interests and later they can rely on established contacts. This point was repeated by all interviewees.

Demonstrations, pickets and other **protest actions** were considered inadequate for influencing political decisions and realising one's goals. The main argument was that political decisions are taken according to certain routines and protest actions can influence procedures of political decision-making only to some minor extent. At the same time, protest actions often hamper functioning of public institutions and public life and cause material/financial losses. Public demonstrations were considered as a means for conveying information about groups' goals and making the case more visible in the very crowded media-space, under the conditions of information overflow. The role of organisations was stressed also here – demonstrations normally are organised by an organisation (Sven, Karel).

The interviewees did not intend to involve themselves in any kind of direct action. The reason was simple – there are better and more efficient ways of achieving one's goals.

8 Theme 5. Opportunity Structures for Participation

8.1 Tallinn, women

Contradiction between generations was mentioned in this group: older generation of politicians does not tolerate younger people to participate actively. Younger are kept apart from decision making, therefore older generation should be replaced by young people if we really want to improve our society. This would encourage also other younger people to participate more actively⁵. Discussants mentioned repeatedly the **feeling of (dis)empowerment** – that ordinary individual can not change anything. If one wants to initiate changes, one needs support of many people: *'.../we have collected signatures, 700 signatures, and we forward the signatures to Association of Student Self-Governments, which will take the signatures to the state. I believe, it will change something and if it does not, we can say that we tried, though unsuccessfully'*.

Several participants considered **politics dull and corrupted** sphere of activities, which is unattractive.

Importance of **managing own life** was mentioned: *'I start thinking about social problems and about other people only when my own affairs run smoothly. My first task is to manage myself. An I think, people in general should fulfil the task before they start to manage others' lives'*. The idea was shared by other groups as well; probably it is a consequence of (ultra)liberal social thinking and practice, which has been popular in the last decade. This passage highlights also that **poor economic condition** obviously was one factor which prevented people from being socially and politically active. Most people have spent all their attention and energy on managing elementary needs so they had no interest and wish to spend additional energy on relatively distant affairs ('politics' is quite abstract and distant). In words of another participant: *'When I manage successfully my own life, I do influence society by not being an asocial/dropout person. Maybe in later years I will become active in politics...'*

Access to other people, **membership in networks** is a huge and indispensable resource for participation in society. It follows that lack of tight networks is a strong discouraging factor, which prevents people from participation. There are certain groups in society that are characterised by relatively weak networks – retired and elderly people, unemployed, rural people.

8.2 Viljandi

The group in Viljandi equated social activism with individual activities. Communication between people was mainly associated with settling some misunderstanding or quarrel between neighbours. One discussant mentioned collective activity as a means of solving a common problem: *'You have to turn to*

⁵ Actually, Estonia is a country of young politicians and top civil servants. Many key positions in public administration and politics are manned with people in their twenties and thirties.

people who experience the same trouble. They would give you their support.' However, this calls for personal activism and social skills but all discussants agreed that they do not possess enough energy for initiating and leading a pressure group. Strange as it might be, social activism was perceived as a lonesome affair.

Young women in Viljandi shared opinion that poor economic conditions prevent people from participation. One has to **work hard** to make ends meet, and by the end of the day or by the end of the workweek one just does not have energy left for participation, hobbies or any other voluntary activities.

Participation in work force was strongly dependent on **earlier work experience**: *'In every enterprise you are asked what is your experience in the field. One might present hundreds of certificates of specific education, but this all is in vain – employers are for experience.'* Another participant said that her brother and sister had graduated from a university but they could not find a job.

They also mentioned **lack of social knowledge and comprehension of society** and **lack of social skills** as factors that prevent people from social activism. As one discussant said *'I wish I could tell about it in the local newspaper. But I can't, I never wrote an article'*. It is my interpretation that they perceived as if they understood social processes insufficiently. Also the group left an impression that if young people were more skilful in interpersonal communication as well as in sorting out and organizing their ideas and thoughts, they could be more active.

8.3 Jõhvi

Focus group in Jõhvi discussed participation in the context of **political membership** and **feelings of belonging**. Weakness or total absence of identification with the Estonian state was probably the main factor preventing them from participation. One discussant answered to moderator's question whether he voted: *'No. Even didn't think about going to elections'*. Weak sense on attachment means also that they follow Estonian politics very rarely and they do not feel **informed** enough to choose between parties. Shortage of factual and systematic knowledge about Estonian politics push non-Estonians away from participation. **Language barrier** has got its impeding role here as well. Without knowing Estonian sufficiently, it is nearly impossible to become and stay informed about processes in the society. Crux of problem is that even if people in North-Eastern pass language course and are proficient in the language after the course, they forget it soon because in that region, nearly nobody speaks the titular language. Another reason for being politically inactive was **citizenship status**. However, being a non-citizen in Estonian prevents only from voting in parliamentary elections. Participation in other forms is available to all members of society. Obviously the issue was again brought up by the feeling of detachment from the state. One discussant mentioned that he would be the first person to vote in Russian presidential elections (the elections took place in March, after the interview was recorded) while he did not show interest in participation in Estonian elections (Raimond). He was not politically inactive – only that his activism was just directed to **Russia**.

8.4 Individual interviews

Individual interviews revealed quite clear sequence of steps which young people passed during their social activism 'career'. First, interviewees mentioned **personal interest and motivation** to involve in various organizational activities. The motivation and interest begins in early years of high school, at age 15-16. This age is obviously a significant borderline where social skills and capital start to develop and accumulate. At that age, young people had principally one channel, where to realize their personal initiatives – **school self government**. After having serving in school self-government, contacts began with a **political party youth organization**. On the next step, active people get involved in a **political party**.

It is obvious that contacts made in youth organisations (YO) – during social events – play crucial role. People get to know each other in informal settings and the bonds strongly facilitate also 'business' communication. Existence of **mediating institutions** between young individuals and society (political community) is a significant factor for activating young people.

Distance from the capital, which is the centre of social and political life, does not prevent being active. Two of the interviewees (Karel, Janika) spent their high-school years in small towns, approximately 250 km from the capital. Nevertheless, this did not prevent them from contributing to student government on local as well as on national level.

Non-Estonian **ethnic background** in itself does not prevent being politically active – one of the interviewees had Russian background (Oksana). She was active in school; at the time of interview she was elected to a city district council and she was a leading figure in a YO of a political party. However, it is important to know Estonian **language** to the extent that one can freely communicate with other active people.

However, from the interview in Jõhvi it was evident that citizenship status and language capabilities determine social and political activism to a notable degree.

9 Comparison of Focus Groups versus Individual Interviews

Individual interviews were more detailed. Active young people used a wider variety of terms to analyse political and social settings. Also their reasoning was more sophisticated, they took into account factors that were not mentioned in group interviews.

Educational level played important role. People with lower education showed less enthusiasm during discussion, their arguments were tied to personal gains and losses, they rarely left personal level and moved to analysis of society as a collective entity.

10 Some most important concepts

Democracy was associated with different 'freedoms' and rights, foremost with freedom of choice. Other ideas include elections and choosing leaders, power of people, representation and participation, NGO/NPOs, public initiative, political parties, participation in state governance and in important decisions, social order.

Participation included several activities: voting, keeping oneself informed – following news in mass media and discussing politics, partaking in organisations and in a political party, involvement in protest actions in extreme cases.

Citizenship was associated with being member of a political community, obeying laws and paying taxes, being informed about events in a society, performing well in job, initiating cultural and other projects, being kind to other people.

Political and politician include 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.

11 Stimuli for Quantitative Work

- ✍ Interviews showed that individual differed quite notably in terms of participation activity as well as in terms of political attitudes (trust, knowledge). Some young people are quite well aware of political life, use quite sophisticated ways of thinking and are active in several ways. Others know less and use more simplistic ways of reasoning, they are less active. How to capture the whole spectrum? My idea would be to separate active people from passive with help of filter questions and ask more detailed questions from relatively active people.
- ✍ Certainly the themes of national identification, national pride and national hostility should be included. The feeling of hostility against other nation or ethnicity was obvious in the group of non-Estonians. Discussants of the group ascribed feelings of hostility against Slavic people to Estonians. Actually none of Estonian discussants mentioned any feelings of hostility against non-Estonians. It is my viewpoint that in the enlarged Europe with free movement of labour and services, national conflicts might become one major determinant of protest actions. In any society, it is youth who is more likely to rebel and fight.
- ✍ Attitudes' section could include items measuring interest, trust, disempowerment, alienation. Interviews revealed strong element of attitudinal determination of behaviour and behavioural intentions. Interviewees said that disinterest in politics was one of the main determinants of social passivity. Psychological detachment from the state, distrust in politicians and politics were frequently mentioned as answers to the question of why youth does not participate in political organisations.
- ✍ A section on knowledge of politics, following mass media and discussion of politics should be included. These factors determine interest in and participation in society to a large extent. Shortage of factual and systematic knowledge of the society depresses interest and participation plans. Perhaps it would be reasonable to develop a rather detailed indicators for these themes, including appropriate distinctions between mass media channels and discussion themes. In Estonia, the group of non-Estonians followed mass media and discussed politics – but it was all about another state...
- ✍ It seems also relevant to include a section for gauging language, communication and social skills. In the interviews it became repeatedly evident that social interaction and communication between people are the cornerstones of organisational activism. On the one hand, these qualities are developed in organisations; on the other hand, low level of those qualities holds back activism in collective activities.

12 Summary of main findings

I made an attempt to order the main points in descending order of importance.

- ✍ In general, my interpretation of the interviews would be that Estonian youth holds a view that participation is something extraordinary, not a natural part of societal life. This might be a result of extreme economic liberalism and the concept of minimal state have been helped to develop.
- ✍ Personal characteristics like interest in social interaction, wish for organisational work, leadership qualities and communication skills obviously play significant role in social activism. These factor override such objective constraints like living in a periphery or insufficient language skills.
- ✍ Educational level explains much of youths' 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 in touch with other people who are socially active than people with lower educational attainment. Also, more educated have opportunity to participate in school or university self-government that is among 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 distrusting, they were much more alienated from their country of residence. Also they 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 (= gather social capital) and learn how to work collectively. Through organisations they get first contacts with people in power positions and learn routines of (political) decision making.
- ✍ There were no significant differences between young men and women without children. But girls with children were different from both boys and other girls – child-rearing placed additional pressure on their time allocation as well as on work life. They had to work more and they could not use their time as freely as other boys or girls.
- ✍ Economic situation of family/household evidently plays 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 places mentioned lack or absence of opportunities for spending free time. They missed well-equipped places for sports and decent places for going out with friends.

- ✍ Employed persons obviously were under much stronger stress than youngsters in education. This conclusion followed from their frequent reporting of total exhaustedness by the end of workday or workweek. Students did not have similar experiences.