



EACEA 2010/03:  
Youth Participation in Democratic Life

*Final Report  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study is concerned with the participation of young people in European democratic life. When we speak of young people, we are actually referring to a diverse and highly heterogeneous group in society with a complex variety of identities and socio-economic as well as educational backgrounds. However, the distinction between who is considered youth and adult is also culturally determined and changes over time. In some countries, for example, young people are dependent on their parents for much longer than in other countries and this tendency is exacerbated in times of crisis. For the purpose of this study the focus is on young people in the age range 13-30, in accordance with the target audience of the Youth in Action Programme. Where the study refers to a different age range, it is mentioned specifically.

A normative conception of youth participation, defining political participation broadly, is about engaging in forming opinions and taking actions to bring about positive change in society. It can take different forms. Examples are:

- **Participation of young people in representative democracy:** standing for or voting in elections or membership of political parties
- **Participation of young people in participatory structures:** promoting the involvement of more young people in structures, such as youth organisations or issue-based NGOs or volunteering
- **Participation in debate:** on youth or community issues; opinion-shaping through written press or youth radio, participating in online discussion fora, writing or following blogs
- **Seeking information and learning about democracy:** participating in simulations of political processes, attending training or learning at school, engaging in youth organisations

Youth participation, in other words, fosters a sense of citizenship and makes policy processes more transparent and accountable towards young people. At the same time, it helps young people build self-confidence, develop a sense of initiative and acquire and test skills that are relevant for the workplace, such as communication, negotiation or teamwork, in a practical environment.

When it comes to the participation of young people in democratic life, Europe has no borders. Young people's patterns of participation in society vary in line with different cultural norms, history and geography. But across Europe, the concept of youth participation is shared. The conclusions and recommendations of this study are therefore not only relevant to the member states of the European Union, but equally to other countries in the wider Europe context (which would in practice include non-EU members of the Council of Europe). In its efforts to promote youth participation and to recognise young people's involvement in decision-making, the Commission promotes sharing its experience in youth policy with the EU's neighbouring countries in Europe.

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## AIMS

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As political participation – from electoral turnout to party membership – has significantly declined over the past 40 years both in Europe and beyond, particular care needs to be taken that young Europeans get the best possible opportunity to engage with their political systems. This study is one of the most in depth ever conducted on youth participation in democratic life in Europe. It provides unprecedented empirical evidence on the exact strengths and weaknesses of the participation of young people in Europe across their social and national diversity and systematically assesses their causes. Perhaps even more importantly, however, in a context of changing political structures and technological opportunities, it studies ways to enhance the participation of young Europeans, not only quantitatively (that is, by making young Europeans ‘participate more’) but also qualitatively (enabling young people to ‘make the most’ of democratic participation and be better represented and more influential in national and international democratic systems).

### *Key themes:*

- (1) the representation of young people, with a particular focus on youth organisations
- (2) decision-makers’ engagement with young people in policy processes, with specific attention to the EU’s Structured Dialogue
- (3) youth electoral participation, including an assessment of e-voting and social media campaigning
- (4) non-electoral (both organised and unorganised) forms of participation, including volunteering
- (5) the role of mainstream media, community media and new media in fostering participation in democratic life amongst young people
- (6) youth exclusion and its relationship to civic participation

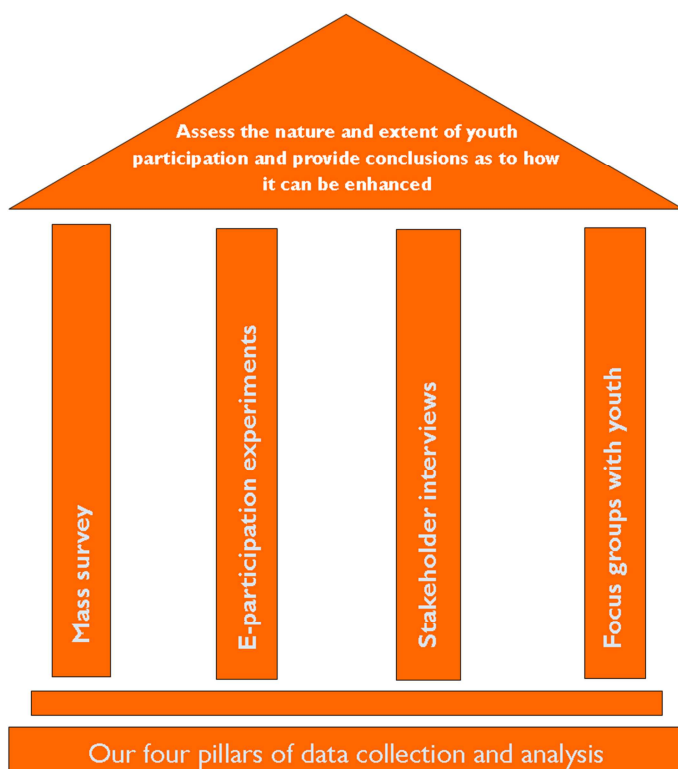
The results of this study are structured around six key themes: (1) the representation of young people, with a particular focus on youth organisations, (2) decision-makers’ engagement with young people in policy processes, with specific attention to the EU’s

Structured Dialogue, (3) youth electoral participation, including an assessment of e-voting and social media campaigning, (4) non-electoral (both organised and unorganised) forms of participation, including volunteering, (5) the role of mainstream media, community media and new media in fostering participation in democratic life amongst young people and (6) youth exclusion and its relationship to civic participation.

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## METHODOLOGY

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The report uses an innovative and sophisticated mixture of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to assess in detail the state and roots of youth participation and formulate policy recommendations:

- **Documentary analysis and desk-research:** over 50 policy documents, academic journal articles and research reports were consulted and analysed.
- **Secondary data analysis:** several data sets were re-analysed with a particular focus on young people to provide comparative data across the EU.
- **Survey:** a large-scale representative survey of pre-voters (16-18) and young voters (18-30) in 7 countries (Austria, Finland, France, Hungary, Poland, Spain and the UK) was conducted, focusing on the reality of youth participation and perceptions but also young people's ideas of what measures could lead them to participate more.
- **Experiment:** in 6 countries (Austria, Finland, France, Hungary, Spain and the UK) an experiment in e-voting and use of social media for campaigning was conducted.
- **Focus groups:** in 6 countries (Austria, Finland, France, Hungary, Spain and the UK) a total of 18 focus groups were held with a wide variety of young people from different backgrounds (in each country, a reference focus group of students, a group of active youth and a group of excluded youth). In particular, the latter category includes groups which are often ignored or largely underrepresented in existing research (unemployed, migrants, homeless, etc.).
- **Stakeholder interviews:** 77 interviews were conducted (face-to-face, telephone, Skype and some through email) with stakeholders in the 6 selected countries and beyond.

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## GENERAL FINDINGS

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### **Young people are stakeholders, not victims**

Young people are stakeholders in the European democratic system. They express ideas and preferences, and defend diverse interests. This is true even before they reach voting age. Young people articulate preferences and interests, and some of them are even more active than a majority of adults, notably through volunteering. Moreover, a clear majority of young people ask for more – and not less – opportunity to have a say in the way their political systems are governed.

Young people are as diverse as adults, have competing political interests and also have diverse perceptions of how best to influence the lives of their political system. As such, young people are not ‘victims’ or ‘problematic’ as often claimed, but diverse and critical stakeholders in democracy, who often feel that their priorities are under-addressed in the political discourse. Young people, furthermore, are full of good ideas on how to improve their representation and the democratic system at large.

### **Young people want politics to change but they also want to participate in it**

Interviews with stakeholders, focus groups and survey results reveal that there is no crisis of democratic participation amongst youth across Europe and neither is there major disenchantment with political issues and concerns on the part of young people; in fact, quite the contrary. However, a clear and growing dissatisfaction can be observed with the way politics is conducted and with ‘politicians’ in general.

### **Political education is at the heart of participation**

Many stakeholders and young people alike echo the important role of learning and education in improving participation in democratic life. In this regard, free political education is seen as a prerequisite for more participation. Most recognise that it would be most efficient to include a practical element in learning about democracy, both at a formal and non-formal level. It is also deemed essential to make political education compulsory at a young age (12-16) which is the only time when all young people – even those coming from the most excluded backgrounds – are still in the school system.

Young people request more information about politics and elections. In particular, they largely support the generalisation of voting advice applications (these allow citizens to find out the policy proposals of various parties and compare them to their own views) and the organisation of full scale debates by young party representatives in schools during election time.

### **Institutions and contexts matter**

Local political contexts play a pivotal role in the extent and nature of youth participation in democratic life. For instance, the presence of a far right candidate in the French 2002 presidential election led to a strong electoral mobilisation of young voters, and the Austrian experiment of lowering the voting age to 16 has had an impact on youth engagement.

Young people consider multiple specific institutional settings that could improve their participation and representation, including providing for the mass election of special youth representatives. With the right supporting framework, lowering the voting age to 16 could also improve participation.

Increasingly opinion exchanges take place online via the internet and social media. These channels of communication provide new opportunities. Yet whether these opportunities materialise depends on the way in which they are set up; they can even be counterproductive if poorly used.

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## THEME 1: YOUTH REPRESENTATION

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### **Representation of young people is contested**

Interviews with expert stakeholders and 'active' youth suggest that there are many young people and adults working within youth organisations who devote a lot of energy to representing the interests of young people in the public sphere and in policy contexts.

At the same time, a majority of focus group participants (in 'active', 'reference' and 'excluded' groups), and some expert stakeholders also maintain that those representing young people in Parliament, in student unions, in youth councils and national youth organisations are not sufficiently representative of youth in their diversity.

Young people from 'active' and 'excluded' focus groups, as well as 'reference' focus groups in Austria and the UK were more critical and questioning about representation and governance than their peers in 'reference' groups in other countries (i.e. France, Hungary, Spain and Finland).

### **There exists a problematic divide between national and European youth participation organisations on the one hand and grassroots or community-based youth organisations on the other**

Previous studies, some stakeholders and 'active' focus groups argue that national and European-level youth organisations are in a better position than grassroots organisations to advocate the interests of young people with policymakers, but are also often seen as being more distant from the concerns of most young people.

Previous studies, some expert stakeholders and 'active' focus groups lead us to believe that grassroots and community-based youth organisations are often more successful at motivating participation from a range of young people, but have fewer resources and less access to those in power.

Our survey and the experiment demonstrate that there is space for increasing the participation of young people in existing institutions and voting and that young people are positive towards innovations such as the mass election of youth representatives by all young people.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS THEME 1**

*Reach out to young people*

*Strengthen the representativeness of young people*

*More resources for grassroots organisations*

- Reaching out to young people, especially more difficult to reach groups, through debates, popular media formats, internet platforms and meeting directly with young people in disadvantaged areas.
- Providing young people with the opportunity to vote for youth representatives at the national, European, and local level before the age of 18, the development of voting advice applications, and stronger, more democratic students' unions can be seen as ways to strengthen the representativeness of young people.
- More resources need to be made available to organisations that are working directly with young people at a grassroots level rather than organisations that represent other organisations. Such groups would have a better understanding of engaging with young people in specific circumstances and locations.

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## THEME 2: YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN POLICY AND POLITICS

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### **Ensuring young people are aware of the democratic opportunities they have**

The EU's Structured Dialogue is a good opportunity for youth engagement but was not mentioned or known about by 95% of the expert stakeholder interviewees or young people in the focus groups.

However, several stakeholders who knew of the Structured Dialogue praised it as a genuine and well-organised attempt by the EU to reach out to young people. One stakeholder pointed out that the Structured Dialogue process and the information and materials it produces constitutes a valuable resource to use with young people to engender discussions about politics.

A minority of stakeholders involved in the Structured Dialogue were more critical and pointed to ways in which it could be improved, such as deepening the involvement of young people beyond representatives currently involved through the Steering Committee in relation to defining the agenda and topics to be discussed and reaching out to a broader constituency of young people.

### **Young people must not merely be given a voice, but also learn about the follow-up process and be able to further shape the debate.**

Young people must not simply be consulted but there must be an active effort on the part of the governing authorities to include them further in policy development, for example in the agenda setting phase or in the implementation of solutions to pressing social issues. Many young people expressed the concern that they feel that what they say is not taken seriously by adult policymakers when decisions are being made.

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS THEME 2**

*Acknowledge and amalgamate different political inputs*

*Involve more grassroots organisations, NGOs and neighbourhood groups*

*Define 'the political' more widely*

*Make the Structured Dialogue process more efficient and inclusive*

- The broad tapestry of political activity occurring in Europe needs to be acknowledged, and new innovative mechanisms need to be devised to amalgamate the various and distinct inputs this creates into the formal policy process.
- Enlarged access and diversity can be achieved through involving more grassroots youth organisations, NGOs and neighbourhood groups, rather than relying too exclusively on large national or European political youth organisations.
- In building this broader tapestry of participation, wider definitions of “the political” should also be employed to allow more groups to partake in policy discussions.
- In terms of improving the Structured Dialogue process, further improvements could include mechanisms to inculcate a greater sense of ownership on the part of young people by making the process more wide reaching and inclusive.
- Monitoring the representativeness of national delegations to the Structured Dialogue is needed to ensure that a broader cross-section of young people are taking part in the process at a national level.

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### THEME 3: (E)VOTING

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#### **Voting is an important means to an end, but it is not all about numbers**

Our survey shows that young citizens both under and over 18 still see voting as the most important mode of participation in democracies and one in which they believe as much as older generations did. However, stakeholders outside of institutional politics as well as ‘active’ and ‘reference’ focus groups also argue that voting is not an end in itself nor the only key indicator of participation in democracy.

The survey furthermore shows that interest in politics and internal efficacy increase with age, but reaching voting age also results in an increase in cynicism and belief in non-electoral forms of participation. Therefore, it seems important to start encouraging or allowing young people to vote from a young age. The first two elections in the life of a voter are key in determining their long-term participation. Those who do not participate in the first two elections after they are eligible to vote are likely to become habitual abstentionists, but those who do are likely to become habitual participants.

It is thus crucial to ‘bring young people to the poll’ on one of these first occasions. It could also suggest that it would be a good idea to allow young people to vote from the age of 16 which would make it easier to sensitise them to the voting at a time when they are still in the school system.

#### **Low voting turnout amongst young people is not necessarily the result of disenchantment, but has a variety of reasons**

According to a majority of the expert stakeholders interviewed and young people in ‘active’, ‘reference’ and ‘excluded’ focus groups, low voter turnout in the 16-26 age group should not be regarded as a sign of political apathy. This confirms the overwhelming results of the survey: young people do not feel apathetic, but they do think that the political ‘offer’ does not match their concerns, ideas, and ideal of democratic politics. There is also a clear lack of opportunity and political inclusion amongst some young people who are systemically excluded (through poverty, unemployment, linguistic, ethnic or social integration, etc.).

Focus groups and the experiments indicate that young people do not believe that politicians sufficiently address their concerns (see also theme 2). This could be improved either by political parties making an effort to take youth concerns more seriously, or through the direct elections of young people representatives which would force a campaign on youth-relevant issues.



Stakeholder interviews and the focus groups suggest that if the voting age is lowered to 16 across the EU this should be accompanied with political education and information adapted to 16-18 year olds. Survey results suggest that young people would overwhelmingly welcome the generalisation of voting advice applications as well as the organisation of electoral debates in schools at election time.

Technicalities can prevent young people from voting, with potentially significant long-term consequences. The main one is related to youth mobility, which means that often, young people cannot be present where they are registered on the day of the election. The simplest and largely-supported measure to avoid this would be the introduction of advance voting across the EU (i.e. the possibility for voters to vote, in a polling station, for a period – generally 2 to 4 weeks – before election day).

**E-voting and social media use during campaigns are often requested, but when implemented they can have counterproductive effects on young people's perceptions and efficacy.**

The e-voting experiment conducted in the framework of this project indicates that both exposure to social media campaigning and systematic internet voting seem to have no positive effect on turnout. Internet voting also leads to negative perceptions of the vote, representation, and efficacy as compared to traditional polling station voting. In this regard, previous studies as well as the experiment suggest that voting at a polling station increases group dynamics while e-voting favours the individualisation of the voting decision.

The survey and experiment show a paradox in the context of social media campaigning. In principle, many young people ask for a greater use of social media by politicians, but in practice, when it happens, it leads to overall more negative perceptions of politicians and an increased perception of the gap between political elites and the young.

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS THEME 3**

*Fund events where politicians can meet young people*

*Consider lowering the voting age to 16*

*Organise school debates with young politicians*

*Consider enabling advance voting*

*Consider electing youth representatives*

*Develop initiatives aimed at first-time voters*

*Note that social media can be counterproductive*

*Retain the opportunity to vote in person*

*Treat e-voting with caution*

*Address participation, consultation and representation needs innovatively*



- Regular and dedicated events for politicians to meet young people face to face both during and outside of election time should be encouraged by providing funding for such events, for example through school-based debates.
- Consider lowering the voting age to 16 years, whilst ensuring that knowledge and understanding of politics amongst 16-18 year olds is enhanced through political education both inside and outside of school contexts.
- School debates should be organised during election time, especially with young politicians to improve awareness and interest.
- Consider the use of advance voting to avoid penalising young people who often do temporarily work or study in a different place from where they are registered to vote.
- Consider the election of designated youth representatives by young people in parallel to regular elections at the local, national, or EU level to encourage political parties to address issues that are relevant to young people.
- Encourage the development of specific initiatives directed at first time voters as the first two votes in a citizen's life have a strong impact on his/her lifelong participation.
- Social media should be used to supplement rather than as a replacement to inform young people about proposed policy changes. Moreover, institutional and political actors need to be aware that a poor use of social media to address young people can lead to counterproductive results.
- The ritual of going to the polls in person to vote should be retained across Europe and is truly valued by young voters.
- E-voting should be treated with caution. It results in lower turnout when systematic, and to more negative perceptions of the vote, of elections and to the impression that citizens matter less in politics (low efficacy).
- Assess innovative ways of addressing young people's demand for more channels of participation, consultation, and representation.

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## THEME 4: CREATIVITY, INNOVATION AND PARTICIPATION

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### **Youth participation takes place at many levels of democratic life on a spectrum from the traditional and conventional to the innovative and creative**

Volunteering is connected to youth participation in two ways. First it is in itself a form of participation, based on a sense of solidarity between young people and others around them in society and a wish to give something to others for free or with minimal extrinsic reward. Second, and equally significantly for this project, it must be seen as a pathway to further participation in other spheres of democratic life from education to employment. In increasing young volunteers' skills, knowledge, social networks and sense of self efficacy, volunteering can play a part in empowering them to be even more active citizens in their localities and countries.

The survey, stakeholders' interviews and all focus groups stress that volunteering by young people across Europe is alive and well and not suffering from any crisis. The survey, the interviews with stakeholders and all focus groups indicate that volunteering strengthens young people's sense of community and solidarity, but is not equally accessible for all. Volunteering can, however, be negatively affected by social circumstances like low pay, long-hour employment in the 18-30 year old age group or by familial circumstances of caring and youth poverty.

Secondary data analysis, our survey and the focus groups confirm that young people typically volunteer their time and labour in a wide range of projects, activities and are devoted to a wide range of causes, both social and political. Caring for elderly relatives, for younger siblings and for people in the neighbourhood are also important forms of unseen

voluntary work routinely done by youth from disadvantaged communities and much overlooked in general.

### **Activism strengthens political identities and continued political participation in democracy**

A large majority of expert stakeholders as well as 'active', 'reference' and 'excluded' youth explain that collective action is key to forming strong and lasting political identities among young people. Expert stakeholder interviews and 'active' focus groups stress that successful or effective collective action is key to motivating strong continued political participation in democracy.

All three types of focus group interviews indicate that low responsiveness to youth concerns – about unemployment, housing, cost of education and leisure facilities – within the formal democratic political institutions, may lead to lower levels of political efficacy amongst young people when participating in democratic life.

There is also a danger that disenchantment, socio-economic pressures and the lack of effective upward channels of communication from informal and often unorganised political actors to institutional political actors may lead to increased polarisation and increased support amongst young people for political extremes and sometimes even to violent acts, particularly against persons from immigrant backgrounds.

### **Civic spaces catering to young people's needs and interests are instrumental to include 'excluded' young people in democratic life**

'Reference' and 'excluded' focus groups, as well as expert stakeholders working with excluded groups, argue that free supervised public spaces for young people such as local youth clubs are at the heart of fostering democratic participation and preventing further exclusion.

A large majority of young people consulted in the focus groups expressed their regular need for such spaces. Many trust and talk to the adults who work there, and use the internet there for information or school/work. Civic spaces are also often venues where debate and conversation takes place and creativity and cultural output are stimulated.

Many of the expert stakeholders working with 'excluded' youth explained that these spaces are important because they do not force young people to pay, buy something or consume anything, thus enabling them to develop a civic consciousness beyond the market context.

### **Social enterprise is an innovative way of enhancing participation in democratic life, but needs to be well organised to allow companies' survival beyond heavy subsidies over time.**

Stakeholders and young people who knew what 'social enterprise' entails drew attention to both the positive aspects of this innovative model, but also to the challenges.

When social enterprise works it is an interesting and creative model. We found evidence of several cases of excellent practice in this mode – bike repair shops staffed by long-term unemployed; restaurants or news magazines for the homeless.

However, it is foremost seen to work for those who already have adequate training, education, skills and knowledge as well as social capital, family or cultural networks and institutional support to start and develop an enterprise.

Furthermore, many of the success stories of social enterprises are heavily funded by regional or local councils or grants, exposing issues of sustainability once the funding is removed.

#### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS THEME 4**

*Support organisations that facilitate volunteering*

*Enable young people to be listened to*

*Explore social enterprise training for young people from more diverse backgrounds*

*Safeguard youth budgets*

- Support for organisations facilitating volunteering is crucial. It would also make sense to think creatively about ways of incentivising a more diverse group of young people to volunteer through the provision and funding of training and material support for those who do volunteer.
- Upward channels of communication must be built between young people active in more unorganised forms of participation in democratic life and the political realm at a national and transnational level of governance. This also ties in with the finding that young people not only want an opportunity to voice their concerns, but they also want to be listened to.
- The social enterprise model of youth employment and participation is innovative and provides opportunities for some young people. More could be done to provide training for young people from more varied socioeconomic backgrounds, in order to build their skills and boost their self-confidence. It has to be taken into account though that the market does not in all cases seem to sustain this kind of initiative.
- Make every effort to safeguard youth budgets in the wake of austerity, particularly for leisure facilities and extracurricular activities, so that civic spaces can remain accessible for local youth of all backgrounds.

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### **THEME 5: TRADITIONAL/NEW MEDIA AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION**

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#### **Traditional media remain important tools to foster youth participation in democratic life**

Our secondary data analysis and focus groups suggest that there is a high level of distrust amongst young people, as in the general population, with the press and how it reports on local and global issues.

In some countries with a strong public service tradition, such as Finland, young people see public service broadcasters as more trustworthy and reliable than commercial media. Stakeholders pointed out that television stations are not producing content aimed at young people in the 14-19 year old age group.

Community radio stations and community media projects are examples of some of the most innovative, diverse and fresh participation with young people. They are often staffed by young people and provide training and skills.

Free local newspapers provide an important source of news and political information for 'excluded' groups. As such, they need to ensure quality content free of prejudices (such as xenophobia or sexism); also other local campaigns should try to get their content and concerns into these free newspapers. Even homeless youth can and do get access to them.

### **The digital divide is still a reality for excluded young people who are not attending school or further education**

Access to the internet and social media is less of an issue for young people who are in education and/or training. Access does become problematic in many EU countries for young people from a disadvantaged background when they leave school or are not in training.

Besides access, the level of digital skills remains an issue for some, mostly with a low educational level, but much progress has been made in this regard thanks to schools, libraries, civic spaces and the ubiquity of information and communication technologies in everyday life. Despite this, protecting your privacy online is a skill that is not mastered by a majority of young people in the EU.

### **Facebook and the social media are important networking tools but do not replace face-to-face interaction in young people's views**

All of our participants in focus groups and stakeholder interviews held the view that new media and social media can be a very useful additional tool to connect and inform some young people. They play a role in: individual information seeking, cross-checking of news, communication on intranets between organisations and members, getting messages across to political cadres, and sending petitions to or contacting politicians and municipal officials.

However, a large majority of stakeholders and young people consulted through focus groups insisted that face-to-face contact is the best method of democratic political engagement and encouragement. New media tools cannot be a replacement for real face-to-face action and engagement or even for old media. This echoes findings from the survey suggesting that young people derive more from 'live' participation such as voting or demonstrating than from virtual participation on social fora.

It also has to be noted that some focus group participants, as well as some stakeholders, point to the dangers and risks of online and social media. Particular issues that were mentioned in this regard include: opinion reinforcement, online bullying, pornography, the inability to ascertain the precise identity of others and linked to this being contacted online by strangers.

### **Internet tools and social media can enhance the participation of young people in democratic life, whereby fostering a dialogical mode of interaction is crucial.**

As pointed out by various stakeholders online platforms have the potential to stimulate and increase the possibilities for the participation of young people in consultations and in political debates, as online platforms can be designed in a truly interactive way fostering two-way and even multi-way patterns of communication.

Increasing the use of online platforms to facilitate the participation of young people in policy processes also has consequences for policymakers in charge. Such platforms should be clear on their purpose, the nature of the input requested from young people and how it will be used in order to avoid creating false expectations amongst young citizens regarding the efficacy of their participation.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS THEME 5

*Support media productions*

*Fund and provide regulatory support for community media*

*Increase internet access and training for excluded youth*

*Increase media literacy among young people*

*Consider how to design online platforms*

- Provide support for media productions aimed at young people in the age category 14-19 years old.
- Since community media fulfill an important democratic role in local communities they should be guaranteed funding by localities so as to safeguard their sustainability.
- An enabling and supportive regulatory framework for community media, which should stimulate community media development, is also recommended.
- It is imperative that measures to increase free and equal access to the internet for excluded youth as well as computer and internet skills sessions are continued.
- Policies to increase media literacies amongst young people and to increase education about the risks of being online and of social media should be put into practice.
- Online platforms can facilitate the participation of young people in democratic life, but should be designed making full use of the interactive potential of the internet and ideally have a connection with the offline world.

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## THEME 6: SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

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### **Political exclusion is endemic, complex and growing**

Exclusion and isolation are not the same things. Exclusion is never a choice and social and economic exclusion often also entails exclusion from many channels of democratic participation.

Previous research, our survey and the expert stakeholder interviews point out that political exclusion in European democracies is linked to economic and social exclusion but not confined to these issues. About half of our interviewees have experiences with exclusion or excluded youth either personally or professionally. Excluded youth represent large numbers in each country.

Stakeholders working with excluded youth stress that in order to stimulate young people's participation in debating and building democracy certain basic needs have to be met first, like housing and health, as well as clothing, food, education and then employment.

Focus group interviews with 'reference' youth indicate that there are also young people coming from an average economic background who try to participate, but they find that their voices are never heard, their concerns never acted upon and their interventions ignored. This is also a form of exclusion.

As also pointed out in the voting section of the survey and confirmed by 'reference' focus groups, community and family are influential sites where political socialisation takes place. This is the case in relation to both democratic and anti-democratic politics. As a result, different youth are socialised differently towards different aspects of participation.

Stakeholders working with excluded youth and young people in 'reference' and 'excluded' focus groups point out that economic cuts are affecting the funding of civic spaces for young people, leading many of these spaces to close down.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS THEME 6

*Housing grants for those in need*

*Access to education and employment*

*Political education for youth in need of it*

*Free civic spaces for youth in need of them*

*Multi-stakeholder meetings*

*Training and remuneration for those who work with 'excluded' groups*

- Guaranteed housing and/or housing grants for those in vulnerable circumstances as well as those coming from poorer socio-economic backgrounds.
- A non-selective schooling system and affordable, guaranteed access to higher education and/or to paid employment for young people or those returning to education and lifelong learning courses will greatly improve the participation of vulnerable youth in democratic life.
- The provision of funding and national and local policy support to provide youth in 'excluded' groups or 'at-risk of exclusion' with political education in both formal and informal settings.
- Strong national and local policy support, backed up with financial resources to provide youth in 'excluded' groups or 'at risk of exclusion' with free civic spaces for learning, leisure, internet access and debate.
- Regular multi-stakeholder meetings, including grassroots groups, with politicians and policymakers to discuss the circumstances and needs of different excluded groups of young people with grassroots organisations working with them.
- The training and economic remuneration of carers, youth workers and teachers who believe in the potential of different groups and categories of 'excluded' young people to contribute as citizens.



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## CONCLUDING POINTS

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One of the key findings of the study is that young people are not apathetic or unwilling to participate, but rather feel that the political system is neither sufficiently listening nor sufficiently adapting to their hopes and needs. While it would be unreasonable to “only” expect the democratic system to adapt to young people, it would also be both unreasonable and inefficient to only expect young Europeans to adapt to a system that remains unresponsive to this crucial group that represents its future. Often, a lot could be done to easily improve the system’s inclusiveness of young people, our understanding of their democratic will, and their participation by noting a few crucial points.

Motivation to participate further, in the view of both stakeholder experts interviewed as well as young people, comes from:

- Proximity to an event or value or idea – many younger teenagers may find it easier to get motivated regarding concerns that are real, material and immediate while some older teenagers from more educated or more engaged backgrounds may find it easier to relate to issues that are abstract or global. It is therefore easier to support youth democratic participation when both types of issues are addressed in political debates.
- Having decision-makers listen to and act on young people’s concerns and opinions and from seeing the positive outcomes of these actions on local, social and individual contexts over a period of time. Again, the study finds that many young people feel insufficiently listened to by political elites.
- Motivation also comes from acting together with others and realising that one has efficacy to change local things (building skate parks, preventing demolition of a youth club).

Willingness to participate and feeling of efficacy come from a feeling of being included. Many young people and stakeholders express the view that the representative democratic system itself does not work well enough at the moment and needs to be fixed. They argue that democracy should not work better for some than for others as it currently does, and point out that too many categories are being excluded or left out. The suggestions made for modifying ‘the democratic system’ are complex and varied. They include a need to make all forms of participation – including lobbying, debating, and direct participation more accessible to poorer people, those from minority backgrounds, and those with less education. Many young people and stakeholders believed that participation would be improved if more institutional and cultural barriers were removed, if more was done by politicians to reconnect to all young people and visit them in their neighbourhood, and if more diverse forms of participation were accepted and encouraged. Given the overwhelming levels of perceived betrayal, distrust, scepticism and/or anger expressed with regard to politicians by 95% of our focus group respondents from ‘reference’, ‘active’ and ‘excluded’ focus groups in all six countries and the survey results that point to a political offer that is often perceived as inadequate, this seems to us to be an immediate and significant challenge and action point.

Overall, young people with different ideas, backgrounds, preferences, and personal experience of participation have different perceptions of what are the main impediments to greater youth participation and the best solutions to improve it. What they have in common is a certainty that deep inside European youth want to be politically included and active participants. The analysis of the six themes suggests that the most productive boost to youth participation will stem from a multi-polar set of measures, which build on the diversity of European youth, their backgrounds, their difficulties, their ideals, and their democratic will.

There is an opportunity to create multiple new participation channels at the local, national, and EU level, include those young people who currently feel excluded whilst improving the perception of representativeness of those who already but begrudgingly engage with politics, encourage both the electoral and the non-electoral participation of young people and combine the use of face-to-face interaction, localised initiatives. and social media opportunities. There is no crisis of participation of European youth, but there is a huge opportunity that awaits taking.



# Youth Participation in Democratic Life

## INTRODUCTION

### Theorising Participation in Democratic Life

Participation in democratic life is considered a fundamental right recognised in article 10.3 TEU of the Lisbon Treaty (2009) and an inherent part of the European citizenship provisions:

‘Every citizen shall have the right to **participate in the democratic life** of the Union.’ (Lisbon Treaty - emphasis added)

Besides this, when focusing more specifically on young European citizens, Article 165 of the Lisbon Treaty states that one of the aims of EU action should be geared towards:

‘Encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socioeducational instructors, and **encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life** in Europe.’ (Lisbon Treaty, emphasis added)

The national policy context in relation to youth participation in democratic life is highly diverse across the European Union and tends to coalesce around a series of issues such as training and high education, transitions from education to employment, opportunities for volunteering and youth work and housing. There are broad trends across Northern, Southern, Eastern and Central and Western European nations with relation to specific ways in which young people’s inclusion is approached, with some more pro-active state welfare strategies implemented specifically in Northern Europe and more of an emphasis on family and school in post-Socialist states or religious institutions in Southern Europe. Efforts to increase training opportunities for young people at risk of exclusion, to provide a counter-balance to social factors such as socioeconomic class via educational initiatives and youth work, and to enable more underprivileged young people to participate in sport, volunteering or the arts are pursued in most countries through a broad policy of support for non-governmental organisations aiming to work with these cohorts of young people rather than in a systematic and structured way by national governments. The assumption that exclusion from democratic life follows from economic and social exclusion is not, however, uniformly accepted in individual national policy contexts, although countries in our sample such as the UK and Finland, for instance, have such an assumption written into their policies on youth inclusion. More broadly, however, these national policies on youth are responding to the changing EU policy landscape in this regard.

Indeed, the concerns of the Commission in terms of fostering youth participation and involving young people in policymaking has a long legacy before the Treaty of Lisbon. Since 1988 the EU has been focusing explicitly on youth programmes and the 2001 white paper on ‘A New Impetus For European Youth’ provided a solid framework to formalise and embed the participation of young people in EU policymaking, amongst others through the Structured Dialogue, which will be addressed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> section of this report. The objective of the Commission in terms of youth participation is to

'Ensure **full participation** of youth in society, by increasing youth participation in the civic life of local communities and in representative democracy, by supporting youth organisations as well as various forms of 'learning to participate', by encouraging participation of non-organised young people and by providing quality information services.' (European Commission, 2009: 8 - emphasis added)

However, according to some, the concrete measures to facilitate the right to participate in democratic life in the EU were 'very much focused on providing guidelines for the behaviour of the institutions of the Union and less so on empowering the citizens' (Closa, 2007: 1053). The Lisbon Treaty and the subsequent actions of the Commission could be seen as attempts to counter critiques like these, reaching out to citizens and young citizens in particular. Other examples of initiatives with particular relevance for young people are ERASMUS, the Youth in Action initiative, and the implementation of a Structured Dialogue with young people in relation to EU youth policy. The council Resolution of 27 November 2009(b) on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018) further explains the impetus for surveying and approaching young people and youth organisations on a regular basis in an attempt to match policies, needs and changing circumstances.

Youth policy should be evidence-based. Better knowledge and understanding of the living conditions, values and attitudes of young women and men needs to be gathered and shared with other relevant policy fields as to enable appropriate and timely measures to be taken. (2009b: 7)

It is with these concerns and within this broader policy context that this report is situated. First, however, it is deemed of crucial importance that the core concepts of 'participation' and 'democracy' are briefly contextualised as they are both what political scientists call 'essentially contested notions', under constant negotiation and never achieving complete closure in terms of what they actually mean (Laclau, 1996: 36).

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## PARTICIPATION

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When talking about participation it becomes apparent fairly quickly that many people have different conceptions as to what participation actually means and entails. Already in the 1970s, political theorist Carole Pateman (1970: 1) referred to the elusiveness of participation when she pointed out that

'the widespread use of the term [...] has tended to mean that any precise, meaningful content has almost disappeared; "participation" is used to refer to a wide variety of different situations by different people'.

This explains why, in the political theory literature, participation tends to be differentiated into various degrees of participation. Pateman for example introduced the useful distinction between full and partial participation, whereby the former refers to 'equal power to determine the outcome of decisions' for all participants and the latter to a consultation where 'the final power to decide rests with one party only' (Pateman, 1970: 70-1). Along the same lines, Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation differentiates the concept of participation even further specifically in relation to policy contexts. She identifies several layers from non-participation over tokenism to citizen power (see Figure 1). Similarly, the OECD (2001: 2) distinguishes between information dissemination, consultation and active participation, which again points to different degrees of involvement and influence.

These hierarchies of participatory practices point to the difficulty or even impossibility of achieving 'full' participation, as in 'equal power to determine the outcome' (Pateman, *ibid*), which is considered a normative ideal to strive for, while knowing that we shall never quite reach it (Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2005). Thus, many scholars have developed notions that attempt to capture the reality, rather than the elusive ideal of participation.

Such realist rather than normative notions of participation acknowledge the subtle difference between, on the one hand, enabling citizens to influence policymaking but without the power to decide and, on the other hand, conveying to 'participants' the impression or feeling that they can influence and participate, without this being the case as exemplified in such notions as pseudo-participation (Verba, 1961), non-participation (Arnstein, 1969) or manipulative participation (Strauss, 1998).

As Pateman pointed out in her definition, participation is a notion that is intrinsically linked to power. However, power often gets black boxed in state, international or regional organisations' participatory discourses and their efforts to involve citizens and/or civil society in their decision making processes (Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2005; Cammaerts, 2008). This confusion regarding the precise relationship between participation and power runs the danger of creating conflicting expectations amongst participants which in turn risks creating frustration and further disengagement, the exact opposite of what strategies to bridge the gap between the governed and those that govern intend to achieve.

#### **POWER**

Unsurprisingly, power is theorised in different ways by different philosophers and sociologists. The traditional perspective on power approaches power as domination, as the **power over**. This is the Weberian view of power that defines it as the ability to make others do what you want them to do, even and crucially against their own will. However, as pointed out by Giddens amongst others, power also has a generative effect, in that it can enable things to happen. This view of power speaks of the **power to** – in other words, as empowerment and providing space for agency and change. Giddens identifies a dialectic between the power over and the power to, between the repressive and the generative features of power, between structure and agency. Post-structuralists such as Foucault reject this dichotomy between structure and agency and situate power more at a micro level, pervasive and ubiquitous, neither positive nor negative, but mobile and, above all, constitutive of knowledge, discourse and our position in society, professionally, but also in everyday life, as parents, children or young people. Foucault's analytics of power emphasises the **power in**; it shows us that power is not possessed, but embedded in relationships, in practices and crucially in the resistance against the exercise of power rather than against power itself, which is elusive.

(Weber, 1922; Foucault, 1978; Giddens, 1984)

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## DEMOCRATIC LIFE

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The precise nature of the relationship between political participation and political power is of course also at the heart of debates concerning the meaning and nature of democracy, democratic processes and democratic life for that matter, which is the second concept we will unpack. For some, democracy is mainly procedural – a method to elect and change the elites that rule us at given time intervals (Schumpeter, 1942 [1973]; Downs, 1957; Mills, 1956). For others, democracy is more about civic cultures and the expansion of democracy and democratic decision making into everyday life; democracy as a way of life (Almond and Verba, 1963; Pateman, 1970; Habermas, 1994). These two views conform to the representative and to participatory models of democracy (see Held, 2006).

From the representative perspective, democracy is often reduced to a means of formalised decision-making, and participation by citizens is limited to voting and legitimating the ruling elite, a system which Schumpeter (1942 [1973]) called ‘competitive elitism’. Representative models often consider the large-scale participation of citizens beyond voting as potentially detrimental to democracy because of the danger of populism and mob rule. This is also in line with efforts to prevent a majority imposing its will on a minority, as outlined by J.S. Mills in his essay *On Liberty* when discussing the dangers of a Tyranny of the Majority:

There is a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence; and to find that limit, and maintain it against encroachment, is as indispensable to a good condition of human affairs as protection against political despotism. (Mills, 1860: 7)

Since the 1970s and the emergence of so-called New Social Movements, there has been much talk of a crisis of the representative model of democracy (see Crozier, et al., 1975). The gap between the governed and the governors is being perceived as having widened, resulting in low levels of trust in politicians and reduced levels of legitimisation of democratic decision making processes. The EU is not immune to this, as debates about ‘the democratic deficit’ illustrate (Wind, 2001).

In the wake of these debates, decentralised or participatory models of democracy, as originally advocated by Jean Jacques Rousseau, have re-emerged, suggesting the need for more direct citizen participation and involvement in politics (Pateman, 1970; MacPherson, 1977; Held, 1987). Participatory models of democracy emphasise the importance of ‘real’ citizen participation in a democracy, and criticise the reduction of participation to the periodic voting in or out of different elites.

**DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION**

As pointed out above democratic participation can be defined in a narrow sense or in a broad sense. From the former perspective, the main focus is on free and fair elections and on citizens voting their representatives at regular intervals who are subsequently mandated to take decisions in the name of citizens. The main concern here in terms of participation relates to voter turnout, which when low reduces the legitimacy of those taking decisions in our name. However, as pointed out by participatory models of democracy and by theories foregrounding the importance of civic cultures, democratic participation is about more than the duty to vote every 4 or 5 years (Dahlgren, 2009). As such, a broader conception of democratic participation stresses the value of citizens' participation in civil society organisations and social movements, student participation in the governance of schools and universities, worker participation in professional contexts, as well as democratic participation in the family. As Pateman (1970: 42) explains, a civic or democratic culture of participation needs to go beyond the formal political process in order to sustain the legitimacy of democracy: 'The existence of representative institutions at national level is not sufficient for democracy; for maximum participation by all the people at that level socialisation, or *social training*, for democracy must take place in other spheres in order that the necessary individual attitudes and psychological qualities can be developed. This development takes place **through the process of participation** itself'. In this study we adopt a broad conception of participation which goes beyond voting without disregarding the importance of voting as a democratic practice.

However, it would be totally wrong to simply juxtapose the representative model with the participatory one. Many participatory models of democracy precisely attempt to articulate ways in which the two need to co-exist and feed off each other, so as to improve the quality of decision making by 'forming a broad consensus prior to embarking upon legislation and to sustain legislation once it is in place' (Héritier, 1997: 180).

Besides the debate concerning the nature of decision-making, centralised or decentralised, there is another tension that defines political theory and is highly relevant to understanding the various conceptions of what a democracy is or should be, namely between political consensus and conflict. While some eloquent philosophers emphasise the importance of consensus-formation and the need for societal harmony, others – equally eloquent – have stressed the inevitability of conflict and political struggle in a democracy.

Deliberative theories of democracy, for example, assume that out of a rational political dialogue between equal participants a 'common will' will emerge, which ultimately leads to the establishment of the good society (Galbraith, 1997). However, critics of the deliberative model of democracy who emphasise the importance of passions and the presence of conflicts in a democracy argue that such a 'common will' can never be total (Mouffe, 1993). In other words, to varying degrees certain views, opinions and ideologies will be excluded and various forms of power (power over, the power to and power in) will impact on who or what is included and excluded, on who gets to decide and who does not, even on what it is possible to decide upon.

**DELIBERATION**

Consensus-oriented models of democracy (and participation) emphasise the importance of dialogue and deliberation, and focus on collective decision-making processes, based on rational argumentation between equal participants. Opinion-formation is thus approached as a process involving various actors, a wide range of information sources, communicative action and dialogue, rather than as an aggregation of individual personal preferences. A deliberative process is defined as a rational argumentative dialogue, which

- is accessible to all
- disregards the status of who voices an argument
- expects from its participants the ability to change their views based on sound rational counter-arguments
- aims to transform citizenship ideas emerging from society, into laws and regulation.

(Habermas, 1984)

A recent form of deliberative democracy is multi-stakeholderism, which emerged through the UN and EU institutions and is defined as a process aiming to 'bring together all major stakeholders in a new form of communication, decision-finding (and possibly decision-making) on a particular issue' (Hemmati, 2002: 1). Multi-stakeholderism is championed by many as a way to bring the citizen, and more specifically the 'organised citizen' or civil society organisations, closer to the decision-making process by making such processes more democratic, transparent, legitimate and accountable, raising support from a wider constituency (Cammaerts, 2008).

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## YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC LIFE

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Young citizens are at the heart of what many observers deem a 'crisis of representative democracy'. Some of the more alarming accounts proposed by tenants of the theory of a 'crisis of democracy' have to do with a perceived distrust of political systems, institutions, and social elites by European citizens in general and young citizens in particular (see Newton, 2001; Mishler and Rose, 1997; Seligman, 1997; Kaase, Newton and Scarbrough, 1996). More generally, social scientists have tried to document what they almost unanimously perceive as a growing impression of 'dissatisfaction' of citizens towards what the European Union and its national member states can offer them as democratic citizens (Norris, 1999; Torcal and Montero, 2006).

In fact, a BBC study (2005) showed that, by and large, European citizens tend to be more cynical and less trusting than those of any other continent, be it towards their political leaders, religious authorities, administrations, justice systems, or the media, and again, young citizens are more distrusting than average in every respect. This apparent growth in young people's cynicism has been accompanied by a decline in most modes of participation. Party and Trade Union membership figures are collapsing in most European countries and the membership that remains is ageing (Scarow, 1996; Katz and Mair, 1994; Pharr and Putnam, 2000).

As for voter turnout, LeDuc, et al. (1996, 2002) conclude that participation of young voters is in decline in national democratic elections and this is even more the case for European Parliament elections (Deloye and Bruter, 2007). Of course, beyond these academic studies, multiple surveys, focus group, and series of interviews have already looked at the transformation of patterns of participation (e.g. Flash Eurobarometer 202/319, work of the Council of Europe, Scotland 2005 survey, and numerous commercial surveys by Mori, Ipsos,



Gallup, etc.), but somehow, the ‘missing link’ is the hiatus between *de-participation* and *desire of participation* among young citizens. In this regard, it needs to be stressed that being distrustful and critical of representative democratic institutions is not necessarily the same as apathy and disinterest in politics; in fact, quite the contrary.

While young citizens are the most likely to criticise the state of their political systems and apparently disengage from it, they are also the most likely – to a significant degree – to hold extremely ambitious and idealist notions about what democratic participation should be like and about how involved they actually say they want to be (Bruter and Harrison, 2009). This democratic paradox, also noted by Pattie, et al. (2004), leads us to wonder how the participation of young citizens can be encouraged and increased using this paradoxical appetite for involvement (Bruter and Harrison, 2011 – see methods section).

In our stakeholder interviews and focus groups many of the tensions and issues identified in the theorisation of participation and democracy were highlighted by youth experts and young people alike. What is strikingly obvious across all of the focus group data is a very clear split between the **theory** and **the practice** of democracy. Virtually every respondent in every focus group agreed that as a **concept**, democracy signifies or should signify freedom, equality and social integration. It is seen as a healthy, positive and fair way of organising society. Often it is, (as a concept), seen as the “other” to dictatorship, hierarchy and the silencing of argument and disagreement. In terms of **practice** however, few respondents understand themselves to be living within a democratic system. For this reason, when asked what the term democracy means, answers commonly begin with “ideally” or “in theory” and proceed by outlining the limitations, impossibility, fragility, rarity and contradictions involved in its actual practice. That is, “in reality” commonly follows hot on the heels of “in theory.”

‘In principle, it’s about equality but in practice, it can never be realised in its entirety. You can only try to get close.’

The following quotes, taken from a variety of focus groups conducted in different countries, clearly illustrate this general split between understandings of the **concept** and understandings of the **practice** of democracy.

“It’s associated with equality and the absence of hierarchy but politicians tend to be old men from the beautiful district. They speak *about* youth not *to* youth.” (‘Active’ focus group, f2f, France, 2012)

“We do not have a democracy because people do not get represented.” (‘Active’ focus group, f2f, Spain, 2012)

“Most young people do not believe they have a democracy.” (‘Active’ focus group, f2f, Finland, 2012)

“Most young people feel that they are never consulted.” (‘Active’ focus group, f2f, Austria, 2012)

“Democracy is rare. It doesn’t really exist. Too many are denied a voice.” (‘Active’ focus group, f2f, UK, 2012)

“Democracy is now in danger in Hungary. In principle, it’s about equality but in practice, it can never be realised in its entirety. You can only try to get close.” (‘Active’ focus group, f2f, Hungary, 2012)

“We don’t live in one or if we do, it’s dying.” (‘Reference’ focus group, f2f, France, 2012)

“We’re losing it. The ideal is one thing. The reality another.” (‘Reference’ focus group, Spain, f2f, 2012)

“It means equality but it’s a contradiction. There’s a power division between rich and poor. True democracy doesn’t exist.” (‘Reference’ focus group, f2f, Finland, 2012)

“There should be democracy everywhere. It means everyone has a say.” (‘Reference’ focus group, Austria, f2f, 2012)

“It means freedom. I can speak out. But of course, some will always be heard more.” (‘Reference’ focus group, UK, f2f, 2012)

“Hungarian version is inferior to that of “the West”. Hungary is conservative.” (‘Reference’ focus group, Hungary, f2f, 2012)

“Ideally, it’s about equality. In reality, we don’t have it enough.” (‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, France, 2012)

“This (current situation) is not a democratic system. It’s only mentioned at election times. Ideally, it’s about equality.” (‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, Spain, 2012)

“In theory, it’s for the good of all. But in practice, minorities are always trampled on.” (‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, Finland, 2012)

“We don’t live in a democracy. Poor people are always excluded. No one listens to poor young people.” (‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, UK, 2012)

“The poor aren’t heard. You’re only heard if you have money.” (‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, Hungary, 2012)

There is a remarkable congruence here between the views of the three different sets of focus groups in describing and defining democracy as an ideal and as a reality. In relation to the practice of democratic participation, one of the clearest conclusions that can be drawn from the focus group data concerns the extent to which political participation is shaped by various forms of (both formal and informal) background education. Most participants begin their learning about politics from their parents. After this come friends and finally comes the education system with Higher Education seemingly the place wherein these are engaged with most seriously.

Across all of the groups there is a general agreement that in order to motivate young people to participate, a far more in-depth education about politics is called for. Many argue that politics and policy studies should form a much more central part of basic school studies because, it is argued, many young people simply do not know enough about how their system works:

“In secondary modern, you need to be more critical.” (‘Reference’ focus group, f2f, Austria, 2012)

“It should be made clearer that politics is part of general knowledge and education because people do not seem to understand that.” (‘Reference’ focus group, Austria, 2012)

“I wouldn’t have a clue where to start.” (‘Reference’ focus group, f2f, UK, 2012).

Where formal educational establishments (such as schools and colleges) are absent from a young person’s life, local youth groups and certain local social services play at least some role in providing this education. (See ‘excluded’ focus group UK and ‘excluded’ focus group France). However, for many young people, information and education is inadequate. So, several participants claim that they want to participate but simply have no idea how to.

In what follows the preliminary results of our study will be presented in six core themes that are deemed of particular relevance in relation to young people’s participation in democratic life:



- Youth representation
- Promoting youth engagement
- Electoral participation
- Creativity, innovation and youth participation
- (New) media and participation
- Youth exclusion

The more meta-questions and tensions exposed by the theoretical debates concerning participation and democracy – between representation and participation, between consensus and conflict – will inevitably run through the analysis of the different themes. Besides this, general patterns and trends across Europe will be identified and particular case studies will highlight either a best practice or a problematic phenomenon.

## THEME 1: YOUTH REPRESENTATION

### Introduction

The idea of representation can be defined in two ways. One view gives the individual representative a huge degree of autonomy – essentially, they are supposed to act as an agent drawing on their own judgement. In contrast, the microcosm view of representation argues that decision makers should be representative of the community they are working for – in other words, the institution they are a part of should reflect the shape of wider society in terms of, for example, gender, race and sexuality (for the classic discussion of this distinction see Burke, 1774/1906; for the leading contemporary volume on representation see Pitkin, 1967).

This long-standing theoretical tension is evident among European youth groups. Many youth organisations are aware of limitations of their representative capacity, as defined in the microcosm view, and thus would not claim to represent the opinions of young people outside their membership. However, even in these groups, there is also a clear desire to advocate for young people generally. This view is evident in our dataset, illustrated by the argument made by the National Youth Council Representative from Finland:

We have 100 thousand members; we can say that it is a big enough number for Finland. We still try to expand. We regularly send out questionnaires to get feedback. Then again, when it is a policymaking meeting, **we cannot send someone from the street. The representative needs to be someone from the organised youth.** The EU wants two organised and two non-organised young people in the meetings. I have no idea how those two non-organised are chosen. It's not good for either of groups if they come to meetings where they **don't have a clue.** During the EU presidency, we had to organise a European meeting. We opposed the idea of 2 + 2 but the ministry forced it so we had that formula. Half of the participants were complaining 'we are playing games here, when do we start to work on youth policy?' and the other half complained 'we don't understand anything of what we are talking about'. (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Finland, 2012, emphasis added)

This is an honest and practical account, seeking to reconcile the representative tension. It is possible to see the irony of claiming to represent all young people in Finland, while being quite unable to think about creative ways to include, support and scaffold the participation of non-organised young people in general and those with fewer opportunities in particular.

How did young people want to navigate this tension? We saw no evidence that young people did not believe in selecting or electing representatives in general. In fact, despite all the distrust and betrayal expressed towards politicians, young people were mainly keen to:

- Be heard by their representatives
- Be taken seriously by their representatives
- Have more representatives from minority groups – disabled, homeless, young women, unemployed, ethnic minority – engaged in speaking to those in power
- Have regular contact with and feedback from their representatives
- Have 'authentic' representatives, not just those who were suited to politics and rhetoric.

## 1.1 WHO ARE THE VULNERABLE AND DIFFICULT TO REACH YOUNG CITIZENS?

With these aspirations in mind, it is worth remembering that the most excluded group of young people are those *not* in employment, education or training (usually discussed as NEETs, see section 6 for further discussion) and a distinct subsection of 'Excluded' youth.

**Table 1.1:** Young people aged 18-24 not in employment and not in any education or training

	2003	2008	2011	2003-2008	2008-2011
AT	7.1	8.7	8.3	1.6	-0.4
BE	20.4	13.3	14.8	-7.1	1.5
BG	36.7	21.6	27.9	-15.1	6.3
CY	12.3	13.4	20.7	1.1	7.3
CZ	17.2	8.9	10.6	-8.3	1.7
DE	13.8	11.8	10.2	-2.0	-1.6
DK	7.0	5.7	8.4	-1.3	2.7
EE	13.9	11.1	14.7	-2.8	3.6
EL	21.9	15.9	24.4	-6.0	8.5
ES	14.8	17.0	23.1	2.2	6.1
FI	12.0	9.9	11.7	-2.1	1.8
FR	13.5	13.5	15.9	0.0	2.4
HU	16.1	15.3	17.7	-0.8	2.4
IE	12.9	17.4	23.9	4.5	6.5
IT	20.2	20.7	25.2	0.5	4.5
LT	14.4	12.3	16.8	-2.1	4.5
LU	6.6	8.6	6.5	2.0	-2.1
LV	16.0	13.9	19.3	-2.1	5.4
MT	18.0	8.5	11.7	-9.5	3.2
NL	6.5	4.6	5.0	-1.9	0.4
PL	22.8	12.3	15.5	-10.5	3.2
PT	12.5	12.7	16.0	0.2	3.3
RO	26.7	13.4	20.9	-13.3	7.5
SE	9.6	10.7	10.3	1.1	-0.4
SI	10.1	7.9	8.8	-2.2	0.9
SK	24.4	14.4	18.2	-10.0	3.8
UK	10.8	15.4	18.4	4.6	3.0
EU27	16.7	13.9	16.7	-2.8	2.8

**Source:** EACEA/EC 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life' re-analysis of Eurostat data, 2012: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/income\\_social\\_inclusion\\_living\\_conditions/data/database](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/income_social_inclusion_living_conditions/data/database)

The low-level of participation of NEETs in political life remains a cause of concern. As Table 1.1 shows, while NEET rates had been coming down in the period 2003-2008, in most EU member states the number of young people not in employment, education or in training has increased again in recent years. Germany and Luxembourg are exceptions in this regard as the number of NEETs in these countries have decreased in the last 3 years, respectively by 1.6% and 2.1%. In all other countries an increase can be observed, which can be attributed to the current economic crisis (ILO, 2012: 32). In 15 countries of the 27 member states 15% or more of 18-24yo are categorised as NEETs. Typically those with low educational levels, low household incomes and those from immigrant backgrounds are at greatest risk, but the

economic crisis has also increased the risk of those with higher educational levels of ending up in the NEET group (EFILWC, 2012).

Yates and Payne (2006) point out that when regional or local governments intervene to implement policies to give more young people training – particularly in relation to improving participation – these interventions are usually targeted at reducing NEET statistics by placing young people on lists which suggest they are in training, while in fact many are not. They furthermore argue that

‘NEET’ is a problematic concept that defines young people by what they are not, and subsumes under a negatively-perceived label a heterogeneous mix of young people whose varied situations and difficulties are not conceptualised’ (Yates and Payne, 2006: 329).

Based on these concerns, focus group data from this project was designed to include a sub-sample of ‘Excluded’ young people with different needs and circumstances, not confined to but including some NEETs, who are frequently understudied in such research projects, due to difficulties inherent in reaching them.

Our data points to a twofold problem with the participation of ‘Excluded’ youth: broader sociological issues and narrower institutional barriers. Issues of social background were noted by many focus group members in different countries:

‘For me, the most important thing is that the family is ok. If the family is ok, you can achieve a lot more. It doesn't have to be a rich family but it has to be a family that loves you, just proper parents that are there for you when you have problems’ (‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, Austria, 2012).

‘The neighbourhoods, the income of your parents and your lifestyles all affect [the ability to participate]’ (‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, Finland, 2012).

‘In comparison to upper class backgrounds. There, parents manage to interest their children in politics. On the contrary, in poor districts around Paris, parents don't talk about politics with their children’ (‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, France, 2012).

In short, these focus group participants argue that they have little opportunity to be inducted into a political and representative culture, certainly in comparison with their more affluent peers. They show no hope that they would themselves ever be able to represent themselves or their own groups.

The data would seem to re-affirm the long-established belief among political scientists that family and community culture play a huge role in establishing political identity (see for example Campbell, et al., 1960). Clearly, such inequalities of opportunity raise broader social questions about participation. However, a narrower question – but still one very germane to this study – is how representative organisations structure their response to these facts, and in particular whether we can find examples of best practice of groups that have taken steps to offer opportunities and modes of participation that overcome some of these broader societal challenges. This leads to the second barrier to the participation of excluded youth, and NEETs in particular; namely institutional arrangements that discourage participation.

Certainly there is an awareness of this issue among youth groups. For example, a representative of an organisation that benefited from a Youth in Action grant noted:

In terms of representation they are however representing only a small part of European youth, essentially those active within the organisations: unorganised youth, the majority of European youth, are left without a voice (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012).

Achieving representation and participation for a wider cohort of youth is clearly a concern for policymakers and leads to many well-intentioned interventions, including those designed to encourage political participation. The challenge is to develop programmes that have the potential to fit with the varying aspirations, life circumstances or motivations of the very groups they are supposed to reach out to. Interviews with such young people and with the youth workers who speak to them on a regular basis suggest that they very often have no contact with 'official youth representatives' who operate in youth councils, and that they are at risk from homelessness, different forms of violence and discrimination as much as they are at risk from lack of education and training (cf. CivicWeb Deliverable 16).

Indeed, research has shown that most socio-economically deprived and/or geographically mobile youth, as well as those with learning difficulties, or caring responsibilities are often 'too hard to reach' and hence remain unengaged by the elite language, institutional concerns and strategies of broad-spectrum youth civic bodies (Gerodimos, 2008; Sweeney, 2009; Banaji and Buckingham, 2010; Olsson and Miegel, 2010). Many youth representatives who have contact with adults in positions of power have been handpicked by school or college authorities or are self-selected on the basis of their experience, confidence and ambitious aspirations. Those with less self-efficacy or with divergent political views do not tend to fall within this group.

Even the nominal democracy afforded by elections and the right to vote is not reflected in the sphere of youth representation across Europe. Attempts to counterbalance this lack of opportunity by attempting to engage groups of youth in local and regional 'partnerships' with adult institutions are also beset by inequality. As Mike Geddes (2000: 794) has shown

'[p]artners have widely differing resources and power, even when there is formal parity of representation among different social interests.'

Our focus group and stakeholder data points to some of these problems that help to offset them. At this point, it is important to separate out different elements of the representative sphere. First, we will address the traditional route through political parties, after which we will address youth organisations.

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## 1.2 POLITICAL PARTIES AND YOUTH REPRESENTATION

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Political parties offer a particular mode of participation, tied into electoral and institutionalised politics. As such, the motivations and objectives of participants are distinctive. A case in point arises from one of the interviews conducted for this project with a 26yo French politician. He highlights that promoting the participation of young people in democratic life is *not* the main concern of this young politician or; in fact, the youth organisation of his party appears to be merely a structure of the party and follows its logics, priorities and aims: 'Our aim is to enlarge the mobilisation of young people [...], to work to the benefit of our elected leaders and our elders' (Stakeholder interview, telephone, France, 2011).

This method of viewing young people who join youth wings of a party as a means of spreading party ideology and enhancing the fortunes of the party is a most common one, and in practice means that the most highly educated, articulate and confident young people get selected for frontline work while others are relegated to background roles. Certainly, this is how many young people perceive it, with one of our focus group sample even referring to "party logics" as being a distinctive form of politics (cf. excluded youth focus group in Spain).

Our interviews also reveal, however, that there are young politicians who have a less instrumental and more democratic set of working practices, which are exemplified in the following excerpts from our interview with a young immigrant MP in the Finnish parliament. His is one of the most innovative stories about enhancing participation by those already in a position of power and points towards the possibility of substantive change in how parliamentarians interact with young constituents. He described how he uses a method of direct meetings and conversations to start debates and discussions with young people, children and their parents, rather than trying to get a specific political message across.

‘During the day I meet with the students and during the night I meet the parents. I get amazing feedback from this interaction. The debate in Finland is on the triangle: kids, schools, and parents, and who should teach kids about life. With this small action of mine we started a new conversation on the subject. Big issues like sexual identity are not easy topics to bring up at the dinner table to parents but when I talk about it they can start the conversation over my talk and parents discuss it in the meeting then it becomes ok to talk about the issue. They both have the issue in their head, and when they go home they are on the same track and then it’s easier to start talking.’

I.A.: Does that motivate them to participate?

‘That’s not my starting message. I am not talking about politics, I try to activate them in all levels of life, emotionally, and about what they think about their future and awareness of the society; the values of how I treat other people and how I can add to the values of my society. Then one of the tools is politics. **My main goal is not to involve them in politics but in society.** I received feedback from teachers that 7th graders knew that I am a parliamentarian, and from the Green party and they say that it is so unusual that they know beforehand because usually they don’t know politicians. Of course it has to do with the fact that I was on TV’. (Stakeholder Interview, f2f, Finland, 2011 – emphasis added)

Similarly, a young British MP blamed political parties and not young people for the growing estrangement between youth and party politics, noting ‘There is a lack of understanding and that is **the fault of the political parties also**, for not communicating that, what a party is about’ (Stakeholder Interview, f2f, UK, 2012 – emphasis added). The solution, according to the same politician, is exposing people to politics and making sure that debates are linked to communities:

‘I do get contacted a lot by young people, but not on any specific issue. Young people often contact me because they want to know how to be an MP. That happens a lot. I will take the time to talk to those young people, ask them ‘why do you want to be an MP?’, and what I will always say to them is ‘work in your own community’, ‘how can you make a difference in your community?’, because honestly, if they are not interested in that, they shouldn’t be wanting to be an MP in the first place’ (Stakeholder Interview, f2f, UK, 2012).

These examples are interesting and link our findings back to contemporary political science research. Much has been written about both the declining numerical strength and civic effectiveness of political parties (Dalton, 2009; Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002; Scarrow, 1999). However, it has been noted that party politics which are more effectively able to ground themselves both in community and social movement politics can remain vibrant, effective and legitimate (Anstead & Straw, 2009; Chadwick, 2007). Successful young party politicians across Europe are aspiring to do this, and when they are able to do so, are more able to represent both young people and the wider community.

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## 1.3 YOUTH ORGANISATIONS AND REPRESENTATION OF YOUTH

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‘Nothing should be done about young people without young people’

At the European level, young people are institutionally represented by the European Youth Forum. The importance of this institution’s aspirations are recognised by representatives across the continent. This is perhaps most clearly put by the motto ‘nothing should be done about young people without young people’, as quoted by a member of the Slovene Youth Council (Email interview, Slovene Youth Council, 2012).

The European Youth Forum is a deemed by many within the youth sector to be a well-functioning vehicle to represent young people across Europe. As one active board member of the EYF asserted: ‘The European Youth Forum’s work in reaching out to young people across Europe, I would argue, is second to none’ (Email interview, 2012). In its response to our questions the European Youth Forum stated that it

‘represents the diversity of youth organisations from all over Europe with its membership reaching far beyond the EU’s borders consisting of a cross-section of political, religious, student and rights-based groups. The organisations that form the Platform are membership-based, meaning that they **truly represent more than 20 million young people in Europe** from the countryside of Russia to the urban outskirts of London, making them the best placed to reach out everywhere in the continent’. (Email interview, 8/02/12 – emphasis added)

Obviously there are issues regarding representation and reach, and it is an explicit ambition of the EYF to widen and strengthen their representation of young people in the EU. In particular, some consider reaching minority groups to be an issue. Others stress that more emphasis should be put on making sure that unorganised young people are also reached and represented, as this representative of the Dutch Youth Council makes clear:

‘The European Youth Forum is now foremost an organisation that represents ‘youth organisations’ rather than genuine young people. This can be witnessed in the lobbying for the new Youth in Action Programme, where the focus is mostly on opportunities for youth organisations rather than the interest of unorganised youth’. (Email interview, 26/01/12)

Clearly, such a conception of the EYF raises issues about representation. One way of navigating this tension is to explicitly reject the microcosm approach to representation. We found some evidence of this in our sample, where the need to *represent all European youth* was not directly equated with *involving all European youth*. A board member of the EYF argued:

‘It is important to see the Youth Forum as a tool for individual youth organisations to collaborate together and be stronger together. It is not therefore important that young people know about the direct activities of the Youth Forum. [...] It is also an important right that many young people **do not want to participate directly** at the European level. It is therefore the Youth Forums’ roles to support the educational work of their member organisations so that decisions are made with the right knowledge’. (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012 – emphasis added).



This is an important argument, as it re-conceptualises the idea of representation. Although it should be noted that the above argument does not preclude the EYF seeking to expand its base of participants (which is something that was argued for in the same interview)<sup>1</sup>.

However, for the EYF to claim legitimacy, the challenge which remains is ensuring that no groups of young people (notably excluded young people, but also those from other potentially marginalised groups) are institutionally barred or discouraged from participation, even if they then do not actively choose to take part. Our findings offer some important examples of good practice, as groups across Europe seek to address these issues.

One way to navigate this issue is, of course, for groups to retain an awareness of their demographic weaknesses, and to attempt to be as open as possible to those from different backgrounds, and to always strive for a broader membership, even if actually achieving a perfect microcosm of the overall population remains an aspiration. There is some evidence of this already occurring within the European Youth Forum:

Widening and strengthening our representation of young people in Europe is something that can always be done better, developed and consolidated. The Forum is for this reason proactive in closing gaps in its membership, in engaging in initiatives that reach far beyond its members and in furthering inclusivity (Email communication, 8/02/12).

Other stakeholders in our sample made similar observations about their desire to participate and engage with politics, but also at the difficulty they faced in reaching some young people and, in turn, better representing them. For example, a member of the British Youth Council noted that their aim was 'to promote on one hand, effective and on the other hand, representative participation' (Stakeholder interview, UK, 2012). It is interesting that these two objectives were presented as being somewhat at odds with each other, but it was also observed that the aim of the Council was always to be more representative and broader-based in the future.

In terms of the Structured Dialogue, a board member of the EYF also noted that more than 10 per cent of the young people participating in the British consultation process suffer from either physical or learning disabilities. This data is gathered through a questionnaire of participants (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012). Such data monitoring offers an insight into the representativeness of those being consulted. The value of consulting this group is particularly evident – as well as sharing many of the same opinions as their peers, they will also have a unique set of concerns, which might go unspoken if they were unrepresented.

Another suggestion for best practice to enhance the representativeness of and lower barriers to the Structured Dialogue process was offered by a Dutch participant, who argued that greater agenda-setting power should be devolved to young people, stating:

It would be good if the Structured Dialogue would be organised as a **bottom-up process**, which means that young people themselves are asked what they consider to be important and that these themes would be communicated to national governments and the EU. In this way, we would know what really is important to young people instead of asking young

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<sup>1</sup> For the accession criteria and admission procedure of the EYF see: [http://www.youthforum.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=60&Itemid=71&lang=en](http://www.youthforum.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=60&Itemid=71&lang=en) and [http://www.youthforum.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=58&Itemid=69&lang=en](http://www.youthforum.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=58&Itemid=69&lang=en)

people's views on things they sometimes do not have not have an opinion on. (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012 – emphasis added).

Beyond this, the representative made the point that the guiding questions<sup>2</sup> as currently instituted can actually act as a barrier to participation, since they require a lot of knowledge to engage with: 'the guiding questions should be more easy to implement. Now the guiding questions are written in jargon and are often not useful to consult young people' (Email interview, 2012). Similarly, another board member of the EYF argued that while the EYF does a good job, it could be more focused on issues that directly impact young people, notably unemployment (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012).

However, it should be noted that our stakeholder interviews did not find universal agreement on this point. Certainly, one discussion with a Hungarian community radio station producer who focused on youth and politics indicated that the topics raised by the Structured Dialogue as currently instituted has actually driven much of their discussion and provided an important focus within a youth politics project they run (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Hungary, 2012). This seems to be a particularly positive example and is indicative of how even complex policy debates can engage a broader base of young people if mediated in an appropriate manner.



***Grassroots youth organisations are closer to young people but have less contact with those in power***

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<sup>2</sup> This is a set of questions which guides the Structured Dialogue process, essentially creating the agenda for the discussions.

## Case-Study 1

Hallgatói Önkormányzatok Országos Konferenciája, HÖÖK, ([www.hook.hu](http://www.hook.hu)) is an alliance of student unions in every state-run and private but accredited Hungarian higher education institution. HÖÖK is the “official” organisation that represents students’ interests in the country, recognised as such by government and higher education administration; when a new law or a measure about tertiary education is planned to be introduced, this is the organisation the authorities need to negotiate with. As such, it has an important role in representing young people, seeing it as its job to represent students’ interests nationally and internationally, particularly in EU member states. Its constitution states that the organisation “initiates legal changes, evaluates proposed bills, and arranges debates about them”.

HÖÖK members are delegated by local student councils of universities and colleges, who are in turn elected by the student body of the institutions. Larger schools have two-level student councils: students elect their representatives for the faculty councils, which delegate members to the university or college-wide representative body. HÖÖK is the alliance of these bodies.

At the time of the research, HÖÖK was primarily engaged with expressing its objection to the new higher education bill, proposed by the conservative Christian Democrat government in December 2010, and debated by the Parliament in December 2011. HÖÖK was officially requested to evaluate the reform bill, but they claim that their points were largely ignored by the education ministry. HÖÖK also claims that after the initial request, it was mostly left out of the consultation process about the bill. In response, it issued protesting statements, and its members organised demonstrations and strikes, including a hunger strike, at several universities in the country.

Although in principle, HÖÖK represents every student in higher education institutions in Hungary (and it represents only them), there has long been some palpable dissatisfaction with its politics. The current reform plans gave rise to a more fundamental, by its self-declaration “autonomous movement of Hungarian university students”, named the Student Network. The focus of this new organisation, however, seems to be narrower than that of HÖÖK: it primarily aims to give voice to students to oppose the proposed higher education bill.

The Hungarian example is indicative of a changing representative eco-system. HÖÖK offers a highly formalistic model of representation, reliant on bottom-up inputs from those it represents in the form of student union elections, and top-down legitimacy, based on its access to government decision makers. This is a highly traditional model of political representation. At the same time though, its representative function goes beyond this formal role, linking it up with broader-based youth politics. This also creates complex inter-relationships with other groups, such as the Student Network. In an increasingly diffuse political environment, such relationships and arrangements are likely to become more common, and raise challenges for all formal political institutions seeking to represent broad constituencies.

## Conclusions

Our focus groups and other stakeholders outlined the scale of the challenge for groups seeking to represent such a broad range of young people from such diverse circumstances. Examples from our data include:

“One of the things that has come out of our research and is important is that the institutional responses or initiatives that might be set up to help young people are often very negative about them and young people do not feel they are working for them.” [Academic expert stakeholder, telephone interview, UK, 2012]

“What we want to get to is not needing an all women shortlist [of candidates at election time]. I am not entirely comfortable with the [party] shortlists, and I am in a minority in my party that is not comfortable with it, but this does not mean that I don't think we have to have them. [...] A lot of the debate [about getting more women representatives into parliament] focuses on trying to make Parliament a family friendly place, but to be really blunt, parliament is never going to be a family friendly job for men or women.” [Young politician, stakeholder interview, UK, 2012]

Speaking specifically about young women voters, this stakeholder explains how again, political parties have failed to communicate the connection between beneficiary policies that help someone's life and the importance of the political process in bringing about these policies. At the women's shelter in Paris where we conducted our 'Excluded' youth focus group with young women fleeing from violence, this young UK politician's concerns about the rights and representation of young women citizens were raised time and again. Discrimination in terms of pay, career choices, subtle educational situations and a lack of women politicians to understand their predicament was the main theme of the group's comments on representation.

This sense of an inability and/or failure on the part of 'representatives' to communicate their messages successfully to most groups or to do the representative work they were selected/set up to do in relation to young women, working class youth, excluded and at risk youth and young people from ethnic minorities is substantiated in focus group discussions of representation. Outlining the role of ethnic minority politicians, some young Hungarians comment on the fact that having better and more representatives in parliament would also reduce the chances of the extreme right from implementing their anti-democratic policies:

X1: I'd like to see more Roma in the Parliament.

X2: Yeah, I agree, it'd be good.

X1: At least they [the MPs] would watch their mouth.

X3: It'd be harder for [Far Right Jobbik leader, Gábor] Vona to suggest that they should be enclosed with barbed wire if there's one next to him looking at him nastily.

X2: This is the most direct reason. If a militant Hungarian was sitting here, I'd select my words more carefully. [focus group, f2f, Hungary, 2012]

These arguments are not surprising. Representation is a multifaceted concept, subject to a great many highly contested definitions. As such, it makes little sense for a single group or even a single model of group to claim a monopoly on the term. The challenge faced by youth groups across Europe – ranging from youth wings of national political parties, formal institutions engaged in European Union policy-making, and both formal and informal activist and media production groups, is to create a broad-based participatory eco-system, allowing young citizens to engage in different ways on their own terms.

Seeking this objective will do much to ensure that the broadest range of young people's concerns are voiced in the political sphere. However, such an objective is far from simple. The tension between different types of political participation was very evident in our sample. Despite the evidence detailed above of young policymakers reaching out to their

communities and seeking to be inclusive, there remains a huge divide between institutions associated with representative national politics (i.e. political parties) and other areas of political and civic participation, especially less formal and civically-based groups. Crucially, there remains an important cultural distinction between the two arenas. In what offers an instructive comparison with the young French right-wing political activist cited above making a very instrumental case for party involvement, a French social activist referred to those involved in party politics as 'Jazz talkers', which can best be translated as 'smooth talkers' (Stakeholder interview with French activist, f2f, 2011). This is indicative of the derision with which some young people regard formal party politics.

From the perspective of representative theory, the emergence of less formal groups clearly highlights the tension between the different definitions of representation. On the one hand, low levels of institutionalisation means they lack the institutionally-derived legitimacy enjoyed by political parties or organisations such as HÖÖK. On the other hand, the *raison d'être* of such groups is to be found in the critique of formal politics and its participants as unrepresentative of their interests.

The evidence gathered through case studies, interviews and existing literature suggests that issues of youth representation are a key concern for many local, regional and national governments, as well as student bodies. However, it is also becoming apparent that a very narrow spectrum of young people (particularly those from highly educated, traditionally political or affluent and aspirational backgrounds) are far more likely to be engaged in 'dialogue' or 'consultation' with adult policy-makers and politicians than their less highly educated, less experienced or less wealthy counterparts.

As such, while it is seen by policy-makers, the youth sector and young people themselves to be vitally important for young people to act as representatives for other young people, the 'representativeness' of the young people who get selected or put themselves forward is questionable in relation to the vast majority of youth in Europe.

Although there are no straightforward paths to achieving representativeness and fairness in representation, there are a number of ways in which much more could be done in this regard by established stakeholders which would involve both greater accountability to local and regional communities of young people, and greater openness and flexibility in relation to the forms of participation and communication accepted by established political elites across the European Union. Crucially, our focus group data points to a failure at community level, with many young people not being acculturated into the world of political life. Furthermore, many political organisations (especially those, such as political parties, with an instrumental function) do not consider this as something they should be seeking to correct. However, there are examples of work done in communities that brings parents and young people together. With each being afforded a distinctive voice, the process has tremendous power to change social norms and open up the participatory world.

In particular, based on the discussion above, we would draw attention to the following best practice:

- Young politicians seeking to ground their political life in communities and reaching out to those who are excluded.
- More young politicians.
- More young female politicians.
- More young ethnic minority politicians.
- The taking seriously of youth representatives in mainly adult policy of consultative fora.
- More efforts to educate, strengthen confidence and encourage young people from excluded groups to represent themselves and their groups.



- Monitoring of participation in the Structured Dialogue process, similar to the British example with young disabled activists, to ensure that a broad range of voices are heard.
- Fostering discussion forums (such as the Hungarian community radio example cited above) where European issues are debated in a jargon-free and open manner.

Above all, the challenge for policymakers is to appreciate the broad tapestry of political activity occurring in Europe, and devise mechanisms to amalgamate the various and distinct inputs this creates into the formal policy process.

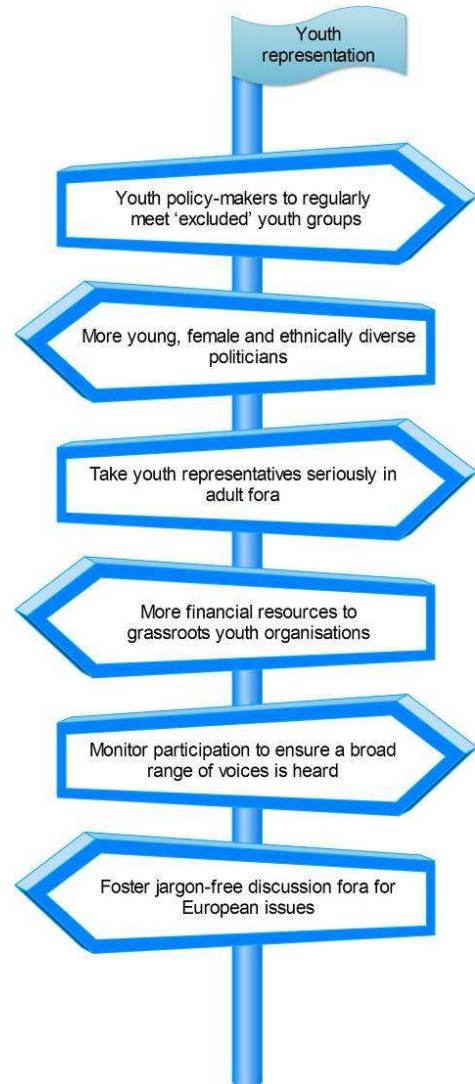
**Policy Recommendations for Theme 1**

Reaching out to young people, especially more difficult to reach groups through debates, popular media formats, internet platforms and meeting directly with young people in disadvantaged areas.

The representativeness of national delegations to the Structured Dialogue should be monitored to ensure that a broader cross-section of young people are taking part in the process.

Giving young people the opportunity to vote for youth representatives at the national, European, and local level before the age of 18, the development of voting advice applications, and stronger, more democratic students unions can be seen as ways to strengthen the representativeness of young people.

Several stakeholders have argued for allocating more resources to organisations that are working directly with young people at a grassroots level rather than organisations that represent other organisations. Such groups would have a better understanding of engaging with young people in specific circumstances and



## THEME 2: PROMOTING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

### Introduction

The *Treaty of Lisbon* explicitly gives a role to the European Union in fostering participation among young people and “encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe” (2007: Article 165, sub-section 2). Similarly, the Preamble to the *Youth Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*, agreed in 2003, states:

Young people have the right and should have the opportunity to have a **real say** when decisions affecting them are being made at local and regional level. They should also be supported and given the space to be involved in all kinds of activities and actions. Of course, having a right is no good, unless young people have the **opportunity, support and knowledge** to use it. (*Council of Europe, Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life* “Have Your Say!” p2.)

Certainly our research with young people across Europe and the organisations that seek to represent them would suggest that young people see this as an issue that has the potential to be addressed at the European level, as expressed by a Youth in Action grant holder:

The youth organisations act as a forum for communication between all members from different countries and the EU decision makers, ensuring that the message is passed and that the concerns and the views of young people are represented and endorsed at EU level – we strongly believe that this is one of the most important aspects in role of youth organisations (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012).

This objective can be achieved. Contained within this document are a range of examples suggesting that where young people are properly catered for and supported by their local and regional authorities, their pathways from education to employment are relatively smoother and their opportunities for volunteering taken up more fully. As discussed above, there is growing evidence of a common rhetoric of youth inclusion, youth consultation and youth empowerment used across youth participation organisations in the formal civic and political sphere (including schools/colleges, local and national governments, some NGOs, etc.). This rhetoric must itself be seen as an improvement on the past situation because it answers a legitimate concern about policies and practices which have, to date, been largely driven by the adults working in the youth sector or by the policies and practices of people with little direct contact with young people.

More recently, the 2009 EU Youth Strategy made promoting youth engagement, both in terms of breadth (the number of people engaging) and depth (the range of forms of participation in which young citizens can engage), a priority. This latter point is especially reflected in the range of participatory structures acknowledged by the document. As well as the Structured Dialogue, the importance of diverse ‘mechanisms for dialogue; guidelines (existing and new); political and financial support for youth organisations; information and communication technologies; ‘learning to participate’ programmes in schools from an early age; and debate between public institutions and young people’ are noted (European Commission, 2009).

Political science research offers some insights into some of the problems faced by policymakers seeking to encourage greater and more equal levels of participation among young people. Virginia Morrow (2000) has illustrated that many young people from middle and lower socioeconomic groups are particularly aware of the strategic exclusion they face in



processes of formal 'consultation'. These programmes have good intentions. However, despite this, young people's summaries of the ways in which they are requested to give their opinions about civil society and governance only to have those opinions ignored is emphasised by their interview testimony and in the title of Morrow's discussion: "We get played like fools". The young people consulted by youth charities and other non-governmental organisations about the running of these organisations have similarly both positive and negative experiences – mentioning how decision-making and consultation are often quite separate things (cf. discussion on participation and power).

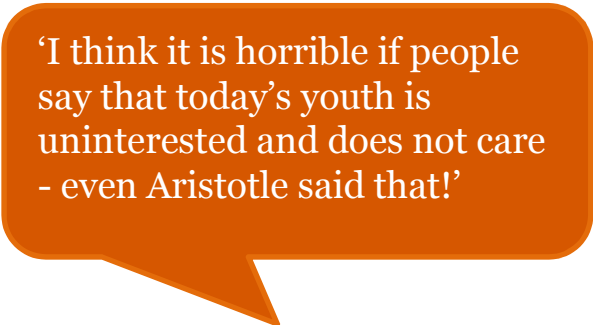
However, while many local, regional and international organisations now speak and write about 'youth voice' as a means to democratic participation or empowerment, the extensive literature on this (cf. Morrow, 1998 and 2000; Vromen, 2008; Bessant, 2004) emphasises that some organisations and governmental bodies intend to act upon the participatory rhetoric, while others do not. In fact, a number of adult actors in the youth civic sphere just see these types of consultations as a way of reducing youth discontent by giving young citizens the impression that they contribute to policymaking (cf. Matthews et al., 1998).

Such approaches which simply offer the mirage of participation are clearly flawed. Academic research suggests that the more inclusive model (similar to that advocated by the Commission in the documents cited above) can have real benefits. In fact, in relation to such youth consultation, Middleton (2006) finds that organisations which do listen reflexively to the concerns and ideas of young people on their boards or subcommittees have been strengthened and consequently produced better and more appropriate youth services. Her advice, therefore, like ours in this study, is that it is vitally important to continue to try to have young people speaking and contributing to decision-making processes to engage them and be engaged with their concerns.

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## 2.1 CHALLENGES WITH ENGAGEMENT

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'I think it is horrible if people say that today's youth is uninterested and does not care - even Aristotle said that!'

Fostering engagement is a multifaceted challenge, requiring an appreciation of the circumstances of a wide variety of young people. Our focus group data offers insights into some of the problems that young people who are only engaged in political and civic activity in a limited way face. One particular group in our sample were neither heavily involved in politics, nor were they excluded (the 'reference' group). This did not mean, however, that all of them were automatically included or that none of them were at risk of exclusion. In fact the whole purpose of including this particular 'reference' group was to obtain a wide spectrum of civic, social and political circumstances. The views of this group are instructive when considering the distance that exists between attempts to foster engagement by policymakers, and the views and experiences of young people.

The first important observation that comes out of these groups is that young people are not apathetic about politics – they are interested and wish to engage and participate. Many have an interest both in their own communities, and the issues that impact them, but also in broader issues on the international stage. Many participants to the focus groups claimed to have been on demonstrations for a great array of causes, including environmentalism, anti-racism, protesting against education cuts, pro-Palestinian marches and being part of the so called “slut walk” movement<sup>3</sup>, imported from Canada (Focus groups, f2f, France, Austria and UK, 2012). Others noted that they were inspired by the Arab Spring and the example of young people being mobilised by the internet to engage in direct action for freedom (‘Reference’ focus group, Austria, 2012). The Hungarian and Spanish ‘reference’ focus groups also reported that every single attendee had been on some kind of demonstration in the year preceding the discussion (‘Reference’ focus groups, f2f, Hungary and Spain, 2012).

Similarly, the ‘Reference’ focus group in Finland suggested a broad array of concerns among the young people participating, who were able to list a multitude of matters that were of concern to them:

‘Arts, [a current issue because Helsinki is the Design Capital 2012], sports, environment, globalisation, lifestyle, immigration, education, human rights, peace, religion, social inequalities, drugs, sexual orientation, health, family, unemployment’ (‘Reference’ focus group, f2f, Finland, 2012).

Many of these participants had also independently engaged in political activity and also stated that they were generally comfortable expressing their opinions to others (‘Reference’ focus group, Finland, 2012). This is crucial because it alerts us to the fact that the work needing to be done by some institutions, organisations or governmental and cross-European bodies to ‘engage’ young people is not such an uphill task as it might seem.

Of the various school focus groups, it was in the UK and French samples where the greatest number of political activities were engaged in by participants. Cited examples included: signing petitions, going on marches and demonstrations, visiting websites, signing online petitions, passing on political memes on Facebook, making films, organising for political activism, working in a youth club, and life style politics (in this case being a vegan – although it should be noted that the participant, while responding to a question about political activity noted that she saw this as a personal choice) (Focus groups, f2f, France and UK, 2012). This breadth of political activity is not just the product of the recent anti-tuition fees movement in the UK<sup>4</sup>, which led to renewed political engagement among many university and school-aged citizens, but also a legacy in both countries of parental and older sibling engagement in the anti-Iraq war movement of 2003. Across all the groups, there was a universal rejection of the idea that young people are not interested in politics, with one participant noting the historical irony of such a claim, stating ‘I think it is horrible if people say that today’s youth is uninterested and does not care - even Aristotle said that!’ (‘Reference’ focus group, f2f, Austria, 2012).

Recent political science research has done much to foster the idea that young people are uninterested, and thus has been important in developing the dangerous misconception that

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<sup>3</sup> On the history of the Slut Walking movement, see Slutwalk (2012).

<sup>4</sup> This movement was a response to proposals by the UK coalition government to introduce higher levels of tuition fees and give universities the ability to charge differing amounts based on the institution attended and course taken. This has led to widespread youth mobilisation, including both peaceful and violent protest.

young people do not engage and do not want to engage politically. However, such analysis is the product of an overly formalistic definition of political participation, too focused on very limited measures of engagement, exclusively in the arena of formal politics (for an overview of this discussion and important corrective, see Wring et al, 1999).

Our focus group sample provides ample evidence of the problem with such an approach – for many young people – and despite their belief that political issues matter – formal, institutionalised politics has shown itself to be alien and unapproachable. Attitudes to and experiences of formal politics in Finnish focus group are indicative of this problem:

‘[I will participate] in some demonstrations yes, but I would not join political parties, they are somehow too large ensembles, it’s easier to support specific persons’  
‘Yeah, some civil organisations may have a clearer target, whereas the scale in political parties is wider, so it’s more difficult somehow’  
(‘Reference’ focus group, f2f, Finland, 2012).

Similarly, expert members of our stakeholder sample noted that measuring voting turnout alone gives little indication as to engagement:

‘If we talk about disenchantment with politics, than we can underline this argument with low first-time voters’ turnout. However, this only means that they first need to get used to the ‘system of voting’. This is nothing new and does not say anything about disenchantment with politics’ (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Austria, 2012).

For policymakers, then this dichotomy presents a difficult problem – while some young people do indeed claim not to be ‘interested in politics’, many young people are evidently engaged with the political life of their localities, schools, regions or countries, many of them caring about it passionately. However, there is frequently a reported estrangement from formal institutions and politicians, which leaves no space for the expression of this engagement. This raises the question of whether best practice can be found which can form a better connection between these latent political aspirations and more institutionalised processes.

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## 2.2 ENGAGEMENT AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

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European institutions, to some extent at least, can sidestep some of the issues discussed above – by far the strongest vitriol in our focus group sample was reserved for national or regional politicians and political parties. However, this also creates problems: the anger directed at national politicians is largely because they are perceived to have power over everyday political concerns, which are frequently focused in the localities and communities where young people live or on young people’s aspirations to employment, housing and further or higher education. The tripling of university tuition fees in 2010 and the freezing of the minimum wage for young people in the UK in the same 2012 national budget which has awarded substantial tax cuts for those in the uppermost income brackets may be taken as a case in point. In contrast, European-level politics seems somewhat removed.

This creates no major problem; however, as noted by a Finnish youth worker in our stakeholder interviews, ‘Young people don’t know that there are these opportunities for them’ (Stakeholder interview, f2f, 2012). Certainly the evidence in our focus groups bears this out: aside from the most prominent national political concerns and occasional mention of local issues, few other avenues for engagement were explicitly noted. As such, publicity for

engagement opportunities for young people with European policy-makers and politicians at a supra-national level presents a major challenge.

September 2011 saw *The Structured Dialogue Session* held in Warsaw at the European Youth Conference. The Structured Dialogue is the European Union's institutional mechanism for including the voice of young people in youth-policy decision making. To this end, it seeks to bring together young people and policy makers, to interact, debate and feed into the policy process. The Structured Dialogue process lasts 18 months and takes place in both all member states and at European Union level. At the European Union level, a steering committee (consisting of Representatives of the Ministries for Youth Affairs from the Trio Presidency countries, the National Youth Councils from the Trio Presidency countries, the National Agencies for the Youth in Action Programme from the Trio Presidency countries, the European Commission, the European Youth Forum) coordinates the process (for further details on the Structured Dialogue process, see Fernandez et al., 2011)

Observing the sophisticated and nuanced debates focused on complex issues relating to European youth policy was especially impressive. Considering the number of young people from many countries in attendance, this was in keeping with the stated aims of the process, notably to foster cross-border exchanges between young people, which in turn (it is argued in the recommendation document) promotes participation (workshop 7, preamble). Certainly, representatives who have participated in the process both find it personally fulfilling and an important statement of the value of youth participation in the European project, as pointed out by a Dutch participant:

It is good that the EU Commission has introduced the Structured Dialogue. It is an opportunity for young people across Europe to have their say in decision-making processes. The EU Youth conferences are a good way to bundle the outcomes of the national consultations and making sure the voice of young people is heard' (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012).

This assertion raises empirical questions, however. In particular, we need to consider the institutional venue of the participation and who is actually engaged in it. Institutionally, the Structured Dialogue sessions bring together young people from across Europe who have gravitated towards it through various, nationally- and transnationally-defined paths. As such, there are a number of distinctive relationships in play between local, national, party and transnational participation. Our research data suggests that while such organisations frequently act as "feeder" groups for the Structured Dialogue, they are not nationally consistent in terms of their relationship with formal political institutions, especially government, student unions and political parties, or representative of a majority of young people (see section 1). This has the potential to create barriers for most young people to the Structured Dialogue process.

A UK-based Structured Dialogue participant, for example, noted that the feeder organisations for the process were the 'British Youth Council, Scottish Youth Parliament, Northern Ireland Youth Forum and Funky Dragon' (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012). These groups in turn are application-based, with individuals being admitted on the merits of written applications which require, in turn, a vast array of knowledge, skills and high levels of literacy. This model of recruitment creates a difficulty for the Structured Dialogue process, since the institutional apparatus around it may not be wholly in control of the pool of candidates it has to select from, in turn making it difficult to achieve goals relating to participation. One way of overcoming this difficulty is to broaden the models of consultation employed in the Structured Dialogue process. Our sample of stakeholder interviews indicated that many participants in the process were looking to make greater use of new media to engage in consultation (Email interview with Structured Dialogue representative, 2012). This development could have important democratic consequences, since the

architecture of new media, especially so-called Web 2.0 applications (O'Reilly, 2003) lend themselves to a multiplicity of forms of engagement, which in turn lead to a co-existence of different conceptions of democratic participation. A variation of this theme was raised in a face-to-face interview with another Structured Dialogue participant, who suggested greater linkages with the Eurobarometer survey (thus offering another avenue to gain insights in opinions of young Europeans), which could in turn inform the discussion (Stakeholder interview with Structured Dialogue participant, 2012, country redacted).

There may be additional reasons to be concerned about this. One inherent element in the Structured Dialogue process is an underlying commitment to normative ideals of deliberation (discussed in the theoretical introduction to this report). In other words, the view that discussion and rational engagement can foster a unified position among participants – embodied in the final outcomes document. While the practices advocated by deliberative democrats are certainly important democratic skills and to be encouraged, a desire to create unity may also, paradoxically, be alienating, as it necessarily excludes some voices from the outcomes of the process. Furthermore, overly rigid agendas, shaped by broader European issues, will seem alien to many young people and the political concerns that are manifest in their daily lives.

It seems that there is a danger in assuming that the Structured Dialogue process automatically leads to better and more engagement either on the part of young people and older adults or on the part of national politicians. In fact, we were alerted by some Structured Dialogue participants to the unrepresentative nature of the process and to tensions between a desire to be representative and a desire to be practically effective (see Section 1 of this report). In terms of a way forward, we were told by a stakeholder interviewee '[The Structured Dialogue] could learn a great deal from the approach of the Council of Europe where there is a co-management system' (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012, country redacted). This comment may seem contradictory to the form of the Structured Dialogue. After all, the Youth Forum chairs the Steering Committee and runs its secretariat, and in youth organisations at national level, young people are actively involved in the management of the Structured Dialogue. Indeed, it should be noted this interviewee also commended the Structured Dialogue for attempts to foster co-management. However, these attempts exist within a highly formalised and hierarchical structure. As a result, many stakeholders do not feel they have influence over the process.

At this point, it should also be noted that the Structured Dialogue process does contain a strong evaluative element. Notably, delegates gather at the end of the 18 month cycle, most recently in Brussels in May 2011, when suggestions were made as to how to encourage more young people to participate, make engagement processes more nationally distinct and raise the profile of the Structured Dialogue (see EACEA, 2011). It does indeed seem to us that deepening and broadening partnerships between diverse groups of young representatives and policy-makers at all levels, and between national and supra-national teams of youth representatives is something to strive for, however difficult this may be to achieve in practice.

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## 2.3 OTHER FORMS OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT: THE EXAMPLE OF EUROPEAN YOUTH PARLIAMENTS

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Since its establishment in 1987, the European Youth Parliament has evolved into a complex and multi-faceted participatory institution. As the organisation's website notes:



Today the EYP is one of the largest European platforms for political debate, intercultural encounters, political educational work and the exchange of ideas among young people in Europe. The EYP consists of a network of 35 European associations and organisations in which thousands of young people are active in a voluntary capacity (EYP, 2011).

The European Youth Parliament is itself made up of national youth parliaments. In order to better understand the relationships that shape these organisations, we contacted every single EU Youth Parliament. The main focus of the organisation is educational. A representative of the Finnish European Youth Parliament argued:

The EYP is primarily an educational organisation and as such, doesn't primarily deal with political representation of the youth, meaning that political participation or having an influence on the society are not our primary aims (Stakeholder interview, email, 2011).

Similarly, a Belgian representative of the European Youth Parliament claims that:

We remain an organisation that focuses on the educational aspect and we are not striving for political influence (Stakeholder interview, email, 2011).

Another overriding theme emerging from our focus group data was the importance of universal, compulsory and imaginative political education. However, our data suggests two particular problems with the European Youth Parliament system. The first is its financial precariousness. Many national-level European Youth Parliament organisations have access to very limited resources, which tends to increase the scale of the second problem, namely the relatively limited number of participants in the various organisations. Respondents to our email survey frequently spoke in terms of hundreds of active members (one respondent, mentioning that the Youth Parliament charged a relatively small membership fee of €7 in order to increase the resources it had access to, noted that the national organisation now had 'about 40 members'). Although there is no uniform method for the recruitment of members, our sample of European Youth Parliaments tend to recruit through schools, and often through schools with a particularly high socio-economic intake, particularly where the national system is divided between technical and grammar schools. This creates its own problems, in terms of the types of young people who are being reached, limiting the ability of Youth Parliaments to fulfill their educative function, especially among young people who would otherwise not have access to participatory processes.



***Increasing access and diversity can be achieved through involving more grassroots youth organisations, NGOs and neighbourhood groups, rather than relying on institutional political youth organisations***

## Case-study 2

“The UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) was born in 1999, out of an idea proposed by Andrew Rowe MP. He realised how important it was for young people to take part in the decisions made by local and national government and wished to create a body which would give young people in the United Kingdom a voice through which to express their interests and concerns. The aim of the UKYP is to empower young people from the ages of 11 to 18 by giving them the chance to influence national and local government. [...] The UK Youth Parliament is made up Members of the Youth Parliament (MYPs), most of whom are elected by the young people in their local area. Anyone between the ages of 11 to 18 can stand for election as long as they are a permanent resident of the UK. MYPs are drawn from Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the nine English regions. MYPs and Deputy MYPs have to represent all the young people in their area at a local level and a national level. Some of the ways they do this are:

- by collecting views and opinions from youth and school councils and voluntary organisations such as scouts and guides, in their local area
- by communicating regularly with their local government and with their MP.

All the MYPs meet together once every year, at an event called the Annual Sitting. During the Sitting, MYPs discuss policy and procedure and develop a Manifesto, which is presented to the national government. Other activities take place throughout the year.” (Source: 2004, Report to government on UK Youth Parliament)

The UK Youth Parliament aims to raise debates and campaigns on issues (for instance, such as tuition fees, bus fares and representations of young people in the media) that appear relevant to young people in the UK. The website, although running a number of forums, some embedded videos and UKYP TV, is text heavy, with a fairly high level of literacy demanded by many of the editorial postings. Ideologically too – in terms of the editorial orientation and belief about, for instance, action and rights in the social, cultural, political and economic spheres – the site appears to cater for those already involved or interested in governmental and parliamentary politics. It thus serves a kind of apprenticeship function in relation to traditional politics, both online and offline. Explicitly, however, the mission statement of the UKYP addresses itself to **all young people in the UK** – a wide and unspecified demographic:

The UK Youth Parliament enables young people to use their energy and passion to change the world for the better. Run by young people for young people, UKYP gives the young people of the UK between the age of 11 and 18 a voice, which is heard and listened to by local and national government, providers of services for young people and other agencies who have an interest in the views and needs of young people.

‘Being heard’ sounds good but does not explain what this term might mean in practical terms. The forums on the UKYP website also claim to offer a chance for *any* young person to share their views on political and civic issues.

‘Got an issue you feel passionate about? Want to get something off your chest? Want to meet other likeminded young people? Then the UKYP online forums are the perfect place for you. [...] Culture, education, health, international matters, law and society, entertainment, philosophy – whatever your issue, you will find other young people to debate with.’ (10 July, 2010; <http://www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk>)

Several of the young people encountered during our study are indeed passionate about key civic and social issues, and clearly no less knowledgeable than older adults. Some of the young people in regional MYPs have organised campaigns through their youth parliament contacts in relation to issues like local spaces for young people or leisure facilities. However, the majority of views and opinions expressed in UKYP documents, online forums and offline debates generally appear to represent those who have tended to be academically successful at school/college and/or those from affluent backgrounds. This is particularly notable in relation to discussions of social issues such as education, the power of schools, censorship, benefits and rights, where, despite some interestingly polarised political debates, and a number of compassionate or angry postings and statements, a very small number of the participants in the hundreds of threads and debates analysed demonstrate first-hand knowledge of social deprivation. ‘Excluded’ youth do not appear to contribute at all.



## 2.4 BEYOND THE FORMALLY POLITICAL: DIFFERENT TYPES OF ENGAGEMENT

'I'm not confident because I don't have knowledge

The example of European Youth parliaments shows some of the problems in trying to achieve broad-based political and civic education for young people – namely, that formalised approaches will only ever be able to reach a limited proportion of the total, and most of these will probably already have many of the skills required to participate effectively. Critical youth organisations who work with young homeless, young unemployed, school drop-outs, young offenders and addicts, young mothers, young asylum seekers, etc. maintain that being included in democratic processes requires a step-by-step approach (see Bynner and Parsons, 2002; Coussée, et al., 2009):

- 1) acknowledgment by local authorities of their existence as citizens
- 2) social and spatial inclusion via face-to-face contacts
- 3) re-integration through education, training and interaction
- 4) building efficacy by listening to critique and acting on their concerns.

Evidence for the wisdom of this approach is found in our focus group data, especially the French school group, where many participants expressed the view that political engagement required a particular skill set, which they themselves did not possess ('Reference' focus group, f2f, France, 2012). Even more confident participants noted that they had a particular set of skills that allowed them to engage – the Finnish participants to the 'reference' focus group expressed their confidence in engaging in political discourse, while Austrian participants continually referenced the fact that they attended a grammar school and were thus more likely to be skilled in institutional political discourse than their peers in technical or vocational schools ('Reference' focus group, f2f, Austria and Finland, 2012).

The perceived requirement for political skills was even more evident in the 'Excluded' focus groups. Some examples in our dataset included:

'[Commenting on people involved in a political campaign] For example, those were students. I don't mean any harm but they are freaks that are well versed in everything' ('Excluded' focus group, f2f, Austria, 2012)

'I'm not confident because I don't have knowledge' ('Excluded' focus group, f2f, Finland, 2012).

Such arguments pose a particular challenge to the Structured Dialogue process and similar environments, as they are by nature high-knowledge forms of political engagement. Indeed, this was a point noted by an Austrian civil servant with a responsibility for youth policy, who observed:

'You need to give young people the tools and knowledge to be able to participate on a higher level, such as the EU. If you send people to conferences, you need to prepare them beforehand in workshops. You cannot send anyone climbing Mount Everest without the proper equipment' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Austria, 2012).

For many young people, the nature of debate taking place in the Structured Dialogue process would be akin to that ill-prepared ascent of Everest. However, one response to this

challenge, and in keeping with many of the ideas argued for in the step-by-step approach outlined above, is exemplified by the UK-based youth organisation **Step Forward**. A representative of that organisation told us during an interview that homelessness and overcrowding are major problems for the young people she works with and as such are the primary issues of participation and democracy with which her young people engage:

**'All that affects young people, because they have no space to be, feel their own,** to be able to understand what is going on with them. And then you have overcrowding conditions, people not having the money to go out... and young people don't have many provisions anyway, then youth services are being cut as well, and so they get into crime' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, UK, 2011).

The organisation works by counseling youth from multi-ethnic backgrounds in a particular municipality (borough) of London. Step Forward's services are also based on a distinctly creative, inspirational model of engagement for young people. The activities they offer include Art, Drama and Writing, during half term, Easter and summer time. Young people can spend the whole day at Step Forward, getting to know one another, building trust and relationships in mixed age groups from 11 to 18 years old. These groups have received very positive feedback from the teenagers involved and some of them keep coming back.

The second reason for the organisation's multidisciplinary approach is that, according to the expert stakeholder interviewed, a youth organisation needs to be flexible and open, not to specialise in one issue only, something that might ultimately drive young people away. Their attitude is 'No problem is too big or small', in order to encourage young people to come in and talk about anything that is affecting them. In their words, the focus is

'everything, everything that comes through the door. We want to help young people; it could be anything, anything as small as just having a question. We want young people to come in [...] and that's like taking a weight off their shoulder' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, UK, 2011).

As an organisation they simply try to be as accessible as possible, even though the counsellors have specialised fields and knowledge. They find this approach extremely important because of the conditions under which young people now live in London. Step Forward says it is vital

'because young people at the moment are under so much pressure. They have peer pressure, they have educational pressure, they have got pressure from the society, and there is no funding, there is overcrowding, there are different cultures, different sexualities, different religions [...] They are just trying to fit in, find a space to fit in' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, UK, 2011).

It appears from the approach of this youth organisation that engaging young people in democracy does not have to be constrained by the limitations of organisations that are overtly related to the political system such as youth parliaments or youth councils. Engagement, according to this view, begins with the everyday pressing concerns of young people and with assisting youth in facing or challenging everyday issues in their localities and communities.

A similar ethos is to be found at Perg in Austria, a youth centre which provides a space for young people to develop their civic skills. As well as advocating such an approach the youth worker who runs the organisation also noted the inappropriateness of traditional means of political education:

'It is our goal to get young people to participate in society. [...] We have to bring them to see that it has a value for her/him to participate. [...] Still, it is very hard to get young

people to become involved, to find topics they are interested in and where they can make decisions which have an influence... Teaching democracy needs to happen on a different, non-formal level. It doesn't help if the mayor comes to visit a school' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Austria, 2012).

Our stakeholder interview with an academic expert in Austria provided a stark comment on the challenges socially excluded young people face, but also on the value of embracing alternative mechanisms for including them in political and civic engagement:

'Young people at risk usually lack self-confidence, because they never experienced success. Young people that lack 'academic skills' or other competences cannot be helped by again and again training those skills in a school setting. You can only reach them by employing youth subcultural strategies e.g. engage them in musical education, rap music, theatre performances, to build up or strengthen their self-confidence and other competences. An example for this is the so-called 'université de hip-hop' in France' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Austria, 2011).

In some ways, this approach is in keeping with policies advocated by the Commission. By using different means, such as art and drama, to engage young people and develop their skills, Step Forward and Perg are replicating European Commission policy, stated in 2009, to engage young people in a creativity and culture, in order to – among other things – 'promote active citizenship and participation' (European Commission, 2009). However, such alternative approaches to engagement also provoke challenges for policymakers. As Zentner (2011: 13) points out, the structures to enable youth participation to take place do not only need to be in place, policymakers also need to listen and genuinely take young people's concerns and wishes into consideration:

Provided structures exist and are known and consequences of developments are understood, youth will participate in society and policymaking. Then it is the task of the politicians to accept young people's approach to participation, try to understand the messages and requests and act on them.

## Conclusions

Local, regional and national youth participation organisations have an important role to play in representing the interests of educated, motivated and already-participating young people

It is our finding, therefore, that local, regional and national youth participation organisations do have an important role to play in representing the interests of educated, motivated and already-participating young people. They also occasionally give voice to legitimate concerns about policies and social circumstances which keep some groups of young people in situations of inequality. As such they have a role to play in mediating between some young people and adults in positions of power, and can make limited changes to improve the youth friendliness of practices and policies and, in particular, in maintaining an image of young people as rational and deliberative citizens in the minds of politicians and policy-makers. They also provide an important educational function for this particular cohort. However, it should also be noted that many

of those who are engaged in the process are already highly skilled in comparison with their peers and have determined on a political career:

‘Besides my academic studies and trainings experiences, I needed to get experience in public space. Besides my studies in law, I had a will to be integrated in circles, in European networks. [...] Me, if I went to those councils, it’s because I could see the added value it could bring me, with competencies and things like that’ (Stakeholder interview, regional Youth Council of Ile de France, f2f, France, 2011).

There are practices such groups can use to broaden the level of engagement they are able to achieve (see list of bullet points below). However, for many young people, the highly formalised model of political engagement they embody is alien and intimidating. The findings in the case study are supported by our own stakeholder interviews. According to a young representative of regional youth council in France:

“It is this category (unemployed, precarious) which is the most difficult to reach. [...] It’s obvious that people who go away have mostly this profile, unemployed young people. And it’s the people who are disappointed, disillusioned, by the administrative delays, because the administration wasn’t able to listen to what young people had to say, to the projects they wanted to hold because it didn’t fit with the political priorities.” (Stakeholder interview, f2f, France, 2011).

This alienation should not be mistaken for a lack of interest or political engagement. There is nothing in our evidence to suggest this is the case. Rather, there is a lack of confidence among many young people and a belief that politics is both difficult and requires specialist knowledge.

To overcome this challenge, participation needs to be conceived broadly and include different mechanisms for young people with different skill sets and experiences to make a contribution. In addition, it needs to be stressed that strengthening the confidence of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate in policy contexts is of prime importance – training is seen to be beneficial to increasing young people’s confidence.

In conclusion, we would like to highlight the following examples of best practice in youth engagement:

- Moving away from the conception that young people have little interest in politics because of a lack of traditional engagement through formal institutions. Instead, developing new measures that take in account the broader types of political activity in which young people engage.
- Ensure young people are aware of the democratic opportunities they have. Our focus groups demonstrated a striking lack of knowledge of all but the most publicised forms of participation.
- Many young people’s concerns are primarily local. This can be built on to construct linkages between the local, national and transnational political sphere.
- Look to embed a multiplicity of democratic models in the Structured Dialogue process, in addition to the deliberative approach that currently dominates and which has the potential to be exclusionary. New media offers the possibility to aid with this process.
- Strengthen and evaluate the ways in which Structured Dialogue is made available to young people at national level and the ways in which EU/EP policies on youth and other issues are discussed and described by national-level politicians.
- Strengthen existing youth organisations, NGOs and neighbourhood groups which have managed and continue to engage with and engage the interest of young people from a diversity of backgrounds in creative political and civic ways, rather than always drawing representatives for dialogue from institutional political youth organisations which claim to represent them.
- Deepen existing institutions of co-management during the Structured Dialogue process, broadening agenda-setting powers beyond members of the Steering Committee and giving a larger number of young people greater ownership of the process. In addition to this, several stakeholders also emphasised the importance of a follow-up process.

- As per the European Union’s 2009 policy, look to supporting broader definitions of participatory activities which allow young people to develop their skills as citizens, such as those with a creative or artistic aspect. The Step-Up programme in the UK and the Perg club in Austria indicate the benefits that can be gained by equipping young people with the basic skills, such as confidence, that facilitate participation.

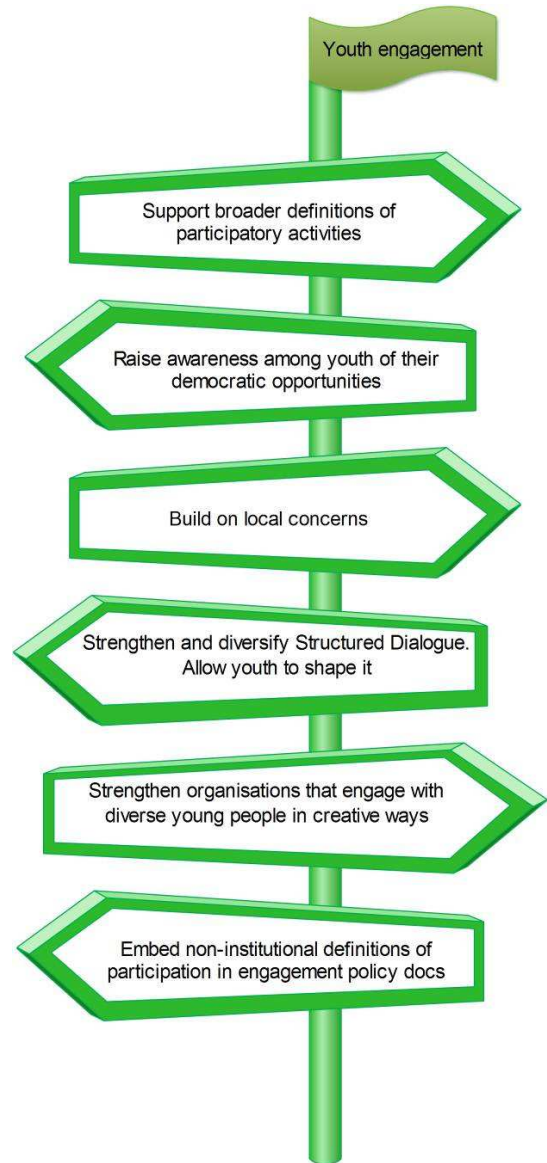
**Policy Recommendations for Theme 2:**

The broad tapestry of political activity occurring in Europe needs to be acknowledged, and new innovative mechanisms need to be devised to amalgamate the various and distinct inputs this creates into the formal policy process.

Enlarge access and diversity can be achieved through involving more grassroots youth organisations, NGOs and neighbourhood groups, rather than relying too exclusively on large European, national or institutional political youth organisations.

In building this broader tapestry of participation, wider definitions of ‘the political’ should also be employed to allow more groups to partake in policy discussions.

In terms of improving the Structured Dialogue process, mechanisms by which young people are not merely invited to discuss a pre-defined issue, but can actually co-shape the agenda and take part-ownership of the process need to be assessed.





## THEME 3: YOUNG PEOPLE AND ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

### Introduction

What are the real causes of the low electoral participation of young people?

Is it due to age or generational effects?

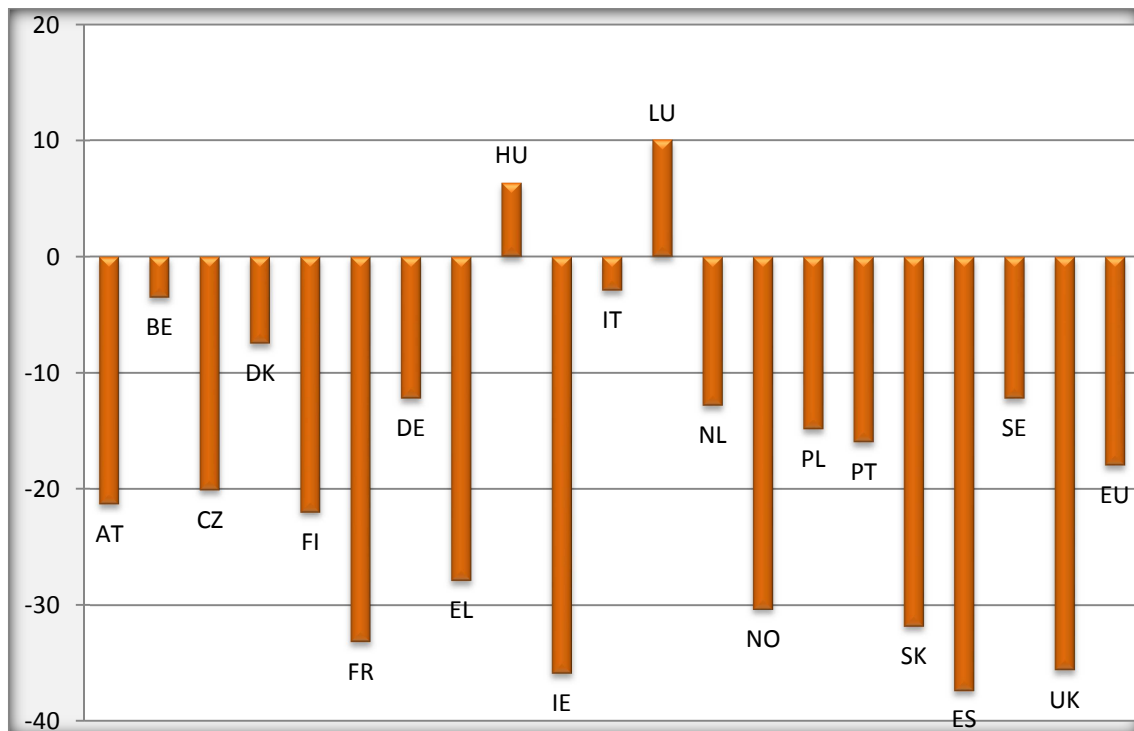
What policy solutions could be considered to remedy this?

In this section, we look at what is historically the primary channel of democratic participation – the vote. We first look at the nature and extent of the electoral participation deficit of young people and then move on to analysing the causes and meaning of young people's low participation and how voting compares to other forms of participation in their hierarchy of preferences using our mass survey. We continue to explore the emotions associated with the vote. We look at the possible ways to increase youth participation in institutional politics, including e-voting, lowering the voting age, and specific young people's elections. We then analyse young people's answers to the suggestions highlighted earlier as possible avenues to increase voter turnout. Finally, we report on the results of our experiments on social media campaigning and e-voting on young people's

voting perceptions and behaviour before concluding on the appropriateness of the various measures considered in this report.

Political scientists across the developed world have pondered on two distinct (albeit related) long-term trends in electoral participation that have become increasingly evident in recent years: the overall decline in voter turnout, and the particular propensity of young people to abstain at election time. The evidence that young people are less likely to vote relative to other citizens varying across the EU has been largely documented and is illustrated in figure 3.1. These data are calculated by subtracting the overall number level of citizen participation from the declared level of youth participation. As can clearly be seen in this survey, in all but two exceptions where data was available, young people were less likely – on many occasions, significantly less likely – to participate in elections than the average citizen.



**Figure 3.1:** Differential turnout between young people and other citizens

**Source:** EACEA/EC 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life' re-analysis. Data calculated by subtracting annual voter turnout in Parliamentary elections, 1990-2011 from young people's voting rate, as declared in European Social Survey

Wattenberg (2006) notes that this phenomenon is multifaceted. Young people not only abstain at election time, but also opt out of many of the traditional avenues for political learning and development, such as reading newspapers or watching television news broadcasts. It is easy to blame these patterns on political apathy, but Kimberlee (2002) argues against this, noting four possible explanations for declining youth participation:

- Youth focused explanations, which focus on the attitudes of individual young people, such as apathy.
- Politics focused explanations, where the emphasis is placed on the conduct of politics, which puts young people off participating.
- Alternative value-based explanations put the emphasis on the disjunction between young people's political values and those embedded in the political system.
- Generational explanations focus on the unique experiences of the particular cohort of young people under consideration and how this influences their political awareness and development.

Kimberlee (2002: 96) thus contends that greater attention should be paid by policymakers to the difficult process of transition that occurs between childhood and adulthood, with emphasis placed on guiding the development of young people's political consciousness. What this means, however, is that there is a set of contradictions within our existing knowledge on youth participation: (1) what are the real causes of the low electoral participation of young people, (2) is it due to age or generational effects, and (3) what policy solutions could be considered to remedy this.

In effect, in the context of our study, these results lead us to key questions that we need to address using the primary research that our team has conducted using both a mass survey of young people and two experiments:

- What do we know about the real causes of the low electoral participation of young people?
- In the context of our answer to causes of low electoral participation, what possible techniques would be most likely to be effective in increasing youth participation and what could be their positive and negative side effects?

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### 3.1 PROBLEMS, PERCEPTIONS, MEMORY AND EMOTIONS

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In this section, we look at the causes of the low electoral participation of young people, using original empirical data from our survey of pre-voters and young voters. What is the story behind it, how is voting perceived by young people, and what emotions do they experience when they do or do not vote?

#### ***3.1.1 The low electoral participation of young people – demand-side or offer-side problem?***

As we have mentioned, there are a number of conflicting explanations for the relatively low turnout of young people in elections across Europe.

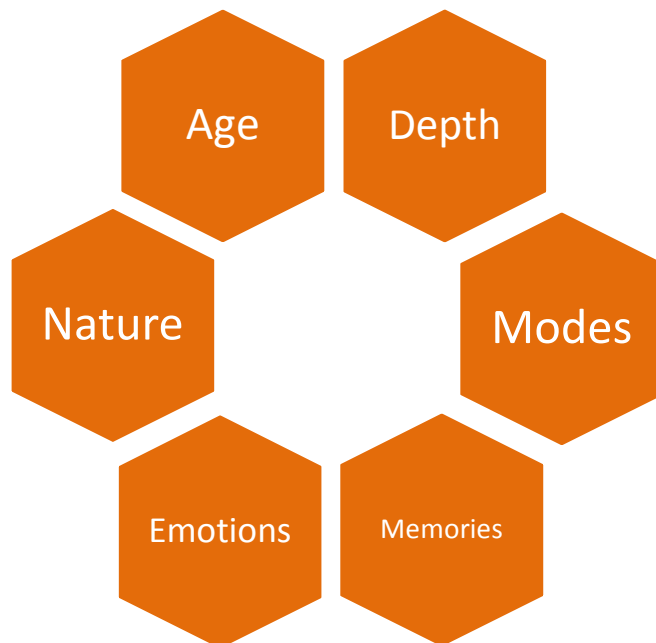
A first question has to do with whether the low turnout of current young voters is essentially due to 'age' or 'generational' effects. Under the former model, people would be less likely to vote when they are young and would then progressively get absorbed in more participatory patterns as they age. Under the second model, it would be the current generation which would be less likely to vote than older generations and this would be unlikely to change as the members of this generation get older. The two models call for radically different analyses and potential solutions. If the current crisis is due to age effects, then there is no real reason to worry and if anything, one should refrain from further lowering the voting age as it would only end up integrating people who are even less interested in voting than current young voters. By contrast, if the issue is a generational one, it becomes essential to understand the reasons why current generations get disaffected about the vote, and some specific measures would need to be taken to motivate the current and future young generations to go to the polls. In that case, for instance, lowering the voting age could precisely transform into a positive measure as it would imply an early exposure of young citizens to electoral democratic politics.

Based on the existing literature (Butler and Stokes, 1969, Franklin, Mackie et al. 1992, Harrison and Bruter, 2011), our understanding is that turnout variations, which used to be caused by a mixture of age and generational effects until the 1970s, are now essentially based on generational effects, and that a new sub-part of young voters is made of 'chronic' abstentionists who will never transform into active voters if they are not motivated during their first elections. This concurs with the findings of Butler and Stokes (1969) who contended that citizens' behaviour in the first two elections of their lives are highly influential in terms of their electoral behaviour thereafter.

The second issue – and an equally important one – has to do with whether young citizens' disaffection with the vote is a matter of 'principle' or a matter of 'specifics'. A large proportion of the literature claims that young people are simply not interested in politics, more self-centred and less socio-tropic than previous generations, and if such a demand side problem exists, little can probably be done to solve it. An alternative theory, however, and one which our findings support throughout this project is that **there is a true democratic demand from young people, but one which they think is not well matched by the current political offer**. If indeed the demand for democratic involvement does exist on the part of young

people, then the duty of policymakers becomes to know how to meet it better. If this can be achieved and helped with the use of technical improvements to channels of electoral participation **then the participation of young people in voting can be regained.**

Our survey allows us to fill some of those gaps and in particular to understand:



1. What is the DEPTH and NATURE of young people's problem with institutional politics? Are young people bored with institutional politics or altogether sceptical of the value of democracy per se or are they disappointed with politicians and the specifics of the political offer that they receive?
2. WHEN do young people become cynical or sceptical about institutional politics and the use of participation techniques? Existing research points out to generational doubts but we need to understand if those doubts are learnt very early (before young people reach voting age) or only get revealed as young people are entitled to full citizenship rights. This has crucial implications on possible solutions to the current voting participation challenges faced by Europe.
3. Is there a mismatch between the MODES of participation that we traditionally encourage and those that young people trust, appreciate and support?
4. What EMOTIONS and which MEMORIES do young people associate with participation in its various forms? This is key to understanding how to encourage young people to further embrace political participation not just as a 'duty' but as something that will bring them something.

The findings of our survey overwhelmingly support the second point and suggest that democratic demand is there in principle but what is currently offered to young people does not satisfy them; and that unlike older generations (which are also rather dissatisfied), young people are willing to take the route of voting abstention if nothing is done to improve the political offer.

### 3.1.2 Are young people bored with politics?

Young people  
wholeheartedly  
believe in democracy

As discussed in the 'state of the art' section of our report, much of the existing social science literature – as well as many journalistic comments on the supposedly low turnout of young people in elections – assume that nowadays, young people are simply fed up with politics *per se* and not interested in the political questions facing their communities, their nations, and the European Union. We have

explained that much of the literature referring to this fails, however, to provide any convincing empirical evidence for such claims.

And yet, the question of whether the apparent lack of young people's participation in voting stems from a lack of participatory demand or, on the contrary, by an existing participatory demand which is not satisfactorily matched by the existing democratic offer of European institutional systems and politicians is absolutely crucial to the definition of the policies that could be developed to bring young people back to the institutional democratic life of their communities. As such, establishing whether young citizens are effectively 'bored with politics' or, on the contrary, demanding greater democratic participation in principle is an essential part of our enquiry.

The first series of questions therefore measure young people's attitudes towards democracy in general and the extent to which citizens should be consulted. The result is extremely straightforward. Young people wholeheartedly believe in democracy. They overwhelmingly believe that citizens' participation is essential, that governments should consult citizens using direct democracy (referenda) more often when key decisions are taken, and that citizens should have more opportunities to participate in political decision-making. It is also worth noting that young people in our sample continue to largely favour a traditional conception of democracy, centred around the founding role of elections and the will of the people, suggesting that these mechanisms are largely irreplaceable.

However, let us point out that this traditional conception of democracy is partly related to income. When considering the statement that 'nothing can replace elections in a democracy', there is a negative correlation of -0.06 between support for the statement and family income, as well as a positive 0.05 between income and the suggestion that government should be obliged to consult citizens directly on important decisions. While these correlation levels are not substantively very high, they are statistically significant which means that less wealthy young people are more likely to think of elections as replaceable by alternatives and less likely to support the use of direct democracy to resolve important questions. There was no statistically significant correlation with regards to other democratic perceptions. As shown in Table 3.1, in terms of young peoples' perceptions of democracy, the majority of young citizens believe that citizens' participation is vital to democracy and assert that governments should consult citizens directly when important decisions have to be made. In addition, young people state that they would like more opportunities to participate in decision making and that the country would be better governed by politicians if they listened to the general public rather than to experts. Young people across the two age groups tend to have a fairly traditional conception of democracy as they believe nothing replaces elections in a participatory democracy and support for the proposal of regular consultation and surveys is low.

**Table 3.1:** Perceptions of democracy for under and over 18yo young citizens<sup>5</sup>

	<18	>18	<18	>18
Is citizens' participation essential to democracy?	Essential		Not essential	
	67	69	7	7
Should government have to directly consult citizens on important decisions or is it enough they have been elected?	Obligated		Legitimate because elected	
	62	64	9	9
Wish citizens had more opportunity to participate in political decisions	Wished		Not wished	
	62	64	8	8
Country best governed if politicians listened to what people want or competent people say?	People		Experts	
	57	52	14	18
Can nothing replace elections, or could regular surveys and citizens consultation replace elections?	Elections		Survey/Consult	
	<b>48</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>19</b>

**Source:** EACEA/EC 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life' Survey in 7 countries, 2011-2012

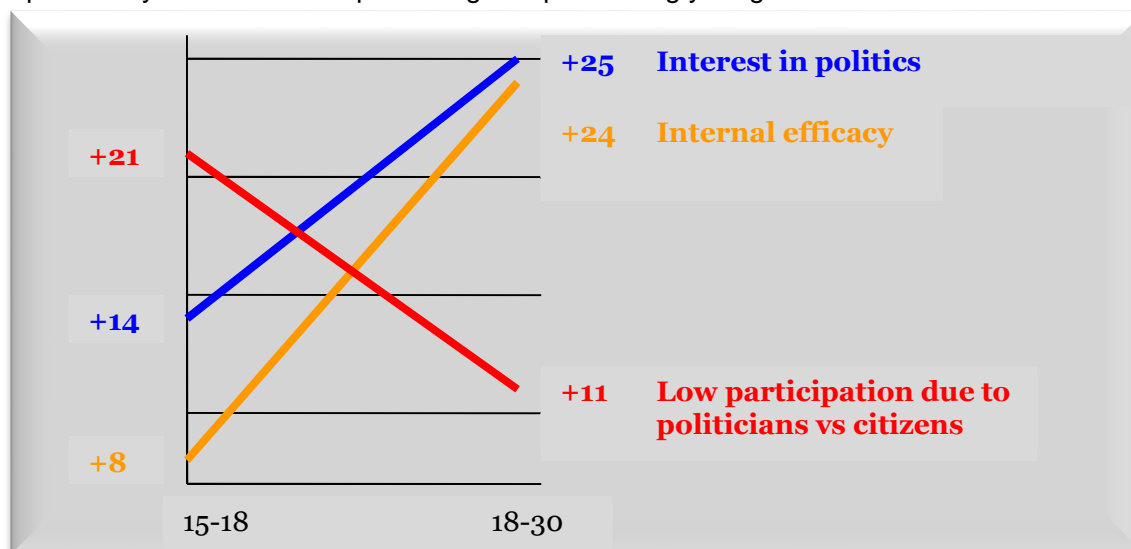
Young citizens' appetite for democracy goes beyond general support for democratic organisation. **A clear majority of respondents claim to be interested in politics.** Despite frequent comments in the European media, a clear majority of respondents tell us that they do not believe that political questions are too complex for them to have an opinion, and confirm, instead, that they have an opinion on most political issues.

However, there is, in this respect, a clear difference between under 18s and over 18s. As young people progress from their pre-voting teenage years to the first stages of their political adulthood and get the right to formally participate in the democratic life of their country, the EU, and their local community, both their **interest in political debates and their perceived ability to master their complexity and take part in them increase very significantly.**

Internal efficacy and interest in politics are both negatively correlated at 0.04 and -0.06 levels respectively. Both correlations are statistically significant, suggesting that poorer youth are less interested in politics and less efficacious than wealthier youth but only in a very marginal way. By contrast, there is no clear relationship between income and likeliness to blame politicians rather than citizens for the low participation of young people.

<sup>5</sup> Figures represent the proportion of total respondents that expressed support of the statements below. Totals do not equal 100% as neutral responses are not included in the table.

**Figure 3.2:** Differences in levels of interest in politics, efficacy, and perceived responsibilities of political cynicism between pre-voting and post-voting young citizens<sup>6</sup>



**Source:** EACEA/EC 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life' Survey in 7 countries, 2011-2012

Ultimately, young people's assessment of what prevents them from participating further in politics is most clearly summarised by their answer to our question on whether citizens' limited participation is mostly the fault of politicians or of citizens themselves.

To that question, a majority of respondents clearly put the blame on politicians, although it is worth noting that the difference between the two options decreases quite significantly as citizens reach voting age, and that approximately a third of respondents hold politicians and citizens equally responsible, suggesting both political offer and demand may be equally responsible for the current crisis of democracy.

**"Those in power don't listen"**

The problem of low efficacy – and fact that young people are mostly blaming the actual political offer that they are facing rather than the principle of voting, was overwhelmingly confirmed by our interviews and focus groups.

The feeling most often expressed was that currently politicians neglect young people and that 'democracy is only mentioned at election time' as exemplified by the quotes below:

"It is because young people don't vote! So politicians don't come to see them, because they don't need them". ('Active' focus group, f2f, France, 2012)

<sup>6</sup> Figures are net difference between scores on tension scales. For example, with regard to the statement in the questionnaire on whether low participation is mostly the fault of politicians or citizens, the score is the number of respondents believing that politicians are to blame for low participation minus the number of respondents believing that citizens are to blame for low participation.



“Those in power don’t listen. Most people know their votes don’t count. If someone’s going to get power, they’re going to get power anyway. Votes don’t count.” (‘Reference’ focus group, f2f, UK, 2012)

“Those in power don’t listen.” (‘Reference’ focus group, f2f, UK, 2012)

“I think there’s better ways of hearing young people than getting them to vote.” (‘Reference’ focus group, f2f, UK, 2012)

“...This is not democracy... Democracy is only mentioned at election time... There are small political parties that would do it better than bigger parties.” (‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, Spain, 2012 – emphasis added)

“[Alternative parties] do not make any difference. Once they reach power they all do the same. There are no differences between right wing and left wing. Look at the recent change of the Spanish government: Did you notice any difference? They only act in their own interest. They are all the same...” (‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, Spain, 2012)

In a similar vein, it was argued also that young people in excluded groups are getting less attention and the least education in how the voting system works and what it means to participate:

“First [in order to vote] you must not be alone... .You must have people to discuss with. With whom you can speak, who can give you that will to vote.” (‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, France, 2012)

“I think it’s a central issue that isolated people cannot fight for their issues themselves because they have different problems like depression or drugs. Politicians are not aware of these issues, the people show no outward signs and many don’t want to tell about their own problems to older people so that they don’t become stigmatised.” (‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, Finland, 2012)

Our representative of Structured Dialogue in Hungary expressed the view that young people in Hungary distrust politicians too much to believe in the efficacy of having the vote at 16:

“Young Hungarians, when asked about [voting at 16] didn’t think that lowering the voting age would help them being taken seriously... I think the reason for this is that they don’t want to become a target for politicians already at 16, which is the result of distrust they have towards politicians. ... I think it’d be a good thing if you see more young people in the Parliament and more young politicians ... on TV.” (Stakeholder interview, Hungary, f2f, 2012)

Both in stakeholder interviews and in focus groups, blame is attributed first and foremost to politicians. Indeed, one of the French stakeholders suggested that it was unlikely that the voting age would be lowered to 16 in her country because:

“politicians don’t like, are afraid, to talk to young people; young people seem more unpredictable [than older age-groups]. And above all, young people engage in discussions about difficult issues, where politicians feel powerless. It is complicated to speak strongly about unemployment for politicians, but it is the most important issue for young people.” (Stakeholder interview, f2f, France, 2012)

In this sense, our representative samples of young voters, specific focus groups, and stakeholders all share the exact same impression. Young people are not bored with politics, they are fed up with feeling that those who ‘do’ politics do not care about them. This is a crucial finding and one that shows that in all likelihood, the downward trend of youth participation could indeed be reversed with institutional and political will. However, if lower youth participation is neither due to political apathy *stricto sensu*, nor, as we see in other parts of this report, to a lack of ideas or enthusiasm about politics, we need to understand what is preventing young generations of citizens to engage as much in electoral participation as older generations, and in particular, we need to understand what experience young voters have compared to young abstentionists. In this sense, to further understand the role of voting

in young people's fundamental perception of political participation, let us now specifically approach the question of their experience and memory of elections.

### 3.1.3 Learning democratic participation – the memory of elections

The political science literature provides us with useful insights on the transmission aspects of political socialisation (for instance Greenstein, 1965, Butler and Stokes, 1969).

However, traditional measures focus on similarities between parents and children or the learning of political messages rather than the practices and emotions that children and young people experience in their early years. In this survey, we therefore focus on a hidden aspect of young voters' socialisation – their memory of elections.

The first element that clearly emerges from our question is that young people hold very salient memories of elections that took place before they reach voting age. What is more, these memories tend to be overwhelmingly positive.

Overall, only a very small minority of respondents did not have any memory of past elections, and equally few had predominantly negative memory of past elections. The most frequent – and to a large extent most positive – memories of past elections of young citizens are of friends and family discussing an election, and of their parents taking them to the polling station.

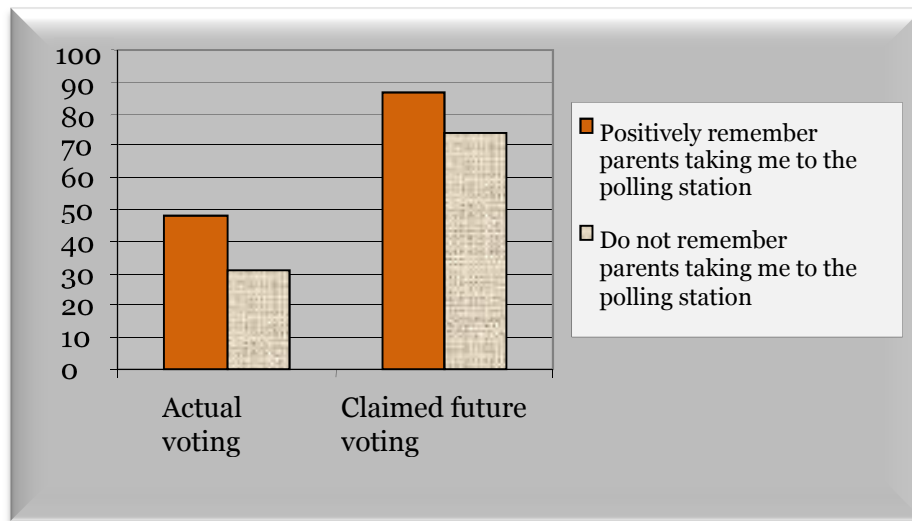
**Table 3.2:** The memory of elections.

	Good memory (%)		Total memory (%)	
	<18	>18	<18	>18
Family/friends discussing the election	59	56	81	<b>80</b>
Parents taking respondent to polling station	46	52	60	<b>66</b>
Someone telling how they will vote	47	49	68	<b>74</b>
Watching election night	40	52	67	<b>78</b>
Discussing election with friends at school	46	45	69	<b>70</b>
Getting interested in elections on one's own	37	53	59	<b>74</b>
Candidates' debates on TV	40	45	73	<b>79</b>
People arguing/fighting over the election	<b>35</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>63</b>

**Source:** EACEA/EC 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life' Survey in 7 countries, 2011-2012

However, **memory is mostly important in that it is highly consequential when it comes to young citizens' participation, as early experience of elections significantly increases propensity to participate.** Thus, 48.4% of young people who positively remember being taken to a polling station by their parents have voted in an election against only 30.3% of those who have not been introduced to the polling place by their family. Similarly, in terms of expected future turnout, young people with a positive memory of having been taken to a polling station are 20% more likely to expect to vote in future elections as compared to those who have not.

**Figure 3.3:** Effect of early memory of parents taking young people to the polling station on future likeliness to vote.



**Source:** EACEA/EC 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life' Survey in 7 countries, 2011-2012

#### **3.1.4 Vote and political participation: an emotional experience**

These elements concerning young people's memory of elections also partly echo our finding on young people's motivations to go to vote or not in the first election when they were eligible to do so. Thus, while obvious reasons to vote such as feeling a sense of duty or wanting a given candidate to win are cited by a majority of respondents, the 'experimental' and 'fun' aspects of the vote are an important motivation such as seeing what it is like (about a third of respondents) and thinking voting would be fun or interesting (about a fifth). In terms of external influences on the decision to vote, they are relatively limited and according to the respondents' claims more related to family than friends. It is also worth noting that one in four young people decided to go to vote in order to express a preference *against* a given party or candidate which they wanted to lose. In other words, **for every two young people who go to vote hoping a certain party/candidate will win, one goes to vote hoping that a certain party/candidate will lose.**

Motivations of young people are not really affected by income, and sense of duty, desire to see what it is like, and support for a party or candidate remain very important with young people of all social backgrounds.

**Table 3.3:** Why young people vote in the first election when they are eligible to<sup>7</sup>

Main reasons why young people went to vote	>18
Duty	75
For a given candidate/party to win	55
To see what it was like	31
For a given candidate/party to lose	25
Thought it would be fun or interesting	20
Family proposed to come along	17
Family told respondent they should vote	15
Many friends were going to vote	6
Friends proposed to come along	3
Nothing important to do that day	4
Other	6

**Source:** EACEA/EC 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life' Survey in 7 countries, 2011-2012

In terms of respondents failing to vote, however, the main reason for this seems to be that a young person cannot find a party or candidate which they really want to win. This is largely dominant (44% of answers). The second highest answer is that the respondent had something important to do that day, and then that in one in four cases, the respondent did not really want to see what voting would be like. One in six young respondents also explain that they simply forgot about the election on the day, which could be a significant abstention reason when the young person is first eligible to vote in a non-salient (typically local) election.

**Table 3.4:** Why young people fail to go to vote in the first election when they are eligible to.

Main reasons why young people did not go to vote	>18
No candidate/party wanted to win	44
Something important to do	26
Not interested in seeing what it was like	25
Forgot	16
No candidate/party wanted to lose	15
No duty to vote	13
Did not think it would be interesting/fun	13
Family was not going to vote	6
No friends went to vote	4
Family did not encourage to vote	4
Friends were not going to vote	3
Other	29

**Source:** EACEA/EC 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life' Survey in 7 countries, 2011-2012

Unlike voters' motivations, non-voter motivations are strongly affected by income. Young people from poorer backgrounds are significantly more likely not to vote because there was no candidate or party they wanted to win (correlation of -0.12) or lose (-0.06) or because they did not care so much about seeing what it was like.

<sup>7</sup> Figures in Table 3.3 are proportion of total respondents who selected the listed explanations of why they went to vote. In Table 3.4 figures represent a proportion of total respondents who selected the listed explanations of why they did not go to vote. Multiple answers were possible.

As we know, young people who do not go to vote in the first two elections when they are eligible to do so are likely to become long-term habitual abstentionists, which makes it essential to better derive from these results how to trigger young voters to at least try voting in one of their early electoral opportunities. While the answers to our questions on why young people decided to go to vote or not only give us part of the answer, they highlight some possible areas for participation communication such as ‘seeing what voting is like’ or not letting a disliked party or candidate win.

However, these results are even more striking when we look at them in combination with what young people tell us about how they feel as they go or do not go to vote. This question is indeed as crucial as it is never asked in traditional surveys.

We find that young people who vote overwhelmingly associate a vast array of positive emotions with their voting experience. In particular, voting makes them feel interested, part of their community, that they are part of an important moment for their country, with a responsibility on their shoulders, excited, and even happy.

By contrast, neutral (such as feeling ‘nothing special’) or negative emotions (such as feeling old, worried, or bored) are very rarely experienced by young voters. This is a crucial element because it explains us that while young people might start voting out of duty or to see what it is like, they are likely to continue to vote because they find it a cathartic, pleasant, and exciting experience. By contrast, those who choose not to vote are excluded from these positive experiences and shared moments.

When we look at causal effects on long-term participation, we find that enjoyment of elections proves a crucial determinant of continued turnout and consolidation of participatory practice. As such, it seems that it is critical to emphasise the exciting, fun, and enjoyable aspect of participation as a double trigger to lead young people to experience political participation, and then as a supporting drive for long term involvement in political and civic practice by younger generations.

It is worth noting, however, that as far as the emotions associated with political participation go, contradictions emerge between voting and other modes of participation such as debating political questions on Facebook or participating in street demonstrations. The comparison between the emotions experienced by young citizens when they engage in voting and in non-voting political activities is truly telling.

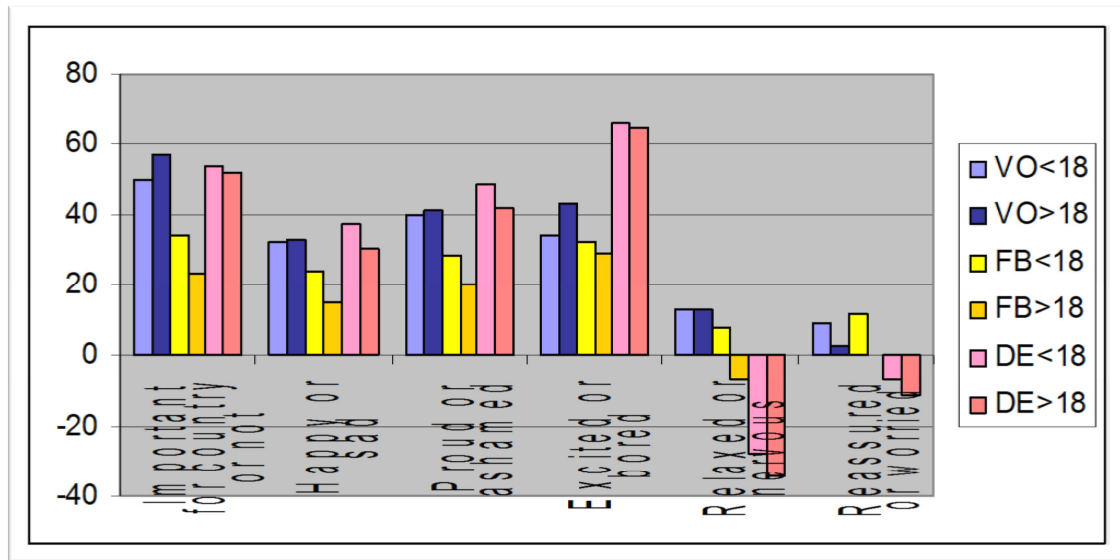
**Table 3.5:** How young people feel when they do (or do not) go to vote.

	Feeling while voting (%)	Feeling while not voting (%)
	>18	>18
Interested	36	4
Part of community	36	2
Important	28	2
With responsibility on one’s shoulders	22	6
Excited	22	3
Happy	9	4
Nothing special	9	27
Old	8	3
Worried	5	6
Different	4	6
Bored	4	12
Other	6	26
Don’t know	4	20

**Source:** EACEA/EC ‘Youth Participation in Democratic Life’ Survey in 7 countries, 2011-2012

Voting makes young people happier, excited, and gives them the impression that they are doing something that is important for their country. Engaging in virtual activity such as debating political questions on Facebook simply does not compare. It is a lower intensity, lower emotion, and lower engagement than voting. In short, **in emotional terms, young people clearly tell us that virtual activity on social networks simply does not replace the ‘real thing’.**

**Figure 3.4:** Emotions associated with voting, debating on Facebook, and demonstrating<sup>8</sup>



**Source:** EACEA/EC ‘Youth Participation in Democratic Life’ Survey in 7 countries, 2011-2012

**VO:** Respondent’s emotions as (s)he casts his/her vote; **FB:** Respondent’s emotions as (s)he participates in a Facebook debate; **DE:** Respondent’s emotions as (s)he participated in a demonstration

### 3.2 SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF LOW ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION. CONSIDERING E-DEMOCRACY, LOWER VOTING AGE, AND OTHER SOLUTIONS

We now better understand both the nature and extent of young people’s lower electoral participation, and its context and causes. We have seen that young people cry for more democratic involvement, still believe that elections are THE natural channel to express it, and do associate very positive emotions when they vote – much more so than when they engage in non-electoral forms of participation. Yet, we have seen that their low efficacy, negative perceptions of the political offer and relative cynicism towards the political system makes it a significant possibility that they will abstain. In this context, what solutions could be proposed to increase the turnout of young voters?

<sup>8</sup> Figures are the proportion of total respondents that mentioned the above listed emotions when voting, debating on Facebook, and demonstrating



At this stage, it should be acknowledged that two different types of answers could be provided to this question. The first deals with the **substantive** issue of negative perception of the political offer of many young people. Short of replacing candidates or parties so that they would be considered a 'better' alternative by young voters, we can at least explore the question of how to improve perception and understanding of the political offer by young people using a number of possible models such as social media campaigning, voting advice applications, or civic education. The second category deals with **formal and institutional** procedures that would increase turnout such as an exploration of e-voting, lower voting age, or specific elections dedicated to young people. In this third section, we shall consider both types of possible solutions. We will first consider them theoretically and in terms of policy practice, then explore young people's consideration for these possible solutions through our survey, and then look at the impact in practice of two of these possible solutions: a substantive one (social media campaigning) and an institutional one (e-voting) on young people's actual perceptions and behaviour.

### **3.2.1 Possible solutions to low electoral participation**

Several particular solutions adopted by policymakers are of particular interest to this study and as we explained, they can be divided into substantive and institutional solutions. They include:

#### *Institutional:*

- Lowering the current voting age (18 in most European countries) to 16
- Developing e-voting
- Allowing for the large scale election of specific youth representatives, be it at European, national, or local levels

#### *Substantive:*

- Developing informative or consultative forms of e-participation and notably encouraging social media campaigning in elections
- Encouraging specific aspects of civic education such as political debates in schools
- Encouraging the development of information tools such as voting advice applications

Let us now consider the policy basis of these avenues. Impacting the voting age to mobilise young people in elections has been persistently seen as an important possible lever. Until the 1970s, the voting age in most European countries was typically 21. However, during this decade, moves were made in most countries to lower the age of majority to 18. More recently, many countries have considered lowering the voting age to 16, with Austria being the one European Union country to have enacted legislation in the area (internationally, this puts Austria in a similar position to countries such as Brazil and Nicaragua, which also allow voting at 16). Moves to lower the voting age have sizable cross-party support in Denmark, Ireland and the UK. In Germany 16-18 year olds can also vote but only in local elections. The Scottish government has piloted the extension of voting rights to 16-17 year olds for the election of Health Boards and Community Councils. The Scottish government is also promoting the idea of giving 16 and 17 year olds the right to vote in the upcoming 2014 referendum on Scottish independence, which has engendered some criticism as 16 and 17 year olds are more likely to vote in favour of independence.

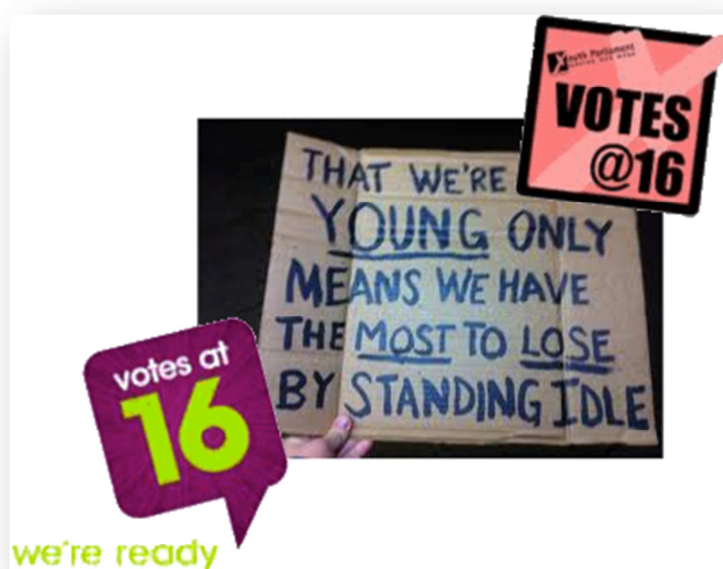
A number of arguments have been made in favour of such changes, including that the enhanced responsibility will combat apathy by encouraging young people to develop their civic skills, and that a change in the voting age would end legal discrepancies, such as the right of (in some European countries at least) young people to get married or join the armed services before they can vote (Folkes, 2004). Counter-arguments have been made against

this position, with it being noted that the vast majority of 16 and 17 year olds remain financial dependents rather than self-sufficient, and that the very principle of an age of majority requires a cut-off point of some kind, and that this undermines claims made by pro-votes at 16 groups that their situation is analogous to other groups in society – such as women – who have previously been disenfranchised (Cowley and Denver, 2004).



*Young citizens who do not participate in the first two elections after they are eligible to vote are likely to become habitual abstentionists. It is thus crucial to 'bring them to the poll' on one of these first occasions*

**Figure 3.5:** Campaigns for voting rights for 16 year olds



Source: own collage

### Case-study 3.1

In June 2007 Austria lowered the voting age to 16 for national elections. Lowering the voting age to 16 is seen by many as an antidote to low political participation amongst young populations, but also as a way to re-balance democratic representation in the wake of an ageing population and declining birth-rates.

There is a real risk that young people will be marginalised in the political process, both on a specific level as they will be numerically out-numbered, but also because the political agenda risks becoming dominated by issues that are primarily interesting for older people. This is particularly problematic in a time, when societies more than ever will need the commitment and work efforts of young people in order to keep up economical growth, social security systems and social cohesion (Council of Europe, 2009).

One of the main reasons Austria is the only member state in the EU to have lowered the voting age to 16, is a large scale and long-running campaign in favour of lowering the voting age and confronting the counter-arguments such as apathy or immaturity. For example, the vote4future campaign of the Austrian National Youth Council ran from 2002 until 2005 and not only aimed to motivate young people to vote and to spread information about the voting rights in Austria but had the demand of lowering the voting age at its heart ([www.vote4future.at](http://www.vote4future.at)).

Alongside lowering the voting age to 16, new measures in the area of civic education, such as compulsory courses on political education to be taught in schools in combination with history or the appointment of a professor in didactics of political education at the University of Vienna were introduced as well. However, given the fact that the Austrian government fell prematurely, these measures were not implemented yet by the time of the first elections in which 16-18 year olds could participate.

Despite this, the results from a study after the 2008 elections look promising and indicate that:

- Participation of young voters is as high as the average (based on random samples).
- More than two thirds of the electorate between 16 and 18 stated that they were interested in the election campaign.
- Main motivations: young voters tend to see elections more as an opportunity to participate and define it as a right to vote, rather than a duty or a democratic obligation.
- Low trust of political parties, politicians and their programmes is combined with high trust in elections and institutions such as the parliament.
- They are more interested in discussing content-related concepts instead of hearing simple slogans and buzzwords – they call for more authenticity.
- The youngest group of voters place great importance on education, vocational training, youth unemployment, equality of sexes and poverty.
- But more than 50% of respondents say that politicians pay no attention to what they consider to be the important issues in society.
- Learning politics is doing politics – schools are considered crucial spaces to learn about politics and democracy (see Kozeluh, 2009).

It should be noted that it is simply too early to fully analyse the effect of lowering the voting age in Austria. Indeed, while the promising results highlighted above look encouraging, the acid test of lowering voting age or any of the other possible solutions to low youth turnout must be considered over the long term. A one off boost to turnout would be ineffective and needs to be sustained over a longer period, coupled with political education.

E-voting has also been considered by a number of national governments as a solution to low turnout. Essentially, the theoretical underpinning of the policy is based on the rational choice conception of political action (or, more specifically, inaction). Turnout rates at elections are argued to be inversely proportional to the costs incurred by voters – i.e. the time and effort they have to spend to get to a polling booth. As such, any lowering of these costs by, for example, allowing people to vote from home or at any polling station in the country would increase turnout.

It is important to note that in this study, when dealing with e-voting, we mean the use of remote e-voting which would allow voters to vote from home or some other places (including from school) rather than having to go to a polling station. This is not to be confused with direct electronic voting (or the use of ‘electronic voting machines’) which has been practised in many countries for a number of years, most notably the United States. In this system, voters may pull a lever; or mark or punch a card, which is then machine read. The main virtue of such systems is that they increase the speed and decrease the costs of counting. However, they have also led to controversy, simply because it is much harder to verify final figures than with paper ballots. Within the European Union, countries including Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom have made use of this method of voting or vote counting, with varying degrees of success and controversy. Voting machines, however, do not fundamentally change the relationship between voters and polling station.

E-voting – understood as the ability to vote over the internet from any location – is thus a more far-reaching solution, and one that has been considered by many democracies. They allow citizens to express their preferences from their own homes or indeed anywhere else in the world where the web can be accessed. In 2005, Estonia became the first country to hold a legally binding election using internet voting (Maaten, 2004). France has also experimented with allowing citizens abroad to vote using the internet, while the European Union has established the CyberVote project as early as 2000 (Cybervote, 2003). Other experiments on e-voting have included some votes in Switzerland and the use of e-voting for nationwide student representatives elections in Austria.

While voting over the internet may be ‘easier’, it is certainly not symbolically the same thing as going to a polling station

The advantages of such systems include the perception that allowing citizens to vote from home will make it so ‘easy’ to vote (as compared to having to go to a polling station) that most people will take a minute or two to do it at their convenience. However, there remain a number of concerns about online voting which are of two main orders: technical, and psychological. In technical terms, Lauer (2004) notes that mechanisms must be provided for voter authentication, to ensure confidentiality and to allow the voting process to be re-audited after the event. Fulfilling these criteria with electronic voting systems is problematic, to the extent that even some e-voting

advocates have seen the technologies as more useful for second tier elections, as opposed to national contests (Mohen and Glidden, 2001). In terms of the psychological limits of e-voting, the argument is that while voting over the internet may be ‘easier’ it is certainly not symbolically the same thing as going to a polling station and participating in the atmosphere of the election. In our study, we thus focus on the differing emotions of young people who vote over the internet as opposed to in person in a polling station, as well as the impact of e-voting on effective electoral behaviour including turnout and voting choice.

Another institutional avenue to solve the youth abstention issue would be to develop or encourage the direct election by young people of youth representatives. Already, multiple levels of governance, including European, have encouraged the development of youth parliaments, youth local councils, etc. where young people sit and discuss and defend issues

that are particularly relevant to young people. The advantage of this model is that it implies the creation of a level of political discussion which explicitly deals with themes that are relevant to young people and which could thereby bring young people into the realm of political discussion without them feeling that most of the discussions taken by regular politicians may feel abstract or less relevant to their generation. At this stage, however, these initiatives are generally not backed by comprehensive elections. By contrast, for example, one could imagine creating a full-scale European young people's parliament with elections being opened to 16-18 year olds and taking place on a fully democratic scale at the same time as the regular European Parliament elections. It should indeed be noted that this possible institutional solution could be considered as a conceivable alternative to a blanket lowering of the voting age to 16 if the political will to do so was not present.

If we consider the substantive options that could be encouraged by political institutions, a number of possibilities present themselves:

- First, next to e-voting, some scholars have looked at the impact of other forms of e-participation on electoral behaviour, and in particular at the use of the social media for campaigning. The idea behind this suggestion is that 'bringing' politics on the arenas which young people consult in their daily life such as Facebook or Twitter could make it easier for them to relate to political debates. There is a clear demand on the part of political parties (both in general and through their young party organisations) and candidates to reach out to young people and using social media appears a natural way to do so, not least because of the specific and more relaxed style of communication that it entails.
- A second substantive alternative would rely in the possibility to reinforce knowledge and interest in electoral politics through civic education. While this is true as a general option, a particularly useful component of this would replicate the development of electoral debates in schools involving party (or youth party organisation representatives) in election time. This is already largely implemented in some northern countries such as Norway where youth turnout deficit appears to be a little bit less than in most of Europe. This would allow young people to engage in political debate and discussion in a natural school setting, focusing on issues that are relevant to them. Of course, some countries may feel uncomfortable at the idea of letting politics enter school, but it is likely that some creative solutions could be found to develop formulas that would allow for youth political debate in school without endangering the fundamental nature of neutrality of European school systems.
- Finally, a third substantive option worth exploring is the development of voting advice applications (VAAs). These voting advice applications are typically developed by media actors and allow voters to figure out which parties are closest to them on the issues that matter to them. VAAs are already vastly available in countries such as Switzerland, Germany or Finland and offer a number of interesting features. To start with, they put policy proposals at the heart of elections by allowing voters to compare parties according to their substantive preferences on issues rather than on other criteria such as personality or party names. Moreover, VAAs are by nature interactive and typically user-friendly. The operational development of VAAs (studied by Ruusurvita and by Trechsel for instance) is relatively straightforward. Parties are asked to specify their stances on a number of issues and these stances are then recorded and coded. VAA users – who can be any citizen – will then go on a VAA website, enter their own stances on the same issues, often decide which are most or least important to them, and a result will be generated showing which parties are closest to the voter to facilitate his or her choice. Often, VAAs can provide additional details (for instance allowing voters to better understand on which policy aspects the party is nearest and furthest from him/her) and it is also possible to allow VAAs of any level of complexity to accommodate at the same time casual voters who may



only want to know about parties' stances on a handful of issues, and highly sophisticated voters who may prefer a significantly more precise questionnaire with highly detailed questions.

In what follows, based on our survey, we will determine how young voters relate to these possible solutions to turnout problems, to subsequently assess the effective impact of two such solutions – social media campaigning and e-voting on the behaviour and perceptions of young first time voters using two experiments.

### ***3.2.2 Discussing possible ways of increasing and extending youth participation further***

The final point of investigation of our survey is thus to run a number of ways to increase institutional youth participation past young people themselves. Based on existing research and published ideas, we highlighted a number of possible directions that could be explored in order to foster greater levels of youth participation and representation. We asked two different types of questions to young people about each of those: whether or not they thought that they would represent positive initiatives, and whether or not they would be efficient to increase youth participation. In survey design, we know that the first version tells us more about the likely influence of an idea on the individual per se while the second corresponds to their perceptions of others' motivations and limitations.

Consistent with the arguments developed in the previous section, we voluntarily suggested a wide array of possible ways to increase youth participation in democratic life – some institutional (for example lowering voting age to 16, allowing internet voting, organising specific elections for young people representatives at the national or the European level, etc.), some political (for instance organising school debates with parties' representatives at election time, developing voting advice applications on the internet, developing Facebook debates with election candidates, etc.). However, we also relate these two types of solutions to social or direct actions (such as sit downs and mass demonstrations) in order to further gauge the extent to which young people believe that the solution to their crisis of electoral participation should stem from elections themselves or from alternative channels of participation. That last category is obviously not directly useable in that it cannot be directly encouraged by institutions but it is an essential point of reference which can allow us to better understand whether young people think that there *is* a solution that can be provided by institutions at all or if they believe that the problem is effectively beyond institutional action.

The first note-worthy finding is that literally all of our suggestions get some high levels of support from young people. Most notably, election-related solutions – be they institutional or substantive – tend to score very highly while the direct action-related options come far down the lists of possible ways of increasing youth participation in democratic life. This suggests that **many young people believe that policymakers can help to trigger greater youth participation if they have the will to do so**. The only two solutions which do not receive strong support are lowering the age of voting to 16 – which would not be supported... by over 18s!, and e-voting which only receives moderate support.

Among the favoured solutions of young people, one is institutional and one is substantive. Indeed, **under-18s would primarily favour the election of youth representatives** while **over-18s would also want to see the development of voting advice applications** over the internet. Both solutions are however largely supported by both groups as would be stronger school and university students' unions to defend young people's interests. This last point is all the more interesting that as seen in the survey, a vast majority of young people do not express confidence in the groups that currently claim to represent them.

Among possible institutional solutions, lowering voting age to 16 receives the lowest level of support from our respondents, even though it is still supported by a clear majority of under-



18s (but not of other-18s). Internet voting is more complex. It is effectively far down the list of desired solutions by most people, but rather high in terms of expected efficiency. In other words, based on our knowledge of survey design, we can say that **most young people do not really want (or expect to change their behaviour as a result of) internet voting, but many expect that others would.** This is one of the great paradoxes of internet voting as a possible solution to voting participation problems. Few people claim that this would make any difference to their own voting patterns but many think that not being able to vote on the internet might be a problem for others.

The effect of social background and income on preferred solutions to low participation is interesting. Overall, young people from wealthier backgrounds are significantly more favourable to lowering the voting age to 16 (statistically significant correlation of 0.06) and e-voting (0.04). By contrast, young people from less wealthy backgrounds think that the solution to young people’s under-participation is more to be found in stronger student unions and sit downs (both -0.05). While they do not necessarily support mass protests, they are also significantly more likely to see them as an efficient form of action than wealthier youth (-0.05).

**Table 3.6:** Evaluation of possible youth participation boosters – Under 18<sup>9</sup>

	Positiveness	Expected effectiveness
<b>Elect special young people representatives (national)</b>	<b>2.9 (1.1)</b>	<b>2.7 (1.2)</b>
School and university students’ unions	2.8 (1.2)	2.6 (1.2)
<b>Voting advice applications</b>	<b>2.8 (1.2)</b>	<b>2.7 (1.2)</b>
<b>Elect special young people representatives (European)</b>	<b>2.8 (1.1)</b>	<b>2.5 (1.2)</b>
<b>Elect youth councils (local level)</b>	<b>2.8 (1.1)</b>	<b>2.6 (1.2)</b>
<b>Facebook interaction with candidates</b>	<b>2.7 (1.2)</b>	<b>2.6 (1.2)</b>
<b>School debates with party people at election time</b>	<b>2.7 (1.2)</b>	<b>2.6 (1.2)</b>
Mass demonstrations on youth specific issues	2.6 (1.2)	2.4 (1.3)
Sit downs on big issues	2.5 (1.2)	2.3 (1.3)
<b>Allow internet voting</b>	<b>2.5 (1.4)</b>	<b>2.5 (1.3)</b>
Mass demonstrations on major issues	2.4 (1.2)	2.2 (1.3)
<b>Lower voting age to 16</b>	<b>2.3 (1.4)</b>	<b>2.3 (1.4)</b>

<sup>9</sup> Figures in Table 3.6 and 3.7 represent scores on a 0-4 scale, where 0 is very negative and very unsuccessful and 4 is very positive and very successful with respect to the two columns. Figures in bold highlight measures that refer to electoral participation and figures not in bold indicate measures that refer to non-electoral participation. Standard deviations are reported in parenthesis.

**Table 3.7:** Evaluation of possible youth participation boosters – 18-30

	Positiveness	Expected effectiveness
<b>Voting advice applications</b>	<b>2.8 (1.2)</b>	<b>2.7 (1.2)</b>
School and university students unions	2.7 (1.2)	2.5 (1.2)
<b>Elect special young people representatives (national)</b>	<b>2.6 (1.2)</b>	<b>2.4 (1.2)</b>
<b>Elect special young people representatives (European)</b>	<b>2.6 (1.1)</b>	<b>2.3 (1.2)</b>
<b>Facebook interaction with candidates</b>	<b>2.6 (1.2)</b>	<b>2.6 (1.2)</b>
<b>School debates with party people at election time</b>	<b>2.5 (1.2)</b>	<b>2.4 (1.2)</b>
<b>Elect youth councils (local level)</b>	<b>2.5 (1.1)</b>	<b>2.3 (1.2)</b>
Mass demonstrations on youth-specific issues	2.4 (1.3)	2.2 (1.3)
Sit downs on big issues	2.4 (1.3)	2.1 (1.3)
<b>Allow internet voting</b>	<b>2.4 (1.4)</b>	<b>2.5 (1.4)</b>
Mass demonstrations on major issues	2.30 (1.3)	2.0 (1.3)
<b>Lower voting age to 16</b>	<b>1.5 (1.3)</b>	<b>1.7 (1.3)</b>

**Source:** EACEA/EC 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life' Survey, 2011-2012

In short, in terms of the most positive possible solutions to the perceived lack of youth participation in elections, young people would predominantly favour the election of specific youth representatives by youth under the voting age at national and European levels, the development of voting advice applications, the progress of social media interaction with candidates during electoral campaigns, stronger student unions, and school debates at election time. Without supporting it, many young people also surmise that introducing internet voting would encourage some of their fellow young citizens to vote more. It is based on some of those results that we designed our double experiment on participation and participation perceptions.

These results were more or less mirrored in the stakeholder interviews and young people focus groups which we conducted. Indeed, the possibility of lowering the voting age was looked at with a mixture of interest and caution. Almost all participants from the focus groups and the stakeholder interviews emphasised that voting at 16 is not going to magically change the participation of young people in elections unless it is tied to a) detailed and thought-provoking political and civic education throughout schools which allows for debates on key political issues and b) positive experiences of engagement with politicians, who are currently regarded as having no connection to young people or to real issues of poverty, lack of housing and lack of employment. Moreover, more than half of the interviewees and several of the youth in focus groups expressed an anxiety that if the voting age is lowered to 16 but there is no better deal for young people in society and if there is no proper political education, the gains of this move will go to the Far Right parties who seem to be getting a larger section of the youth vote. Confirming this fear with voters aged 17-24, our own research indicated that where some of the young people who are in excluded groups but from Caucasian [White] backgrounds did vote or talk about who they were going to vote for – in particular in France, in Hungary and in Austria – they chose to vote for Far Right candidates.

All in all, the position of stakeholders on lowering the voting age to 16 thus varied from highly enthusiastic to cautious. Examples of the enthusiastic arguments were as such:

"I worked before at the youth department and I saw 16 year olds there who make much much more sense than some of the members of the parliament. [...] they take care of their siblings, they work already, they need to choose the right high school, if you give them more responsibilities, why not give them more power to participate?" (Youth Media Producer, Stakeholder interview, f-2-f, Finland, 2012)

In Austria, the only country where 16 and 17 year olds can vote, or a youth representative from the Austrian Nation Students Union told us that: 'it is important that voting at 16 is possible, that it is possible for young people to participate in some way in democratic decisions. However, I think it's too little to cast a vote once in four years' (Stakeholder Interview, f-2-f, Austria, 2012). He furthermore emphasised that since there is no serious political education at 13, 14 and 15yo which accompanies the right to vote at 16, those who can and do cast their votes are not "prepared" as they should be.

Focus groups often resulted in the same comments, as per the 'reference' focus group in Finland (2012):

**Moderator:** Should young people at 16 have the vote?

'Yes, because it will increase democracy in society. I want to ask the question 'why not?' I think it should be natural.'

'I think they shouldn't because people at that age they don't have enough information. I don't think that two years will increase democracy. I don't think 18 years olds vote so eagerly, so why should 16 years old vote so? I think they are too young.' ('Reference' focus group, Finland, 2012)

By contrast, an academic expert on Youth and Participation in France was more cautiously in favour of lowering the age of voting at 16.

'Because research about political participation has shown that the youngest you get used to participate, the longer you go on participating and the stronger the custom is integrated [...] It could also be a way to get young people more responsible, and to strengthen their interest about politics and political debate. [...] As the majority of them are still at school, it could be the occasion to give an important part to school in that regard.' (Stakeholder interview, f-2-f, France, 2011)

A contrario, examples of more cautious attitudes mostly had to do with the risk that young people could be choice prey for extremist parties as exemplified by the academic expert on Youth and Participation in Austria who told us:

'We can say from experience, that more than 50% of young voters chose right-wing parties, which was quite shocking. [...] This leads to the conclusion that the voting age shouldn't be lowered without enhancing political education in schools. Also, it should not only be about teaching institutional politics, but also involve discussing daily politics. [...] One cannot talk about a general disenchantment with politics. However, there is certain political apathy discernable in connection with national politics. Young people and their problems aren't taken seriously, because they are only a marginal voting group.' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Austria, 2012)

'E-democracy tools are not enough. You must find a way to create a sense of group'

When it comes to e-voting, it is also interesting to see that stakeholders and the youth we talked to in focus groups also largely reflect the findings of the mass survey. It was often emphasised that those who are not in organisations, families or networks and are not planning to vote will not be brought to voting, according to all our interview and focus group data, by simply putting the process online or mediating it through technology.

Almost all participants in both youth focus groups and stakeholder interviews were of the opinion that e-voting should not replace other forms of voting.

While some were of the opinion that e-voting would be a good addition to polling booths in the sense that “you cannot have too many ways that make voting easier or quicker”, 90% of interviewees felt that e-voting itself is not a substantive matter for participation. They emphasised that joining associations which give positive experiences of political efficacy, coming from a family or community which traditionally does vote, having political and civic education as part of schooling and having personal experiences of contact with politicians who actually listen to young people are the factors which will increase the likelihood of young people voting.

This position was well illustrated by the comments of the Finnish academic expert on youth participation who explained that:

E-democracy tools are not enough. You must find a way to create a sense of group, a group feeling of participation, which is also a basic idea of empowerment. The feeling needs to be face to face. You cannot have it only online. The process of wakening cannot be online. First face to face. What should they use it for? They [youth] have no idea what it is to participate (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Finland, 2012).

### **3.2.3 A double experiment on e-participation**

Based on our insights from secondary analysis and the survey, we initiated a double experiment allowing us to evaluate the effects of two key aspects of e-participation: (1) introducing internet voting, and (2) encouraging social media interaction with candidates on levels of political participation as well as qualitative effects on democratic perceptions, efficacy, and the emotions associated with participation. Internet voting and social media interaction with politicians are two of the important possible solutions respectively considered by institutions and politicians to generate greater youth participation across many European countries, and it therefore seemed important to focus on these two options in our experiment. What is more, as seen in the survey, having specific elections for young people’s representatives is seen as a key possible solution to the current crisis by many young people, and as a result, we chose to simulate this specific type of election in our experiments.

The experiments took place in Austria, Finland, France, Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom as per our original proposal with approximately 100 participants per country, which is a larger scope than many traditional social science experiments. In the survey, we found that young people’s attitudes towards democracy and participation tend to become partly crystallised once young people reach voting age, so we chose to focus on the critical age of 15-18 year olds with no or little prior political participation experience. Through our experiments, we attempted to answer a number of key questions such as:

- Do e-voting or social media campaigning result in a quantitative increase in turnout?
- Do e-voting and social media campaign have a qualitative impact on young citizens’ perceptions of the campaign, the candidate, democracy, and the emotions they associate with voting?
- Do internet voting and social media campaigning have an impact on the social component of voting, that is encouraging or discouraging discussion of politics with parents or friends, elements of (positive or negative) group behaviour and perception of voting as a ‘cool’ or ‘uncool’ type of action?
- What is the impact of e-participation on efficacy and straightforwardness of the electoral decision?
- Which campaigning and voting modes do young people prefer?

#### **(1) Experiment on Social Media Campaigning**

The first component of our double e-participation experiment is concerned with the use of social media in campaigning. We chose to focus on a Twitter campaign because it is the

single most widely used social media by politicians and political parties and the fastest progressing social media currently. We therefore compared campaign effects on the behaviour of two groups of young people aged 15-18, one group subjected to a traditional flyer campaign (most low- and medium-salience elections are mostly articulated around flyers as television debates and coverage are only reserved to first order elections such as general or presidential elections) while the other was additionally offered the possibility to follow a Twitter-based campaign whereby six lists would post tweets and accept questions using their Twitter page.

The first results we wanted to consider concern the impact of social media campaign mobilisation on turnout. Looking at actual results in the election, we find that **participants who are exposed to a social media campaign are in fact less likely to participate in the election than those who only received the flyers campaign**. It is worth noting that while the figures below are based on actual votes, our participants were rather truthful about their behaviour in the questionnaire with a turnout over-claim of approximately 4% (across all groups).

**Table 3.8:** Actual turnout by campaign type:

	Traditional campaign	Social media campaign
Voted	30.0%	21.5%

**Source:** EACEA/EC 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life' Experiment, 2012

However, while they were less likely to vote, unlike what we find with adult voters there was generally no difference in the likeliness to vote for extremist parties between traditional campaign and e-media campaign voters. The only exception is a difference of extreme right voting between groups in Austria, in which there were more extreme right voters amongst traditional campaign voters than e-voters.

However, at the same time, the social media campaign – which is largely requested by young people according to our survey results – is not necessarily very popular in practice. **Respondents exposed to the social media campaigning do tend to find the campaign significantly less interesting / more boring, and also less relevant** than their counterparts who only received the lists' policy proposals in the form of a short manifesto. This apparent contradiction may yet again be related to the fact that parties engaged in social media campaigning end up further developing their political arguments while pamphlets themselves, by the nature of the limited space that defines them, have to be 'to the point'. It should also be noted that consistently with findings on actual social media campaigning, our lists' campaigns included references to campaign events (e.g. meetings, activities, etc.) which non-partisan young voters may end up finding relatively irrelevant in the context of the election itself. There was no significant impact of campaign mode on how exciting, complex, and informative the campaign was perceived to be.

**Table 3.9:** Campaign perceptions<sup>10</sup>

Found campaign	Traditional campaign	Social media campaign
Interesting	<b>2.1 (1.2)</b>	1.9 (1.1)
Exciting	1.6 (1.0)	1.5 (1.0)
Informative	2.4(1.1)	2.2 (1.1)
Boring	1.7 (1.2)	<b>1.9 (1.1)</b>
Complex	1.5 (1.2)	1.6 (1.2)
Relevant	<b>1.9 (1.2)</b>	1.7 (1.2)

**Source:** EACEA/EC 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life' Experiment, 2012

While the campaign itself is judged more positively in its traditional form, **candidates' images do not really seem to benefit from social media campaign interaction.** Indeed, while the social media interaction makes candidates come across as less arrogant and ambitious, it also makes them come across as less approachable and less intelligent to a majority of young voters. This suggests that the whole perception by many politicians that using social media will make them come across as 'closer to the public' is mistaken to the extent that using the same modes of interaction as people themselves do does not hide differences in contents or tone from how young people's friends or indeed other public figures such as sports people or celebrities address the younger crowd on social media. Indeed, it should be noted that while social media can attract candidates and parties as an obvious way of addressing young voters 'on their own ground', politicians using these media enter territory on which they are bound to be compared to many others, and in some ways, this can highlight a certain difference in tone (which is not necessarily a bad thing) with the people and role models young voters are more used to listening to in their daily lives.

**Table 3.10:** Perceptions of candidates<sup>11</sup>

Found candidates	Traditional campaign	Social media campaign
Competent	2.2 (1.0)	2.3 (1.0)
Disconnected	1.9 (1.0)	1.9 (1.1)
Intelligent	<b>2.5 (1.0)</b>	2.3 (1.0)
Ambitious	<b>2.5 (1.2)</b>	2.2 (1.1)
Approachable	<b>2.2 (1.0)</b>	2.0 (1.1)
Close to people	1.9 (1.1)	1.8 (1.1)
Nice	2.1 (1.0)	2.1 (0.9)
Hypocritical	1.9 (1.1)	1.8 (1.1)
Capable of making difference	2.1 (1.0)	2.1 (1.1)
Arrogant	<b>1.7 (1.2)</b>	1.5 (1.1)

<sup>10</sup> Figures are derived from 0-4 scale where 0 is not at all and 4 is very much with regards to how respondents perceived the two types of campaigns. Figures in bold highlight the cases where the difference is statistically significant between the two groups. Standard deviations are reported in parenthesis.

<sup>11</sup> Figures are derived from 0-4. Respondents were asked about their perceptions of the candidates. A score of 0 was allocated if respondents found that the candidate did not at all appear to be (competent, intelligent etc.) and 4 was allocated if respondents perceived that the candidates very much appeared to be (competent, intelligent etc.). Standard deviations are in parenthesis.

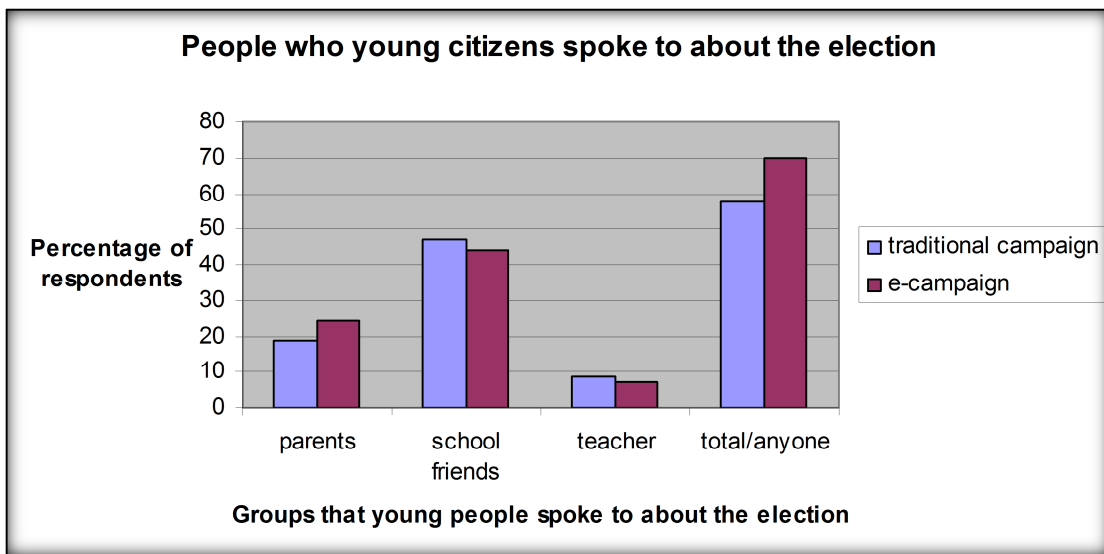


Source: EACEA/EC ‘Youth Participation in Democratic Life’ Experiment, 2012

One of the most interesting benefits of social media campaigning in terms of civic inclusion is that **social media interaction makes it significantly more likely that young people will talk about the election to people around them**. Overall, 70% of the young people exposed to the social media campaign talked to at least one of their close ones about the election, compared to only 58% of the young people exposed to the traditional campaign.

This, however, was almost entirely due to a greater likeliness to talk to parents about the election, as likeliness to talk to other categories was not really affected by the campaigning mode. While this discussion may not have an immediate impact of turnout in this particular election, it is likely that overtime, it would build a greater awareness of and interest in political questions thus having a **longer term effect on young people’s participation**.

Figure 3.6: Groups that young people spoke to about the election<sup>12</sup>



Source: EACEA/EC ‘Youth Participation in Democratic Life’ Experiment, 2012

It is worth noting that the **additional information received through social media campaigning** (either directly through Twitter feeds or indirectly through this discussion of elections with others) **can also lead – albeit only slightly – to further hesitation about whom to vote for**. In the social media campaigning groups, over one in five respondents explained that he or she hesitated about who to vote for against less than one in six in the traditional campaign group.

Table 3.11: Likelihood to hesitate on who to vote for

Hesitated on which list to vote for	Traditional campaign	Social media campaign
%	24.0	26.0

Source: EACEA/EC ‘Youth Participation in Democratic Life’ Experiment, 2012

<sup>12</sup> Figures represent the proportion of respondents from each experimental group (traditional campaign and e-campaign) that claimed to have spoken to the listed groups about the election.

Finally, being subjected to **social media campaigning** only has a **very limited effect** on which forms of electoral campaign participants would ideally desire. Overall, **the diversification of campaigning modes leads to lesser demand for further campaigning**, and being exposed to social media campaigning reduces the desire for both social media and television campaigns as well as exposure to campaign programmes.

**Table 3.12:** Preferred campaign mode<sup>13</sup>

Chosen campaign mode %	Traditional campaign	Social media campaign
Facebook	59.2	54.3
Television	36.4	30.2
Newspapers	28.2	21.6
Campaign programmes	31.1	24.6
Attend debates	19.4	19.6
Twitter	14.1	12.1

**Source:** EACEA/EC ‘Youth Participation in Democratic Life’ Experiment, 2012

## (2) Experiment on E-Voting

Young people asked to vote over the internet were over twice less likely to turn out than those invited to vote at polling stations

The second component of the double experiment is concerned with e-voting per se. A large number of institutional bodies place great hope in the use of internet voting to encourage higher turnout. The assumption made by many is that allowing internet voting would make electoral participation ‘easier’ and therefore higher. In the case of our experiment specifically on under-voting-age young people, the results of the e-voting experiment proved truly interesting. First – and maybe most importantly – of all it seems that **young people asked to vote over the internet**

**were over twice less likely to turn out than those invited to vote at polling stations.** This shock result obviously needs to be taken with some caution. First of all, many (albeit not all) of the institutional bodies who wish to introduce e-voting are thinking of offering it as an optional alternative to polling station voting and not instead of it. The second key element is that while internet voting comes across as a more individual decision, we observed that **polling station voting reinforces group dynamics about political participation**<sup>14</sup>, which in itself is a critical finding. In other words, groups voting at polling stations are more likely to ‘monolithically’ become groups of voters or non-voters depending on whether groups ‘determine’ that participating in elections is ‘cool’ or ‘uncool’.

<sup>13</sup> Figures represent proportion of total respondents who claim to have a preference of campaign mode across the two experimental groups.

<sup>14</sup> Recent ongoing research by Bruter and Harrison (2013 - forthcoming) confirms that this is also the case for postal voting. It is thus the ‘polling station experience’ (rather than the use of a paper ballot) which boosts young people’s positive perceptions and emotions associated with voting.

However, the researchers' team noted some truly interesting anecdotal evidence on the value of the 'polling station experience' for first time voters. For example, **in several countries, while this was not offered as an option, multiple young people registered in our e-voting group and thus only allowed to vote electronically voluntarily went to the polling station uninvited explaining that they would prefer to vote in person.** Conversely, no young person registered as an 'on site' voter asked to vote electronically. While this is only anecdotal evidence, it did concern several young people who explained that they really wanted to see what it was like to vote and did not consider that voting on the internet was quite the same. We also re-emphasise that as explained in our methodology section, we chose 16-18 year olds on purpose precisely because we wanted to measure reactions of people who had not had a chance to vote before, and in this context, this result is rather striking. Only Hungary proved an exception in which turnout for the e-voting group was higher than for traditional voters.

**Table 3.13:** Actual turnout by campaign type

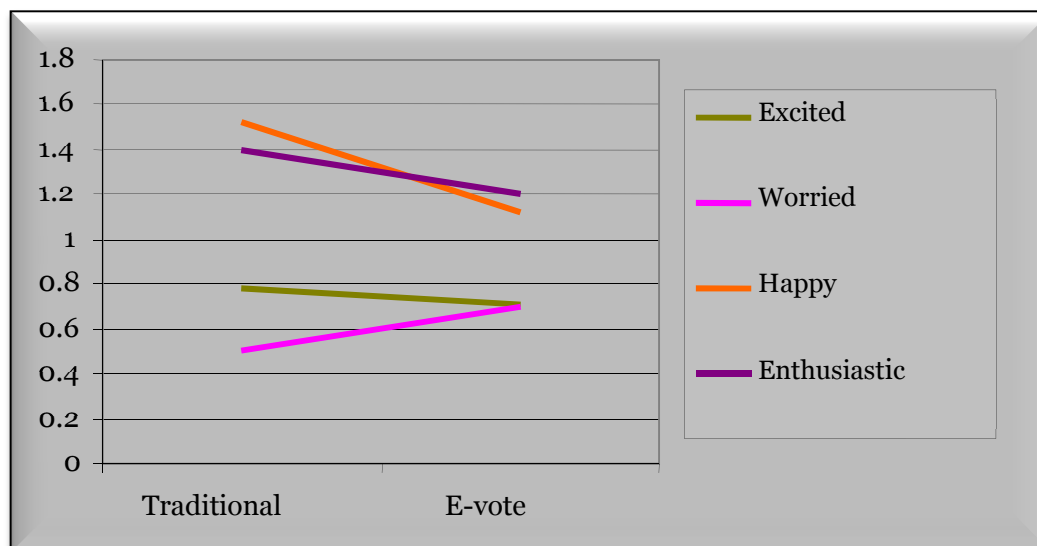
	Traditional vote	E-voting
Voted	<b>36.9%</b>	17.4%

**Source:** EACEA/EC 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life' Experiment, 2012

Unlike what we have found for adult voters using larger samples, the difference in the impact of voting mode in terms of likeliness to vote for an extremist party were generally not significant in this study. This was largely due to the low turnout of the e-voting groups in all countries but one.

However, it is already clear that e-voting does not result in the same positive emotions as voting at the polling station. By and large, even for this simulated election, the participants who went to vote at the polling station that we created within their school for the purposes of the experiment feel significantly more excited, enthusiastic, and happier, and significantly less worried about the act of voting than those who voted electronically.

**Figure 3.7:** Emotions associated with traditional and electronic voting experiences



**Source:** EACEA/EC 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life' Experiment, 2012

We also find that the people who voted online rather than in person were significantly more likely to hesitate on who to vote for. It seems that the formalism and solemnity of the polling station entrenches citizens in their choices while home voting makes them feel a little bit more lost as to which parties or lists to cast their vote for. One should note that in the context

of our experiment, the period open to electronic voting was only 24 hours, and it is possible that, had this period been longer, this effect would have been even stronger as young people would have had more time to reconsider their choices.

**Table 3.14:** Likelihood to hesitate on whom to vote for

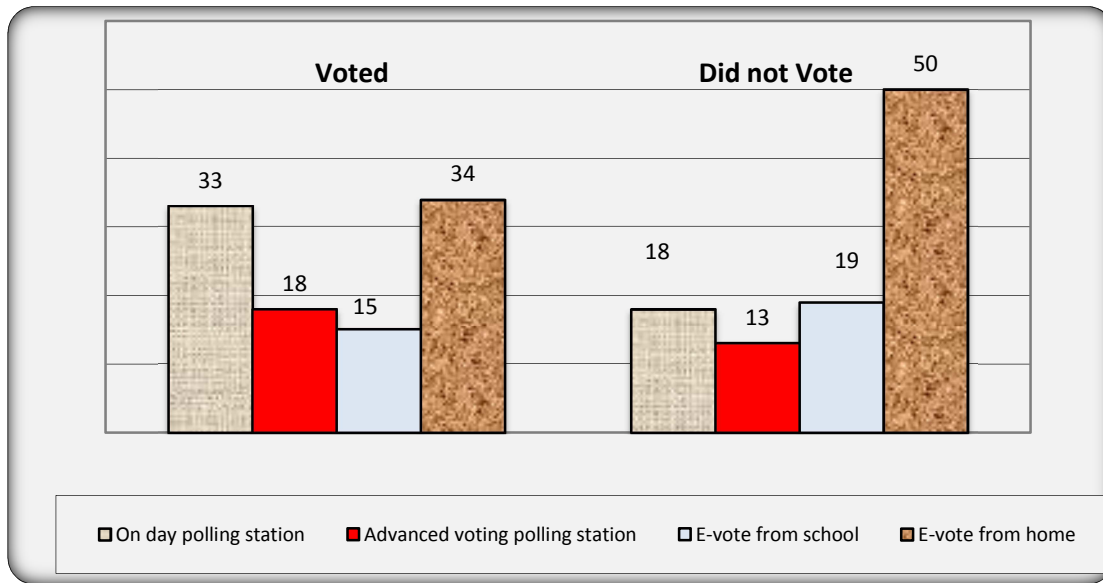
Hesitated on which list to vote for	Traditional voting	E-voting
%	22.2	27.2

**Source:** EACEA/EC ‘Youth Participation in Democratic Life’ Experiment, 2012

Finally, interestingly enough, we wanted to understand which voting modes young people would prefer depending on which voting organisation they experienced for the first election of their life – in the context of this experiment. Unsurprisingly, many young voters request the ability to vote electronically, whether from home or from a polling station in their school. However, two points are worth noting:

- internet voting is mostly supported by those who did not vote anyway (even if they were offered the possibility to vote electronically) rather than by those who voted.
- the young people who experienced e-voting through the experiment are no more likely to support it but more likely to suggest other voting innovations such as advance voting.

**Figure 3.8:** % Preferred voting mode by actual vote (voters/non voters)<sup>15</sup>



**Source:** EACEA/EC ‘Youth Participation in Democratic Life’ Experiment, 2012

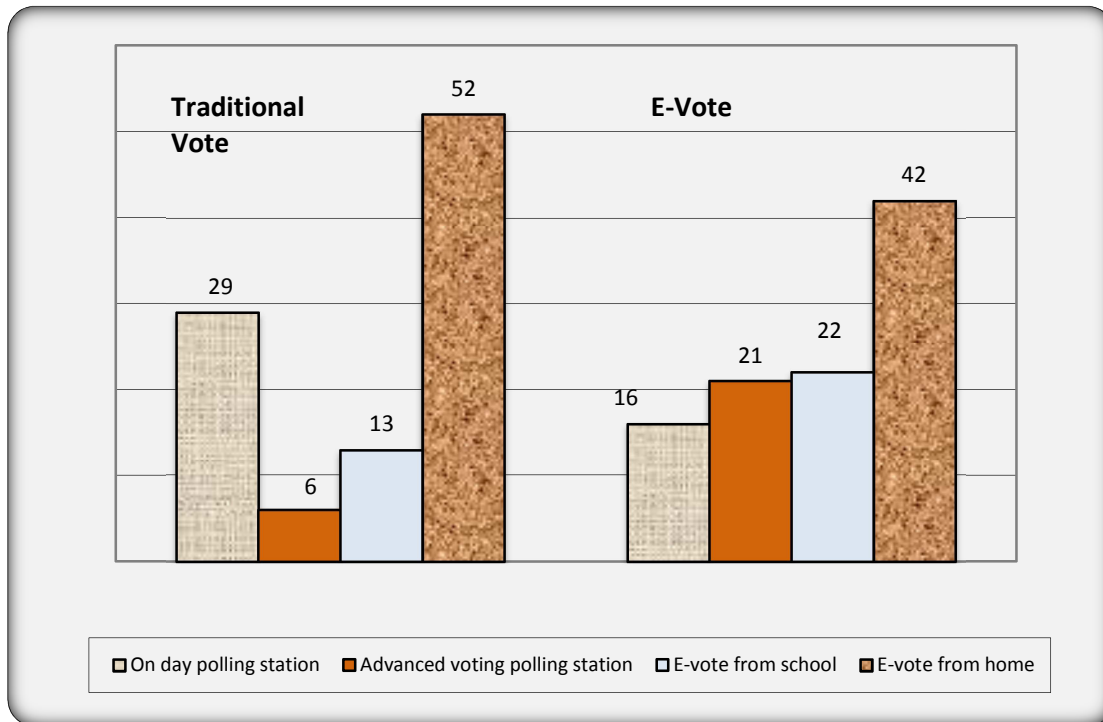
The first difference, between voters and non-voters, is critical. A majority of actual voters favour polling station voting (those that prefer on-the-day voting at the polling station and those who prefer to vote in advance) over internet voting (51% versus 49%), while over two-thirds of non-voters claim that they would prefer e-voting (69% versus 31%). Secondly, in terms of the difference between the voting organisation experienced by young people during the experiment, while the group which used traditional voting are most likely to favour a

<sup>15</sup> Figures represent proportion of total respondents expressing a preference of voting mode comparing voters and non-voters.

repeat of their election day polling station experience, one in five who were offered to vote electronically would prefer to be offered the possibility of advance voting instead. Critically, experiencing e-voting does not make young people more likely to like it as a voting alternative, and instead, it increases respondents' willingness to look for other alternatives to increase turnout such as advance voting.

Here we would like to point to the institutional definition of advance voting according to electoral authorities. Advance voting (which is widely practised in countries such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand for example) consists of allowing voters to come to either their regular polling station, or a range of ad hoc polling stations (typically installed in supermarkets, post offices, etc.) for a number of days before the official polling date. While advance voting makes it 'easier' to vote for people who are not planning to be in their constituency on the actual day of the vote (electoral registration statistics worldwide confirm that young people are significantly more likely to vote in a place that is different from where they live or study most of the year than other adults), it does not, in any way, alter the environmental experience of the polling stations, unlike e-voting.

**Figure 3.9:** % Preferred voting mode by experimental vote organisation (polling station/e-vote)<sup>16</sup>



Source: EACEA/EC 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life' Experiment, 2012

All in all, the e-voting experiment is therefore quite telling. Firstly, it does not seem to deliver in terms of increased turnout, and does limit the 'group effects' that we witness in the context of polling station voting (and which can play either positively or negatively). Secondly, **e-voting leads to significantly less positive emotions associated with the experience of**

<sup>16</sup> Figures represent proportion of total respondents preferring polling station voting versus e-voting across the two experimental groups.

**voting than traditional voting.** Finally, e-voting remains an important request on the part of young people, but mostly of those who do not make use of it when given the chance, while actual voters are more likely to favour polling station voting in the majority.

However, we do note that offering advance voting (in polling station) as an alternative way of increasing turnout is a rather positively welcomed suggestion. It could be particularly useful for young people who may be registered as voters in a given place but study or work somewhere else. Allowing advance voting (which is institutionally defined as allowing citizens to vote (1) in person in traditional or ad hoc polling stations that replicate the conditions of election day stations (2) for a number of days before the vote) could give them a chance to vote whenever they visit their place of registration even if they are not in a position to do so on the day of the election itself.

## Conclusions

Young people from poorer backgrounds vibrantly share the desire of those from wealthier backgrounds to benefit from an improved model of electoral democracy

In this section, we thus find that while young people tend to have lower rates of electoral participation than older generations, this is not due to them being 'bored with politics' but rather with their genuine appetite for electoral democracy not being matched by a political offer that fully satisfies them. We find that young people's lower tendency to participate in elections is a generational – rather than age – effect, and therefore that it absolutely must be tackled by political institutions, otherwise part of these

generations could escape the realm of electoral democracy for good.

We find that it is all the more important that young Europeans say loud and clear that they count on elections to participate in the democratic life of their country, their local community, and the European Union, which a vast majority of them want to do. We also found that while social background plays a role in democratic expectations and experiences it is not overwhelming and that despite a greater tendency to prefer direct action, young people from poorer backgrounds vibrantly share the desire of those from wealthier backgrounds to benefit from an improved model of electoral democracy.

We explored six distinct possible solutions to the lower electoral participation of young people: three institutional (lowering the voting age to 16, introducing e-voting, and creating young people's representatives at the local, national, or European levels who would be directly elected by young people using clearly publicised direct elections) and three substantive (organising election debates in school, encouraging the use of social media campaigning, and encouraging the development of voting advice applications).

Overall, the evidence of our research suggests that e-voting would probably not durably solve the problem of lower youth participation which is simply not due to the 'cost' of going to the polling station, and could even be counter-productive as young people who vote electronically have a much less positive electoral experience than those who vote in person at the polling station.

The evidence on social media campaigning is also mixed at best. While it does encourage exposure to debate and is supported in principle by young people, it seems to lead to campaigns being perceived as less – rather than more – interesting and relevant and highlights the difference between the discourse of political parties and what young people



seem to want to hear. By contrast, a number of possibilities seem to be largely supported by young citizens, in particular:

- the generalised election of young people representatives, particularly at the national or European levels (and to some extent also at the local level),
- increasing the offer of voting advice applications which could make it easier for young people to understand where parties stand and which offer the policies that most correspond to their own preferences,
- the organisation of school debates at election time.

The jury is still out on the relevance to young people's participation and to democracy of lowering the voting age to 16. While it is not seen as a priority by at least half of young people, it seems that it could be a good way to encourage young people to vote at a time when they are extremely curious about 'what it feels like' to vote and are still in a school setting, provided that the measure is accompanied by educative actions such as the development of school debates at election time and as an alternative to large scale youth representative elections.

We believe that under these circumstances, this could result in higher turnout in the crucial first elections of young voters and thereby significantly increase their likeliness to be long-term voters.

### Policy Recommendations for Theme 3

Regular and dedicated events for politicians to meet young people face to face both during and outside of election time should be encouraged by providing funding for such events, for example through school-based debates.

Consider lowering the voting age to 16 years, whilst ensuring that knowledge and understanding of politics amongst 16-18 year olds is enhanced through political education both inside and outside of school contexts.

The organisation of school debates during election time, especially with young politicians to improve awareness and interest.

Consider the use of advance voting to avoid penalising young people who often temporarily work or study in a different place from where they are registered to vote.

Consider the creation of the mass election of youth representatives in parallel to regular elections at the local, national, or EU level to encourage political parties to address issues that are relevant to young people.

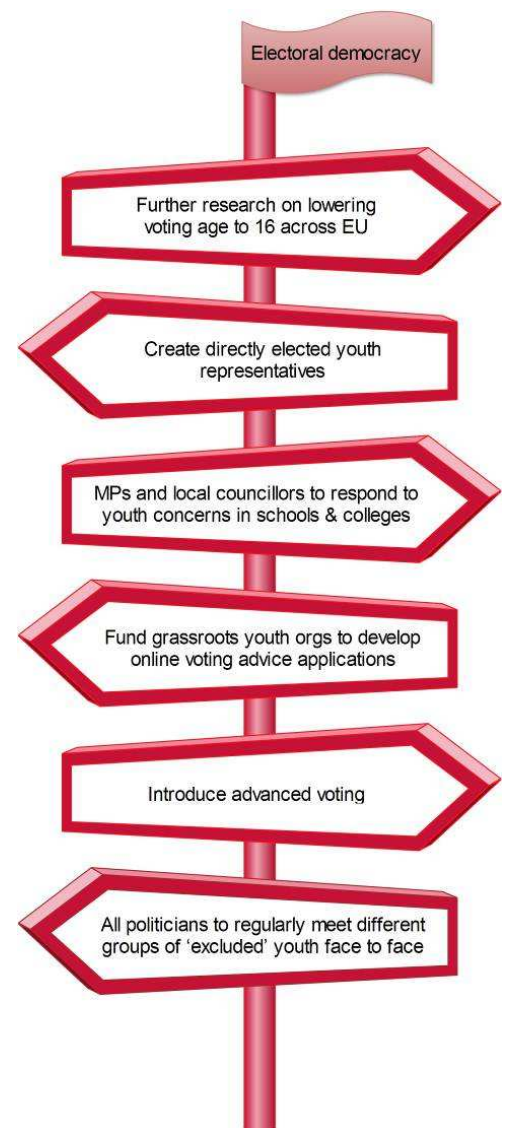
Encourage the development of specific initiatives directed at first-time voters as the first two votes in a citizen's life have a strong impact on his/her lifelong participation.

Social media should be used to supplement rather than as a replacement to inform young people about proposed policy changes. Moreover, institutional and political actors need to be aware that a poor use of social media to address young people can lead to counter-productive results.

The opportunity to vote in person should be retained across Europe and is truly valued by young voters.

E-voting should be treated with caution. It results in lower turnout when systematic, and to more negative perceptions of the vote, of elections and to the impression that citizens matter less in politics (low efficacy).

Assess innovative ways of addressing young people's demand for more channels of participation, consultation, and representation.



## THEME 4: CREATIVITY, INNOVATION AND PARTICIPATION

‘Young people...add less conventional forms of participation to traditional ones such as the vote.’

We begin this section by building on our insights from earlier sections and on data from wider research in this area. Participation by young people in democratic life on a local, national, regional or international basis is not a new phenomenon. Attention to this phenomenon, however, has been increasing. Many recent studies call attention to the tensions between managed/dutiful participation framed by communitarian rhetoric and autonomous, networked or creative participation (Lister, et al., 2003; Bennett, et al., 2009; Coleman with Rowe, 2005; Banaji and Buckingham, 2010; Hirzalla and van Zoonen, 2009; Hands, 2011). We have learned through extensive interviews with youth organisations and young people (Banaji and Buckingham, 2009 and 2010; EACEA Youth Participation in Democratic Life, 2011-2012) that different types of participation in political life are not equally available to all young people. If participation is conceptualised more broadly than just being about voting as we suggest it should be (see introduction) then, there is ample evidence that a variety of participatory activities and strategies are taken up by young people between the ages of 15 and 30 years old, as also shown in Table 4.1 and in this quote by a French youth expert: ‘What happens is that young people have enlarged their participation to different types of participation, including unconventional ones. They add less conventional forms of participation to traditional ones such as the vote.’ (Stakeholder interview, f2f, France, 2012)

Building on insights from our own survey in 2011-2012 with a cross-section of youth in seven countries – Austria, France, Finland, Hungary, Spain, Poland and the UK – in this section we will examine participatory activities *not* as falling into distinct groups – e.g. those which are entirely original and innovative and those which are tried and tested or traditional – but as pertaining to **a continuum of democratic participation** fraught with *practical* and *normative* tensions and moving along a spectrum from the traditional or conventional to the innovative and creative. In some contexts a particular form of participation may be *innovative* because a group of young people who would previously not have become involved in civic life have now done so. In other contexts young people’s participation may be viewed as civil disobedience by the local, national or transnational authorities and the innovation or the civicness denied. In yet other cases, new digital media tools or old media may play a part in challenging political policy or political governance. Or some groups of young people may sidestep formal democratic life and participate in parallel.

However we define these types of participation, the relationship between traditional civic approaches and innovative civic methods is *not straightforward*. Therefore, in this section we draw attention not only to what has been considered innovative and creative by experts and academics in relation to youth participation in democratic life across Europe, but also to new trends amongst youth who do participate which have emerged from our focus groups and interviews, such as the use of spectacle and social media to raise awareness on and co-ordinate campaigns and the use of public spaces to debate democratic issues.

In this context, where the practice of democratic participation itself is contested and the ways of reaching desired ideals must be 'learnt afresh by each new generation' (Shaw and McCulloch, 2009: 9) the social positioning of young people in relation to institutions and the state are of paramount importance for motivation and participation. In what follows secondary data analysis of volunteering patterns and wider forms of participation across Europe will be interspersed with and followed by detailed insights from the stakeholder interviews and youth focus groups carried out for this study and suggestions about overcoming barriers for particular groups and best practice case studies involving traditional and creative forms of participation.

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## 4.1 THE VOTE AND VOTE-RELATED PARTICIPATION: PRACTICE AND PERCEPTIONS

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This part of the survey mostly provides additional details to some of the data we summarised earlier in this report and also helps to differentiate between the participatory practice of under- and over-18s, a distinction which is paradoxically somewhat absent from existing research and cannot be reconstructed in a scientifically rigorous way with traditional surveys as their samples are not meant to be representative within sub-groups. In other words, we want to understand what role voting plays in young people's perception and practice of varying channels of participation.

As young people leave the world of childhood to enter their adult life, they progressively experience invitations to participate in politics in a number of different ways. Between conventional and non-conventional, peaceful and violent, institutional and non-institutional forms of participation, offers can be extremely diverse, and what young people choose to 'try' could have a lasting influence on their future behaviour as citizens.

Often, voting may be seen as a paradoxically less obvious way of influencing politics by young people, as illustrated by the comments of some of our stakeholder interviews and focus group discussions, such as this young centre-right UK politician who told us that: 'When I was younger I did not really think that you could influence anything. Until I got elected, I really honestly felt that if you voted for someone in your local elections it did not mean much' (Stakeholder interview, UK, f-2-f, 2012). He compared this to young people engaging with MPs more directly during the tuition fee debate<sup>17</sup> in his country: 'When the tuition fees vote was taking place, young people were really engaging with their MP, even though, unfortunately for them, they did not get the vote they wanted. There were hundreds of [young] people writing in.' (Stakeholder interview, Ibid)

We therefore enquired about the main modes of political participation that young citizens have already indulged in, using categories developed in political science literature (see for example Verba and Nie, 1972). First of all, there is a clear difference between the participatory experience of under and over 18s, confirming that it is not until the late teens that young people start actively engaging with politics.

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<sup>17</sup> In 2010 the UK government decided to raise the cap on tuition fees for undergraduate degrees from £3000 to £9000 and to abolish the Education Maintenance Allowance to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds stay in school.

Exceptions do occur, however, and while nearly half of under 18 respondents discuss politics, a third follow current affairs, but also have signed a petition and donated money to a cause or charity. Similarly, amongst these very young citizens, over a quarter will overpay for a product simply because it supports a cause or charity, and nearly as many have volunteered time to a cause or charity and participated in a demonstration. One in six under 18s responding to our survey has also stood in a non-political election (such as class representative, club president, etc.), voted in a sectorial election, and posted political comments on a social media website.

By contrast, the modes of political participation change quite interestingly when respondents reach voting age. Indeed, **for over-18s, apart from discussing politics, participation essentially consists of voting in national, European, or local election, and signing petitions, all of which are done by over half of our respondents, while over 40% have donated money to a charity and overpaid for a product to support a cause.** Other modes of participation are followed by approximately a third of respondents (voting in sectorial elections) or a quarter of them (demonstrating, boycotting a product for political reasons, volunteering time to a cause or charity, or posting political comments on social media). Participation in elections is of course partly correlated with income, as is volunteering time, initiating petitions, contacting politicians and standing in elections. Other channels of participation are generally unaffected by income.

Table 4.1 below highlights the fact that more young people tend to be more involved in political participation once they pass their 18th birthday. The older peer group tends to discuss politics and be more interested in current affairs than their younger counterparts. There is little difference between the two age groups in their use of social media tools or to volunteer time for a charity, which perhaps suggests once the decision is made to commit time and effort to one of these things it is often carried throughout the years beyond.

**Table 4.1:** Modes of participation experienced at least once by young citizens

	<18	>18
Discuss politics	46	60
Sign existing petition	32	55
Donate to cause or charity	31	45
Vote in national or European election	7	59
Vote in local election	7	57
Overpay for a product to support a cause	27	40
Vote in sectorial election	17	33
Participate in a demonstration	21	26
Volunteer time to cause or charity	23	24
Boycott a product for political reasons	14	25
Vote in a Facebook or social media survey	19	23
Political comment on Facebook/social media	17	23
Stand for non-political election	18	17
Follow charity or party on social media	14	18
Join union or pressure group	6	16
Subscribe to charity or party newsletter	9	14
Send letter to politician or organisation	8	13
Join a political party or young party organisation	3	6
Initiate a petition	4	4
Stand for election	3	4
None of the above	19	7

**Source:** EACEA/EC Youth Participation in Democratic Life survey, 2011-2012.

As we have seen before in other areas of this study, there is very little difference between very young people (under 18) and young citizens (between 18 and 30) in terms of an

overwhelming expectation that they will vote for a party close to them (nearly 9 in 10 respondents), sign a petition (85%), and probably participate in peaceful demonstrations and in strikes (see sections 4.2 and 4.4). Here again, we see that voting is still perceived by young people in contemporary Europe as the main channel of democratic participation.

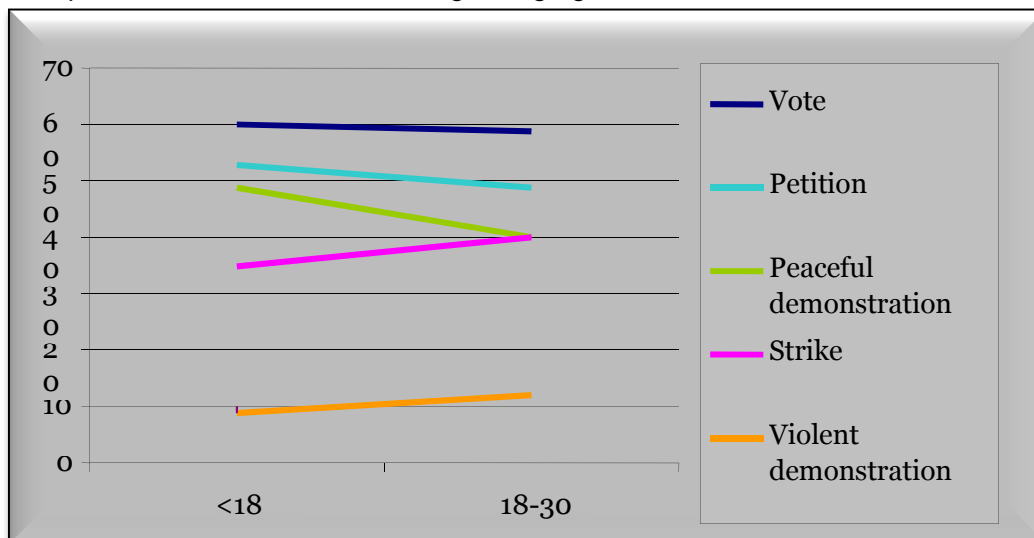
As we can see, voting is an essential part of young people's participation. When they reach the typical franchise age of 18, 59% explain that they have voted in a national or European election, which makes it the second most experienced channel of participation, only one point behind discussing politics. Looking at other modes of participation gives us an interesting context on what to make of electoral participation however. An essential difference between younger people and older generations is younger people's apparent lack of willingness to join a political party (3 to 6%) or send a letter to a politician or organisation (8 to 13%). However, one in 6 18-30 year old respondents claim to have already joined a union or pressure group, and an equal number also follow a charity or party on some social media.

Interestingly enough, however, beyond the modes of participation young people have already experienced, they overwhelmingly keep the door open to participating more in the future, and there, 'classical' modes of participation dominate their answers. This time, there is very little difference between very young people (under 18) and young citizens (between 18 and 30) in terms of an overwhelming expectation that they will vote for a party close to them (nearly 9 in 10 respondents), sign a petition (85%), and probably participate in peaceful demonstrations and in strikes. This time even more than before, **voting is still perceived by young people nowadays as the prime channel of democratic participation.** This finding is confirmed when one asks respondents to rank various modes of participation according to their perceived efficiency, what is best for democracy, and what they would individually prefer.

The perceived efficiency of peaceful demonstrations when it comes to affecting politics declines by 9 points as young people reach voting age and that of signing petitions by 4 points. By contrast, within the same context, the perceived efficiency of strikes increases by 5 points and that of violent demonstrations by 3. Only voting seems to remain perceived in similar ways by both age groups. In addition, **while voting is still perceived as relatively the most efficient way to participate and even more so as the most beneficial to democracy, we should note that it is not the preferred mode of participation of all young people currently.** It thus also becomes essential to better understand where this disillusionment comes from since we crucially find that it is not purely a generational difference (i.e. we find that before becoming 'fully fledged' citizens, young people have higher levels of democratic hope). This is an extremely important finding because it shows that **while the perceived efficiency of voting remains high and at the same level amongst all groups, some young people also begin to perceive non-confrontational modes of participation as less efficient and confrontational modes as more efficient as they become older.**



**Figure 4.1:** Perceived efficiency of confrontational and non-confrontational modes of participation before and after reaching voting age



Source: EACEA/EC ‘Youth Participation in Democratic Life’ Survey in 7 countries, 2011-2012

**Table 4.2:** Ranking of modes of participation in terms of efficiency, democratic quality, and preference

	Most efficient		Best for democracy		Personally preferred	
	<18	>18	<18	>18	<18	>18
1	<b>Vote</b> 60%	<b>Vote</b> 59%	<b>Vote</b> 61%	<b>Vote</b> 61%	Petition 56%	Petition 60%
2	Petition 53%	Petition 49%	Peaceful demo 56%	Petition 55%	<b>Vote</b> 54%	<b>Vote</b> 57%
3	Peaceful demo 49%	Peaceful demo 40%	Petition 55%	Peaceful demo 50%	Peaceful demo 54%	Peaceful demo 49%
4	Strike 35%	Strike 40%	<b>Stand in election</b> 28%	Strike 30%	Strike 32%	Strike 35%
5	<b>Stand in election</b> 25%	<b>Stand in election</b> 26%	Strike 28%	<b>Stand in election</b> 26%	<b>Stand in election</b> 28%	Pressure group 24%

Source: EACEA/EC ‘Youth Participation in Democratic Life’ Survey in 7 countries, 2011-2012

It is also worth noting that there is a strong impact of income on young citizens’ preferences amongst the various modes of participation but that this does not really extend to voting. **Standing in election and joining a party is far more tempting to young people from higher socio-economic demographics** (+0.08 and +0.12 correlations respectively). Voting, however, is less affected with a positive correlation of only +0.04, which makes it seemingly the ‘unanimous’ participatory choice of young people across social backgrounds.

## 4.2 JOINING AND BELONGING AS A FORM OF PARTICIPATION: PARTIES, UNIONS AND YOUTH PARLIAMENTS

Membership of organisations or associations is a strong variable to assess young people's embeddedness in democratic life. 22% of 15-30 year olds across the EU27 report being a member of an organisation, with half of them members of sports clubs (Eurobarometer Flash 202, 2007). The type of organisation young EU citizens engage in is also of relevance. As mentioned before sports clubs seem to be the most popular type of organisations young people are members of, but in some countries other types of organisations are also popular.

**Table 4.3:** Type of organisations of which % of 15-30 year olds are members

	Sports clubs	Youth org.	Trade unions	Political parties	Religiou s or Parish org.	Cultural/ Artistic ass.	Hobby/ special interest
BE	56	22	1	1	1	3	9
CZ	49	11	1	1	4	5	10
DK	26	7	<b>55</b>	12	3	1	5
DE	71	4	2	<b>33</b>	4	6	11
EE	40	<b>20</b>	9	5	3	8	5
EL	42	7	7	12	1	13	2
ES	23	8	4	8	<b>17</b>	14	2
FR	67	5	4	1	1	11	3
IE	53	7	5	2	2	3	9
IT	27	5	3	11	9	<b>19</b>	4
CY	21	<b>24</b>	7	12	3	8	14
LV	14	<b>28</b>	9	9	0	14	16
LT	19	<b>26</b>	7	10	8	4	0
LU	53	13	7	11	1	16	3
HU	23	<b>26</b>	8	4	2	11	3
ML	36	14	1	4	<b>17</b>	10	8
NL	65	4	10	4	7	5	6
AT	40	9	4	4	5	12	12
PL	26	<b>15</b>	5	4	7	10	7
PT	37	<b>16</b>	1	<b>16</b>	3	6	3
SI	40	13	5	6	2	12	15
SK	29	12	9	4	9	8	10
FI	19	14	<b>32</b>	6	4	2	10
SE	40	5	<b>27</b>	6	5	4	10
UK	18	7	<b>15</b>	5	3	3	4
BG	35	<b>25</b>	8	11	2	2	0
RO	12	<b>26</b>	9	<b>21</b>	4	5	5
EU15	52	6	7	5	5	8	7
NSM12	28	<b>18</b>	6	7	5	8	7

**Source:** EACEA/EC 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life' re-analysis of data from Flash Eurobarometer No 202 – Youth Survey, 2007

Table 4.3 suggests that in countries with a strong union tradition, such as Sweden, Denmark and Finland, membership of unions among the younger generations tends to be relatively high. New member states, such as Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Latvia tend to score more highly on membership of youth organisations such as the scouts. However, as we discovered in our stakeholder interviews in Hungary, scouts membership is not an accurate predictor of other forms of political participation at age 18 upwards. Furthermore, in Table 4.4 drawn from our research, we find evidence that the over-18s are less likely to expect to participate in a peaceful demonstration (-14%) and slightly more likely to expect to participate in a demonstration where there is violence (+2%). This may or may not be initiated by protestors, however, and should be seen in the light of focus group discussions as greater experience of police violence during demonstrations.

**Table 4.4:** Modes of participation in which respondents expect to participate in the future

Expected mode of participation	<18	>18
Vote for a party close to me	89%	87%
Sign a petition	86%	84%
Participate in a peaceful demonstration	73%	59%
Participate in a strike	57%	49%
Join a pressure group	38%	31%
Join a political party	30%	22%
Stand in an election	28%	18%
Participate in a violent demonstration	9%	11%

**Source:** EACEA/EC Youth Participation in Democratic Life survey, 2011-2012.

It is also interesting to see that there is a remarkable lack of difference between the two age groups when it comes to voting for a party that is close to them or signing a petition. Reported likelihood of participating in strike action appears to decrease as young citizens grow older, as does the likeliness of joining a pressure group or political party. This perhaps suggests that if the idea of joining a political party or pressure group is not an interesting option at age 16-18 then the probability that this will become more enticing decreases significantly as the young citizen progresses in their life. Focus group discussions confirm the trend suggested by the figures (30% of under 18s and 22% of over 18s may join a party) that disillusionment with politicians and political parties increases with age and experience.

**Political parties and unions** did traditionally play an important role in facilitating participation in the social life of a society. Their role, however, seems to be diminishing, certainly amongst the younger generations who seem more willing to participate in informal volunteering activities, religious civic activities and unpaid work for charities.



**In some North and South European countries as well as in Scandinavia, attendance of demonstrations is far higher than in Baltic and Eastern European countries**

Scandinavian countries tend to score highest for participation in institutional forms of politics amongst the 16-17 year olds, but in most other countries (except Cyprus, Malta and Austria) participation in activities organised by unions and political parties is below 2%. In contrast, in Greece, Sweden and especially Denmark the 16-17 year olds participate more in activities by unions and political parties than the 18-64 year olds (based on re-analysis of Eurostats EU-SILC Module 2006 on social participation). There are, of course, still a number of examples where youth branches of political parties or political movements attract a proportion of young people. Indeed, all this should not be taken as evidence that all young people are somehow less politically engaged as this participant in a focus group in Austria maintains: 'I have the feeling that young people are active. When I look at how many of us young people volunteer in organisations. [...] They are not *party politically* involved but they are politically involved' ('Active' youth focus group, f2f, 2012 - emphasis added). In sections 4.3 and 4.4 we explore evidence for this belief that a greater proportion of young people are more active in non-institutional forms of participation, including volunteering and activism and civil disobedience.

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### 4.3 VOLUNTARY AND SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS PARTICIPATION

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In 2011, DG Education and Culture at the European Commission commissioned Flash Eurobarometer 319 on 'Youth on the Move', which highlights some important aspects of voluntary youth participation. This research suggests that while only around 15% of young people participate in institutional political groups, a substantive minority (24%) of young Europeans engage in voluntary organisations. This is confirmed by interviews with youth policy and youth work stakeholders as well as our focus groups:

'I volunteer at youth clubs'. ('Reference' focus group, f2f, UK, 2012)

'I volunteer for EuroGames [Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender sporting event] very actively. I volunteer for a programme [to inform high school students about LGBT issues] very actively. And I can't put these in my CV because I'll likely work in a social institution and they, especially the ones funded by the state, might not appreciate my [gay] identity'. ('Active' focus group, f2f, Hungary, 2012)

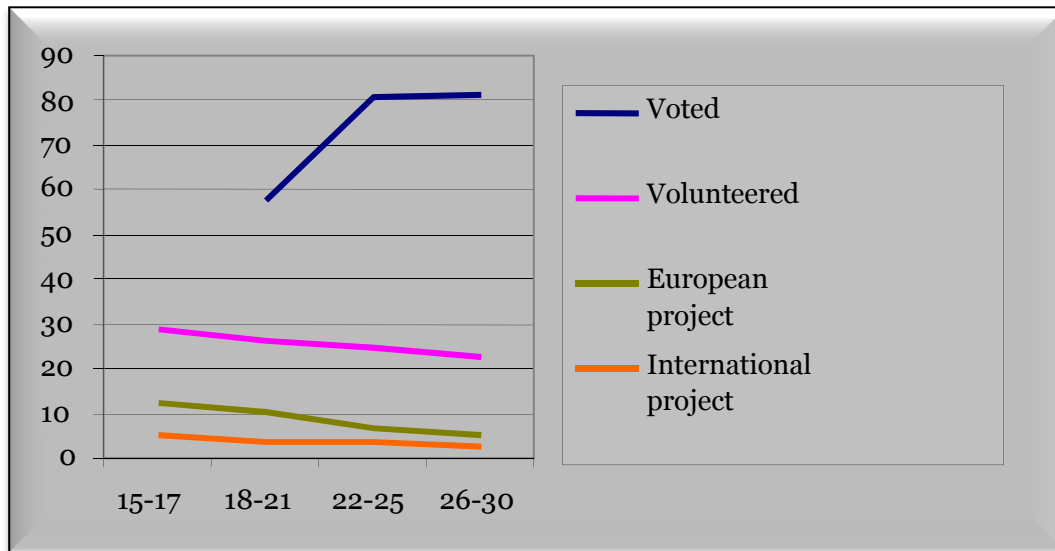
‘It’s easier to start with something else, become active, and then participate politically, for instance working first in a time bank or other volunteering systems’. (‘Active’ focus group, f2f, Finland)

Approximately half of these voluntary actions (51%) surveyed by ‘Youth on the Move’ were directed at improving local communities. These results confirm that in many ways, for many young people, political participation in democratic life starts with proximity, first and foremost at the local level, where young people get a chance to see the direct impact of their involvement. This has been highlighted countless times, such as when young people participated in ‘cleaning the street’ actions following the British riots that took place in the summer of 2011. In all these cases what is not highlighted enough is the fact that many of the actions taken by young people in relation to politics and democracy are altruistic and for the benefit of the entire community rather than just themselves.

Unlike voting, engagement in voluntary activities seems to be negatively correlated with age, since it concerns 28.6% of under-18s, 26.2% of 18-21s, 24.5% of 22-25s, and only 22.7% of 26-30 year olds (cf. Figure 4.2). Given that employment in the labour force rises with age, as can caring and/or childcare responsibilities, and thus ‘spare’ time diminishes, this is a completely expected finding that must be kept in mind when injunctions to volunteer are sent towards young people.

Finally, 9% of the young people interviewed in the survey claimed to take part in some activity aimed at fostering international co-operation, approximately two-thirds of which focuses on co-operation within the European Union. There again, strong generational differences highlight the increase of transnational projects involving the youngest generations and student-aged youths. While only 4.9% of 26-30 year olds claim to be part of a project aimed at fostering European co-operation, this proportion increases to 6.9% of 22-25s, 10.3% of 18-21s, and 12.6% of under-18s. For non-European projects, these proportions are 2.8%, 3.6%, 3.8%, and 5% respectively.

**Figure 4.2:** Evolution of four key forms of political involvement by age group



**Source:** EACEA/EC ‘Youth Participation in Democratic Life’, based on re-analysis of Flash Eurobarometer 319 data, 2011

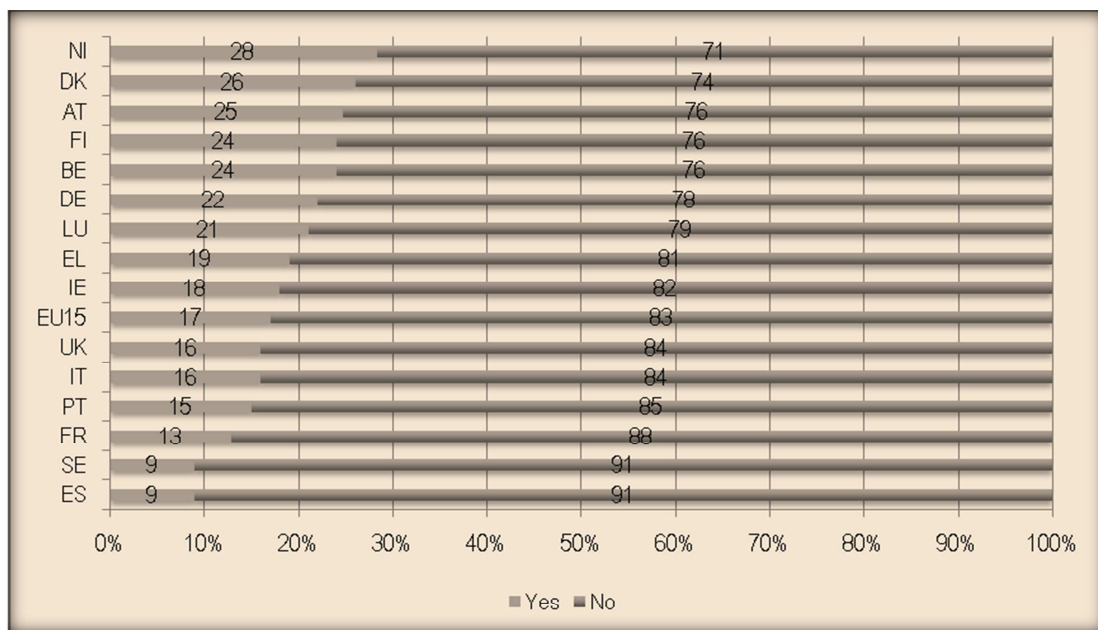
Encouraging volunteering as a key aspect of civic consciousness amongst young people has been one of the EU and Council of Europe’s foremost strategic goals in the past five years. As recent policy papers explain:

Showing solidarity to society through volunteering is important for young people and is a vehicle for personal development, learning mobility, competitiveness, social cohesion and citizenship. Youth volunteering also contributes strongly to intergenerational solidarity. In its recent Recommendation, the Council has called for the removal of barriers to cross-border mobility for young volunteers (**An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering: A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities**’ 2009: 9).

Furthermore, 3 out of 4 respondents in the 15-30 year old category consider volunteering programmes to be an ‘incentive for their greater participation in society’.

So, how many young people across Europe are volunteering, and are there any noticeable changes in patterns across the under-18 and over-18 age groups? Figure 4.3 suggests that amongst the EU15 member states, the Netherlands (28%), followed by Denmark (26%), Austria (25%), Belgium (24%) and Finland (24%) score high, while in NMS12 states, Slovenia (30%), followed by Slovakia (25%) and Hungary (22%) exhibit a relatively high percentage of 15-30 year olds engaging in voluntary activities. Countries with low percentages of young people participating in volunteering include Sweden, Spain, Poland, Bulgaria and Romania (less than or equal to 10%).

**Figure 4.3:** Are you engaged in any voluntary activities? (EU15)



**Source:** ‘EACEA/EC Youth Participation in Democratic Life’ re-analysis of Flash Eurobarometer No 202 – Youth Survey data, 2007

Our own survey for EACEA ‘Youth Participation in Democratic Life’ found an even smaller variation in volunteering activities between under- and over-18 year olds.

**Table 4.5:** Percentage of youth engaged with volunteering or donations

	<18	>18
Volunteer time to cause or charity	23%	24%
Donate to cause or charity	31%	45%

**Source:** EACEA/EC Youth Participation in Democratic Life survey, 2011- 2012



Whilst we find that there is a clear difference between the participatory experience of under and over 18s across the various modes of participation such as discussing politics, discussing current affairs or signing petitions, we can see from table 4.5 above that there is no notable difference between the two age groups when it comes to volunteering time to a cause or charity. This suggests that **young people do not become more active as volunteers as they grow older**. We can surmise, then, that once a young person decides to volunteer their time and labour to a cause or charity they appear to keep doing so. Unsurprisingly, table 4.5 also suggests that donating to a cause or charity does increase past age of 18. Just under half of the survey respondents over the age of 18 stated that they donated, whilst just over a third under 18's did so (45% and 31% respectively). As young people progress in their working lives, they have more disposable income compared to their counterparts that are under 18 and therefore are more likely to be in a position to donate to charitable causes.

Looking in greater detail at patterns of voluntary activities, Eurostat data on social participation (EU-SILC ad-hoc module 2006<sup>18</sup>) measured four types of social participation: participation in informal voluntary activities, participation in church activities, participation in unpaid charity work and participation in activities organised by unions or political parties. On average 29% of young people between 16 and 17 year olds participate in so-called **informal voluntary activities** such as: cooking for others; taking care of people in hospitals/at home; taking people for a walk; shopping for others, etc. (this figure rises to 35% in the age category 18-64 year olds). Informal voluntary activities exclude activities undertaken for the household, work or within voluntary organisations.

We demonstrate in Case Study 4.1 that innovative initiatives for becoming involved in communities and engaged with social change attract both older adults and young people.

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<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately the Eurostat database publicly available only differentiates between 16-17 year olds and the rest of the population.

#### Case-study 4.1

The Aikapankki - the Finnish branch of the Community Exchange System (CES), more commonly known as the Time Bank, was founded in October 2009. There are several local time banks in Finland (see <http://stadinaikapankki.wordpress.com/>). The Helsinki Branch has over 1.000 members and to date some 3000h have been exchanged. The movement's philosophy is summarised as follows by the global website of CES:

'Information can replace currencies and at the same time eliminate most of the problems associated with regular money' (<http://www.ces.org.za/docs/whatces.htm>).

Members of the Time Bank can use Aikapankki to exchange their services online without the need to exchange money. Instead they offer their time in sharing skills, knowledge, manpower, and other services and they receive in return what they need from others. The network may also be used to exchange goods, but in the context of this report the free exchange of services between citizens is of more relevance. Besides this, many communities operate along to basic democratic lines and involve their members in their decision-making process:

'Stadin Aikapankki has from its inception wanted to be a people's process addressing among other issues of community building and alternative economic space building, of aiming in various ways at cultural, structural change.'

(<http://stadinaikapankki.wordpress.com/stadin-aikapankin-toiminnasta/>)

This online community movement is getting more and more popular among the netizens in Finland through their own website and on social media platforms. While Aikapankki clearly use online platforms extensively to mobilise, to recruit and to facilitate the process of service exchange, the local founders also organise offline events such as parties to spread the idea across society and particularly among youth. Young people are active within the Helsinki Branch of the Finnish Timebank, but they acknowledge that increasing youth participation is one of their core-challenges:

'There are young people on board, but they will not be the majority. It is one of the challenges, how to involve them more too. There is however a continuous interest, also among young people.' (Stakeholder expert, email exchange, 2012)

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## 4.4 INSTITUTIONAL AND AUTONOMOUS ACTIVISM

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‘Where rights have been extended it has always been because they have first been demanded’

Participation in democratic life cannot be reduced to membership of organisations, but should also relate to the attempts made by young people to influence policy-making and politics and their efforts to come together to discuss, think about and plan for social change. This occurs in different forms and different contexts or fora. As sections 1 and 2 of this report showed, engaging directly with policymakers is one possible way of attempting social change. In addition, looking across the datasets already existing and at our own survey data, 85% of young people in Europe appear to believe that either joining a political party or trade union, taking part in a demonstration, signing a petition or being a member of or supporting an NGO has a significant impact in ensuring that their voices are heard by policymakers. Testifying to this, petitions – a well established and low intensity form of democratic participation which can be either institutional or autonomous – are the most popular documented form of activism in Europe for all age groups; meanwhile about 20% of young people in Europe have attended a demonstration.

There are, however, discrepancies in types of civic action popular with young people across Europe. In countries with a strong activist tradition such as Greece and France, public demonstrations and even occupations are more accepted and thus also more common. Young people in Eastern European and Baltic countries tend to score lower with regards to activism than in other parts of Europe. For example, while almost 25% of young people from EU15 have attended a demonstration, this is only the case for 10% of young people residing in NSM10. This was confirmed by the young people interviewed in focus groups in France and Spain, where participation in associations, organised protest, political groups and marches is relatively popular with the 16-24 age groups on the one hand, and the stakeholders and young people in Hungary who show a marked skepticism about political associations, social enterprise, volunteering or protest as ways of achieving social change or making their voices heard. So, other than national civic and political histories, what accounts for the discrepancies between the extent and intensity of young people’s activism across our sample?

Shaw and McCulloch (2009: 9) explicitly draw attention to the ongoing tensions between the *rhetorical* and *practical* definitions of citizenship and democracy in Europe:

Democracy has a long and complex history which demonstrates that it has been as much about exclusion as inclusion; about legitimising certain groups and interests whilst marginalising or excluding others; about securing powerful interests and containing dissent. Democracy has therefore been a historic site of struggle between those trying to retain power and those who have challenged it. Where rights have been extended it has always been because they have first been demanded.

Previous quantitative and qualitative studies with young citizens (Cushion, 2004 and 2007; Bennett et al 2009; Edwards, 2007) has found that young people who participate in both institutional and autonomous actions such as strikes, demonstrations, occupations, sit-ins, political graffiti, hacktivism, online ‘whistle-blowing’ or civil disobedience in addition to

volunteering, are often discouraged severely by police or sanctioned and penalised. Data from both ‘Excluded’ and ‘Activist’ groups in our study seems to confirm this insight:

- ‘As for me, how politics is present in my life, there was yesterday this demonstration with Gyurcsány's [party] and 8 police officers came to detain them. I was just standing there waiting for a friend’. (‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, Hungary, 2012)
- ‘I have seen a little 10 year old boy seriously wounded after a police charge. And do you know what people said? They said that the boy should not be there.’ (‘Excluded’ focus group, Spain, 2012)
- ‘It is impossible to participate in a different way from what politicians tell you to. Look at the police charges against the 15-M movement’. (‘Active’ focus group, f2f, Spain, 2012)

Desk research for this project, as well as stakeholder interviews with youth participation experts and youth workers, suggest that activist politics such as calling attention to inequalities in the education system by occupying a university campus have been discouraged by political authorities. Some interviewees surmise that this is a way preventing young people from becoming too critical of the political system and decision makers.

‘Participate? It seems to me that people are beginning, only beginning to awake. But giving the situation, people should already have ransacked and turned things upside down [...] And even when people say ‘NO!’, I’m sorry but you can see that there is repression.’ (Stakeholder interview, France, f-2-f, 2011)

Despite this, depending of the type of political activism, as will be seen in the existing as well as new data presented in the pages to come, a considerable number of young citizens participate in democratic life through both traditional political activism such as occupying and demonstrating as well as through innovative activism involving a multitude of approaches to media and politics. Table 4.6, drawn from Flash Eurobarometer No 202 (2007), shows responses to the question: ‘Which of the following political actions do you think is the MOST important to ensure that your voice is heard by the policymakers?’

**Table 4.6:** Which of the following political actions do you think is the MOST important to ensure that your voice is heard by the policymakers?

	% To participate in debates with policy-makers	% To join a political party	% To take part in a demonstration	% To sign a petition	% To be member or support NGO	% To join a trade union	% DK/NA
<b>EU 15</b>	11	17	15	12	10	<b>28</b>	5
<b>NMS12</b>	12	13	8	8	15	<b>33</b>	9

**Source:** Flash Eurobarometer No 202 – Youth Survey data, 2007

Despite the perceived gap between politicians and citizens – old and young – a considerable group of young people believe that engaging in debates with policymakers is the most effective way of having your voice heard. However, being part of a trade union, joining a political party and taking part in a demonstration is perceived to be more effective by more young people. Particularly surprising, here, given the decline in youth membership of organisations is the statistic about perceptions of effectiveness of joining a trade union.

**Table 4.7:** There are different ways of being involved in political life in order to ensure that your voice is heard by the policymakers. Have you done any of the following in the last year?

	Signed a petition	Presented your view in an online forum	Took part in a public demonstration	Worked for a NGO or association	Was active or member of a trade union	Worked for a political party or action group
<b>EU 15</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	12	<b>9</b>	5
<b>NMS12</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>26</b>	9	8	<b>5</b>	5

**Source:** Flash Eurobarometer No 202 – Youth Survey data, 2007

Signing petitions, posting comments and views online as well as public demonstrations are the most popular forms of activism. In the new member states, the number of young people participating through a petition or a demonstration, as well as through NGOs and trade unions is on an aggregate level lower than in the older member states. However, on average young people in new member states do tend to engage more online. In terms of being active in a political party or action group no differences occur. Crucially, the perceived effectiveness of joining a trade union is far greater than the willingness shown to take an active role in one (compare the statistics in table 4.6 with those in 4.7).

The European Social Survey (2008 wave) provides more detailed comparative data on the signing of petitions and attending a demonstration (see Appendix 3).

**Signing a petition** tends to be more popular in North European and Scandinavian countries such as Belgium, France, Finland and Sweden and least popular in Eastern European and Baltic countries such as Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania. The younger generation is less likely to have signed a petition than the 25-30 year olds (35.9% compared to 41.5% on an aggregate scale). Exceptions to this trend are the Greek and Finnish youth, a higher percentage of whom report having signed a petition compared to their older fellow citizens. Additionally, with the advent of Facebook, many young people report being sent and reading or signing online petitions.

When it comes to **attending demonstrations**, huge variations can be observed across Europe. In some North and South European countries as well as in Scandinavia, attendance of demonstrations is relatively speaking high, while the Baltic and Eastern-European countries show very low figures when it comes to attending demonstrations.

A more imaginative form of activism is **occupying spaces**, a longstanding tactic used mainly by workers and students but which has recently been given a new twist in the occupations of public spaces by youth flash mobs<sup>19</sup>, complaining about an issue such as the privatisation of education, tuition fees or lack of affordable housing or to publicise a new idea – such as particular forms of environmentalism, as well as the sit-down corporate tax protests of the UK UNCUT movement. The following table documents the types of involvement of young people self-reported during face-to-face focus group discussions.

<sup>19</sup> Shirky (2008: 165) described a flash mob as ‘a group that engages in seemingly spontaneous but actually synchronized behaviour’. Rheingold (2002) speaks of smart-mobs, using the flash-mob tactic aided by networked technologies for political purposes.

**Table 4.8:** Types of involvement of young people across the focus groups

	France	Spain	Finland	Austria	U.K.	Hungary
'ACTIVE'	Organising debates. Building projects. Demonstrations. Daily exchange of information on internet. Publish newspaper articles. Public speech training. Dealing with journalists training.	All connected to youth association of trade union. Meetings. Web page meetings. Protest events. Discussion groups.	Political emails. Peace camps. Theatre performances. Student lobbies. Volunteering. Inviting immigrant groups to Scout meetings.	Demonstrating. Voting and Elections. Commitment doesn't need to be conventional: i.e. video-making.	Demonstrations. Petitions. Marches. Slutmarch. Trade unionism. Volunteering	Cynical about demonstrating. One "demonstrates metaphorically". Volunteering for organisations. Posting campaigns on Facebook.
'EXCLUDED'	Demonstrations. Feminist meetings. Organised discussion. Voting.	Half have voted. Camp protests. Anarchist discussion group. Union involvement. Demonstrations.	Voting. Demonstrations. Facebook campaigns.	Voting. Letter-writing to M.P.s. Demonstrating is no use.	Enjoy witnessing. Not any involvement – one interviewee admitted looting during riots.	Even though demonstrations mentioned, all believe they're largely pointless.
'AVERAGE'	Demonstrations – but didn't really recall objectives.	Demonstrations. Strikes.	Conversations with friends. "Active Youth" involvement. 'Active' in schools. Demonstrations.	Demonstrating against education cuts. Women's rights demonstration. 'Slutmarch'. 'Free Palestine' demo. Petitions.	Demonstrations. But usually, it does nothing more than signal (in small way) an issue. Online petition. Street petitions. Going to look at occupation (sic).	All been to demos recently. Distributed flyers. Still feel it's pointless really.

**Source:** Focus groups Thematic Analysis - 'EACEA/EC Youth Participation in Democratic Life' January-March 2012

There is a strong match between all of these lists of activities that we were told about during the focus group discussions and the various activities that were described to us as being engaged in by young people by the diverse groups of stakeholders interviewed. Interestingly, the qualitative data such as this yielded a wider range of types of participatory activities than seen in quantitative survey data. This goes some way to show how the space and wording limitations of surveys, as well as the knowledge and imaginative categories of researchers, can constrain the types of activities reported by young people as part of their democratic participation. The following excerpt about creative ways of participation from the 'reference' focus group in Finland (2012 – emphasis added) exemplifies this point:

'You can, of course, always make up the most imaginative ways. Just put some written text about some issue on your back and run naked around the football field in the middle of a game, for sure you will be seen on TV and everybody sees it, the biggest football games are followed by millions, for sure you'd have influence on something'  
 'The visibility is the primary thing, but is it positive or negative, then, like would the folk look at you like what kind of fool is running in there, or are they like 'hey that guy has a point'  
 'The way you dress up is also one thing. For example, if you dress up like a neo-Nazi the folk see that you've got an opinion on things'  
 'The visibility and promoting indeed...'  
 'Also, the biggest dream of some graffiti artists is that they could make their way to New York where there is this train, to make their graffiti in there even though it's illegal, but street art is also one example of promoting [opinions]'  
 'You gain visibility with money'  
 'Also all the caricaturists and like the cartoon strips in the Metro magazine, everybody reads them in the morning and there is a lot of political mud-slinging in those'

In this excerpt from a focus group, there is a clear insistence that political participation can be rightwing or leftwing, it can be mainstream, anti-authoritarian or highly authoritarian, that 'messages' are not necessarily pro-democratic and that all political actions, however



innovative or creative, are not necessarily recognised as such by adult authorities or even by people with different ideological standpoints. These are very complex points. Making a political statement about something to do with the environment by painting a slogan on your back and running naked across a football pitch is an innovative political action and can get your cause media attention; but it can also be misunderstood and represented by the media and by parents or school authorities as narcissism or disruptiveness. Dressing like a 'neo-nazi' is also a political statement – of a very specific and anti-democratic kind of politics but it is a form of participation. Doing graffiti and cartoons can be legitimate ways for young artists both to make their living and to make political points.

Notably, in table 4.8, even though young people in the 'excluded' groups may seem cynical about the effectiveness of their protests in bringing about social change, several of them are still emphatic about their participation. They showed no signs of having lower levels of interest than the rest of the population, although it was clear that several of them would like to know more about the options for participating that exist. In particular, this was brought home to us in the UK focus groups where the 'excluded' group spoke about wanting to take part in a discussion of their issues with the young mayor of their area but did not even know that precisely such a debate had been organised by some of the 'active' youth in the town hall across the street.

Mechanisms for young people even to be informed about the options in terms of participation were seen to be largely *ad hoc*

Mechanisms for young people even to be informed about the options in terms of participation were seen to be largely *ad hoc* or depending on 'whom you happen to talk to', 'what your family is like', 'where you live' or 'if you accidentally become part of something'. The most 'activist' young people described to us campaigns which involved a range of participatory

mechanisms and which, in addition, were careful that both the means and the ends were keenly democratic, as in the case study below. The case study shows how closely old and new forms of participation and action can be linked within a single movement and how the trend amongst the 18-28 year old age group in some of the partner countries is for a move away from traditional party political participation based on representative democracy towards organised debating and active fora where participatory or direct democracy is attempted. This does not mean side-stepping tricky political issues or eschewing policy demands. But it does require time and the occupation of public spaces large enough to accommodate decision-making by hundreds of young people.

#### Case-study 4.2: democratic protest innovation, Spain

In May 2011, some 130.000 mainly young Spanish citizens protested against (youth) unemployment and austerity measures and for a better future. Camps were set up making the anger and frustration of large part of the population very visible in city centers across Spain, Madrid's most central space, Puerta del Sol, was occupied and in Barcelona it was Plaça Catalunya. The Spanish/Catalan activists were inspired by their Egyptian peers who had occupied Tahrir Square in Cairo some months earlier, but unlike in Egypt they imposed a strict non-violence policy. The movement was coined Los Indignados or "the indignant".

One of their core slogans is Real Democracy NOW [Democracia Real YA!], which relates to the earlier discussion on what precisely constitutes democracy. As such, some of their demands are centered around measures to improve citizen's rights and enable participatory democracy and this is also reflected in their own decision making processes through assembly meetings. This did not go smoothly nor was it conflict free, as explained by Gelderloos (2011), but in cities where centralisation tendencies were weak he contends that something altogether new emerged. The occupied spaces:

became a place for intense and multifaceted debates, carried out autonomously among hundreds of people over the course of days and weeks; a place where new theoretical texts representing various and diverging lines of thought have been written, distributed in the thousands, and argued over; a place where people have the opportunity to gain experiences of self-organisation, either inside or outside the official structure.

Inspired by the Arab Spring and the Spanish Indignados, social activists in the US and Canada started calling for an occupation of Wall Street to protest against the corporate influence on democracy, the lack of accountability for the bankers and a growing disparity in wealth between rich and poor (Adbusters, 2011). In Sept 2011, Zuccotti Park in New York was peacefully occupied, followed by similar actions in other U.S. cities and cities across the world. One activist recalls the early calls for action in view of the Occupy London Stock Exchange (LSX) voiced the anger of many citizens across the UK and beyond:

We are a people-powered movement, protesting against the increasing social and economic injustice in this country. Since the financial crisis the Government has made sure to maintain the status quo and let the people who caused this crisis get off scot-free, whilst conversely ensuring that the people of this country pay the price, in particular those most vulnerable. (<http://www.urban75.net/forums/threads/occupy-london.281890/>)

In a combination of innovation and conventional participatory mechanisms, most occupation encampments are run through a **basic democratic assembly system with sub-groups responsible for various topics and tasks, for example a legal team and a media team**, etc. but the **ultimate decision power resides with the general assembly which convenes every day**.

**The voicing of approval of what is said during public meetings is made clear through waving both hands in the air so as not to disrupt an argument being developed**; in some occupation sites privileged speaking rights are attributed to those from minority groups (cf. progressive stack). In all cases these debates can go on for many hours and even during the night until all members are convinced of the effectiveness of a value, demand or course of action. This has the advantage of not engendering new 'factions' who break away because their voices are not being heard within a group. It is, however, extremely time-consuming and difficult for those in fulltime employment or parenthood to participate in on a regular basis.

One of the main demands of the movement is to introduce a global or regional robin hood tax on financial transactions and speculation. Other demands emerging from the Occupy general assemblies include the strict separation of economic interests and politics, genuinely independent regulators, fundamental economic changes to redress global as well as

domestic inequalities and to stop damaging the environment, as well as democratic changes towards more participatory models.

This disparate, decentralised, but at the same time unified and transnational movement is also innovative in the way it has used new media and especially the immediacy and highly interactive features of web 2.0 applications and platforms. Some even speak of Cloud Protesting in relation to the Occupy movement— this shows itself in the speed of organisation and co-ordination and diffusion of movement messages, calls for mobilisation, but also because mobile technology is plugged into these platforms, making them accessible for more people. Besides this, cloud protesting is also characterised by self-mediation and the building of collective identities through self-representation – ‘social media *give voice and visibility to personalised yet universal narratives*, whereby everyone participates in building the collective plot’ (Milan, 2011: np).

As suggested in our stakeholder interviews and focus groups with active youth in all six countries, the case study just discussed is representative of a wide array of similar activist cases across the partner countries. In the UK, the UK Uncut movement; Campaign Against Fees and Cuts; the Occupy London and other cities movement; in Austria the campaign against Fees and for better education in vocational schools; in France, *Génération Précaire*, the movements of youth for better remuneration for youth employment, and more. As a stakeholder from the *UK National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts* summed up the views of most of the activist interviewees in our sample and many of the young people, **protests must not be seen as non-participation**; in fact, they are:

‘a good example of very oppositional type of participation; opposing the austerity agenda, opposing the undermining of public services, defending the welfare state. It is a **creative as well as defending action**.’ (Stakeholder interview, f2f, UK 2011)

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## 4.5 COMBINING PARTICIPATORY FORMS

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All the stakeholders interviewed face-to-face and through telephone, as well as all of the participants in the 18 focus groups were asked to comment on and where possible to give examples of innovative ways for young people to enter the public sphere and the world of work at the same time. This could be, for instance, by starting **social enterprises** which provide employment and deal with social and civic issues. Many of the stakeholders in all of the countries except the UK were unfamiliar with this

Even highly innovative and autonomous youth civic projects we encountered could only operate with consistent income from outside sources.

concept. As one stakeholder pointed out: ‘Sounds cool, but I’ve never heard of it’ (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Hungary, 20/12/11).

On the one hand, amongst the ones who knew about ‘social business’ models, the pattern of exclusion and problematisation with regard to more traditional forms of participation was confirmed. We were told in Austria, Hungary, France, Spain and Finland that when social enterprise works it can be an interesting and creative model – but that it clearly relates only to a small minority of youth and is not scalable. What this means is that it is only seen to work for those who already have adequate training, education, skills and knowledge as well as social capital, family or cultural networks and institutional support. Most stakeholders told us it is ‘an Anglo-Saxon model’ and ‘very elitist’. One expert in youth and democratic

participation explained that many young people are put off from applying for start-up grants for social enterprise before they have even begun:

One question is the funding of such projects/companies. For a 'normal' teenager, it is probably too hard to get funding from institutions such as the EU, because the submission process will demand too much pre-knowledge (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Austria, 2012)

On the other hand, we were also told of several cases of excellent practice in this mode:

- a bike repair shop staffed by long-term unemployed in Austria;
- a restaurant serving low-paid and staffed by unemployed in Sweden;
- a news magazine for homeless staffed by homeless people in the UK;
- a local part-private, part-public ICT training scheme for immigrants in an urban neighbourhood in Spain.

All of these initiatives were heavily funded by regional or local council grants. Some of them began to fail when funding was cut or withdrawn. This begs the question, are there any popular modes of participation apart from occupations and demonstrations which are autonomous and require no external funding to sustain? Even highly innovative and autonomous youth civic projects we encountered could only operate with consistent income from outside sources.

For instance, some of the most innovative instances and forms of participation that we were told about in stakeholder interviews and by young people in focus groups were centred around the use of space by young people for socialising, discussion of civic issues, creative collaboration and media production. In Austria the 'Active' youth focus group (2012) discussed the following case of the *House of Youth*:

For example in Mödling [small city in Lower Austria], there is the 'House of the Youth'. It was the former girl's grammar school and was rebuilt as a youth centre after the girl's grammar school was closed. It's really cool, it's a huge house at a place near a rivulet and you can spray the wall down at the rivulet [...], there is a theatre workshop including a small stage where bands can practice and can also play concerts, there is a small bar and a café. That's the most positive example, where all these ideas or problems you mentioned have been realised in a great way. There is room to gossip, there is room for drinking coffee, there is a social worker, there is a theatre workshop, there is a stage, there is a wall where you can spray, there is a huge garden where you can arrange garden parties and soccer games. That's great.

With the **funding and rebuilding of the space by the local government**, the day-to-day running and creative arts environment of the space can be taken over and managed by the young people themselves with input from strategic adults. If this kind of expenditure is considered alongside the alternatives – crime, the price of prison, vandalism, youth depression and suicide – it can be seen that such civic activism is not just socially but also economically an excellent solution to community problems. In other focus groups too the notion of spaces and places for young people to hang out and do things collectively played a major role:

'[...] There should be places where you could make initiatives, sign and collect petitions. There should be low-threshold places to participate.'

'There should be popular canteens, where people could go to eat their stomachs full for free and meet other people. Nowadays the young eat at schools, but if you're isolated you don't have a school to go to eat. There could be social workers and psychologists in these canteens, and they would be places easy to go to, a place to talk to these workers.'

'There could be an open place for citizens to meet other people in every neighbourhood. Common places or canteens to gather would build solidarity among people, and would be optimal for isolated ones.' ('Excluded' focus group, f-2-f, Finland, 2012)

Creativity in democratic participation through media and media education projects was, interestingly, not confined to new media or even mainly premised on new media use. These included all kinds of media platforms and initiatives, some institutional and some autonomous, some funded by local grants and others by EU grants. In one example the producer of a youth media show in Finland told us:

'Kotomedia is a very small budget project. It's a fiction drama by young people. We reached them (the teenager team) through a call. It was very difficult because they were already doing something else. 'Active' kids are always busy. It is very difficult to find kids who would compromise (for their time). We organise workshops, all kids have their chapter, and they develop characters and their stories. All chapters connect, relate. They describe what is, how is being a teenager. It's very multicultural. It's not a social group/experiment but not commercial either. They cover bullying, loneliness, sex in a subtle way, alcohol, and drugs. We would like them also to be included in the technical stuff but it is not that easy. The series is broadcast on the webpage, the project is also on Facebook, and YouTube.' (Stakeholder interview, f-2-f, Finland, 2012)

As above, in the case study which follows below the patterns of participation and innovation can be seen to be tied to media access and production for the youth involved as well as to civic learning, mentoring and intergenerational relations (see also section 5.2).

### Case Study 4.3 – Youth Voice News Centre (Finland, 2012)

The city of Helsinki funds a project called *Youth Voice News Centre*, which could be seen as a youth media participation project. It was set up in 2006 after an open forum meeting between young people and politicians on the theme of youth and media and has been running ever since. It can be considered an innovative way to stimulate youth participation, as one 17 year old participant argues:

'Making media is an **innovative way of participating**. [...] you don't have to sit in boring meetings but you can really produce something and you learn a lot in the process. [...] I think it's important to know that you are good at something' (f2f interview, Helsinki, 8/02/12).

Some 40 young people from 13 to 20 years of age participate in the project; most participants are 16-17 years old. Participants meet twice a week to discuss about which issues they want to produce media content. The project is run in a partnership with the Finnish public service broadcaster YLE and Finland's largest newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*. The blog of *Suomen Kuvalehti*, a Finnish weekly magazine, is also used as an outlet. When those mainstream media organisations accept the idea and topic selected by the group, the young people start to produce the news article or the short documentary. The focus on mainstream media is deliberate as the project leader of the *Youth Voice News Centre* explains

'The path to active citizen comes from family and school but also from the media. Internet and social media make it easier [to participate], but we still have the big mass media organisations and they are quite important. That's why in this project we focus on mass media' (f2f interview, Helsinki, 1/2/12).

The idea behind the project is that young people make all the decisions. Those running the project just provide technical assistance and the mainstream media organisations decide which article or idea for a documentary they wish to run or broadcast. In 2011, nine documentaries were produced and broadcast on YLE, 13 articles were published in *Helsingin Sanomat* and 45 blog articles posted on the *Suomen Kuvalehti* blog. Many of the stories young people wish to report on involve interviewing politicians, which is overall a very positive and enriching experience for them as the project leader points out: 'It's important for them to feel that as a 14 year old and they can go and discuss this with that politician'. At times this can also lead to tensions because of the critical nature of their questions, which the project leader acknowledges is as such a good thing: 'Many of the subjects young people cover can start conflicts in our own department but that's good' (f2f interview, Helsinki, 1/2/12).

Young people active in the project are overall very positive about the opportunities provided to participate in democratic life: 'People who join our group realise that everything is politics. So they become more interested in politics' (face2face interview, Helsinki, 8/02/12). They are also very positive about what they can achieve through the project in terms of having a real impact on the world around them and the link with mainstream media is important in this regard in terms of increasing media resonance for this issues they address. Examples in this regard were reports on the exploitation of young people employed by an amusement park, corruption regarding the attribution of contracts for school photographers or the use of surveillance technology to illegally monitor students' internet use in schools. In relation to the last example, one participant claimed: 'I've got the feeling that I have the power to change things' (f2f interview, Helsinki, 8/02/12).

Such cases of democratic activity of youth through exceptionally creative media projects are, then, very much a part of the fabric of youth participation in Europe in 2012 and have been joined by multiplatform media projects at community level and sponsored by national broadcasters [for instance, BBC 3, Channel 4 UK]. The **skills and commitment of intergenerational teams of citizens** to making these things happen, the constant search for funding and the knowledge required to remain within the broadcasting law at all times. This can be a legal grey area in some countries. For instance in Spain there is no legal



recognition of community media. This level of innovative engagement cannot, however, be regarded as anything but an exception, rather than the rule, as our interviews and focus groups suggest; but there are clear policy changes which could rectify this situation.

The proportion of state funding which goes towards encouraging a public broadcaster – either directly or through the license fee – who then rarely makes programmes for and with youth on civic themes due to the lack of a ‘national audience’ is, according to an Austrian expert interviewee, many times greater than that available to all the community media in the country.

‘In 2000 – under black/blue [abbreviation for the government coalition between the conservative ÖVP and the far right FPÖ between 2000 and 2006] – all the national funds were cut which then accounted for about 70 to 80 per cent of our budget because of a statement of the then state secretary for media that the real free radios are the private radios because they don't rely on funds. We have survived because you can't kill ideas’ (f2f interview, community media producer, Austria, 2012).

If, in addition, community media is not protected and is treated as a ‘market-place’ and made to compete with large private media corporations the most innovative civic youth projects and democratic initiatives will not survive.

## Conclusions

There are now more civic and political initiatives than even ten years ago with young people either as their primary initiators or playing a major role.

Youth participation in democratic life across our sample of six European member states takes place in a diversity of ways and contexts. Far from being in crisis, it seems to us that there are now more civic and political initiatives and efforts than even ten years ago with young people either as their primary initiators or playing a major role.

The ways in which these initiatives attempt to reach their goals can involve both traditional methods and innovative ones. Whether or not these initiatives reach their goals is usually less to do with the young people involved and more to do with whether the goals are political or civic, critical of government or side-step institutional politics and whether they are on a local or national level.

Our research does indicate, however, that there are still clear patterns of participation in types of civic or political activism and initiative which depend on youth demographics, and on social class in particular (*see section 6 on exclusion*). Where there is a high premium on sustained participation because of the need for higher education skills, funding, support from families or parents, this is usually a type of participation which attracts younger individuals from more affluent and/or educated backgrounds.

Even when there is broad participation, as in the Spanish Indignados and the Austrian and UK anti-fees and anti-cuts protest movements, this tends to be galvanised by a core of young people who have a higher amount of knowledge and efficacy in relation to the existing institutional political system, while loose participation in political and civic actions – sit-down protests, banners, street theatre around a theme, skits and songs about the recession or about taxes and bankers, large graffiti about demands which are then circulated on Facebook, etc. – are engaged in on an ad hoc basis by thousands of other young people.

An established form of civic participation, volunteering is a popular activity in many EU member states amongst young people, but more so in older member states than in the new member states. We found no evidence from either our survey or our qualitative focus groups and interviews with stakeholders that younger citizens participate less in volunteering than people in other age groups: quite the contrary in fact, with greater formal responsibilities of those aged 22 upwards leading to a small drop-off in voluntary work. Nor was it the case that only young people from more wealthy backgrounds volunteer, although it is much easier for them to do so with the financial support of parents.

In Austria, Spain, Finland, France and the UK we discovered a number of young people from excluded groups who did things for others in the homeless or unemployed centres, many were carers for older relatives and provided advice for each other in relation to medications and the availability of benefits. Volunteering does not necessarily take place through organisations, but also frequently occurs in informal settings and contexts and on a more *ad hoc* basis. In terms of informal volunteering there are no real geographical trends, for example some countries in the North score high, others low and the same goes for Eastern Europe.

Membership of traditional civic and political organisations, which could be seen as a more formalised way of facilitating participation, is variable across the EU and across our sample. Trade unions are popular amongst youth in Scandinavian countries and religious organisations in countries with a strong Catholic tradition. Global charities and national NGOs which play an activist lobbying role on political issues are in some countries much more popular as a way of participating in democratic life than in others and are mentioned at least once in each of the focus groups but much more by 'Active' youth. In the UK our interviewees frequently mentioned that they worked for, wished to work for or had been in contact with a charity or activist group.

Consistent with other data in the section on voting in this report, high levels of participation through political parties and/or trade unions is minimal amongst young people, but the same can be said about the general population (with some notable exceptions). Most politicians are regarded by most young people with distrust and even anger, and have a lot to do with turning young people off from institutional politics and from voting.

Much more encouragingly, young people in all the six countries where we carried out interviews and focus groups show a willingness to take part in innovative and creative projects or to employ such strategies in campaigning. This is true particularly of those involving film, radio or new media and which allow them to explore aspects of their lives and the social world. They are engaging in a variety of politically educative activities including starting co-operatives, running informational websites to do with culture or religion, informing people about the environment and other social issues, campaigning for gay rights through local town carnivals or for youth spaces via music festivals. All of our academic experts interviewed in relation to young people interpret this as a tendency for young people to want to 'do politics' in more informal, bottom-up, participatory and direct ways. One expert, in Spain, notably asserted however, that it was important for those mentoring young people to ensure that such initiatives did not become individualistic or that people did not drop out when something failed to deliver the expected results.

Infrastructure – such as access to information, media tools, space, time, mentors, social workers and adult advice – is a key issue for enabling even the most bottom-up and creative participation. The Youth In Action Programme was mentioned by some stakeholders who work with excluded youth as potentially an excellent resource for increasing diversity in participation – provided a knowledgeable older person applies for the funding and makes the programme work at a local level – but in actual fact as having too complicated an application process and as now moving towards an older age group of ERASMUS, who may not benefit as much.

Free, supervised public spaces, particularly those with internet access for young people, like youth clubs, theatres, skate parks and youth libraries or town halls with civic suites are at the heart of fostering democratic participation and preventing further exclusion. Almost every young person consulted in every focus group said that they desperately needed (and didn't have) or used on a regular basis such spaces, and many trust and talk to the adults who work there, and use the internet there for information or school work as well as just providing a space for debate and conversation or creativity and cultural output. In addition, as discussed above, many of the adult stakeholders mentioned that such spaces were so important because they do not force young people to pay, buy something or consume something, thus developing a civic consciousness beyond the market. Localities with an abundance of such free spaces for youth were ones which tended to suffer less from crime and from the intensity of violence and arson during riots.

Economic cuts are seen by many stakeholder interviewees and all young people except the most wealthy in our sample to be affecting the existence of these spaces negatively. The cuts thus have a serious deterrent effect for excluded youth. In this sense there is an urgent need for direct action by the EU Parliament to guarantee that budgets for such spaces remain in place or to replace lost funding without a complicated application process. Whether this is done through a system of rewards or by direct funding, the effects of closures of such spaces are already being felt keenly, according to stakeholders and young people, in Austria, the UK, Hungary and Spain.

As such we identified the following best practices in relation to youth, volunteering, activism and participation in democratic life:

- Non-penalisation of young people on state benefits who take time out from searching for work to volunteer for a cause or charity – (this is very rare, and increasingly less likely)
- Non-selective school systems with the teaching of citizenship education in imaginative, theoretical, and practical ways to all cohorts of youth.
- Publicly funded, non-selective media and arts projects with young people, particularly those employing and training young people at the same time.
- Free supervised spaces like libraries and council buildings where adult mentors can help, talk and listen to the concerns of young people.
- Politicians who are approachable and friendly, who can speak clearly and non-patronisingly with young people and regularly visit deprived areas and youth clubs.
- Projects which use old and new media for participation but do so in sustainable ways so that networks can be maintained when funding finishes.

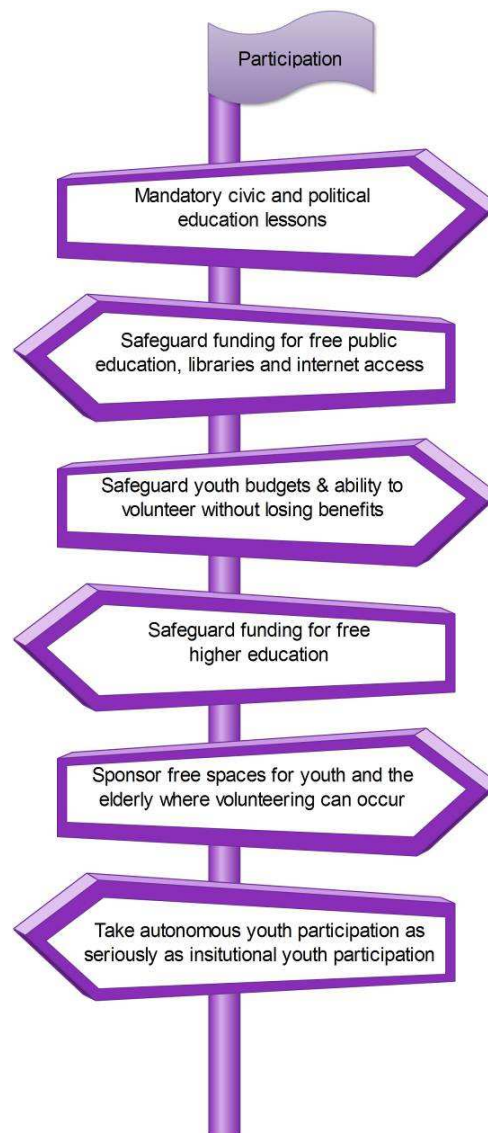
## Policy recommendations for Theme 4

Support for organisations facilitating volunteering is crucial. It would also make sense to think creatively about ways of incentivising a more diverse group of young people to volunteer through the provision and funding of training and material support for those who do volunteer.

Upward channels of communication must be built between young people active in more unorganised forms of participation in democratic life and the political realm at a national and transnational level of governance. This also ties in with the finding that young people not only want their voice to be heard, but they also want to be listened to.

The social enterprise model of youth employment and participation is innovative and provides opportunities for some young people. More could be done to provide training for young people from a more varied background, in order to build their skills and boost their self-confidence. It has to be taken into account though that the market does not seem to sustain this kind of initiative.

It is deemed important to safeguard youth budgets in the wake of austerity, particularly for leisure facilities and extracurricular activities, so that civic spaces can remain accessible for local youth of all backgrounds.



## THEME 5: (NEW) MEDIA AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

### Introduction

The rise of the internet failed to produce the increased political participation promised by the techno-optimistic scenario.

Traditional as well as new media fulfill important pre-conditions for the participation in democratic life. As Blekesaune et al. (2012: 113) point out: 'democracy functions best when its citizens are politically informed'. In this section, three types of media will be addressed. First of all, traditional mainstream media and their role in terms

of participation and democracy; second, participatory media such as community media, which provide ample opportunities for young people to make their own media and finally, the opportunities and constraints of ICTs and new media will be assessed.

Media organisations are crucial actors in a democracy as they (ideally) inform the population about politics and fulfill a watchdog role, holding political elites to account. This represents the classic liberal view of the role of the press in a democracy. Trust in the accuracy and objectivity of reporting and a healthy critique of the powers that be, regardless of ideological persuasion are pivotal. Social responsibility theories have added additional democratic roles for the media such as providing context to the day's events and representing different groups in society equally and fairly (see Siebert, et al, 1956 and McQuail, 2010). As many have observed over the years the news media often do not live up to the expectations raised in normative theories and ethical standards. This means that the watchdog is perceived as a lapdog or even a guard dog – i.e. protecting the vested interests they serve (Watson, 2003: 105).

At the level of traditional media, young people also increasingly produce their own media, independent from commercial and public service media. In this regard, the notion of community media is increasingly foregrounded. Community media is defined as

grassroots or locally oriented media access initiatives predicated on a profound sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream media form and content, dedicated to the principles of free expression and participatory democracy, and committed to enhancing community relations and promoting community solidarity. (Howley 2005: 2)

One particular form of community media, community radio, is a salient case to illustrate the participatory potentials of media. As Lewis and Booth (1989: 8) state, community radio '*aspires to treat its listeners as subjects and participants*', not as objects to be educated or persuaded to consume. There is ample evidence that community media and radio in particular is an appropriate medium to improve community relations, distribute relevant information and increase the possibilities for the empowerment of young people by providing them with opportunities to make their own media and through that participate in democratic life. The critical and democratic role of community radio and their valuable contribution to social cohesion, to youth participation and to (external and internal) media pluralism is increasingly being recognised by policymakers. While the ITU/UN sponsored World Summit on the Information Society rather vaguely called for '*support to media based in local communities*' (WSIS 2003: Article 23j), the European Parliament (2008: 7) advised member states 'to give legal recognition to community media as a distinct group alongside



commercial and public media where such recognition is still lacking without detriment to traditional media'.

New and especially social media, while also an alternative platform for the dissemination of information by formal political actors, enable citizens and young people to communicate and interact with each other, but also with public institutions, NGOs and social movements, adding a distinctive interactive element to the communicative process. Young people are increasingly media, internet and mobile savvy and access is less of an issue for most, but not all. Furthermore, Web 2.0 platforms such as Facebook and Twitter provide new ways of participating or mobilising. From setting up a political group, to launching a call for a direct action event, to clicking on the iLike button of a given cause, it enables users to connect weak ties with a common purpose and determination (Shirky, 2008; Kavada, 2010). However, most empirical evidence to date seems to suggest that the potentialities of new media to re-invigorate democracy, to make policymaking more open and transparent, to make communication between citizens and politicians more direct and to facilitate deliberative decision making processes, have only partially materialised.

Regarding the pitfalls in this regard, Norris (2001: 12) not only speaks of the digital divide, but also of a democratic divide between 'those who do and do not use the multiple political resources available on the internet for civic engagement'. This inevitably creates imbalances in terms of representation, whereby those that participate offline, also tend to do so online and vice versa. King (2006: 26) points to this paradox in his study on the relationship between democracy and ICTs, when he states that 'those people participating in political issues on the internet were highly educated and already highly politically engaged persons'.

Many authors also challenge or at least question the potential of the internet to facilitate and enable (rational) deliberation (Davies, 1999; Wilhelm, 1999, 2000; Dahlberg, 2001; Cammaerts and Van Audenhove, 2005). For example, much debate online tends to take place between like-minded (male) participants situated in homogenic ideological frameworks and engaging in, what Davies (1999: 162) calls, 'opinion reinforcement'. Wilhelm (2000: 89) and others, describe this phenomenon as 'homophily'. In an interview, Mouffe calls this a kind of digital autism:

[New media] perversely allow people to just live in their little worlds, and not being exposed anymore to the conflicting ideas that characterise the agonistic public space. [...] It reminds me of a form of autism, where people are only listening to and speaking with people that agree with them.' (Mouffe quoted in Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006: 968)

Finally, many scholars also stress that all too often online consultation processes are seen to be mere smoke screens and PR exercises designed to convince rather than to listen. As such, online tools are often used to give the impression of having consulted widely when no precise connection to the decision-making process taking place offline has been determined. In a very early study into the potentials of ICTs for democracy, Arterton (1987: 26) concluded that 'the largest differences in the nature, the role, and the effectiveness of political participation were rooted not in technological capacity but in the models of participation that project initiators carried in their heads'. This links back to the discussion on participation in the introduction and still runs true today (Cammaerts, 2008).

Thus, it is not surprising that most empirical research into internet and political participation has concluded that the rise of the internet failed to produce the increased political participation promised by the techno-optimistic scenario (Margolis and Resnick, 2000: 212). One of the main difficulties consists in reaching beyond those already active politically or at least interested in politics. As Barnett (1997: 211) points out, 'there is no evidence that increasing exploitation of new media by campaigning and pressure groups has actually brought more people into the political fold'. Despite all these critiques and pitfalls, recent events in the Arab world, the emergence of the occupy movement, the rise and demise of



WikiLeaks, the mobilisation of students in many European countries, but also recent modest successes in terms of e-participation projects have demonstrated that digital cultures and social media in particular do provide networked opportunities for young people, as well as adults, to participate in democratic life and become politically active (Dahlgren, 2007/2009; Cammaerts, 2012).

When we focus on young people and internet-mediated participation, two schools of thought can be differentiated. On the one hand we can distinguish a so-called *pessimistic disaffected citizen* perspective and on the other hand a *cultural displacement* perspective. Contrary to the former perspective, which emphasises apathy and cynicism amongst young people, the latter perspective suggests that 'young people are not necessarily any less interested in politics than previous generations, but rather that traditional political activity no longer appears appropriate to address the concerns associated with contemporary youth culture' (Loader, 2007: 1-2). In other words, the cultural displacement perspective, which is adopted in this report, has a more positive view of young people, their skills and aspirations, while at the same time calling upon policymakers to make greater efforts at understanding and acting upon the particular challenges young people are faced with today. The cultural displacement model also stresses that we need to acknowledge the wide variety of participatory practices young people engage in, which do not necessarily comply with the old party-political structures through which young people use to engage in democratic life in the past. As Loader (2007: 10) convincingly argues: 'The rejection of arrogant and self-absorbed professional politics may not be a cynical withdrawal, but rather interpreted as the beginnings of a legitimate opposition'.

All this brings up a number of issues that will be addressed in more depth in the remainder of this section. 1) The degree of interest and disinterest in democratic politics will be addressed, followed by 2) trust in media institutions to fulfill their democratic role and the particular efforts of public service broadcasters to reach young people. Subsequently, 3) the nature of and opportunities for participation in community radio will be outlined, after which 4) the level of access to the internet, and varying usage patterns of new media as well as issues relating to digital literacies will be focused upon. Finally, 5) the role of ICTs in facilitating youth participation will be addressed as well.

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## 5.1 MAINSTREAM MEDIA

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Mainstream media fulfills an important role in what a deputy head of the Austrian public service broadcaster calls 'advocating democratic awareness'. This can be done through the provision of news and information, through raising awareness and a moral consciousness about what is happening at home and abroad, by showing that something can be done and finally by supporting democratic and cultural events and 'helping them reach a wider audience' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Austria, 30/12/11).

First, the interest in politics and news amongst young people will be addressed; subsequently the high level of distrust of the press will be assessed to end with emphasising the particular role public service broadcasters are playing in catering to young audiences and promoting youth participation.

### 5.1.1 Interest in politics and news amongst young people

Younger respondents consistently report a lower frequency in **following politics through media** than their older fellow citizens (with the exception of Greece). The UK exhibits the lowest scores for the youngest age group, with a mere 19% of the 17-24 year olds reporting

a high frequency of following politics. Age is an important determinant of being disconnected from news – ‘there are much more disconnected people among younger people than among older people’ (Blekesaune, et al., 2012: 117). Looking at the respondents who claim to ‘never’ follow politics, the UK again stands out with the highest percentage (39%) in the 17-24 age group. Irish, Hungarian and Romanian youth also report high levels of abstaining from following politics (23%, 18% and 19% respectively). Focus group interviews, especially the focus group of ‘excluded’ youth in Hungary, seem to indicate that lack of employment and social exclusion is detrimental for news consumption amongst young citizens:

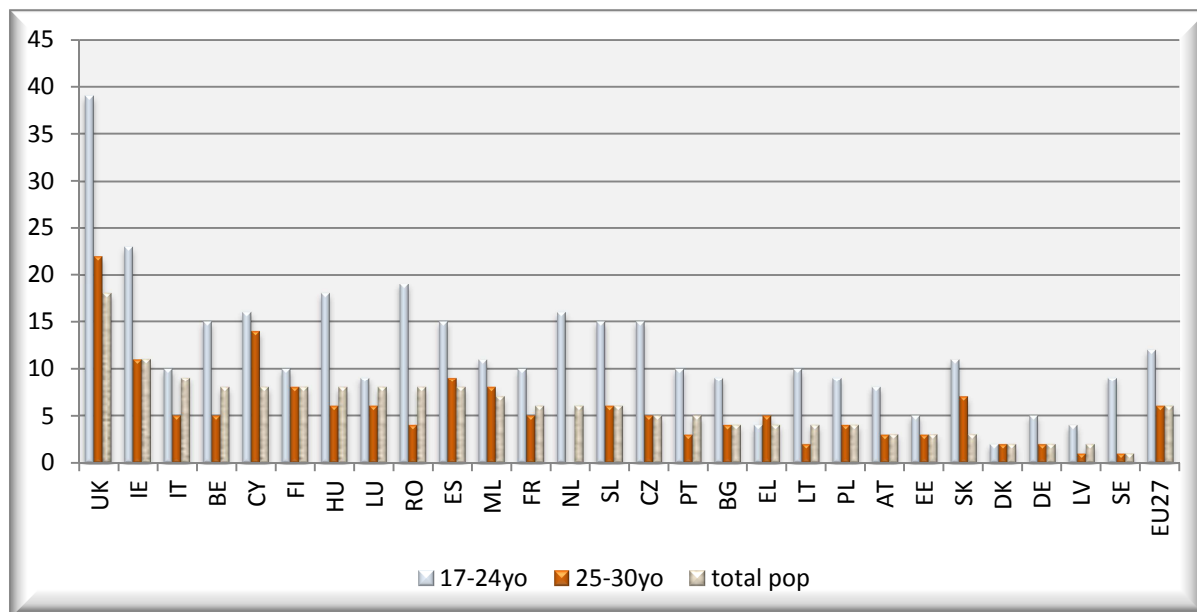
‘When I still had a job, back in Szombathely, I was interested in politics, I watched the news every night, I still had some interest in me... but since there's no work... I don't even remember watching TV’.

‘I don't know when the last time was that I'd watched the news. I don't listen to the radio. I don't know what's going on in the world. **I sometimes stop at a shop window where they have a television set on display, but there's no sound...** I don't know about the catastrophes, about the good things that are happening’.

(‘Excluded’ homeless focus group, f2f, Hungary, 2012, emphasis added)

Contradicting this somewhat is data measuring online news consumption (which refers to all news and not only political news). As the educational commissioner of Channel 4 in the UK points out: ‘It is not uncommon to see teenagers listening to the radio, watching TV, chatting online, visiting a website and looking at their mobile phone, all at the same time without them finding that to be abnormal’ (Stakeholder interview, telephone, 28/02/12).

**Figure 5.1:** % of citizens never following politics through the media



**Source:** EACEA/EC ‘Youth Participation in Democratic Life’, based on re-analysis of European Social Survey – 2008 wave

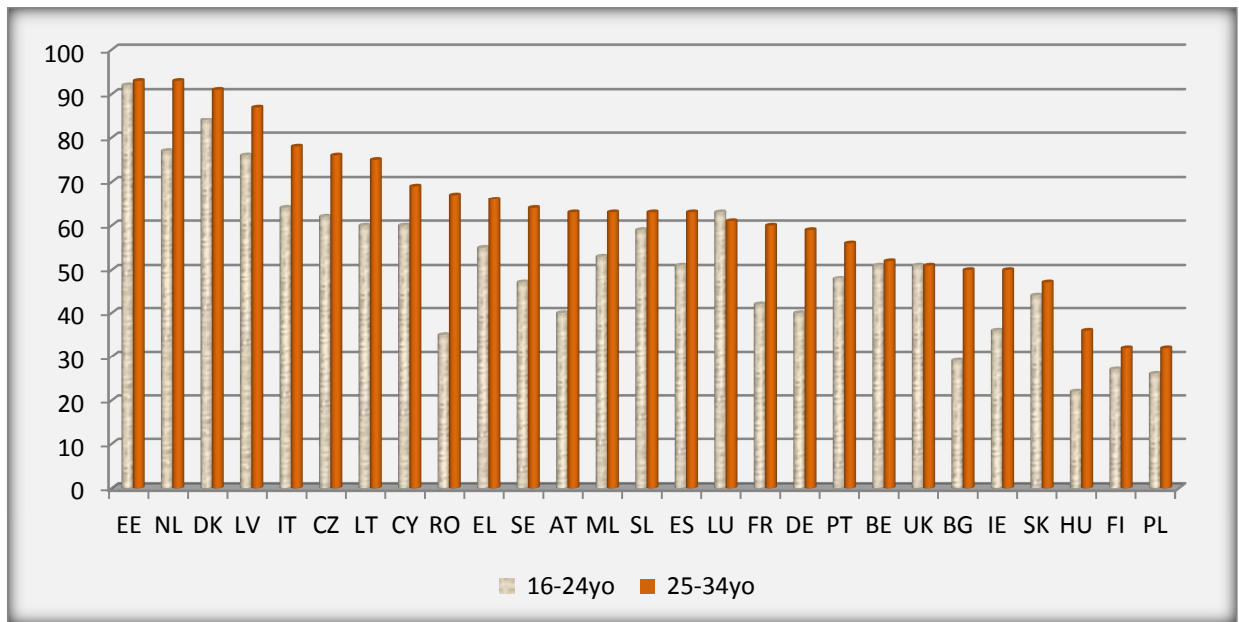
Consulting mainstream news media online seems to be rife amongst youth, with the 25-34yo accessing mainstream news media considerably more than the younger generation. This could be explained by higher degrees of disinterest in news in general amongst 16-24yo. Besides this, it is clear that younger generations tend to use the internet for different reasons than their slightly older peers (see Table 5.3). As a high school student participating in a focus group in Austria proclaimed: ‘I get a lot of political information from Facebook. It is like the new newspaper.’ (‘Reference’ focus group, f2f, Austria, 2012)

*25-34 year olds access their news online more than the younger generation*



However, we do need to take into account that despite the decrease in consumption of print news being partly compensated by the shift towards online mainstream news media consumption (see Figure 5.3), 'most of the time spent online is not dedicated to news and current affairs' (Blekesaune et al., 2012: 111; see also 5.3.2).

**Figure 5.2:** Reading or downloading online newspapers



**Source:** EACEA/EC 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life', based on re-analysis of European Social Survey – 2008 wave

### 5.1.2 Trust and Distrust in the Press

‘Sometimes young people get badly represented in the media’

**Distrust in the press** is quite high across Europe – on an aggregate level about 60% of the European citizens distrust their media organisations. Citizens in the UK, Greece, Italy, Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria are most distrustful of media organisations (>70%), while citizens in Baltic states such as Lithuania and Latvia as well as in Slovenia, Luxemburg and Portugal display relatively speaking less distrust in the press (about 50% or less).

Furthermore, the variations between different generations is overall very limited, both at an aggregate level and in most individual EU member states. In Belgium, Finland, Ireland, Luxemburg and Portugal 16-24 yo tend to be more distrustful of the media than the general population, while in Denmark, Italy, Slovakia and Hungary the 25-30 yo cohort is more distrustful. In Finland a focus group participant explicitly voiced their distrust towards the media: ‘I’m very critical towards the news, the way they say the things. I belong to a group on Facebook which tries to give informed information, trying to show the world from many different angles. [...] I trust this more’ (‘Reference’ focus group, f2f, Finland, 2012).

Also illustrative of this high level of distrust is a statement by a young homeless participant made during a focus group in Hungary: ‘what you hear on the news that’s just 15-25% of reality. You have no clue about the rest’ (‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, Hungary, 22/02/12). This was echoed in another ‘excluded’ youth focus group held on the same day in Hungary: ‘Politics oppresses everything. They influence everything, the media, everyone’ (‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, Hungary, 2012).

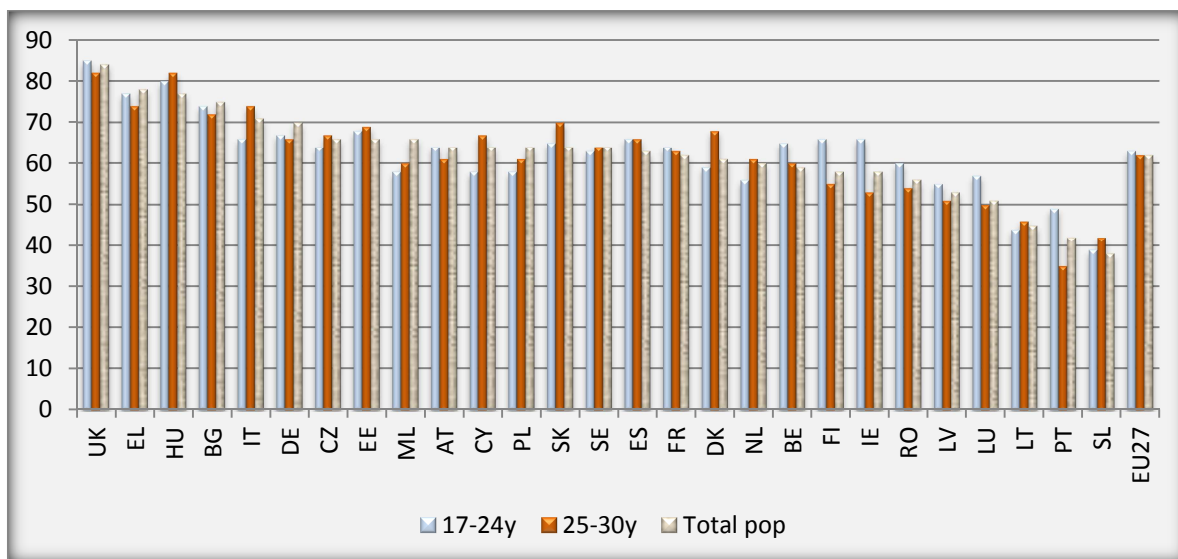
This is particularly poignant in view of the much-criticized new media law in Hungary which the European Commission has condemned as impeding on press freedom and media pluralism. Commissioner Nellie Kroes in a letter to the Hungarian Government stressed that:

‘The respect of media freedom and media pluralism is not only about the technically correct application of EU and national law but also, and more importantly, about implementing and promoting these fundamental principles in practice.’<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> <http://blogs.r.ftdata.co.uk/brusselsblog/files/2012/01/KroesHungaryLetter1.pdf>

Figure 5.3: Degree of distrust of the press



Source: EACEA/EC ‘Youth Participation in Democratic Life’, based on re-analysis of European Social Survey – 2008 wave

This high degree of distrust of the news media is seen to be a response to the media’s lack of objectivity and balance in reporting on young people and democracy. Barnett (2008: 5) points out that this distrust is in line with rising distrust in other institutions, but that journalism bears a specific responsibility in a democracy:

‘Journalism’s decline cannot [...] be seen in isolation from a more widespread phenomenon of declining faith. For an occupation that is supposed to deal in truth, however, and for which accuracy lies at the heart of the various codes of professional conduct, the scale and speed of the decline in trust is a serious issue.’

Young people are especially concerned with the way they are being represented as a group by the mainstream media. Participants to a focus group in Hungary were especially critical in this regard: ‘The media emphasise sexuality. I think the media make young people look a lot worse than they are. [...] they picture them in a bad light’ (‘Active’ focus group, f2f, Hungary, 2012). In Spain another young respondent summed up the sense of frustration ‘TV information spread the image of the Catalonia Square squatters as a group of lazy young.’ (‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, Spain, 2012). Supporting this, a UK youth worker stated that:

‘I personally feel that sometimes young people get badly represented in the media. From what I see [...] young people just do what young people do, sometimes they don’t think straight, sometimes they can have a bit of an attitude, but here we don’t have the problems you see portrayed by the media, like stabbings, shootings, underage sex and all that. We don’t see those extremities here.’ (Stakeholder interview, f2f, UK, 2012)

### 5.1.3 Public Service Broadcasting and Youth Participation

Despite this high level of distrust, our interviews and focus groups with young people and various stakeholders also suggest that many young people are aware of the importance of mainstream media. In Finland several respondents argued that they trusted public service broadcasters more than commercial broadcasters; ‘I trust more in the state funded news or BBC than commercial financed, private things’, one participant claimed, to which another responded by saying that commercial media: ‘make news that appeal to citizens and by which they can make profit, and they bring out things in the light that benefits them, not showing the wholeness.’ (‘Reference’ focus group, f2f, Finland, 2012)

Many young people do seem to feel, however, that there is little content being produced catering to the life world of young people and the issues that concern them. The educational commissioner of Channel 4 argues in this regard that ‘teenagers are very interested in politics, they are interested about their rights and the rights of others, and they are very keen to play their part’, but despite this it is clear that ‘teenagers as a group are underrepresented in the UK media’. As a result of this, ‘[w]e are in the particular position of representing young people as a minority group in UK media’ (Stakeholder interview, f2f, UK, 28/02/12). A 17 year old participant in a media participation project in Finland concurs with this and argues at the same time for more opportunities for young people to participate in mainstream media: ‘Media is a sort of the mirror of our society, there should be more things from young people’ (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Finland, 8/2/12).

One possible reason for the lack of content targeted at teenagers and the lack of opportunities for this age-group to participate in media production is that research done by broadcasters indicates that in many countries the age-group of 15-25 year olds does not watch that much television anymore, but is more active online. This is reflected in the data on news consumption presented above (see Figure 5.2).

In France, the only programme specifically targeted at this age-group was scrapped in 2009. A former director of youth programmes at France Télévision states in this regard that **‘according to our studies, young people gave up television for internet**. That is why the French public broadcaster changed its strategy’ (Stakeholder interview, telephone, France, 2/12/11). The Austrian public broadcaster also does not produce any content for the 12-19 year old age group, which a deputy head explains is due to ‘the audience not being big enough so you would not get a good slot. Here, the possibilities of mainstream media are limited’ (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Austria, 30/12/11). Besides a shift towards media consumption online and a lack of audience for youth-focused programmes, an executive producer of the Finnish public broadcaster YLE points to the fact that young people above 15 years old are ‘watching the same programmes as the adults. I think that’s the case in some other European countries as well’ (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Finland, 3/2/12).

Despite all this, it is clear that most public as well as commercial broadcasters do attempt to address these issues by setting up special projects specifically targeted at young people that operate across platforms and with a strong online component. *DB8* was a project whereby Channel 4 Education worked closely with the Houses of Parliament to open up the UK parliament to a number of teenagers and hosted three debates, using the rules of competitive debating. At the end of each debate, two hip hop MCs took the points coming out of the debates and turned them into lyrics and freestyle on the back of the discussion. The programs were broadcasted through YouTube and the UK’s online youth channel SB.TV. The commissioning editor claims that this format

‘resulted in engagement, because that is their world and that is how urban teenagers are communicating. And rather than have them battle over who has the nicest pair of trainers or other things they traditionally battle across, we **talked about political issues**, such as the police, democracy, youth intervention etc.’ (Stakeholder interview, telephone, UK, 28/02/12).

The French public broadcaster is also planning to set up a specific online platform directed at 15-25 year olds, but this is still in the planning stages. As the case study in section 4 on innovative participation also shows, the Finnish public service broadcaster and the main Finnish newspaper provide some opportunities for some young people to produce their own features or news articles. In Austria there are serious limitations as to what the public broadcaster can and cannot do online so as to prevent it competing with commercial providers of online services: ‘The ORF is very limited when it comes to the online segment due to the competition between public and private media. A lot of [online] interaction is



prohibited' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Austria, 30/12/11<sup>21</sup>). This is especially problematic for the age group that has migrated online.

There are also examples of continuing scepticism amongst mainstream media regarding their responsibilities in promoting youth participation. The director of a Catalan public youth channel bluntly asserted that '[y]oung people need to receive some education in order to form the necessary skills and knowledge to participate. However, media do not have a direct responsibility to provide these skills and knowledge'. (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Spain, 7/3/12).

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## 5.2 COMMUNITY MEDIA

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As emphasised in the introduction of this section, from a policy perspective community media is increasingly seen to be contributing to the participation of young people in democratic life and highly valued in terms of providing opportunities to young people to be creative and to gain media literacy skills. From this perspective, community media organisations could be considered as 'centres of expertise, that not only cherish democratic practice, but that have become over the years very knowledgeable in the actual organisation of democracy, and in dealing with the many problems this incorporates' (Carpentier and Scifo, 2010: 116). This insight is acknowledged by the European Parliament (2008), which considers that community media

'contribute to the goal of improving citizens' media literacy through their direct involvement in the creation and distribution of content and encourages school-based community outlets to develop a civic attitude among the young, to increase media literacy, as well as to build up a set of skills that could be further used for community media participation'.

It is estimated that across the EU some 100.000 people are active in community radio initiatives, many of them young people (Kupfer, 2009: 188). The Netherlands and France especially boast high levels of participation in community radio, approximately 22.500 people in the Netherlands and 40.500 in France participate in community radio stations, either as employees, but more often as volunteers (European Parliament, 2007: 20).

Community media can be found in many forms and formats, such as print cultures, radio and the internet. However, as a report commissioned by the European Parliament (2007) entitled *The State of Community Media in The European Union* points out due to the need for a license '[d]ata on the broadcasting sub-sectors (radio and television) of CM could be identified in many member states. Hard data regarding CM activity in the press and on the Internet, in contrary, is hardly available in most countries'.

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<sup>21</sup> The Federal Act on the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation, reviewed last on 9/2/2011, has been heavily criticised recently for the strict regulation of online content reaching as far as disallowing any kind of Facebook appearance; *Federal Law Gazette* I No. 50/2010: [http://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokument.wxe?Abfrage=ErV&Dokumentnummer=ERV\\_1984\\_379&ResultFunctionTocken=99d19792-12c8-4e8a-9ba8-10582f761866&Position=1&Titel=&Quelle=&ImRisSeit=Undefined&ResultPageSize=50&Suchworte=ORF](http://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokument.wxe?Abfrage=ErV&Dokumentnummer=ERV_1984_379&ResultFunctionTocken=99d19792-12c8-4e8a-9ba8-10582f761866&Position=1&Titel=&Quelle=&ImRisSeit=Undefined&ResultPageSize=50&Suchworte=ORF)

### 5.2.1 The Policy Context

When we consider community radio, which could be considered the most recognised and organised form of community media, the differences across Europe are marked. Some countries having a favourable regulatory framework catering to the specific needs of community radio, whilst others exhibit a clear lack of legislative recognition or specific regulations protecting community radio. In Table 5.1 an overview is provided of the approximate number of community radio station in most European countries, the number of inhabitants per community radio and the funding mechanisms of community media/radio. Four categories of countries can be delimited:

**Group 1:** Member states with very active CM sectors (mainly from the EU 15). These member states have well established regulations specific to CM or have recently introduced new legislation to promote CM organisations.

**Group 2:** Member states with a relatively high level of CM organisations due to a specific legal framework, but without specific public funding.

**Group 3:** Member states with a relatively speaking high level of CM organisations, but without legal recognition or funding mechanisms.

**Group 4:** Member states with a very low level of CM organisations or online only initiatives (mainly new member states, except North Belgium) without legal recognition or public funding for CM.

**Table 5.1:** Overview of community radio in the EU

Country	# of CR Stations	#Inhab/C R	Funding of CM
<b>Group 1</b>			
NL	290	58.700	€7,6 million per year distributed through municipalities
DE	300	274.000	About 2% of the license fee is channeled to CM, which amounts to about €140 million. This mostly goes to Community TV and regional media
FR	683	93.000	The Community Radio Fund provides 3 types of subsidies; installation, equipment and exploitation. There is also project funding. The state allocates about €30 million per year to the fund
BE (South)	23	202.000	Similar system as in France, but with cross-subsidies from advertising revenue of the public broadcaster to CM-sector; only project funding, about 200.000€
DK	159	33.700	Community TV and radio receive about €536.000 per year in subsidies through the Danish broadcasting regulator RTB
UK	135	449.000	Ofcom's Community Radio Fund provides minimal financial support, about €600.000 per year. The fund did not keep up with the increase in the number of licensed stations
IE	19	223.000	Minimal support for evaluations or training through the Broadcasting Commission. No data available on total amount
AT	15	545.000	A newly established fund distributes €2.4 million to community radio and TV, but regional governments as well as the EU fund some initiatives too

<b>Group 2</b>			
HU	100	100.750	Minimal support through a Community Media Fund
SE	165	55.000	No state funding for CM. Often embedded in civil society and supported by NGOs
IT	100	597.000	No state funding for CM. Often relying on advertisement and project funding
ML	38	10.460	Legal recognition for CR, but no limits on advertising or conditions in terms of community participation, hence very commercial CR sector
PL	-	-	'Active' CR sector, mainly religious and student radios, no data available
<b>Group 3</b>			
ES	Approx. 130	400.000	Mostly unlicensed (pirate) stations and as such no state support for community radio
PT	-	-	Mostly unlicensed (pirate) stations and as such no state support for community radio, no data available
<b>Group 4</b>			
BE (North)	4	1.576.000	No legal recognition nor support mechanisms
SI	3	683.000	Fund for special purpose initiatives, but CM have difficulties to get access to this fund, which also supports other type of third tier media
CZ	3	3.558.000	No licenses for CR, all initiatives online
RO	10	2.230.000	No licenses for CR, all initiatives online
SK	2	2.711.000	No licenses for CR, all initiatives online, but tax-breaks for donations to CR
FI	5	1.060.000	CR not recognised by law, most CR are student radios
EL	-	-	Only pirate stations are active, no data available
EE	4	354.000	No licenses for CR, all initiatives online

**Source:** EACEA Youth Participation in Democratic Life, based on: European Parliament, 2009; Cammaerts, 2009; Peissl and Tremetzberger, 2010; FSER, 2010; interviews with stakeholders

Hence, despite general support for the idea of third tier radio, there are still continuing struggles for legal recognition of stations and continuing concerns about levels of (public) funding, diversity and regulatory controls over the sector (Peissl and Tremetzberger, 2010; Lunt and Livingstone, 2011). Concurring with this conclusion, the World Association for Community Radio AMARC (2006: 3) states that 'the lack of proper enabling legislation is the single principal barrier to CR social impact'.

### 5.2.2 Participatory opportunities offered by community media

As pointed out above community media offer ample opportunities for young people, as well as adult populations, to participate and play an active role in their community. A representative of an Austrian community radio points out:

'I think community media – be it radio or TV – is **the most democratic form of media** because everybody that produces programmes can come and say, I want to become involved, I don't only want to produce my programme but I want to take an active part in the future direction of the radio etc.' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Austria, 2012 – emphasis added)

Community radio is furthermore seen as a safe and exciting environment to learn new skills, knowledge and most importantly, the sense that they are doing something worthwhile. As another young media producer working with and for young people in Austria explained,

alternative and community media stations are one of the only places where there is an opportunity for young people to debate issues about politics and democracy in a real-world public setting with a wide audience:

'Community radios or community media in general [...] are definitely an **innovative and new approach** because everybody can venture his or her opinion.' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Austria, 2012 – emphasis added)

It is therefore not surprising that youth workers in the UK, for example, use radio as a tool to improve the skills of young people, boost their confidence and make them think and discuss about the problems they are faced with in the often multi-cultural context they live in.

'These young people are doing so *much* that is not often spoken about. And they are a good mix as well, we've got white, black, Asian, they really mix well. We had a talk about racism on our last Radio Workshop and some of **the comments that came out were phenomenal**. You might think that these young people will be thinking in a certain way when in fact they sometimes have answers to a lot of questions that other older people struggle with.' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, UK, 2012– emphasis added)

The types of skills young people can learn by doing radio are multiple. A representative from a Spanish community TV mentions quite a few when asked what her organisation aims to inspire, many going beyond the practice of making media:

- learning to collaborate and deliberate with others
- having a sense of responsibility and social engagement in the community and beyond
- gaining knowledge about current affairs, political and economic organisation, social problems and culture
- increasing levels of education and employability
- providing opportunities to learn using audiovisual and digital media

She adds to this that her organisation provides 'an opportunity to learn, to experiment and to create, to connect with people, and also to enjoy.' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Spain, 2012)

This is echoed by a youth worker who started a community radio in Hungary targeted at young people between 14 and 24 year olds: 'Here they get used to being independent after a while. [...] they learn to think, they learn to create things independently. They can be happy that yes, we've made it together'. She also stresses that the community radio does not attract young people that come from privileged backgrounds as they are 'not inspired to [make radio]. It's more attractive for those who are maybe a bit neglected, who have no set goals and no dictatorial family behind them' (Stakeholder interview, Skype, Hungary, 20/01/12). Community radio thus seems to be a productive way to rebalance inequalities and discrimination by providing opportunities to migrant communities and other disadvantaged groups in society to have a voice and counter often negative or under-representations in the mainstream media. Two representatives of an Austrian community radio also stress this important function of community radio:

'If you look at mainstream media and how many producers have a migration background, it's about 0.5%, here these people account for about one quarter of our programme-makers, i.e. **we reflect societal reality**. This does not only refer to people with a migration background but also to other marginalised groups such as disabled people, elderly people, women, young people, children.' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Austria, 2012)

Beyond diversity, the Hungarian case is also a good example of how community radio, through providing opportunities for young people to experiment, can lead to better job prospects as about 70% of young participants in the radio station, which is based in one of the poorer parts of Hungary, end up in a communication related job afterwards.

### 5.2.3 Convergence of media

As is already apparent from the overview in Table 5, the convergence of media means that the internet has become an important tool for many community radio stations, to broadcast, to promote their station and connect with the communities they serve or both.

A youth worker in the UK talks about the use of social media by young people producing radio programmes: 'For example, all of them are on Facebook and they have put the link for their radio show on Facebook and they will be telling their friends all about it' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, UK, 2012). Most interviewees from community media initiatives emphasise the increasing integration of new media with traditional media, such as radio, giving rise to hybrid forms of community media. The representatives of the Austrian community radio run media workshops that do not only relate to radio or podcasts, but also include skills relating to writing blogs or how to record and edit a video with a mobile telephone.

'It's about **media competence**. We live in a media age and when I have media competence I can gather information and speak up. That's our priority in our interaction with young people.' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Austria, 2012)

**Case Study 5.1: Mustár FM** (<http://tunein.com/radio/Mustar-FM-896-s106495/>) Hungary, 2012

Mustár FM – discussed for its political pedagogic potential in section 5 – is a community radio station whose programmes are produced by young people aged 14-24 in the town of Nyíregyháza, North-eastern Hungary (the poorest part of the country). It is run by a local NGO, Kulturális Életért Közhasznú Egyesület, which is also behind a local youth information and advisory centre. The centre is located in a building owned by the local government, which also pays for its overheads; the rest of the budget (both for the centre and for the radio) is earned through tenders and applications to foundations and institutions. In this sense the radio station follows a social enterprise model and can be seen as innovative on that as well as other counts. The four youth workers employed by the centre volunteer for the radio as adult mentors and, in the case of our stakeholder interviewee, as the editor-in-chief, taking legal responsibility for what the radio puts on air.

According to the interviewee, the history of the radio station began when the organisation first started out in Nyíregyháza. The youth workers did an informal survey among the local youth on what they would be interested in doing; the majority wanted to try their hands at making television shows. Of course that was out of their financial league, so as the next best thing, they started to produce a newspaper. It appeared 10 times a year and was distributed even in the neighbouring countries. When the opportunity presented itself, the organisation applied for a radio frequency to start a community radio station for the local youth, and they won. At the beginning, about 100 enthusiastic young people wanted to participate, but by the time the radio actually started to broadcast (after the contract was signed and the studio was built) about 40 of them remained. The turnover is fairly large: about 3-400 young people try their hands at making a radio show every year, and 10% of them stick around for at least 4-5 months. They have team building events at least monthly, a 1-day training workshop every three months, a 2-3-day long workshop every half a year, and a summer camp (5-7 days).

According to a local survey, and much to everyone's great surprise, the radio was found to have a 3% listener base in 120,000-strong Nyíregyháza. If accurate, this is a very high figure for a community radio station, and it doesn't even include those who listen to the radio online. According to the interviewee, the feedback shows the radio has a pretty massive online audience, consisting mostly of young Hungarians living abroad, which, she suggests might be because 'they look for a radio in Hungarian that has a high proportion of talk and has no political news'. (Stakeholder interview, Skype, Hungary, 20/01/12)

As for the organisational structure, the radio has an adult system of mentors, training the new recruits and helping them if they ask for it. However, the interviewee emphasised that they don't interfere with the content of the programmes; they do perform random checks though. Once the radio was penalised for breaking the media law when airing a "dirty" song before 10 at night; fortunately, the penalty involved no fine but going off the air for twenty minutes. The staff groups (of 1-4) are completely self-organised; in the beginning, a mentor sits with them in the studio but once they gain a basic knowledge and self-confidence, the mentor is replaced by one of the more experienced young radio hosts. Most of the programmes are pre-recorded for a very practical reason: since almost all of their programmers are in school, it's impossible to ensure that the same people are at the studio at a given time every week, and the most reliable, or the "best" programmers can participate in the 3-hour long live show every Friday. During the summer break, there are live shows whenever possible: 'We love this because it's an opportunity to try them out in a live show. Some kids are not so great when pre-recorded, and when they go live they learn to fly'. (Stakeholder interview, Skype, Hungary, 20/01/12)



## 5.3 NEW MEDIA

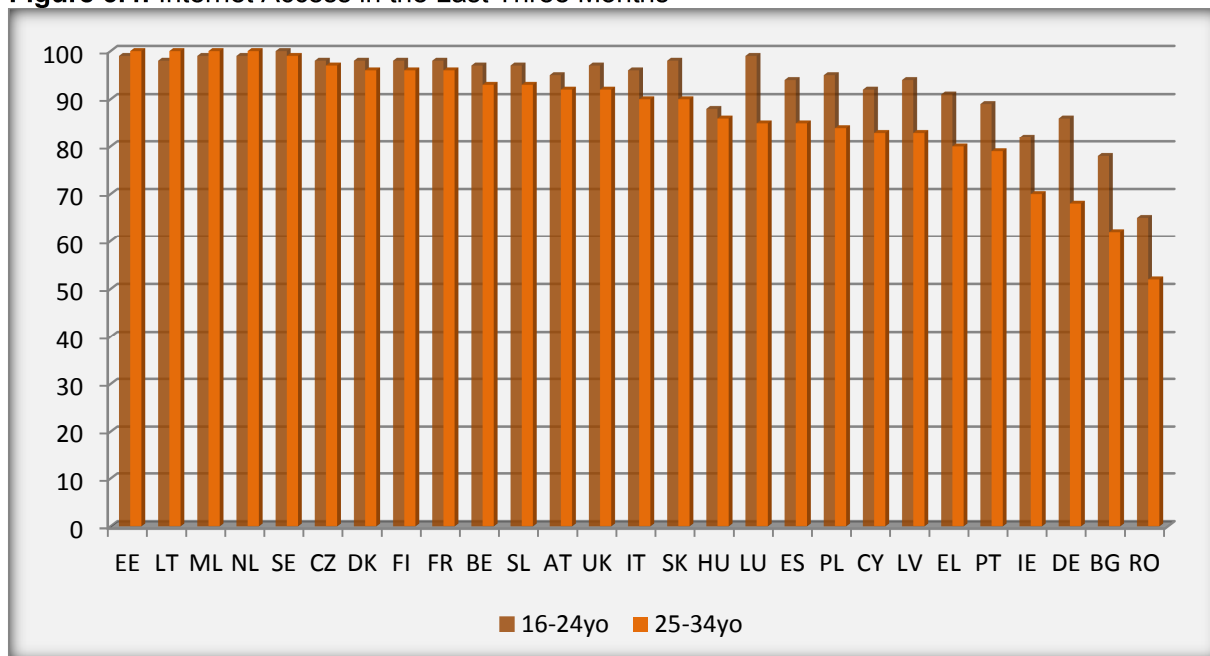
As has already become apparent in the section on mainstream media as well as community media, the internet and the online ecology plays an increasingly important in young people’s everyday life and in their media consumption. As one participant to a focus group stated: ‘Our generation is different to our parents. We visit websites. Our parents watch the TV news’ (‘Reference’ focus group, f2f, UK, 2012). In this part we will address the opportunities and the nature, but also the constraints of new media usage in terms of fostering youth participation. For example, many interviewees stressed that new and social media cannot be viewed on their own, separated from the offline world.

First of all, the digital as well as skills divides will be addressed; subsequently the nature of young people’s internet use, to conclude with an assessment of the opportunities and constraints of the use of the internet to facilitate participation in policy contexts.

### 5.3.1 Digital and Skills Divides

**Access to the internet** is very high amongst young people. It is fair to say that in many European countries penetration rates of the internet amongst young people is approaching 100%. This is certainly the case for the 16-24 year olds, who tend to access the internet in schools, universities and/or youth centres. Another interesting observation is that when overall penetration rates are low, the discrepancies of access between 16-24 year olds and 25-34 year olds increase as well. We assume that part of the explanation for this is young people leaving education, which for some has consequences in terms of their access to the internet in particular and ICT facilities more generally. Besides this, a generational effect is also more likely as younger generations tend to be more internet- and computer savvy than older cohorts.

**Figure 5.4:** Internet Access in the Last Three Months



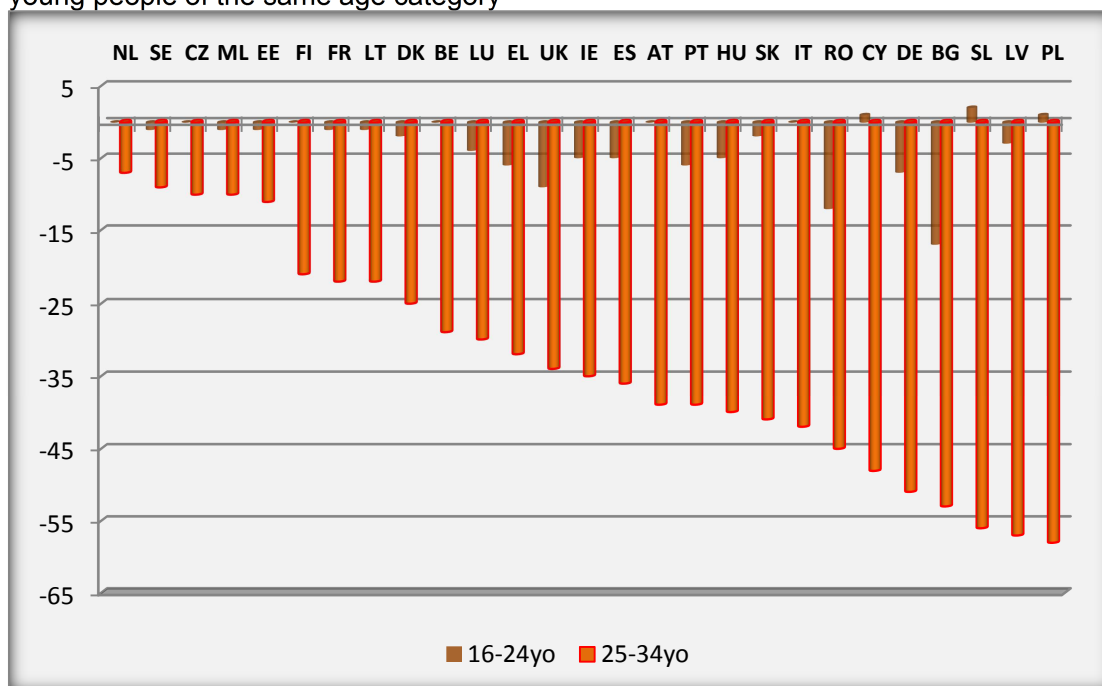
**Source:** EACEA Youth Participation in Democratic Life, re-analysis based on Eurostat Information Society Survey 2010

Digital divides are thus still a reality for many young people across Europe, especially in countries such as Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Bulgaria, Romania and surprisingly Germany.

However, if we disaggregate according to social status, it becomes apparent that the digital divide is especially an issue for those from poor backgrounds or living in poverty. Here we can also observe that education and schools provide a buffer against the digital divide.

The differences between young people from poor backgrounds and all young people in the age category of 16-24 are much more limited than those for the age category 25-34 years old. In all EU member states somebody in the age group 25-34 living in poverty has less chance of having had internet access in the last 3 months than the total population of 25-34 year olds. This is especially problematic in some East European countries, such as Poland, Slovenia, Romania and Hungary, in the Baltic republic of Latvia and in North European countries such as Italy and again Germany where poor young people between 25-35 years of age have more than 30% more chance of being on the wrong side of the digital divide.

**Figure 5.5:** % Difference in opportunities for access of poor young people compared to all young people of the same age category



**Source:** EACEA Youth Participation in Democratic Life, re-analysis based on Eurostat Information Society Survey 2010

In the focus group held in a Spanish prison, when speaking about the media, participants mainly spoke about television rather than the internet ('Excluded' focus group, f2f, Spain, 2012). Also in Hungary during a focus group with homeless young people, the internet did not come up as a topic of discussion in a spontaneous way. When explicitly asked about this, participants claimed not to use the internet: 'I don't even know when the last time was that I'd sat down with a computer. I don't care.' ('Excluded' focus group, f2f, Hungary, 2012). In France a focus group of vulnerable women exposed that while the women knew how to use the internet, easy access to it was still an issue for some of them as this statement of a 21 year old unemployed women attests: 'I'm not looking at anything any more. Because I can't really access the internet. I try to go on Facebook but...' ('Excluded' focus group, f2f, France, 2012).

Acknowledging that access to the internet is still a contentious issue for vulnerable young people in society is of crucial importance as it shows that exclusively using forums, websites and other new media spaces for information and participation neglects already vulnerable groups, especially somewhat 'older' youth in precarious conditions, possibly even increasing

their exclusion from democratic and social life. (Livingstone, Bober and Helsper 2005, Vromen 2008, Banaji and Buckingham 2010, Dahlgren, 2009).

The internet and what it stands for is of course about much more than just access. Many scholars argue that besides attention to access to infrastructure, additional efforts are needed to teach citizens how to use this new medium, how to seek information, how to assess the quality of information, to teach young citizens about online risks, etc. (Livingstone, et al., 2011; Lunt and Livingstone, 2012). These concerns have in recent years been addressed in relation to the digital literacies debate. Most of the comparative data in this regard is rather dated, certainly as digital skills are a very dynamic matter changing rapidly as schools increasingly take up the digital skills agenda and campaigns are geared towards making parents as well as youth more aware of the safety issues linked to the online environment. The EU Kids Online project surveyed children from 11-16yo in terms of 8 specific digital skills in 25 EU countries.

Table 5.2: Children’s digital literacy and safety skills<sup>22</sup>

% who say they can	11-12yo		13-16yo		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Bookmark a website	52	45	72	70	64
Block messages from someone you don't want to hear from	45	46	72	72	64
Find information on how to use the internet safely	51	43	71	69	63
Change privacy settings on a social networking profile	34	35	65	66	56
Compare different websites to decide if information is true	43	37	64	62	56
Delete the record of which sites you have visited	37	29	63	59	52
Block unwanted adverts or junk mail/spam	36	32	61	56	51
Change filter preferences	15	12	41	29	28

**Source:** Livingstone, et al. (2011)

Young people are among the most ICT literate in Europe – as one participant to a focus group points out ‘This generation wants lots of different information from different sources. Different ways of learning are needed. Today, it’s a different tempo. We’ve got a very distracted mentality’ (‘Reference’ focus group, f2f, UK, 2012). However, as indicated in Table 5.2, children that have access to the internet possess on average 4 out of the 8 skills surveyed. While bookmarking a website and blocking unwanted messages from somebody is a common skill, changing the privacy settings on social networking sites, blocking spam or changing filter preferences is less prevalent. Furthermore, geographical differences occur with children in Northern Europe possessing more skills than those in Southern and Eastern Europe (Livingstone et. al, 2011: 28).

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<sup>22</sup> All children aged 11-16 who use the internet

### 5.3.2 Online Usage Patterns

It is, however, also relevant to analyse the usage patterns of young people when they do go online. Table 5.3 below provides a detailed overview of different kinds of internet usage by different age groups. Unsurprisingly, sending email is the most popular use of the internet across different generations of internet users. In terms of information and services young people tend to use the internet mostly to find information about goods, services, training and education, and to consult news and to download software. Online financial services are much more popular amongst those older than 25, as is seeking information about health issues. Younger generations also use the internet more to find a job than older ones do.

When assessing online leisure activities, downloading or watching/listening to digital cultural content is hugely popular amongst the youngest generations who have access to the internet, with almost 90% reporting using the internet for these purposes. Likewise, peer2peer sharing of digital content is also much more prevalent amongst young users compared to older ones (only 5-7% of 35-55 year olds use the internet to share content).

Another important characteristic of the internet is its ability to facilitate interaction with public institutions. It is clear that efforts relating to e-government are starting to pay off, certainly amongst those users that are older than 25 years old. Around 35% of internet users in the age category 25-34 use the internet to seek government or public information, about 30% have downloaded a form and about 20% have sent a filled in document back through the internet. The figures for the youngest age category (16-24yo) are much lower in this regard, respectively 28%, 17% and 12%. A possible reason for this might be that the 16-24yo have less dealings with the state and social security system than older generations.

**Table 5.3: Internet activities as a % of individuals who used the internet in the past 3 months by age group**

	16-24yo	25-34yo	35-44yo	45-55yo
<b>COMMUNICATION</b>				
Sending / receiving emails	89%	88%	84%	82%
Advanced communication services	83%	65%	49%	43%
<b>INFORMATION AND SERVICES</b>				
Finding information about goods and services	74%	86%	84%	82%
Training and education	72%	57%	51%	47%
Downloading software	42%	36%	27%	23%
Using services related to travel and accommodation	41%	57%	55%	55%
Reading/downloading online news	40%	46%	41%	39%
Banking, the selling of goods or services	37%	60%	56%	51%
Seeking health information on injury, disease or nutrition	33%	49%	48%	48%
Looking for a job or sending a job application	28%	30%	20%	15%
<b>LEISURE</b>				
Downloading / listening to / watching / playing music, films and/or games	87%	58%	43%	35%
Peer-to-peer file sharing for exchanging movies, music, video files	24%	15%	7%	5%
Using podcast service to automatically receive audio or video files of interest	10%	8%	5%	3%
<b>INTERACTION</b>				
Obtaining information from public authorities' websites	28%	46%	46%	45%
Downloading official forms	17%	30%	29%	28%
Sending filled-in forms	12%	22%	21%	21%

**Source:** Youth in Europe, 2009: 152

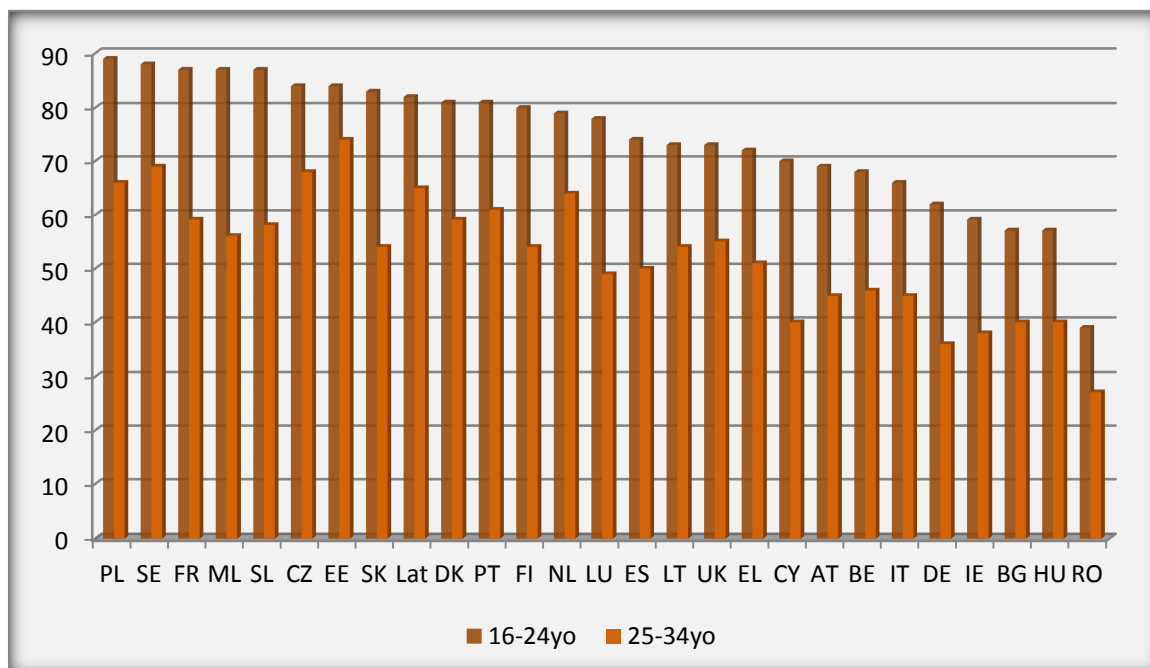
Differences between young people's social media use ('advanced communication services' in the table above and 'posting messages to social media sites or instant messaging' in figure below) and the general population are stark. Social media use is particularly high (>80%) amongst 16-24yo in Scandinavian countries, most Baltic republics, in East-European countries such as Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic and in Malta and France. Germany, Ireland and East-European countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania show relatively speaking low figures of social media use. As mentioned earlier use of social media drops considerably in most countries for the age group 25-34yo.

Differences between different generations of young people are also significant, with the youngest generation most eager in the take-up of social media. Besides this, there also seem to be some cultural and generational patterns that influence the uptake of certain social media. For example, during the focus groups in France it emerged that while almost all young participants are active on Facebook, this is much less the case for Twitter ('Active' focus group, f2f, France, 2012). Similar statements were made in Finland where Twitter is also not very popular amongst young people:

'I use [Twitter] really little, Twitter is not popular in Finland, and people are not fond of it, it seems like some celebrities use it in the USA, but the teenagers don't really use it...' ('Reference' focus group, f2f, Finland, 2012)

But this does not apply to all cultural and political contexts. In Austria, for example, more politically active young people do seem to use Twitter quite actively: 'As an information medium, where you get your news from, I think Twitter is better because it's more concentrated because there is also a lot of trash on Facebook' ('Active' focus group, f2f, Austria, 2012).

**Figure 5.6:** Posting messages to social media sites or instant messaging



**Source:** EACEA Youth Participation in Democratic Life, based on Eurostat Information Society Survey 2010

Our survey provided us with some useful additional information on social media usage, which should be born in mind when considering the best ways of developing potential youth participation or interaction with political system using new media. Firstly, we find that overall 86.9% of our respondents claim to make at least some occasional use of social media. In terms of the specific media used, Facebook is largely ahead, followed by blogs and Twitter, even though in practice, a large majority of politicians prefer to use Twitter and blogs rather than Facebook. This concurs with survey results of EU Kids Online, which showed that about 80% of 15-16yo have a profile on a social networking site. It is most popular in countries such as the Netherlands, Lithuania and Denmark, and least popular in Romania, Turkey and surprisingly Germany (Livingstone, et al., 2011: 36).

Secondly, our survey also finds that politicians and journalists – who represent the main 'channels' to political participation, suffer a major deficit of interest on the part of social media using young people as compared not only to friends and family members but also to broadly conceived entertainment celebrities. Only 14.1% claim to have ever used social media to follow politicians and 17.6% journalists, which is far less than sports people, TV celebrities, actors, and singers. Friends and family members are vastly more followed by young people.



**Table 5.4:** Social Media Use in 7 EU countries (aggregated)

Which social media?		Which people?	
Facebook	78.0%	Friends	71.9
Blogs	29.8%	Family members	59.6
Twitter	25.4%	Singers/Musicians	39.8
Bebo	9.0%	Actors	26.4
		TV celebrities	23.9
		Sports(wo)men	23.7
		Politicians	17.6
		Journalists	14.1
		Others	31.8
<b>OVERALL</b>	<b>86.9%</b>	<b>OVERALL</b>	<b>86.9%</b>

**Source:** EACEA Youth Participation in Democratic Life Survey, 2011-2012

Thirdly, in terms of the impact of income, we find that while overall usage of social media is not related to family income in a statistically significant way, which new media are being used is. In particular, youth from less wealthy backgrounds are more likely to use Facebook and other social media (correlations of 0.04 and 0.06 respectively) while youth from wealthier backgrounds are more likely to use Twitter and Bebo (0.07 and 0.03 respectively). Which channels of social media interaction are chosen could therefore impact which young people are predominantly reached.

It has to be pointed out in this regard that recent studies also point to the risks and potential harm linked to social networking sites and the internet more broadly. This refers mainly to privacy issues, pornography, bullying and grooming (Livingstone, et al., 2011).

### 5.33 Online platforms and participation in democratic life

The internet is by no means a quick fix to democracy. Despite this, the interactive features and open nature of the internet does provide ample opportunities for young people to engage and participate in democratic life. While it might not be suited for the construction of Habermassian deliberative spaces, as outlined above, internet-mediation has the potential of bringing more citizens into the fray, often passionately engaging in public debates and mobilising with the intention of affecting policy. Dahlgren (2005: 158) speaks in this regard of the development of online civic cultures and argues that they 'promote the functioning of democracy, they can serve to empower or disempower citizens, yet like all domains of culture, they can easily be affected by political and economic power'.

Indeed, the internet is by no means only a saviour and young people are acutely aware of this as one participant of a focus group illustrates: 'the danger [of Twitter] is that it can be completely false, so you've got to be good at reading it. Social networking helps us be more skeptical too. We learn not to trust it all and that's good' ('Reference' focus group, f2f, UK, 2012). It seems that issues regarding the reliability of information online requires young people to be ever more vigilant and check several sources, which was emphasised by several young people in the focus groups.

Besides a source of information, the internet and especially social media is increasingly instrumental in terms of mobilising for action, this was especially highlighted by Spanish participants to the focus groups: 'I think that internet is doing a good work as a way to call political actions. It is informing and organising people. Through Twitter or Facebook you can monitor protests first hand' ('Reference' focus group, f2f, Spain, 2012). Also in Hungary participants to the focus groups stressed the importance of the internet in relation to mobilisation: '[the internet] plays a big role because it reaches people the mainstream media doesn't. And because you get your invites from your acquaintances, and you see their activities, it's more personal' ('Active' focus group, f2f, Hungary, 2012). Similarly, in France

more politically active young participants to the focus group acknowledge the power of digital technology and the internet in their mobilisation efforts: 'For example, this morning we had street interviews, and we are going to make a video with it and post it on our website.' ('Active' focus group, f2f, France, 2012).

However, as already indicated above some participants to the focus groups are also acutely aware of the limitations of social media in terms of participating in democratic life, especially issues around 'opinion reinforcement', but also the fact that those active online tend to be those that are already active offline:

'Despite the good aspects I think the Facebook balloon has already popped. It's already obvious that after a while it becomes just as closed a system. You get the input from your acquaintances, your stuff reaches your acquaintances, after a while you ban those with whom you disagree or you're banned.' ('Active' focus group, f2f, Hungary, 2012)

'The thing is that as Facebook is a closed network, information only circulates between friends.' ('Active' focus group, f2f, France, 2012)

'The ones following blogs of politicians are the ones who already know about issues, or those who like those politicians. Some of them also talk language that is difficult to understand.' ('Excluded' focus group, f2f, Finland, 2012)

A participant in a focus group of 'Excluded' youth in Austria also pointed out that there are risks involved when engaging online through social networking sites (see also Livingstone and Haddon, 2008). Very often young people do not know the people they befriend personally and some acknowledge this can be quite dangerous; 'Through Facebook, you also get to know wrong friends' ('Excluded' focus group, f2f, Austria, 2012).

Research into young people's experiences and usages of online platforms to engage in policymaking or with policymakers is mixed. One study of three Australian cases of internet mediated participation initiated by young people concludes that 'young people connect and form on-line and off-line communities in complex and myriad ways' (Vromen, 2008: 94). This study as well as much of the data gathered for this report contradicts the all too common perceptions of apathy and cynicism amongst young people.

At the same time, the use of new media in policy contexts also runs the risk of being disconnected from the actual decision-making and from processes of learning about democracy. One board member of the European Youth Forum claims in this regard that

'While Facebook, Twitter, etc. have a role in getting messages out, I believe that they are overestimated in their impact or usefulness. If they do not also go hand in hand with an educational approach (particular non-formal learning) then it is no use and therefore the Commission should not waste its time with new media directly but support youth organisations engaging in new media.' (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012)

To avoid the risk of engendering forms of fake participation, online platforms must be part of a broader process that also situates itself offline and is embedded in forms of deliberative decision making – 'social media should not be an end in itself' (Email interview, representative of Dutch Youth Council, 26/01/12). The Austrian representative of the Austrian Youth Council echoes this view when she states that social media and Web 2.0 applications 'won't replace everything that was there before and they are not the new marvel, but it's additional'. In other words, there needs to be a clear connection to what is happening in the offline world and embedded in values such as reciprocity and genuine dialogue. In their feedback, the European Youth Forum also pointed to this when assessing the usefulness of new media in policy processes. They argue that online tools should not replace active participation but rather they should be geared towards an interactive and interpersonal two-way process:

**'The application of a variety of online tools may enhance, but does not replace the active participation of young people in the offline world.** The European Youth Forum believes that fostering online deliberation, in addition to “click participation” – so as to move from primarily passive consumption and entertainment to interactive and interpersonal e-communication – is essential. Online media that facilitates **a two way process of information sharing** is more likely to promote the active political participation of young people.' (Email communication, 8/02/12 – emphasis in original)

Many young people active in policy processes emphasise the crucial importance of making use of the interactive features of the internet rather than just using it as a means to push information – they not only want a voice, but they also want to be listened to. For some it is even a pre-condition as this statement by somebody from the Lithuanian Youth Council active in the Structured Dialogue attests: 'if done interactively, social media can be a way to promote volunteering, non-formal education and reach many non-organised youngsters' (Email interview, 10/02/12).

Regarding the latter, it still needs to be taken into account that for some the digital divide remains a constraining factor when using new media. As pointed out above (5.3.1) this is a more pressing issue for some EU countries than others. As such, a representative from the youth division of the Greek Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs stresses that 'special attention should be given to those young people who do not have access to new media' (Email interview, 14/02/12).

**Case-study 5.2** (see Banaji, 2011)

*Muslim Youth.net* was started in 2002 and grew out of the *Muslim Youth Helpline* which was initiated in 2001 by a single young person, Mohammad Syed Mamdani. Concern at rising levels of aggression from police and White youth across the UK in the wake of September 11 2001 meant that the site was popular from the outset. *Muslim Youth.Net* (henceforward *MuslimYouth*) is now an independent charity run by trustees, a dedicated youth team and around 70 diverse young volunteers working between three and eight hours a week on the site and the helpline. A team of half a dozen young part-time and full-time paid staff update content on the site, run off-line projects and look after its day-to-day functioning. This is funded by grant applications to local charitable trusts and to official bodies – for instance, the Department for Education or the national lottery’s Camelot foundation. Volunteers hail from different communities of Asian, African, American and European descent, from Sunni, Shia and Sufi backgrounds and are of different ages and genders. A selection of volunteers interviewed in 2009 confirmed producers’ comments about ethos and address. The site’s offline work includes the telephone *Helpline* and outreach programmes encouraging voting in UK National and local elections and one aiming to support and educate young Muslim prisoners and their families about the challenges of community reintegration after imprisonment. Online activities include a large array of relatively busy forums, with topical political, social and cultural issues debated within them. According to the producers interviewed in 2007, the site had over 3000 registered users. The most active participants in the forums have each posted several thousand times since the forums were launched.

*MuslimYouth.Net* states that it aims to provide young people who identify as Muslim in the UK with information about contemporary social issues and the potential for engaging in social support and debate both within and outside their communities. Interviews with the producers and volunteers of this site suggest that children as young as eleven years old, read, contribute to and moderate content. This lends the site an interesting heterogeneity of language. The website’s editorialised spaces show different strategies in attempting to inform and engage the young people they target. The strategy for motivating young people to return to the site involves getting them to write about their personal, civic and cultural concerns in articles that are published on the site. The forums are ‘self-moderated’ by the heaviest users: young people, broadly of Muslim heritage, but with a diverse set of beliefs and attitudes towards religion, identity, politics and civil society. The tone of the editorialised areas on the website is serious but conversational, deliberately highlighting the differences between young users of the site. The fact that swearwords and text language is allowed on the site means that when reading some of the posts the ‘voices’ of the writers may be felt more clearly than they are on sites with a parent organisation’s identity to protect. Yet, interestingly, despite clear differences of opinion, there is usually little flaming evident. The statement about swearing which is quoted, appears via its vocabulary – ‘barriers’, ‘palatable’ – to be intended for an audience of adults, even potential funders, rather than only young users. While this epitomises the site’s concern with safeguarding the rights of its users, rather than showcasing their adult civiness, there is always a danger in feeling that one has to explain one’s reasons to adult civic authorities.

## Conclusions

Face-to-face contact is the best method of democratic political engagement and encouragement

A lack of interest in institutional politics and traditional political news is higher amongst young people than amongst the general population, and this is especially the case for the 16-24yo. In some countries, such as the UK, Ireland and Hungary the number of young people between 16-24yo who never follow politics is particularly high (>15%). However, young people tend to be high consumers of news online, but this does not necessarily refer to news about politics, on the contrary.

There seems to be a shift in media consumption amongst young people from traditional media to new media. Both newspapers and broadcasting media have difficulties attracting young audiences. Because of this, many public service broadcasters have ceased producing targeted content for the age category 13-25yo. Some are trying to compensate this by developing online platforms, but the main problem in this regard seems to be that this particular age-group is more attracted to content produced for adults.

Another issue that is of concern is the high level of distrust amongst young people regarding the mainstream media, although public service broadcasters are trusted more than commercial broadcasters in some countries. However, the younger generation distrusts the media as much as the general population does. This is in line with a general tendency of distrust towards institutions (the EU seems to be an exception in this regard in most countries<sup>23</sup>). Given the media's crucial mediating role in a democracy this is deemed highly problematic and regaining that trust should be a daily concern for journalists and media organisations.

As discussed in Section 4 of this report as well as this section, community radio stations and youth media projects provide examples of some of the most innovative, diverse and fresh participation with young people. Community media has thus been identified as a best practice to involve young people in democratic life through producing their own media, learning (media) skills in a non-formal context, collaborating with others, and taking responsibility. They are often staffed by young people and often provide training and skills. There is also evidence that voluntary participation in community media has a beneficial effect on future job prospects for young people. Multiplatform media with radio and online incarnations work particularly well when combined with social agendas around drug education, culture, inclusion or simply asking difficult civic questions.

They must be funded by localities, and not left to fend for themselves on a neoliberal economic model where the size of the audience make or break a station. However, despite support from the European institutions for community media, the regulatory framework for community media (especially relevant for radio) and mechanisms for support of these media are still lacking in many EU countries, which impacts negatively on the sustainability of these participatory media initiatives.

As pointed out above, new and social media are clearly used abundantly by young people across Europe, although digital and skills divides still occur. Education and socio-

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<sup>23</sup> Trust in the EU tends to be higher than trust in national democratic institutions or the media, and this is especially the case amongst young EU citizens. In most EU member states more than 50% of the young population from 17-30yo exhibit high levels of trust vis-à-vis the EU (cf. re-analysis of ESS, 2008 wave)

demographic background still play a pivotal role in determining whether somebody has access to the internet or not. Divides in terms of access tend to widen once young people leave school. Also the lower the overall penetration rate of the internet the greater the discrepancy of access between young people from poorer backgrounds and the total cohort of young people. It is furthermore widely accepted that access on its own is not enough.

Other divides at the level of digital literacy skills also exist. Being able to operate a computer or navigate through the internet, critically assess the quality of information found, etc. is an increasingly important pre-condition to being a critical and active citizen in a networked environment. At the level of computer and internet skills, gender differences occur too, but educational attainment also influences skill level considerably.

In this regard, media and digital literacies are being advocated by many as important skills to survive in the information and knowledge society and economy. Besides this, it has to be taken into account that a too exclusive focus on online platforms for the dissemination of information or raising awareness runs the risk of excluding the most vulnerable amongst young people. This is particularly poignant for vulnerable young people that are not in education anymore. Hence, to reach this difficult cohort a mixed media approach is needed.

In relation to new media, most of our participants in *activist* focus groups and stakeholder interviews held the view that new media and social media can be a very useful additional tool to connect and inform some young people and to get messages across to political cadres and even to politicians and municipal officials. Institutionally and organisationally, social media and the internet have enabled many good things, such as individual information seeking, cross-checking of news and communication on intranets between organisations and members. However, there are still many very traditional uses in organisations and many excluded young people (See Section 6 in this report) who do not have the kind of access which enables creativity and innovation to succeed.

It also has to be noted that internet-based political engagement holds an inherent danger, namely that of opinion reinforcement or what some call the fragmentation of the online environment. This phenomenon is characterised by internet users locking themselves up into ideological silos where they are not confronted anymore with opinions and ideas that are different from theirs, one of the pluralist prerequisites of an open and democratic society. Besides this, at a more general level young people also need to be made aware about the risks and potential harm associated with the internet in terms of privacy issues, explicit sexual images, online bullying and being approached by strangers online.

Finally, the use of new media in terms of policy processes, for example to consult young people, is deemed as a good way to reach a more diverse and especially unorganised group of young people. It should be noted, however, that there should be a clear link between what happens online and the offline political process. Young people appreciate that they can voice their opinion, but are also often frustrated that they are not being listened to. Online consultations can easily give the impression of being participatory while in reality they are a form of tokenism.

In order to avoid even more disenchantment, more efforts should be made to provide feedback to young people about their online participation in consultations, as well as make the linkages between the online process and the offline political process more explicit. Furthermore, it should also be taken into account that because of digital and skills divides some young people, especially the vulnerable, are not reached through online platforms.

It also has to be pointed out that 96% of our sample of 180 stakeholders and young people consulted for the project – insisted that face-to-face contact is the BEST method of democratic political engagement and encouragement. New media tools are not seen in and of themselves to be creative or to promote creative participation. They cannot be a



replacement for real face-to-face action and engagement or even for old media, we were told unequivocally.

All of these insights can be seen as turning on the following models of best practice in relation to media, youth and democratic participation:

- Policies aimed to eradicate the digital access and skills divides between youth – and increase free public access to the internet beyond the school classroom
- The engagement of young people neither as victims nor as perpetrators of violent or uncivic behaviour in mainstream media
- The monitoring by researchers and the correction of news media biases and generalisations about young people which lead to stereotyping and exclusion
- Youth media clubs run by public bodies
- Recruitment and retention of young media producers from a diversity of backgrounds
- Public funding for community media outlets, channels, community radio and alternative newspapers
- Legal and political oversight of free newspapers to correct racist, sexist and anti-immigrant biases since these are now the highest read news sources amongst young people of diverse backgrounds
- Funding for media training for young people in schools and the partnership of schools with local public service media outlets in the making of programmes for the young
- Politicians' surgeries with youth in face-to-face and online social media formats which have actual politicians connecting rather than a private secretary or PA
- Digital and media literacy classes in schools across the EU27 rather than just computer science
- Participation projects which combine old and new media rather than fetishising new media as if everyone has access or interest

**Policy Recommendations for Theme 5:**

Provide support for media productions aimed at young people in the age category 13-19 years old.

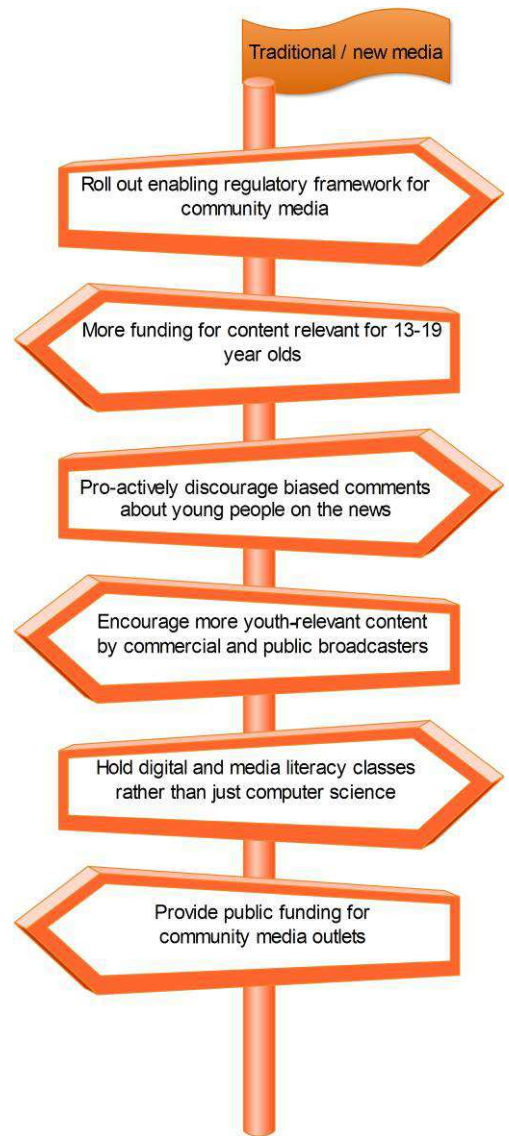
Since community media fulfill an important democratic role in local communities they should be guaranteed funding by localities so as to safeguard their sustainability.

An enabling and supportive regulatory framework for community media, which should stimulate community media development, is also recommended.

It is imperative that measures to increase free and equal access to the internet for excluded youth as well as computer and internet skills sessions are continued.

Policies to increase media literacies amongst young people and to increase education about the risks of being online and of social media should be put into practice.

Online platforms can facilitate the participation of young people in democratic life, but should be designed making full use of the interactive potential of the internet and ideally have a connection with the offline world.



## THEME 6: YOUTH EXCLUSION AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Policies to reduce exclusion can play a significant role in the lives of marginalised or at-risk youth populations.

Youth inclusion in democratic and economic life has long been linked in policy and research literatures. Following a policy conference summing up the links between youth exclusion at economic, social and civic levels and looking towards solutions, Colley, Hoskins, Parveva and Boetzelen note, however, that:

‘Despite more than a decade of policy attention to the problem of social exclusion, polarisation between the life-chances of different groups of young people is increasing. It is spatially concentrated in some regions and neighbourhoods, linked to social class. It is also racialised, gendered and related to other inequalities such as disability. Some young people in Europe feel unable to influence mainstream political processes, and withdraw from conventional political participation.’ (*Social inclusion and young people*. Report of a research seminar 31 October-2 November, 2005. Council of Europe & European Commission Youth Research Partnership 2005: 3)

Seven years on, we write this report at a time of further growing economic uncertainty across Europe. This is both threatening to exclude vulnerable groups of people further from democratic life by making transitions to employment or secure housing more difficult, and also, paradoxically perhaps, bringing some excluded groups of young people onto the streets and to the ballot box in acts of political protest. In this context, we focus on *exclusion* – a phenomenon affecting whole communities rather than individuals – as something that is distinct from voluntary isolation. Drawing on document analysis, our review of the research literature, focus groups with ‘active’, ‘reference’ and ‘excluded’ groups and on the interviews with 77 committed stakeholders in the field of youth participation, we maintain that economic and political exclusion is never chosen voluntarily but results from social, political and economic circumstances. In the words of the ‘EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering: A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities’:

Society needs to show solidarity towards youth, particularly those who are disadvantaged.... Exclusion may be caused by unemployment, disability, societal and individuals' attitudes towards migration, discrimination, physical and/or mental health, addictive behaviour, abuse, family violence and criminal record. It may also lead to radicalisation and violence. (2009: 9)

In this definition, social exclusion is linked to social justice, and a refusal to combat social injustice is tantamount to maintaining an ongoing injustice. Although the word ‘radicalisation’ is not defined here and its ideological connotations left oblique, there is a clear implication that it is not a desirable normative good and should if possible be prevented. Further, showing the key relationship between policies and social inclusion, Kutsar and Helve (2010) content that:

‘Even if [young people from at-risk families] have ambitious goals concerning education or professional life, as research has revealed, they can only achieve these (if at all) in the face of significant odds, because of **fewer opportunities, more limited access** and **more fragile solidarity** in the relationships between these

young people, in comparison with the general youth population, and the wider society. Their career prospects will usually remain lower than that of the general youth population if their special transitional needs continue to be politically neglected (and more robust political attention will be best encouraged through credible academic research and appropriate statistically monitoring). **There is considerable evidence to suggest that the life chances of youth with disadvantaged backgrounds are primarily dependent on the policy context** (welfare policy approaches in general, and employment, education, housing and other policy measures in particular) of the country where those young people live.' (2010: 3, emphasis in original)

These are neither arbitrary assumptions nor ideologically motivated recommendations. The authors reach these conclusions about the importance of policy for this group of young people having conducted a thoroughgoing policy review in relation to young people and social exclusion with a view to including more young people in education, housing, employment and democratic life. We will see in the following sections that evidence from practice revealed by stakeholders and young people confirms and enhances our understanding of the significant role that policies to reduce exclusion can play in the lives of marginalised or at-risk youth populations.

Exclusion, can, of course, also be practiced knowingly or unknowingly by citizens in positions of economic and political power towards other groups of citizens. This can be exemplified most obviously in our stakeholder interview with an elected representative of the far right party in Hungary who stated:

'The other thing is that democracy presupposes universal suffrage, and we partly disagree with this. This topic is taboo, but if you think about it, you can see that it's not right that people who couldn't even finish 8 grades make decisions about the country. People who can't even keep their own life in order, who are completely uninformed and easily misled. And unfortunately there are a lot of people like this. So we think there should be a line in the sand. Not on a very high level, but let's say that the right to vote is conditioned upon finishing 8 grades.' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Hungary, 2012)

Here someone who has been elected wishes to restrict the rights of other groups to vote based on their level of education, thus excluding them substantively from the public sphere. While this is an extreme case, we suggest, focus group interviews indicate that some young people already feel excluded from electoral participation since they are required to work and pay as adults before 18 but cannot vote. In several EU countries migrants too are required to pay taxes without having voting rights. Overall, the research literature in conjunction with our focus groups and expert stakeholder interviews emphasise that the most common ways in which people are *actively excluded* has to do with the barriers and thresholds for participation in terms of skills, language, knowledge and ethos. For example the EU funded YiPEE project (2008-2010) found that:

'Young people who were looked after by the state as children are particularly likely to be disadvantaged, first by the circumstances of their childhood and second by their experiences in state care. This disadvantage is acutely visible in comparison with all young people at the stage of tertiary education.' (YiPEE, policy brief: 1.)

Exclusion is therefore both a **social state** – 'to be socially/politically excluded' – as well as a **set of practices**.

Unquestionably, exclusion in terms of employment, low education, lack of adequate training and risks related to poverty are recognised factors by the EU in themselves. In relation to Education and Training, a Council Resolution of 27 November 2009(b) suggests the policy aim:

‘Equal access for young people to high quality education and training at all levels and opportunities for lifelong learning should be supported. As a complement to formal education, non-formal learning for young people should be promoted and recognised, and better links between formal education and non-formal learning developed. Young people’s transition between education and training and the labour market should be facilitated and supported, and early school leaving reduced.’ (2009b: 14)

‘We're too small to have a say in politics’

These factors are also intrinsically linked to participation in democratic life in a variety of ways. Participation in the democratic life of a society implies inclusion into a society. This was a message we heard repeatedly in all our focus groups with ‘active’, ‘reference’ and ‘excluded’ focus groups in all six countries:

‘Young people to an extent are excluded. **Poor young people** and **people who don’t agree with the authorities** basically.’

‘Excluded are those who **are poor**. Not just poor but homeless. They’re overlooked for sure.’

‘**Travellers** are excluded and people waiting for a visa – ones who haven’t got their immigration sorted yet. **People coming from other countries waiting** for their visa.’

(‘Active’ focus group, f2f, UK, 2012, emphasis added)

‘**Immigrants** like my parents don’t know how the system works. They can’t be involved ‘cause they don’t know how it works really.’

(‘Active’ focus group, f2f, UK, 2012, emphasis added)

‘**People with no or less education** have less say or possibilities to participate in our society’

(‘Reference’ youth focus group, f2f, Austria, 2012, emphasis added)

X2: **Poor young people** [are excluded].

X3: Rich young people right, their dads are part of the cabinet.... So they learn from that. They’re brought up that way.....

(‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, UK 2012, emphasis added]

X1: I don't care about [politics].

X2: My life won't be better just because something works in politics.

X3: The **poor man is excluded**...

X4: We're too small to have a say in politics.

X3: Politicians think about only themselves, they don't spare a thought **for the poor**. They don't ask the poor, “have you eaten anything today?”

(‘Excluded’ homeless focus group, f2f, Hungary, 2012, emphasis added)

Young immigrants, those on low wages, the poor, those in debt, those with low educational attainment, those with no fixed homes, travelers, immigrants and those with divergent views are identified across the different focus groups as suffering from a lack of opportunity to participate in democratic life. While such assertions spring from the life experiences of the young people interviewed, they are supported by research carried out on dozens of European projects from the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme in diverse EU countries and with different cohorts of young people, notably:

- **YiPPEE:** 'Young People from a Public Care Background: pathways to education in Europe'. (UK, DK, HU, SE, SP).
- **CSEYHP:** 'Combating Social Exclusion among Young Homeless Populations: a comparative investigation of homeless paths among local white, local ethnic groups and migrant young men and women, and appropriate reinsertion methods'. (UK, PT, CZ, NL).
- **EUMARGINS:** 'On the Margins of the European Community – Young adult immigrants in seven European countries' (NO, SE, UK, SP, EE, FR, IT).
- **EDUMIGROM:** 'Ethnic differences in education and diverging prospects for urban youth in an enlarged Europe' (HU, CZ, DK, FR, DE, RO, SK, SE, UK).
- **YOUNEX:** 'Youth, Unemployment, and Exclusion in Europe: A multidimensional approach to understanding the conditions and prospects for social and political integration of young unemployed'. (CH, DE, IT, FR, SE, PL, PT).

All of these projects explicitly note the connections between employment, social stability and political or civic participation, drawing attention to the ways in which higher levels of education and employment can lead to greater chances of civic and political participation, while greater opportunities to participate in civic and political life can result in the skills and opportunities to join citizen networks, to volunteer for a cause and to find employment.

Some of the young people we interviewed also call attention to the connections between political consciousness and social experience, another focus group participant reports:

'There are many in my centre who are **heavily in debt**. When you haven't got anything, no resources, you just accumulate debts. You know that when you are going to work, the first months you are only going to give it all away to pay these debts. This is something you didn't want. **And obviously you immediately have a grudge against the president because that's him who manages everything**. Finally I see that, I would not relate all my problems with the president but he and his government have to move and become aware of our real problems.'

(‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, France, 2012, emphasis added)

Re-emphasising the findings of the European funded research projects named above, an academic stakeholder goes further in drawing a link between the frustration of ‘excluded’ young people who do not feel that their voices are heard and their concerns represented and the political violence which has been seen during riots in recent years.

'[...] I have to say that you have to look how young people can find their voice. Because if they are **already excluded from society**, do not have a job, do not go to school, cannot consume, if they are not part of the way society is constructed, then how should they be able to participate politically. [...] Of course it is not right to burn down cars, but this is the background of such actions. Youths in the *banlieues* of Paris or in England [referring to the riots in 2011] simply do not have any other way to show their discontent with their living conditions and the current political and societal structures.'

(Stakeholder interview, f2f, Austria, 2012, emphasis added)

The coincidence between the academic and policy definitions of exclusion, and those of the young people above is notable. Social (educational and employment) exclusion is evidently a precursor to continued political exclusion and non-participation. Triangulation with existing statistical studies of education and exclusion, for instance, supports this by revealing that:

'Highly-educated respondents, in general, are more involved in political life than respondents with a lower educational attainment. Respondents who completed their full-time education after the age of 20 are the most likely to report having taken any of the listed five political actions in the last year, while those who did not study beyond the age



of 16 are the least likely to report being politically active in the past year.' (Flash Eurobarometer No 202 – Youth Survey, 2007: 49).

Furthermore, the young people in our focus groups call attention to another group of youth who may be or may feel excluded from democratic life: 'those who do not agree with the authorities' and this is a clear distinction from those who are economically disadvantaged.

In previous sections we have drawn attention to EU policy documents and examples of non-governmental civic and social programmes designed to provide excluded citizens with the tools and help them to use the opportunities to better their social circumstances. However, as one expert stakeholder expresses it, in terms of democratic participation, even these initiatives are only reaching a point where young people are 'Proto-political' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, France, 2012), it is not addressing the issue of *how to include socially vulnerable youth in the political sphere in a sustained manner*. In this sense, including young people who have been excluded from social and civic life through lack of education, illness, unstable home background, lack of finance or lack of social capital is not so simple as just ensuring that their basic needs are met. The meeting of basic needs is a first step towards the same types of inclusion we discuss in relation to all other groups of young people; it does not guarantee either political or civic inclusion.

The assumption that excluded young people are so busy thinking about how to deal with issues for themselves that they do not give any thought to political processes or to social outcomes for others can disempower them further. Indeed, as discussed in section 4 it appears that young EU citizens (15-30 year olds) not in employment engage more frequently in volunteering activities than those that are in employment – 17% of unemployed are active in volunteering compared to 14% of employees and 9% of manual workers (Flash Eurobarometer No 202 – Youth Survey, 2007: 98).

Therefore in terms of the connections between youth exclusion and participation or non-participation in democratic life a number of issues are of importance. First, in this section we will address broad EU-wide findings about young people who are not in education, employment or training, and link this to specific data collected by us in focus groups and stakeholder interviews on excluded youth, their experiences of democracy, values and concerns in Austria, Finland, France, Hungary, Spain and the UK. Second, we will address the day-to-day risks young people run when living in poverty in connection to their social needs, political consciousness and political demands as expressed in focus groups and testified by other youth researchers interviewed. Finally, we will point to the significance of civic action and/or political activism amongst excluded youth as an enabler to a) greater social and economic inclusion and b) sustained democratic participation.

## 6.1 YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE EU

While unemployment came up as a key political concern in almost all of the focus groups, it was raised as an important issue especially in the ‘reference’ focus groups and by every single one of the young people in the ‘excluded’ focus groups.

**Table 6.1:** EACEA/EC Focus group comparison by category and country of political issues which most concern young people

	France 'Active'	Spain 'Active'	Finland 'Active'	Austria 'Active'	U.K. 'Active'	Hungary 'Active'
Concerns	Racial discrimination and existence of "Front National". <b>Jobs.</b> Education cuts. Lack of political education for young.	Education Cuts. Exclusion of young from democratic system. Health cuts. Conservation of Catalan culture.	Human rights. Environment. Education. Globalisation. Social inequality. Gender. ACTA. The Arts. <b>Jobs.</b>	Party politics. Economy. Education. Gender inequalities. Human rights. Religion. Children's rights. Economy.	University fees. Debt and the global economy. State of the planet. Unemployment. Immigration. Crime. Widening rich/poor split. ACTA.	Apathy of contemporaries. Want to leave Hungary. Politicians don't represent the people.
	France 'Excluded'	Spain 'Excluded'	Finland 'Excluded'	Austria 'Excluded'	U.K. 'Excluded'	Hungary 'Excluded'
Concerns	Homelessness. Extreme right politics. Accommodation advice. Health. <b>Job training.</b> Social assistance. <b>Unemployment.</b>	Lack of opportunities for young. Economic crisis. Social inequalities and being able to talk about them. <b>Unemployment.</b>	Health, including mental health. Gender pay-differences. Human rights. <b>Unemployment.</b> Drugs. Terrorism. Globalisation. Economy.	Health. <b>Unemployment.</b> Immigration. Education. Animal rights. Human rights. Austerity package.	Widening division between rich and poor. <b>No jobs.</b> Social class. Exclusion of poor youth. Cost of living. Growing importance of money. Cuts to education. Cuts to health system.	<b>Unemployment</b> Homelessness. Criminalisation of homeless. No one cares for young. Generational divisions. Theft from and among homeless. Treatment of the poor. Wanting to leave Hungary. Hungary will ultimately be for tourists, not Hungarians.
	France 'Average'	Spain 'Average'	Finland 'Average'	Austria 'Average'	U.K. 'Average'	Hungary 'Average'
Concerns	Young not taken seriously. <b>Employment in future.</b> Unsure about the value of their qualifications.	Deep global crisis. Health cuts. Unfair electoral system. Stereotypes of Catalonia. Education cuts. Exclusion of young from democratic system.	Immigration. Environment. Sexual orientation. <b>Unemployment.</b> Drugs. Globalisation. Family. ACTA. Health.	Drugs. <b>Jobs.</b> Peace and religion. Family. Education. Gender inequalities.	Tuition fees. Economics. <b>Unemployment.</b> Sexualisation of the young. ACTA. Consumerism. Racial tensions.	Problems of the poor. Lack of representation of Roma. Politics are 'uncool'. Inferior version of democracy to the "west"

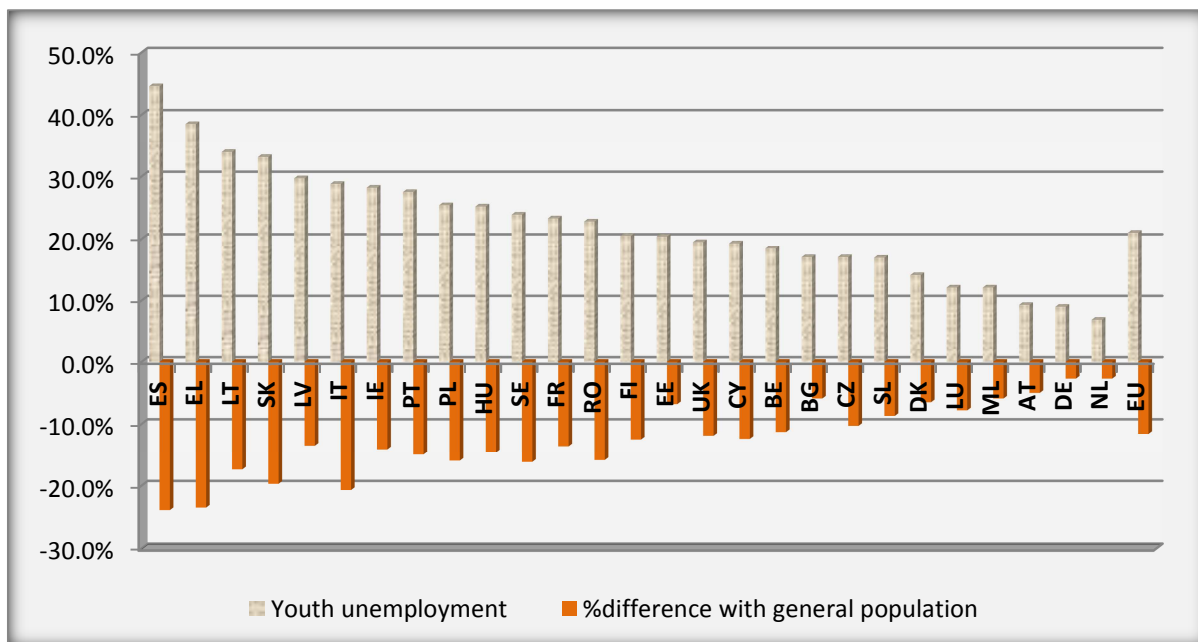
**Source:** Focus groups Thematic Analysis - 'EACEA/EC Youth Participation in Democratic Life' January-March 2012

Youth unemployment refers to those young people from the age of 15-24 who are actively available for the labour market and not in employment. The official ILO definition goes as follows: those who are without work, are available to start work within the next two weeks and have actively sought employment at some time during the previous four weeks. Youth unemployment figures give an indication of the lack of opportunities for young people to enter the labour market.

Although the number of NEETs across Europe has declined in conjunction with young people being moved onto training schemes or doing college courses, youth unemployment in the EU has risen by 5% from about 15% to over 20% over the period 2008-2011; this represents about 1.1 million more unemployed young people across the EU. The situation is most dramatic in Southern Europe, some Baltic republics and Ireland where youth unemployment is not only disproportionately high (above 25%), but the % difference with the unemployment figure of the general population is also high (often above 15% difference). Countries doing particularly well, such as Germany, the Netherlands and Austria (under 10%

youth unemployment), also tend to have more limited differences between youth and overall unemployment. However, across Europe young people are more at risk of being unemployed than the general population.

**Figure 6.1:** Youth Unemployment in Europe (March 2011)



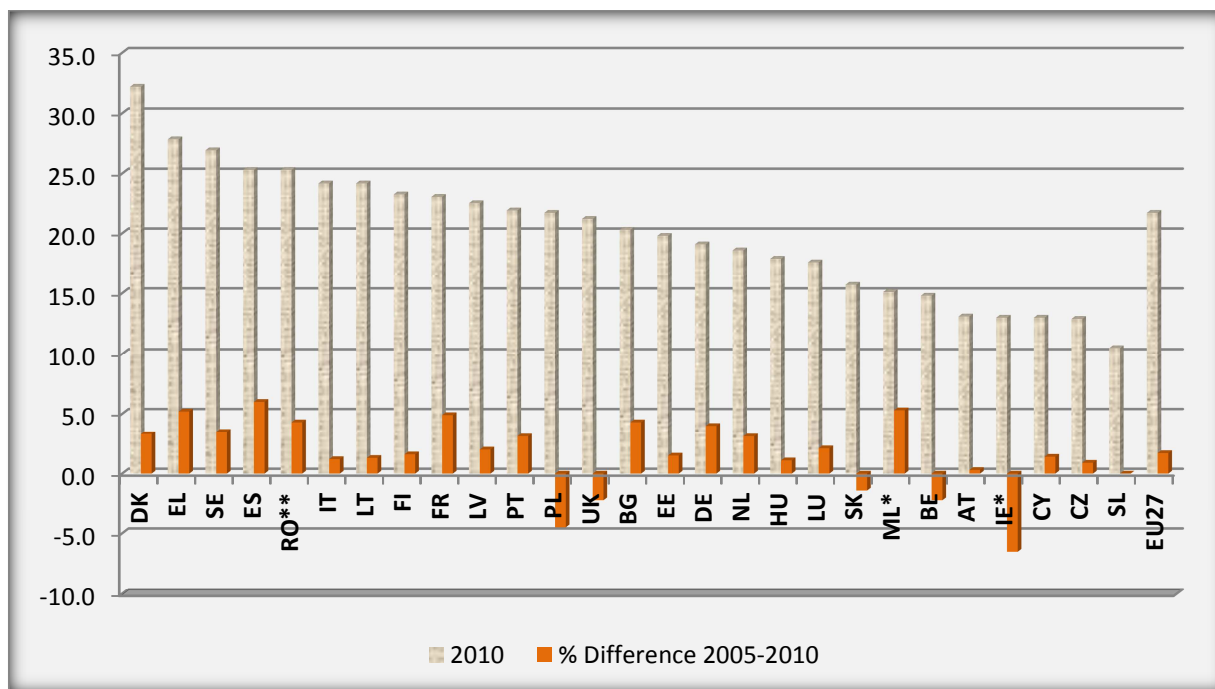
**Source:** EACEA/EC ‘Young people and democratic life’ re-analysis based on EU Employment and Social Situation Quarterly Review, September 2011: 84

Another issue in this regard is the rising level of long-term unemployment amongst 15-24 year olds. The number of long-term unemployed young people has risen by about 3% in the period 2008 to 2011 from 3.5% to 6.2%. This is mainly attributed to the current financial/economic crisis.

## 6.2 YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF POVERTY

Being at risk of poverty refers to those with ‘an equivalised total net income after social transfers below 60% of the national median income’ (Youth in Europe, 2009: 42). **Eurostat data shows that on average more than 20% of young people in the EU between 16-24 years old are at risk of poverty.** The situation also seems to have worsened in most European countries over the last 5 years. In only 6 countries in the EU is the risk of poverty for young people below 15%. Given the legacy of a strong welfare state it is surprising to see such a large proportion of young people at risk of poverty in Scandinavian countries. This might be explained by differences in the way the welfare system operates. In many Scandinavian countries young people are not entitled to any social transfers (i.e. benefits) before they have actually worked and paid contributions to the welfare system.

Figure 6.2: % of young people between 16-24yo at-risk-of-poverty<sup>24</sup>



Source: EACEA/EC ‘Youth Participation in Democratic Life’ re-analysis of Eurostat, 2011 data: ibid. Eurostat, 2011:

[http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/income\\_social\\_inclusion\\_living\\_conditions/data/database](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/income_social_inclusion_living_conditions/data/database)

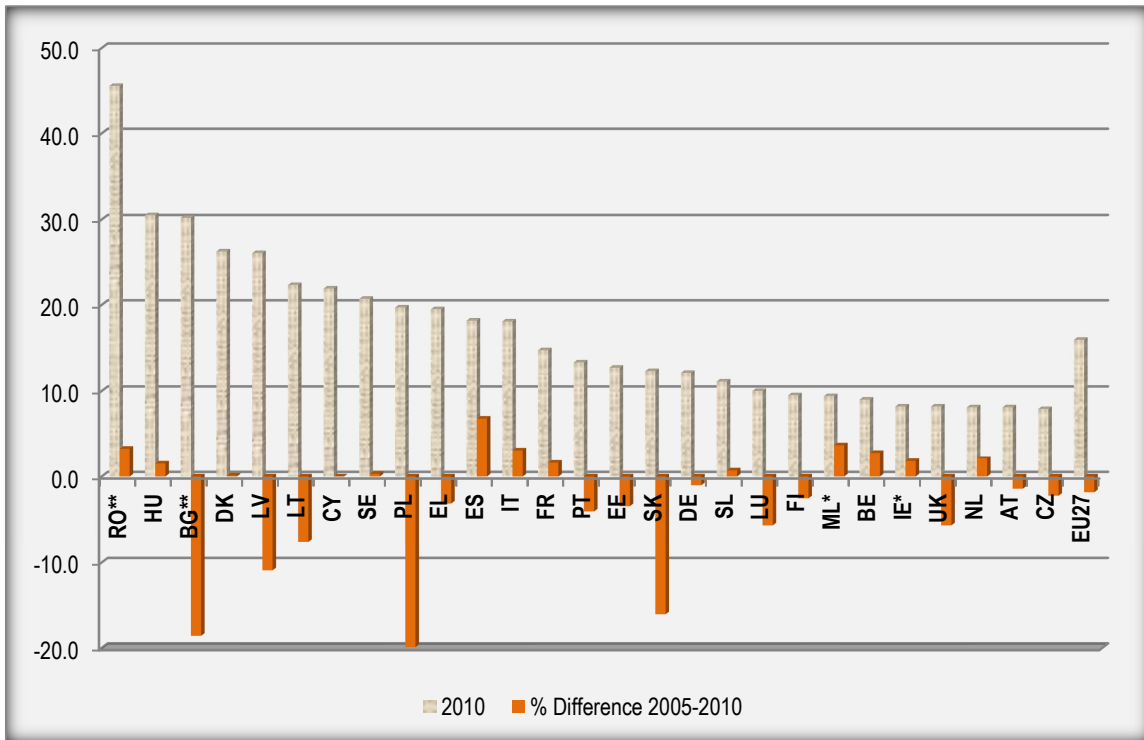
While being in employment greatly reduces the risk of poverty, it seems that even being in employment is not enough in many European countries to avoid poverty. This exposes the often precarious labour conditions young people are faced with – i.e. a lack of full-time permanent jobs, exploitation through internships, low wages, etc. When we consider the difference between the younger generation (18-24 years) and older generations (25-54 years) it becomes apparent that in almost every EU country **the risk of living in poverty whilst working is higher for young people compared to older generations**. On average at an EU aggregate level the difference is relatively low – young people have on average 4% more risk of poverty whilst in employment than older generations. However, in some countries such as Denmark, Sweden, Romania or Hungary the differences are much more significant (>10%).

These figures clearly represent a trend which is expressed both by stakeholders and in focus groups: for young people to be employed in extremely low paid, highly insecure jobs with little relationship to their skill level. In this sense recently migrant youth and youth from working class families are seen as being in the most vulnerable categories and also as vulnerable to failure when they try to apply their skills through entrepreneurship:

'You can find yourself as a Albanian physicist that came to Austria and butters bread 8 hours a day for a pittance. I think that's not the idea. Of course, the idea [social business] is nice.' [Stakeholder interview, community radio programme, Upper Austria.]

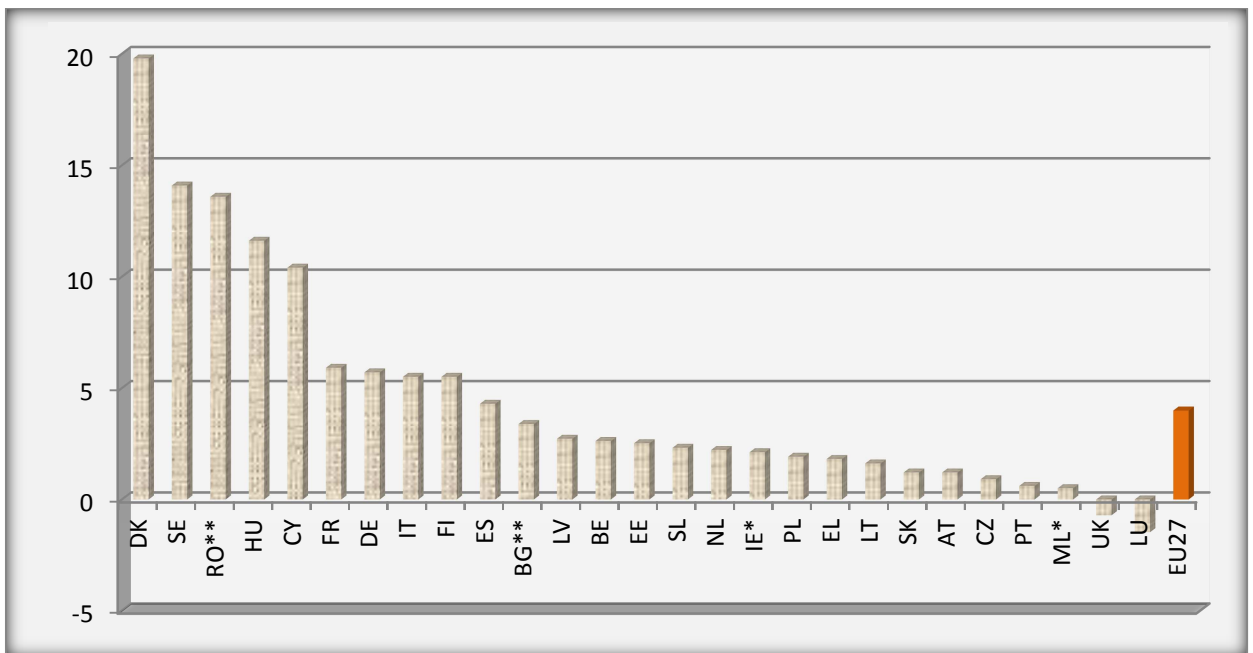
<sup>24</sup> In this and the subsequent two figures countries with (\*) indicate that data from 2009 has been used as there was no data available for 2010; countries with (\*\*) indicate that data from 2006 was used instead of 2005. Data from 2005 (or other years) was also sourced from Eurostat.

**Figure 6.3:** % of young people (18-24yo) at risk of poverty and in employment



**Source:** EACEA/EC 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life' re-analysis of Eurostat, 2011 data: ibid.

**Figure 6.4:** % difference between 18-24yo and 25-54yo in employment and at-risk-of-poverty



**Source:** 'EACEA/EC Youth Participation in Democratic Life' re-analysis of Eurostat, 2011: ibid

Additionally, of course, we were told in focus groups about what politics and the law actually means for those living in abject poverty, in care homes, shelters or on the streets. The meaning of an apparently small change in the law or budget expenditure for some of these young people can be life threatening as demonstrated in this focus group with Roma homeless in Hungary. When asked about what politics means to them, they responded with dismissive expressions such as “yuck”, or “let’s not talk about it”, or more concretely, “the crisis”. Then they proceeded to talk about the laws criminalising homelessness, which they were pretty accurately informed about:

X1: They’re fining the poor man because he sleeps in the street, because he has nowhere to go. He sleeps out in the street. They just caught a guy in the 8<sup>th</sup> district because he fell asleep on a bench, and then they fined him. How will he pay the fine?

X2: They’ll make him work for it.

X3: They passed laws that don’t make any sense... and what would make sense they don’t care about.

X4: Fining a homeless for picking trash? He needs to live on something, no? Giving him a 50,000 HUF fine for dipping into a trash can... this is disgusting.

X5: The poor are being fined, though they can’t pay for it, but those who have money just get more and more.

X6: Yeah the homeless sleep in the street. Not everyone wants to go to a shelter. ... And there’s this man, we know him, and he fell asleep at Keleti [train station], he had nowhere else to go, and the police, they kicked him so bad that the next day...

(‘Excluded’ focus group, f2f, Hungary, 2012)

While it is clear that such high levels of disenchantment with traditional politics and such evident social and economic disenfranchisement are at one end of a spectrum in terms of the young people surveyed and interviewed for this project, it is also the case that the views of such young people are rarely canvassed or taken into account by mainstream politicians in national contexts. It is vital that we do not see these young people as exceptions and therefore ignore their concerns about the spiral of economic exclusion, social exclusion and political disenfranchisement.

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## 6.3 LEAVING SCHOOL EARLY

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Unsurprisingly there exists a strong correlation between educational level and employment or employability. Young people with low educational levels have more chance of being in the excluded youth category and run a higher risk of poverty. Since people living in poverty are at higher risk of exclusion from democratic life, this fact is directly germane to any discussion of young people and participation across the EU. This is also a key finding when linked to the issue of fees and grants on which student organisations across Europe have been campaigning over the past decade.

Our stakeholder interview with the current president of the Austrian National Union of Students confirms the view of other stakeholders active in student councils, youth councils and academia that while the students’ unions are primarily campaigning for those who are university students, the issue of access to higher education and educational trajectories for those from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds is also of significance. This is because of the wider politics of inclusion and exclusion in society through education:

‘When we look at studies of why people drop out of the university, it’s very often because of economic preconditions, a situation where people have to work more and more, where public grants are decreasing [...], **so there are a lot of students that are in a difficult**



**situation and of course it is our job [...] to support them and to change the political framework, so that these people can stay at the university.**

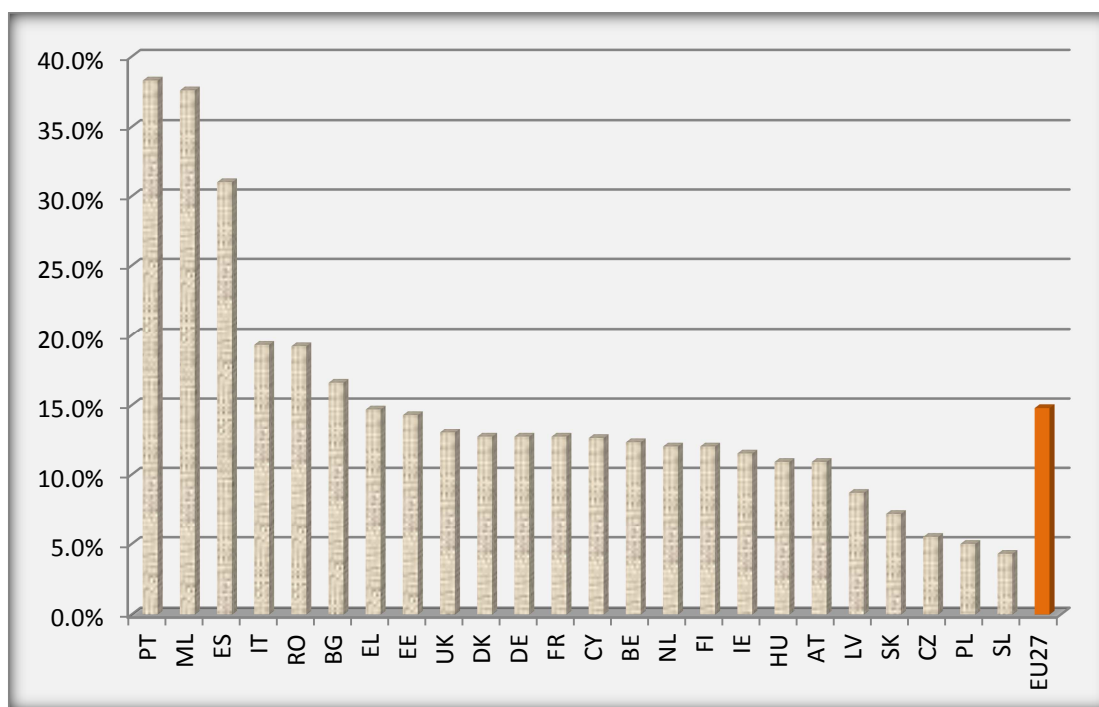
The other group are of course people that don't even make it to the university. That has a lot to do with education politics. **We know that the question if it is likely that somebody will go to university or not is decided at the age of 9 when it is decided whether a child goes to secondary modern school or to grammar school.'**

(Stakeholder interview, f2f, Austria, 2011 – emphasis added)

Like a number of other stakeholders with experiences of the transitions between school and university, this stakeholder challenges the early systemic exclusion of young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds from higher education by highly selective school systems. Selectivity in the educational system applies more to some EU member states than others; also tuition fees vary widely within the EU (for example while a BA costs about 600€/y in Belgium compared to 11.400€/y in the UK).

This raises a few additional issues, first of which is the extent of early school leavers. Although the number of early school leavers has been decreasing consistently over the last decade, young men tend to leave school without or with very low qualifications more often than young women (at the EU level, almost 17% of young men leave school early versus almost 13% of women).

**Figure 6.5:** % of early school leavers across Europe



Source: Youth in Europe, 2009: 94

In addition, according to the EU Framework 7 project Edumigrom: *Ethnic Differences in Education for Urban Youth in an Enlarged Europe*, there are additional risks of educational exclusion leading to employment and democratic exclusion for ethnic minority youth:

'Evidence shows that children of marginalised groups, especially children of poor families of minority ethnic background, are most at risk of educational exclusion. [...] In themselves, educational policies for inclusion are too weak to break the vicious circle produced by poverty, residential separation, labour market segmentation and the group-specific welfare schemes.' (Edumigrom, Policy brief, March 2011 – emphasis added)



*Exclusion in terms of employment, low education, lack of adequate training and various risks related to poverty is intrinsically linked to participation in democratic life*

### Case-study 6.1

**'Génération Précaire' or Precarious Generation** is a French organisation founded in 2005 which fights against what they consider an abusive use of training periods, work placements and internships by businesses, companies and public institutions in relation to young people. Génération Précaire has little or no funding, and use new media to mobilise and communicate among themselves. According to the stakeholder representative of this organisation, interviewed by our project in November 2011, their members are primarily highly educated young people aged between 24 and 30 years old. According to them the unethical employment practices of the businesses, companies and public institutions towards young people lead to an exploitation of young educated people and play a serious role in maintaining the lack of employment and especially in youth unemployment. If young people can be expected to work for free on short insecure contracts, thus saving employers money, why would an employer take on a young person in a secure, well-paid position? This situation also and inevitably leads to putting young people in precarious states of life, with wages way below their level of education or diploma and no job security in job, accommodation and life conditions in general.

Génération Précaire also mobilises offline in order to bring their cause to the attention of the public and the media. They were successful in making their demands public through the media and (for a short while) weighing onto the political agenda. Their representatives were received by ministers and other political institutions. They successfully imposed themselves as partners in social negotiations. For example, they were present at the European Parliament in September 2011 to debate the European charter of training period. However, they do not delude themselves about the power of this type of charter to change the realities of young people's experience:

'We know the very effect produced by a charter [...] (= it is not RESTRICTIVE!). The MEDEF [employer's trade federation] regularly reminds us that they are cooperating through this charter. *Do you know what there is in the Charter?* We don't anymore.' (Stakeholder interview, f2f, France, 2011)

But they do seem pleased to at least have been acknowledged by institutions as a legitimate negotiating partner. Despite this, in relation to their influence on legislation and workplace practice, the interviewee explains that Génération Précaire and the campaigning has had only limited success. After several months of discussion with the government, French legislation about the training period was changed in February 2008. Before 2008, placements in industries or administrations could be unpaid, potentially unlimited and renewed many times. After 2008, when a training period lasts more than three months, it has to be paid at a minimum of 30% of the French minimum wage (and it is exonerated from "social taxes" for companies).

However, **Génération Précaire does not consider that any of the changes really improve the situation of young people, for several reasons:**

- 1) companies can still offer several training periods of less than three months,
- 2) young people in training are still not considered as salaried and consequently don't get social security and cannot get contributions to their pensions,
- 3) there is no legal obligation to turn those training places into jobs afterwards.

It indeed allows companies and administration to keep on employing educated young people without spending what a real job could cost them.

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## 6.4 INTERNSHIPS, APPRENTICESHIPS, VOLUNTARY WORK

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While internships are almost never even an option for young people from poorer backgrounds because they need social security or employment at all times to survive from day to day, there are, however, reasons to believe that paid and legally regulated apprenticeships can be a fruitful way of bridging the education-employment gap and giving young people a stake in both the economy and democratic life. We found a particularly fruitful example of this in the form of Austria's system of public sector apprenticeships. The importance of thinking beyond training for the private sector for young people was echoed time and again in our interviews with those who work with youth in excluded communities.

We have also found that contrary to expectations and despite severe difficulties, volunteering in the 16-24 age group when young people come from deprived backgrounds is underreported in large surveys, which do not even reach them and where the terms of reference do not make sense. Several of the academic and research expert stakeholders working on youth over the past decades whom we interviewed for our study report findings similar to the following:

'A good number of [impoverished] young people are involved in voluntary work. They might be out of the labour market, and appear as an intergenerational workless family, but actually when you start looking into what they are doing, you realise that people are doing all different sorts of voluntary work, some working for formal organisations, others doing community type work, trying to help their local communities in different ways. For us, that was quite a surprising finding because you see a group of people that are very disadvantaged but there is still engagement, work, but not in a paid job.' (Stakeholder interview, telephone, UK, 2012)

Several of our expert stakeholder interviewees noted that the positive feelings associated with the sense of *doing something* and *giving back to the community* play a major role in young people's decision to volunteer. They also suggested that it is in areas like these that national governments and the European Parliament could do much more to acknowledge and safeguard the social and labour value of unpaid work, and to encourage such volunteering.

Interviews with expert stakeholders working with young people and focus group data from 'reference' and 'excluded' focus groups shows that there is a high premium on acknowledging and extending such forms of democratic participation. Youth from more higher socioeconomic demographics where parental financial support is extended into the 20s, and those with higher levels of education can better afford to take 'a year off' to volunteer, start a social enterprise or campaign or to assist as unpaid interns for a charity or political party; youth from such affluent socio-demographic groups already have the education and skills in technology or internet use to be desirable members of these organisations. Young people coming out of care homes or from deprived backgrounds may not be allowed to volunteer by the terms of their social security payments; or may be constrained by

- a) housing issues – if they are housed on estates in the suburbs or far out of the city or in rural areas
- b) demanding childcare obligations
- c) working all hours in low-paid precarious employment to survive

Participants in 'excluded' youth focus groups and stakeholders working directly with 'at-risk' or 'excluded' youth explained that a type of social security form which will deprive excluded youth of their benefits if they cannot show that they are always looking for and available to do

paid jobs has particularly negative impacts on inclusion and voluntary participation. This means that they are not able to take on unpaid internships or to volunteer on a regular basis.

The connections between volunteering as a young person and employability are complex. On the one hand, a positive link between volunteering and gaining skills which enable further participation in the job market and the civic sphere has been demonstrated by the project YiPPEE (Young People from a Public Care Background: pathways to education in Europe). On the other hand, in some cases volunteering by means of caring for elderly or ill relatives outside of the state infrastructure can work to limit or even exclude people from poor socioeconomic demographics further from both paid work and democratic participation, as evidenced by the complex testimonies in another EU-funded project, *Combating Social Exclusion among Young Homeless Populations: a comparative investigation of homeless paths among local white, local ethnic groups and migrant young men and women, and appropriate reinsertion methods*:

'This obligation to provide assistance to an elderly family member, without alternative state infrastructures or home assistance services, can turn a theoretical advantage (of family wellbeing) into a disadvantage... [W]e found young people with intact families who became homeless later in life (at the age of 19 or 20), having withdrawn from education in order to provide financial assistance to their family as early as from 12 years of age: "My parents have been separated since I was 2... I lived with my mother until I was 4/5/6, then I went to live with my granny, who was stuck in a wheelchair... I helped her to wash, I gave her insulin, I gave her food and I went to school... I missed the 3rd class..." (EU-Framework 7,CSEYHP, Project Brief, April 2011)

## 6.5 SOCIAL EXCLUSION, FAMILY INCOME AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM

For our survey of 7 countries we ran systematic correlations between actual forms of participation and family income. Our findings are clear. Young people from higher income socio-economic demographics are more likely to have written to a politician (statistically significant correlation of 0.07), initiated a new petition, stood in a non-political election such as for class representative (both 0.06), demonstrated (both 0.05), joined a political party, joined another organisation such as a union or pressure group, or followed current affairs regularly (all 0.03).

**Table 6.2:** Correlation of forms of participation with family income

Form of participation	Significant correlation
Write to politicians	0.07
Initiate new petition	0.06
Stand in non-political election	0.06
Volunteer time	0.05
Demonstrate	0.05
Join a political party	0.03
Join a pressure group or union	0.03
Follow current affairs regularly	0.03

**Source:** EACEA/EC Youth Participation in Democratic Life Survey, 2011-2012.

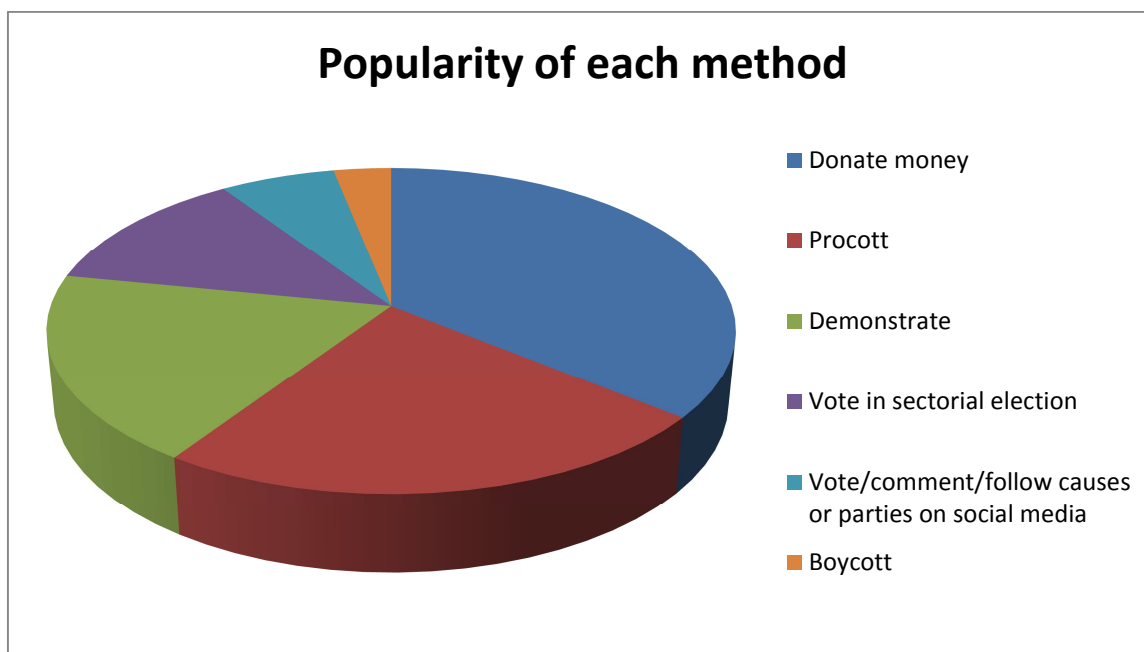
Comparative differences also affect non-electoral forms of participation significantly more than they affect voting itself. Indeed, different countries seem to have different trends of which non-electoral forms of participation are more and less important. Indeed, while signing

petitions seems to be a **privileged** form of political activism across countries, we note the pre-eminence of donating money and volunteering time in the UK. By contrast, demonstrating is a much more crucial channel of participation in Spain and France, sectorial elections in Poland and Spain, procotting in Austria, and social media activism in Hungary.

**Table 6.3:** Top five forms of active non-electoral political participation (i.e. excluding voting in political elections, discussing politics and keeping up with current affairs) in the seven countries studied

	UK	France	Spain	Austria	Poland	Hungary	Finland
1	Donate money	Sign petition	Demonstrate	Procotting	Sign petition	Sign petition	Sign petition
2	Sign petition	Demonstrate	Sign petition	Sign petition	Donate money	Donate money	Donate money
3	Volunteering time	Donate money	Vote in sectorial election	Demonstrate	Vote in sectorial election	Procotting	Procotting
4	Procotting	Procotting	Procotting	Donate money	Procotting	Vote in social media survey	Boycotting
5	Comments in social media	Stand in non-political election	Donate money	Vote in sectorial election	Volunteer time	Follow causes/parties on social media	Vote in sectorial election

Source: EACEA/EC Youth Participation in Democratic Life Survey, 2011-2012



Total across each country, weighting each method according to popularity

Many of the young respondents in the 'excluded' focus groups expressed their satisfaction at spending an afternoon talking to adults about their concerns. Most of them had never been consulted about any aspect of their social or political lives before, or even asked to tell their stories or troubles to others. Youth researchers and youth workers therefore must play a meaningful role in creating the infrastructure and occasion for dialogue and discussion



between young people and politicians or young people and policymakers. As one young 'excluded' focus group participant put it when discussing systemic changes which would aid young people's political and civic participation:

'A room where you can talk about [these issues of social life and democracy], for example. A space like in this pub, for example, but it's an office and you can come here and talk about it with the [youth workers, researchers, adult mentors]. They write it down correctly and bring it to the politicians personally. But currently, I can't tell it to anybody. **Here, I can tell it in the group but I can't tell it to a politician. I can't reach him.** There are 3 security guards heading my way and shove me away when I just want to tell him something.' ('Excluded' focus group, f2f, Austria, 2012, emphasis added.)

Our data suggests that some of the youth workers at a local level and some youth outreach organisations already attempt this. There is, of course, a need for further financial and infrastructural investment in these types of youth services. Almost all expert stakeholders interviewed drew attention to the need for both **opportunity** and **motivation for excluded youth** to participate. This recommendation is summed up by the representative for Structured Dialogue in Finland:

'There are lots of groups in society who have many more difficulties in being active and participating [in democratic life]. Participation is related to education, socio-economic situation, if you are poor it's more difficult, there are geographical challenges, and of course minority groups have problems. **It's important to give them not only information but also motivation to participate.**' (Stakeholder interview, f-2-f, Finland, 2012, emphasis added.)

Taking this advice into consideration, we end this section with a best practice case study drawn from amongst our stakeholder interviews in Spain.

### Case Study 6.2

TEB is an association for young people. It was started in 1992 in El Raval (old town neighbourhood in Barcelona which is highly populated by new and transient migrants and their children from Latin America and Asia). The project stemmed from a number of volunteers committed to bettering the situation of young people in this area. Noting the problems associated with lack of supply of work, entertainment, training and space for young people over 14 years, educators who founded TEB decided to form **an organisation that promotes labour, technological and social inclusion for young people who are marginalised and socially excluded**. In 1995 TEB became an association, constituted as a legal entity. Since its inception, the project has been focused on promoting the self-organisation of young people to help them develop training and job placement. Educators who initiated the project realised that the neighbourhood's youth had a scarcity of resources of every kind. They got a venue space that was rebuilt and decorated to make it a genuine area of integration. According to our stakeholder interviewed, "the first objective was to prevent young people from hanging around on the streets after school and in their spare time". Initially, the project was aimed at children over 14 years, however, she told us, the high demand has led to lowering the minimum age to 12. "We deal with lost childhoods". [Stakeholder interview, 2012]

TEB is dedicated to social work with ICT, for which it has a large team of 14-15 professionals in technical computing, free software, programming, web design and content management systems, youth training, educators, social workers, anthropologists, videographers, multimedia designers, etc. **"There are also young neighbourhood people, who take part of the management structure. They tend to be over 19 and respond to the promotion of the "spirit of community involvement."** In addition, TEB has an advisory council, whose functions include the provision of advice in times of strategic decision making, to assist in the development of the strategic lines of action or to contribute to the design of the internal evaluation of the project. After 20 years, TEB has become a benchmark in technological resourcing for the neighbourhood. It provides advice to businesses, schools and other institutions on the acquisition of technology, the choice of virtual platforms, implementation of content management, web development or repair of hardware.

TEB's young people gather in a monthly assembly. They decide how to participate as a group in projects that affect the community. The stakeholder interviewed gave the example of the visit to the association of the neighbourhood councillor: "It was young people who decided at an assembly that they will explain about the needs of the neighbourhood and the association. To do this, they prepared a video speech and sent it to the council". She highlighted the level of intelligence and digital skills amongst the young participants. She remembered the reaction of young people from the association about the local consultation related to a District Action Plan (PAD) few years ago. "They gathered in an assembly and decided to make a video interviewing people from the neighbourhood to make sure what the local council was asking them for". Young people from the neighbourhood take part in the assembly and collective demonstrations about issues, mainly localised to their environment, such as the closure of the school in the neighbourhood.

These contributions tend to be of a cultural kind: organisation of musical events, campaigns on the life of the neighbourhood, etc. There are also projects proposed by the organisers, although not all the suggestions of trained team members go down equally well with the young people. For example of the creation of a 3D scene representing everything around Raval's La Rambla: from the local people to the buildings. "The project lasted two years. Young people were not interested, but finally they worked because we asked them to do this for us".

## Innovative and Creative Practices

‘Some digital media are great amplifiers for soft voices’

On a more imaginative note, we were told about a practice called Kfé Innovation, a discussion forum in which a maximum of 20 young participants gather in a café in order to argue about an issue and come to a decision or direction. Our stakeholder interviewee additionally told us about another innovative form of participation very useful for TEB. She described it: “A camera is left in a room where only young people could enter. As in the confessional of ‘Big Brother’, they spoke on camera about everything related to the neighbourhood, the association... They criticised everything, but it was surprising how they elaborated their views”. The participation of young Muslim girls and women was highlighted as a success of this form: “They are very quiet and they know that their family may soon ask them to withdraw from public life. But when you give them a camera, they communicate in a brutal way, representing the misery or aspects of neighbourhood life you do not see. Therefore, some digital media are great amplifiers for soft voices”.

This case demonstrates not only what we call institutional innovation in section 4 in the sense that its very *raison d’être* is to better the predicament of a significantly at risk group of young, poor, migrants in a ‘transient’ neighbourhood, but also creative vision in how it organises itself to carry out the work by working alongside the young stakeholders and in the projects done via the use of new media and technological tools as well as innovative debating. As such it goes beyond the ‘basic needs’ approach of many NGOs who work with deprived young people and strengthens their position as citizens and as participatory members of a community.

## Conclusions

Exclusion and non-participation are not the same things. While isolation and non-participation may or may not be self-chosen, ‘exclusion’ from social and political life is never voluntary. The academic literature, stakeholder interviews and focus groups all confirm this distinction. For young people from vulnerable communities, the risk of exclusion from democratic life has increased in the last five years in direct relation to economic austerity measures implemented by national governments.

‘Youth are a priority of the European Union’s social vision, and the current crisis compounds the need to nurture young human capital.’ This is stated on page 1 of the 2009 document, ‘An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering: A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities’.

In the words of the EU Strategy for Youth, if the goal is ‘inclusion’, then politicians, policy-makers and educators can and should play a positive role in combating the injustice associated with the lives of excluded groups by:

- Addressing issues related to teenagers and young adults, in particular those with fewer opportunities, in social protection and inclusion policies
- Optimising the use of EU Funds and experimental programmes to support social integration of young people
- Realising the full potential of youth work and youth community centres as means of inclusion
- Developing intercultural awareness and competences for all young people
- Encouraging youth involvement in inclusion policy and cooperation between policymakers

- Recognising challenges overcome by disadvantaged youth, including through special awards
- Addressing homelessness, housing and financial exclusion
- Promoting access to quality services – e.g. transport, e-inclusion, health, social services
- Promoting specific support for young families

(EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering: A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities' 2009:9)

These are practical and worthy suggestions to include more young people in democratic life and they should continue to guide policy in this area. Nevertheless, between 2008 and 2012 youth unemployment has risen across the EU. Alongside this the number of young people at risk of poverty has also risen. While it is clear that the desire to participate and even the motivation to participate in democratic life is alive and well even among unemployed youth – who are often more likely to volunteer than their employed counterparts – the data in this section suggest a number of worrying connections between the exclusion of the young with regard to poverty, risks and exclusion from mainstream economic and democratic life.

Expert stakeholders, prior research studies and young people in 'reference' and 'active' focus groups maintain that there is a direct and worrying link between exclusion from education due to poverty, exclusion from employment and exclusion from the political and democratic life of a country.

Secondary analysis of existing datasets as well as fresh qualitative research with focus groups and stakeholders indicates that there are strong connections between levels of education and employability. While this does not always translate into a connection between levels of education and wages or income for young people, it is seen to reduce exclusion from democratic life. Concomitantly, there is a strong correlation between being education and/or employment and sustained opportunities to participate in the structures of democratic life. While there are exceptions to this rule in the form of local homeless people's projects and young unemployed projects or rehabilitation for young offenders, this correlation between poverty, lack of education and unemployment usually entails exclusion from civic and political activity related to voting as well as any contact with formal political structures, parties, plebiscites, etc. Yet, across the EU and with the exception of one or two countries, it is becoming more rather than less difficult for young people to remain in education past a certain level because of the introduction of high tuition fees, loans instead of grants and the closure of pay-to-study schemes.

The stakeholder interviews with youth participation experts and with youth workers as well as the focus groups with 'Excluded' young people confirm the finding from desk research that homelessness, untreated mental health issues and/or extreme youth poverty are also major barriers to institutional volunteering, to signing online petitions, to party political activity and to voting as well as to participation in community civic action. Across the European Union, the funding for organisations to work with young people who grow up in or find themselves in these precarious social positions to deliver support and counseling is also being cut rather than protected. Since a greater number of young people from groups at risk of poverty are also at risk of exclusion from all forms of participation in democratic life, this indicates a worrying trend.

Meeting the basic needs of young people in terms of housing, food, clothing, education, well remunerated employment and health care is a prerequisite to greater political inclusion but not a guarantee of political inclusion. All of the stakeholders whom we interviewed who work with young people at risk of exclusion or in socially excluded groups made the point that it is possible to assume that inclusion in the democratic sphere of a locality or nation will follow seamlessly when young people's basic needs have been met. This could not be further from the truth; otherwise all the middle class young people in focus groups would be highly active. As discussed by young people in focus groups, further efforts in terms of political education,

political experience and social space for debate need to be made to connect the policies which affect housing and employment, or taxation and childcare with the active participation by young people from at risk groups.

The risk of living in poverty even while being employed is significantly higher for people in the 18-24 year old age range than it is in the 24-54 year old age range. Even groups of young people who have not grown up in poverty may be at risk of exclusion. Meanwhile, another trend, the exploitation of the free labour of highly educated young people by organisations, institutions, companies and industry in the form of underpaid, insecure or unpaid 'training' schemes and 'internships' can be seen to undermine their faith in democratic equality and in employment legislation – one set of rules and payments for older adults, and another for young people sends a clear message to young people about the way in which society values their participation in the workplace, in society and in democratic life. The introduction of 'competition' into the schools system and fees into the higher education system are further barriers for young people from middle-income families. With all hours of the day and night spent either working or looking for secure employment there is little time for information seeking about politics and the civic sphere, for voluntary work, or for creative protest and participation.

Political dissent from received government or mainstream party policies can lead to political exclusion. This is not the same as self-exclusion and it is misleading to label young dissenters as 'non-participating' in democratic life. In particular, and returning to a point made by young people in focus groups, young people who do not agree with what the government or local authorities in their town, school, college or country are doing tend to be ignored and even penalised. Despite guarantees about freedom of expression and political opinion in most European democracies, in practice many young people who participate in creative protest against authority, or who are drawn into physical combat with police during demonstrations are not treated as equal participants in the democratic life of the country. As we were told in stakeholder interviews, in recent cases documented in the UK they have been given prison sentences of disproportionate length and severity, which will discourage all further participation and dissent.

Building on these findings from the various data collected in this project as well as from previous studies we can begin to delineate a series of best practices which combat the exclusion of young people from civic and democratic life and encourage their inclusion:

- Free and horizontal education systems which do not selectively discriminate against pupils from particular geographic, class or cultural backgrounds
- Free or close-to-free public higher education available to anyone from low-income backgrounds
- General knowledge and civic education classes in colleges in the evenings for those not in work or education
- Funding of grassroots projects and initiatives working to include and encourage young people from a diversity of backgrounds.
- Properly remunerated internships for young people leading to paid employment in particular companies or sectors
- Paid apprenticeships in the public and private sectors
- Mandatory, imaginative and 'authentic' civic and political education lessons by trained political educators
- Regular, well-publicised spaces in public buildings where young people from excluded, at risk and potentially excluded groups such as young mothers, new immigrants, asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors, ill and mentally ill, homeless, unemployed and young carers can come and speak with representatives of the city, town, region and national political elites face to face and see that their concerns are being noted and heard
- An oversight of public and private companies in their anti-discrimination policies towards young people from vulnerable backgrounds, notably homeless, with small children themselves, young carers or those with illness or mental illness in their histories

**Policy Recommendations for Theme 6:**

Housing or housing grants for those in vulnerable circumstances as well as those coming from poorer socio-economic backgrounds need to be guaranteed by local and national policies.

Non-selective schooling systems and free, guaranteed access to higher education for young people from low-income backgrounds.

The provision of funding and national and local policy support to provide youth in 'excluded' groups or 'at-risk of exclusion' with political education in both formal and informal settings.

Strong national and local policy support, backed up with financial resources to provide youth in 'excluded' groups or 'at-risk of exclusion' with free civic spaces for learning, internet access and debate.

Regular multi-stakeholder meetings, including grassroots groups, with politicians and policymakers to discuss the circumstances and needs of different excluded groups of young people with grassroots organisations working with them.

The training and economic remuneration of carers, youth workers and teachers who believe in the potential of different groups and categories of 'excluded' young people to contribute as citizens.





## OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

'We want to vote,  
but you need to  
treat us seriously'

Mechanisms and organisations such as young political candidates, political parties' youth wings and students' unions are perceived as important by young people, both in previous research as well as our own. At the same time, there is ample evidence that many of these organisations could do more to orient themselves towards young people's needs and in particular towards the needs, interests and motivations of young people for lower socio-economic groups. The stakeholder interviews, but also the focus groups, conducted for the project confirm many of the concerns from the literature and previous projects about the level of representativeness of the current youth councils and youth parliaments. In order to be involved in such organisations young people need skills to participate, they need to be articulate and they need to know the ways in which political institutions and politics work, prior to joining.

However, participation should also not be fetishised; several stakeholders indicated to us that there is also a right not to participate. At the same time our data also confirms that non-participation is by no means the same as a lack of interest in politics or a general feeling of apathy. The survey, as well as the stakeholder interviews and the focus groups allow us thus to categorically refute persistent claims of youth apathy towards democracy or politics. Probing qualitatively confirms that **young people are critical rather than apathetic** – i.e. they are unhappy with the political offer rather than bored with politics, which is often not clearly established by previously existing data. As such, while many young people of various backgrounds express disconnection from and are highly critical of politicians and the party political system, they – even many youth in 'excluded' focus groups – are also highly politicised and have clear views and opinions about politics.

Inevitably, as pointed out through our research, education plays a pivotal role in relation to young people's participation in democratic life. It needs to be stressed in this regard that this should not merely be confined to education in a formal setting, but that young citizens can also learn about democracy in non-formal settings, by getting involved in a youth club/centre, a community media initiative or a sports club and learning transferable skills that in some instances can lead to employment, such as was shown in the community media case.

A small number of the stakeholders we interviewed and only one or two out of the dozens of young people in the focus groups knew about the Structured Dialogue process. It seems thus to us that one of the challenges for the partners involved in managing the Structured Dialogue should be to raise the profile of and knowledge about the Structured Dialogue process amongst young people, both organised and unorganised. However, this should also be coupled with new mechanisms to involve young people more directly within the Structured Dialogue process. New media can be a tool for this, as will be discussed further on, but it should be made very clear as to how the online process relates to and above all feeds into the offline process. Beyond this, an important suggestion in terms of improving the process was to introduce innovative models such as co-management whereby young people take co-ownership of the process, as well as mechanisms of follow-up in terms of the implementation of the outcomes of the process.

Sometimes, the most natural of findings are also the most important. Our study found that the role of voting at the heart of political participation is as crucial to the hearts and minds of

young people today as it was for generations who lived decades ago. Not only do young citizens use voting as a key channel of participation in practice, but they also value it, desire it and enjoy it more than any other participatory mode, and they stress that if the participation of young people is to be improved, then voting will need to be at the heart of it. The electoral participation of young people is thus both at the heart of the problem and at the heart of the solution of today's political participation crisis.

As pointed out above, but it is worthwhile repeating this, young citizens are not bored with electoral politics but are instead frustrated by the mismatch between the hopes they have about playing their part in elections and the way they are being addressed and in their view little considered by politicians. The vast majority of them are excited about the experience of going to the polling station to the extent even that many complain when invited to vote over the internet instead. Indeed, the emotions that they experience when voting in a polling station even for an informal consultation are significantly more positive than when voting electronically, the positive effect on their efficacy and their perception of being a part of their democracy is far higher, and one should be very careful about the possible effect of depriving young citizens of what is conceivably the most symbolically loaded moment of their democratic life. Moreover, our findings show that overall and in time, e-voting results in lower rather than higher turnout as well as less positive feelings towards elections and democracy. This should be taken into account when developing strategies to increase voter turnout amongst young voters.

More generally, we explored a variety of possible ways of increasing youth electoral participation with young people themselves. We found that the solutions they would be keenest on include: having large-scale specific elections for young people representatives and having greater access to voting advice applications that would enable them to get a better sense of what parties and candidates stand for. While the evidence is less clear, many would also support a lowering of the voting age to 16, if it is done in the right circumstances including in a way that is backed up by school debates and better civic and democratic education! Finally, while the emergence of social media is a great opportunity to reconnect with young people, we found that it can also be counter-productive if it appears to emphasise the discrepancy between the way politicians address citizens and how young people actually want to be talked to.

The crisis of electoral participation is at the heart of the question of youth participation in Europe. We have highlighted that great opportunities to take innovative steps to improve it radically exist with high chances of success. This, however, implies that we take the full measure of what this crisis is. Anyone who thinks that the low turnout of young voters is due to young people being too lazy to take five minutes to go to the polling station or being too selfish to do so are simply deluding themselves and grossly mischaracterising the immense democratic appetite of the European youth. On the contrary, young people want to be at the heart of their democracies and the changes made must in a way oblige institutions and politicians to further and better address young people in and around election time, either by creating specific elections for them or by making them a larger segment of the electorate and enabling tools of programmatic transparency such as voting advice applications and school debates. This was the overwhelming message that young people delivered to us: 'we want to and are excited to vote, but you need to treat us seriously and like intelligent people so that we do it'.

Beyond being active in policy processes and voting there are a variety of other ways in which young people participate in democratic life. These forms do not always conform to the normative preconceptions of rationality and civility, but may also include acts of civic disobedience, dissent and critical protest. Another important finding is the close relationship between emotions/passions and participation, allowing us to understand how to potentially make participation more attractive to young citizens.

Stakeholder interviews, the survey and the existing data and literature all concur that young people are equally if not more likely than adults to participate in voluntary activities. Within this group, educated but unemployed young people often show the most willingness to volunteer, showing that young people are not disconnected en masse from the civic life of their communities. Despite this, disadvantaged young people are less likely to engage in volunteering because their pre-occupation is most often focused on meeting their basic needs in terms of housing, energy and food. However, many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds also volunteer in less obvious and recognised ways by caring for younger children or the elderly. It is thus not entirely impossible to engage this group in volunteering activities at the level of their local community (proximity plays an important role here), but this requires infrastructure, free and open spaces and specialised personnel that facilitate and assist volunteering by vulnerable groups, that provide skills training and support. It is thus important that such infrastructures are sustainable in the long term rather than a one-off time-limited initiative which disappears once funding runs out and with it the opportunities to volunteer.

One way to avoid this happening is making sure that there is structural public funding for places and spaces where adults and youth can come together as part of communities to help each other by volunteering time and skills – e.g. youth centres where older young people mentor younger youth and children or old people's day centres where youth come to read to older people and learn a skill. Another possibility would be to support schemes which invest in a particular community/locality by training voluntary members of the community in particular areas and skills such as e-skills and these youth in turn training others – e.g. payment for training given in kind.

The media as well as opportunities to communicate and to receive and process reliable information are important pre-requisites for participation in democratic life. Our study confirms previous reports that young people have to some extent disengaged from mainstream media and just like adults are often very distrustful of the press. The other side of this coin is that there is a marked increase of the consumption of news through online platforms. While this is encouraging, there are also risks attached to this. Several young people in the focus groups demonstrated that they are acutely aware of these risks and dangers of which the most important ones are reliability of information, opinion reinforcement - i.e. not being confronted anymore with information or views that contradict your own, and making 'wrong friends' as one focus group participant put it. Measures should be implemented to educate young people about the risks inherent to the internet.

Community media was identified as a best practice in involving young people and having them participate in democratic life, through producing their own media, learning (media) skills in a non-formal context, collaborating with others, and taking responsibility. They are often staffed by young people and often provide training and skills. There is also evidence that voluntary participation in community media has a beneficial effect on future job prospects for young people. Multiplatform media with radio and online incarnations work particularly well when combined with social agendas around drug education, culture, inclusion or simply asking difficult civic questions. It is therefore paramount according to us that this sector is stimulated and developed further, maybe also used by policymakers and youth organisations as a channel of communication to reach young people. In order to do so funding and an enabling regulatory framework are of prime importance.

In terms of new media, digital and skills divides are still a reality in many countries and for some young people. In this regard, it seems that once young people leave school their risk of being on the wrong end of the divide increases. Besides this, it has to be clear that access is not the only divide, but skills divides also exist. All this is especially pertinent for 'excluded' youth who suffer the most from a lack of access and skills, although certainly regarding skills this should also not be exaggerated; some of the participants in our 'excluded' focus groups

use Facebook for example. Nonetheless, care should be taken in terms of streamlining communication exclusively online when targeting vulnerable groups of young people.

As briefly mentioned earlier, online tools to facilitate participation in policy processes certainly provide opportunities to involve a much broader constituency of young people, including unorganised ones. However, there are some important caveats that need to be taken into account in this regard. Many stakeholders have stressed the need for such platforms to be genuinely interactive and designed as a two-way process. This would avoid the perception of some young people that such platforms are like black holes in which their contributions disappear after which they never hear anything back. This also ties in with the need for a follow-up process as well as defining more clearly what the precise relationship is between, on the one hand, the online platform and consultation and on the other hand the offline decision making process. This latter point is of crucial importance to avoid the opposite effect of what efforts to involve young people in policy context aim to achieve, namely less frustration and disenchantment from young people towards policymakers.

The literature, desk research and stakeholder interviews all suggest that a spiral of poverty exists in which child poverty leads to the risk of adult exclusion from democratic life. All in all, a significant risk exists that economic and social insecurity in childhood and adolescence leads to a lack of opportunities to participate in democratic life as a young person. In countries where universities are much more likely to accept youth from 'elite' schools and with higher qualifications, the situation of being disadvantaged is reinforced. Youth from higher socio-economic backgrounds are also the most likely to be able to pay high tuition fees or go to private colleges and universities. Children from poorer families are thus many times less likely to complete higher education than their other peers. Educational outcome, furthermore, plays a significant role in employability.

Homelessness appears to be endemic amongst a section of deprived youth. Rough sleeping is both criminalised, in some countries, and a barrier to getting a job. Thus young people who happen to fall into this demographic explained that they feel even further excluded. Since motivation to participate stems largely, as we have shown, from a feeling that one's concerns as a citizen are being listened to and efforts taken to resolve them, those caught in a spiral of homelessness and lack of employment quite logically report falling levels of motivation to participate in democratic life. Our focus group and stakeholder evidence suggests that repeated failures to gain positions which are respected in society mean that even the existing platforms open to young people to make their voices heard may be denied to those who need them most. Furthermore, young people in such circumstances lack the confidence and of experience to speak, out often shying away from participation in democratic life.

One of the most important ways in which 'excluded' youth are being included in the social fabric of a local community is through what we call civic spaces, which include youth clubs, community (media) centres, libraries and sports clubs. Such spaces offer young people from various backgrounds, but particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, a structure, stability, and opportunities to volunteer or to receive training and to learn transferable skills.

We feel that much is being done to ensure young people have a voice and are being listened to, but on the basis of our research we also feel that more can be done to

- Increase the representativeness of youth organisations
- Reach out to grassroots youth organisations and unorganised youth
- Increase knowledge about EYF and Structured Dialogue amongst young people of all backgrounds
- Recruit and train young people from different sections of 'at-risk' and 'excluded' populations to represent themselves and their groups
- Arrange face-to-face meetings between elected representatives at local, national or regional level and different groups of young people in their own communities

- Ensure that the language spoken by youth representatives and used in written publicity materials matches that which is spoken and understood by the young people they represent.

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- Appendix 10: Details of Focus Groups
- Appendix 11: Details of Expert Stakeholders Interviews

## **Appendix 1:**

### **PROJECT TEAM**

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#### **LSE Project coordinator:**

Dr. Bart Cammaerts

#### **LSE Researchers:**

Dr. Nick Anstead, Dr. Shaku Banaji, Dr. Michael Bruter  
and Dr. Sarah Harrison

#### **Country Researchers:**

- **Austria:** Melanie Pichler and Magdalena Schmidberger (University of Vienna)
- **Finland:** Dr. Itir Akdogan (University of Helsinki)
- **France:** Dr. Emmanuelle Reungoat (Université de Picardie)
- **Hungary:** Judit Szacks (Central European University)
- **Spain:** Dr. Anna Clua (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya) and Salomé Sola (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)
- **UK:** Dr. Maria Pini (Institute of Education) and Eri Bertsou (LSE)

## **Appendix 2**

### **PROJECT METHODOLOGY**

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Our project is possibly one of the most ambitious attempts at gathering original and complex quantitative, qualitative, policy, and experimental data on youth participation in Europe in recent years. In this section, we therefore want to explain the logic behind the research design that we have used and the methodologies that we have employed. In this chapter, we start by explaining the overall methodological strategy of the project. We then provide methodological details for each of the main components of the study: survey, experiments, focus group, interviews, and desk research. We finally explain how we have endeavoured to fully comprehend the impact of social diversity in the various components of our research in order to obtain the most robust and compelling results from which to extrapolate our analysis of the likely consequences of potential policy alternatives.

#### ***Overall methodological strategy:***

In addition to relying on existing knowledge, policy practice, and academic literature, the main contribution of our study relies on its delivery of an ambitious empirical plan to gather the evidence that was so far missing to strikingly improve the political participation of young Europeans in the future. Indeed, our analysis of the six core themes of research into young people participation has not only allowed us to provide a detailed panorama of our knowledge of issues relating to the 'crisis' of participation amongst the European youth but also to highlight some gaps and questions which we need to answer in order to explore, propose, and test possible solutions aimed at improving the quality and quantity of youth participation in the European Union.

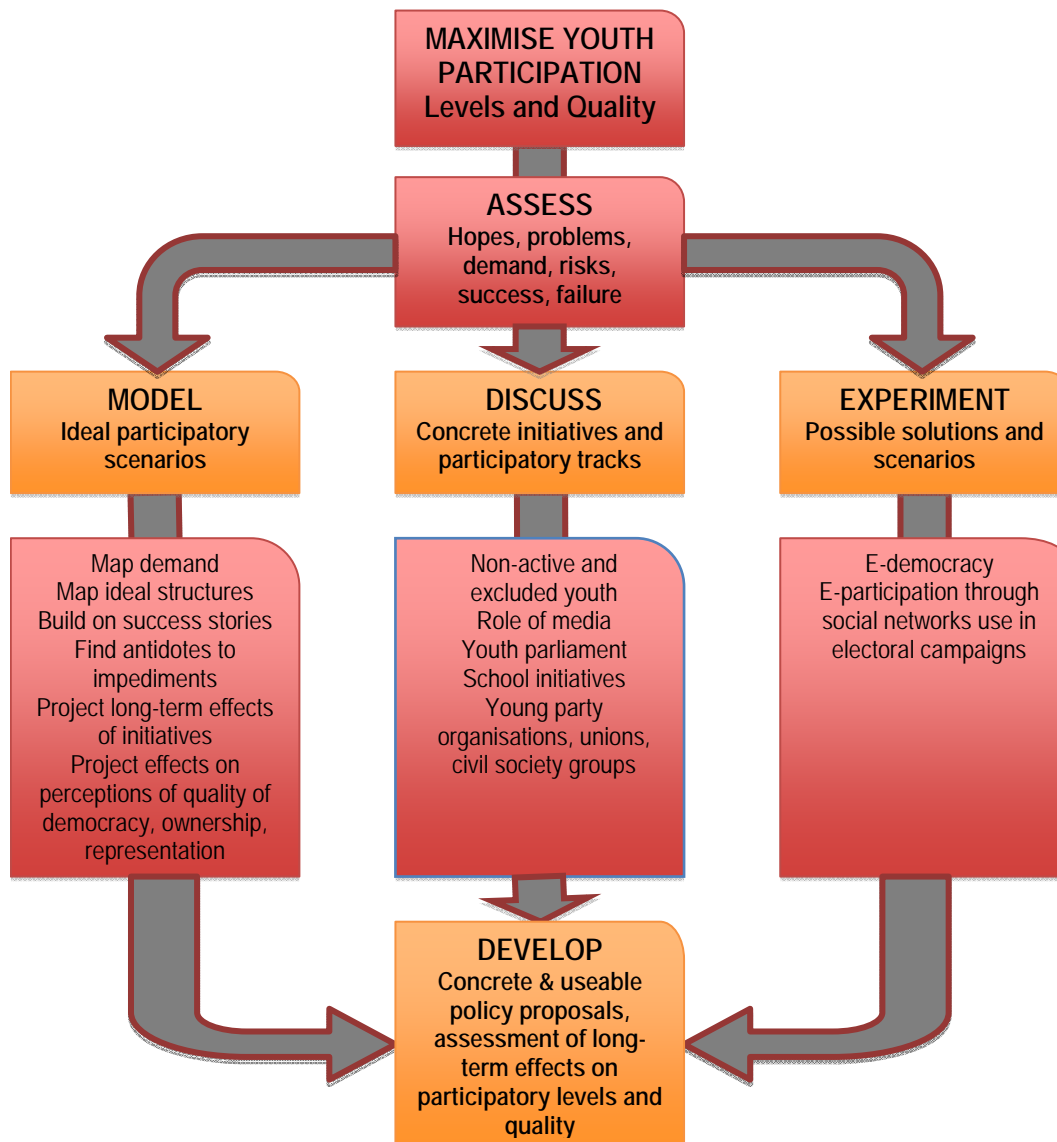
In this context, we developed four major pillars of data collection and analysis in order to generate the instruments needed to better understand how European, national, and local institutions could act in order to further encourage and restore youth participation:

- A mass survey of two sub-groups of young people (15-17 and 18-30 year olds) in 7 EU member states;
- A double experiment on e-participation focused on two aspects: social media use in campaigning and political discussion, and e-voting, which allows us to test possible future solution to the participation crisis;
- Interviews with expert stakeholders that enable us to refine possible strategies to improve participation;
- Focus group with young people themselves, including some from the most politically excluded background.

This results in the global methodological strategy detailed in figure 0.1. We believe that this mixture of rigorous quantitative and qualitative evidence, balancing an ad hoc survey of two crucial age groups – 15-17 year olds (typical pre-voters) and 18-30 year olds (typical young voters), experiments, in depth interviews of key stakeholders, and detailed focus group discussions with young people of specific backgrounds, with a particular focus on those who are, typically, never captured by traditional social science models (including unemployed youth, young people outside of education, young offenders, etc.) is unique at this stage of research into the question of the participation of young people in democratic politics. It highlights our team's and the European Commission's keenness on uncovering genuine effective solutions to durably improve the level of democratic participation of young people in

their European, national, and local democracies, as well as their sense of efficacy and inclusion in democratic politics.

Figure 0.1: Integrated methodological strategy



The different instruments we use are essential to combine because they each have different critical strength, which brought together strongly improve the significance and reliability of the study's findings. Thus, the mass survey allows for a great level to generalizability which is absolutely impossible based on traditional (non-youth specific) studies. Moreover, it allows for a systematic comparison between the situation, perceptions, and hopes of under and over-18 year old's. Conversely, the focus group allow us to get unprecedented insights into the situation of some specific groups which would simply not be captured by broader instruments such as a survey, and to let young people express their perceptions and preferences in their own words, without pre-conceived categories. The desk research ensures that the study is contextualized within the state of the art of knowledge in the field and policy relevant. Finally, the experiments allow us to go beyond words and declarations and test for crucial causal models. Indeed, the concept of political participation is highly

projective and often, we may have the impression that we know of a solution which, when implemented in practice, proves inefficient or even counter-productive.

All these elements have been conducted to the highest level of scientific rigour and to ensure optimal validity and relevance of the findings in accordance to the standards that are applicable to each type of methodology in the social sciences. Ultimately, by confronting ideas to these multiple acid tests, we can ensure that they correspond to young people priorities in their diversity, are generalizable, and are effective when applied in practice – or understand under which conditions they are.

We will now detail the methodology that has been used for each of the empirical components of our study as well as their logic.

### **Overview of bases for desk research**

In terms of the desk-research and providing a broad overview of youth participation in democratic life several policy documents and previous studies were consulted (this list has been added at the end of this method's part).

Besides consulting these documents and others, which can be found in the bibliography of the final report, we also conducted secondary data analysis on data-sets that are available in the public domain. We extracted from these data-sets new data that was previously not available, specifically looking at differences between different generations of young people and the general population. This was particularly the case with the European Values Survey 2008, the Eurostat Information Society Survey 2010, and the Flash Eurobarometer 319. It has to be noted though that from a methodological perspective these data-sets have their limitations and are not as rigorous as our own survey because they do not particularly focus on recruiting young people and certainly do not use complex sampling techniques such as street-corner sampling to ensure diversity of respondents.

In addition to the stakeholder interviews and focus-groups conducted in the six selected countries (Austria, Hungary, Finland, France, Spain and UK), as promised in our original proposal, we also sent out a set of relevant questions by email to more stakeholders. First we sent a number of questions regarding the workings of Youth Parliaments to representatives of Youth Parliaments across the EU of which 7 responded to our questions. Besides this, we also sent a separate and more focused set of questions (see below) to other stakeholders such as board members of the European Youth Forum, as well as representatives of national youth councils active in the structured dialogue, the Junior Chamber International and the European Youth Card Association, as well as several EACEA grant holders. These were the questions we put to them:

1. How would you evaluate the work of the European youth organisations in terms of representing young people across Europe? What works? Best practices? What could be done better?
2. How do you assess the efforts of the EU commission to involve young people more in their decision-making processes (i.e. structured dialogue)?
3. Can you think of innovative ways by which the EU can broaden and deepen its structured dialogue with young people? How to reach young people beyond the usual suspects?

4. According to you, what are possible and realistic mechanisms that make young people from different backgrounds participate more in democratic life?
5. What role do/can new media play in these efforts?

As is often the case with e-mail based interviews the response rate to this was rather low. Out of XX persons contacted, only 25 actually responded to our questions despite sending reminders. In any case, we feel that it was nevertheless a worthwhile effort as it yielded interesting insights and responses which were useful, especially for the sections on youth representation, structured dialogue and the use of new media. (see [Appendix 11](#))

### **The survey**

Very few surveys target young voters, and even fewer target young people under the typical 18 year voting age. Relying on the proportion of young people within a sample of general adults is methodologically highly problematic because they are not meant to be representative of any sub-category, young adults or otherwise. We therefore decided to conduct a double survey of these key target populations using large representative samples in seven European democracies. We ran our survey with 7201 respondents divided into two categories: pre-voting age (15-17.99 years old) and young voters (18 to 30 years old). In total, 2721 respondents belonged to the pre-voting age category and 4480 to the young voters category, allowing us to compare the two groups and assess the way in which democratic and participatory perceptions, preferences and behaviour evolve after young people reach voting age – a crucial element in our enquiry.

We drew the respondents from seven member states of the European Union which represent a cross-section of (1) new and old member states, (2) some of the wealthier, averagely wealthy, and least wealthy member states, (3) some of the member states with the highest and lowest levels of political participation in general, (4) some of the member states with the highest and lowest levels of youth participation. We also chose the seven member states because they have experienced and/or experimented with unusual youth participation such as allowing 16 year olds to vote (Austria), organising an electronic election of student representatives (Austria), heavy offering of voting advice applications (“VAAs”, Finland), recent strong movement of youth direct action against general political questions such as living conditions (Spain) or youth-specific questions such as tuition fees (UK), high levels of students’ unionism including at college level (France), strong recent emergence of extremist parties (Hungary), strong presence of social and confessional civil society (Poland), etc.

**Table 0.1:** The sample

<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>UNDER 18</b>	<b>18-30</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Austria	301	700	1001
Finland	300	800	1100
France	502	505	1007
Hungary	300	702	1002
Poland	302	722	1024
Spain	506	505	1011
United Kingdom	510	546	1056
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2721</b>	<b>4480</b>	<b>7201</b>

*Entries are number of respondents per country and age group*



The samples for both groups (under 18 and 18-30) were based on requirements for statistical significance considering the overall population size and constraints of data collection. In all cases, we aimed for a sample size that allowed for strong statistical significance of our results for each individual sample. For instance, for smaller European countries included in our sample, nationally representative samples of the whole population can typically be achieved by samples of approximately 500 respondents, and in our case, we never recruited fewer than 300 for the 16-18 population, which ensures a good control for all key demographic, social, and economic characteristics of respondents. The survey was administered over the internet in November 2011. We purposely selected countries with high internet penetration rates and insisted that the survey company selected for the tender ensured that the respondents represented all types of social and economic backgrounds, in particular by controlling for family income. This is to ensure that we reached out to all categories of young citizens and we put a great emphasis on this aspect.

As a result, young people from poorer backgrounds are well represented in our original. For instance, at least 12% of UK respondents come from households with under £11,000 of annual income (at least, because 20% did not know or preferred not to answer) and 27% under £22,000; similarly, at least 20% of Finnish respondents came from a family with under €12,000 of annual income and 35% under 24,000 (29% preferring not to say or not knowing), and 34% of Hungarian respondents come from families with under 1.65 million Forint a year (approximately €5,400) and 59% under 3.3 million Forint (23% not answering or not knowing). Proportion of respondents from poorer households in France, Spain, Austria, are very similar to the British situation, and for Poland quite close to the Hungarian situation. However, it should be noted that as for any surveys, the final analyses are based on representative samples through the use of weights which ensure the consistency between the sample and the targeted population. Weighting is a technique which is universally used across all major surveys (Eurobarometer, national and European Elections Studies, European Social Survey, European Values Survey, etc.). By ensuring a strong representation of youth from poorer backgrounds, *we thus do not affect the representativeness of the results* but avoid having to use unfair weights whereby the views of poorer youth would be extrapolated from a very small number of respondents as is the case with many existing surveys. For each element of analysis, we computed correlations with family income and indicated the result in the analysis when relevant and/or statistically significant.

The comprehensive questionnaire that we designed allowed us to measure 115 variables relating to young citizens' preferences, practices, perceptions, memories, and projection about participation.

In order to conduct the survey, we organised a call for tender and on a best bid basis, the survey was conducted by Opinium Ltd, an opinion company with excellent credentials in internet surveys. The company is a member of the British polling council, ESOMAR, the MRS network and the PRCA association and accepted to conduct the survey according to European and local ethics principles which our team wanted to be fully taken into account in the research methodology.

### **The experiments**

In each country, we conducted a double experiment, which allows us to assess the behaviour and perceptions of three treatment groups as well as a control group. The two dimensions are:

- the effect of social media campaigning
- the effect of e-voting

#### *The election*

The experiment targets young people in high school or equivalent. It is based on a simulated election for young citizens' representatives, elected according to a list system and defined by partisan affiliation. In each country, we proposed a choice of six running lists: a moderate right wing, a moderate left wing, a centrist/liberal, a green, an extreme left, and an extreme right list. The lists have labels that make them readily identifiable but do not take the name of any actual parties running in national systems. The councilors elected in the simulated election would sit in a young citizens council intended to advise the government on youth policy in the country.

#### *Social media campaigning stimulus*

In the context of this experiment, we ran a two week electoral campaign. The groups subject to social media campaigning received regular twitter feeds from the six lists in their national and/or regional languages. We encouraged them to register as twitter users and subscribe to feeds by the six lists but they were also given direct links to access to the feeds if they did not wish to register as users. Each country researcher monitored his/her six twitter accounts regularly, posted tweets on each account at least every other day and answered some of the queries/comments received at least three times a week for the two weeks of the campaign.

The groups which were not subjected to the social media campaigning only received a one page description of each list's manifesto which the social media groups also received in addition to the twitter feeds. The non-social media groups (but not the social media groups) also received an additional half-page flyer reminder a few days before the vote.

#### *Electronic voting stimulus*

The groups subjected to the electronic voting stimulus received a personal invitation to vote electronically on the election that we organised online. They were offered a 24 hour period to vote.

By contrast, the groups not subject to the electronic voting stimulus were invited to vote in person only at a 'polling station' staffed by the country researcher for either two or three periods totalling at least 2 hours (typically a 30 minute morning period plus a 1 hour lunch break, plus 30 minutes after the end of classes) in the school where they were recruited.

#### *Debriefing questionnaire*

Each of the participants (regardless of experimental group) was also asked to participate in a short post-experiment questionnaire that was run after then end of

the experiment. The questionnaire was available online or offline at the school to all respondents as we wanted to maximise response rates for that specific part (by contrast, we aimed for ‘natural’ turnout at the election itself).

Each respondent was given a unique respondent number allowing us to relate their answer to their country and treatment group (social media campaign or traditional campaign, e-voting or traditional voting). The questionnaires included questions on reported voting, efficacy, perceptions of democracy, emotions associated with the campaign and the vote, perceptions of candidates, the extent to which each respondent discussed the election, which aspect of it and with whom, preferred campaigning modes and preferred voting modes, etc.

### *Target and recruitment*

For this particular experiment, we targeted high school students, so typically in most cases, people who do not have the right to vote yet (except in Austria) but would get it soon. Approximately 100 participants were recruited in each country, corresponding to each of the 4 treatment groups (including control group).

*Table 0.2: Experiment invited participants by country and % completing questionnaire*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Austria</b>	<b>Finland</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>Spain</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Invited Participants</b>	94	125	98	97	131	80	<b>625</b>
<b>% who fully completed questionnaire</b>	95.7	29.6	81.6	100	41.2	83.8	<b>68.0</b>

Altogether, we invited 625 young people to participate in the experiment across the 6 countries. As we only wanted to have participants who fully consented to participate, there was an element of dropout between invited participants and those who participated in the full experiment. There was then a further possibility of dropout in terms of respondents completing the full post-experiment questionnaire. Respondents who had participated in the experiment but did not answer the questionnaire were still included in the analysis for purposes of turnout measures and voting choice, but of course, all of the questions on the electoral experience of young people could only be derived from the questionnaires themselves. Considering the long design (over 2 weeks), the proportion of respondents who fully participated in all aspects of the experiment was quite remarkably high by social science standards (68%) with some exceptional peaks in Hungary (100%) and Austria (95.7%). We note, however, that a larger proportion of invited participants did not complete the full questionnaires exercise in Finland (29.6%) and to a lesser extent in Spain (41.2%) even though this is in effect significantly higher than typical one-shot survey response rates (evaluated at under 15% on average).

In terms of our target group, few electoral experiments focus on under-18s because organising them is generally harder and more demanding than organising experiments with voting age young adults. Yet, it seemed essential to us to focus on young people who would typically experience their ‘first election’ under the context of our experiment. This represented both specific advantages in terms of putting the spotlight on a crucial segment of young people we want to understand, and a way to avoid problems that could have occurred have we chosen voting age young adults.

Indeed, the problem with voting age adults is that we would have conducted the experiment using a virtual election that would have been incomparably 'weaker' in strength and interest than those young people had already been invited to participate in, thus biasing the results. By contrast, by choosing under-voting age young adults, there is no such risk as the election used for the experiment was not in competition with any actual election young people were invited to vote in. Moreover, we thus fully retained the character of 'first election' which is so crucial to the nature of our experiment. Indeed, as we discuss, theoretically, the political science literature has found that the first two elections young people participate in are crucial in determining the behaviour that will characterise them for the rest of their lives. As such, what we want to understand first and foremost is how some specific changes to the organisation of elections could influence the first electoral experience of new voters, something which explicitly implied using young people who had not already experienced their first elections in real life beforehand.

We systematically selected schools which were 'mixed' or 'average' in terms of their social and economic backgrounds (in particular we avoided schools serving primarily students from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds as this could have skewed the results). We also avoided specialist politics students, favouring instead students from non-social science streams. We fully explained the experimental process to headteachers and responsible teachers, and explained the various stages of the simulated election and its nature to the students, circulated consent forms, ran the project (campaign and election) with all those who agreed to take part ensuring computers were available at schools for the consultation of the twitter feeds and e-voting if preferred, organised polling stations for the traditional voting groups on the day of the vote, and fully debriefed the students after the end of the experiment.

### **Focus Groups**

Focus groups as a methodology are useful for elucidating people's feelings, opinions, attitudes and general behaviours towards particular topics and in interaction with others in the group. Focus groups can be used to elaborate, question and understand trends suggested by survey and questionnaire research, and to strengthen the findings of qualitative methods such as interviewing about how points of view are formed and expressed. They are not appropriate for eliciting statistical trends in public perception or behaviour or for making conclusive cross-National comparisons because they are not, and should not be, used as representative of whole national populations (Barbour & Kitzinger, 2001).

As such, while our focus groups can be used to inform policy or guide decision-making they do not make claims to representativeness across entire populations. Participants may be drawn from naturally occurring groupings – for instance school populations, religious congregations or workers in the building trade – or they may be gathered together to contrast and record the views of a people with expertise or experience in a specific field – for instance policy makers or political activists. Where a project wishes to contrast the views of those with greater experience in a particular practice or field, those potentially excluded from this practice or field and those with an 'average' chance of having some experience of that practice or field, focus groups can be constructed and labeled accordingly. Such labels in this study of young people's participation in democratic life do not refer to essential attributes of participants in the groups but rather are heuristic tools through which those conducting and reading the research will be able to understand the compositional logic of the groups as well as the contexts from which young people are drawn.

Caution must be taken always in interpreting focus group results as more about individuals than about groups. In all of our work we strenuously wished to avoid an implication that the groupings are somehow fixed because of something essential about the young people which would prevent them from being active whatever their social circumstances or which means that they will always be active.

Between December 2011 and March 2012 we undertook 18 focus groups with young people across our 6 partner countries with 3 groups in each of the following: Austria, Finland, France, Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom. The national political contexts during this time include increasing fears and experiences of life under economic austerity; heightening anxieties around education due to steep rises in fees and/or cuts to student grants; riots in some countries; stringent curbs on non-European immigration; and the rise of far right parties and candidates in others; the failures of the most governments in our sample to reassure young people about their future housing or to guarantee the livelihoods of those on low incomes; and an increasing number of activist movements like the Indignados in Spain and the Occupy movement in the UK as well as the disarray and increasing isolation of the Hungarian government in Europe. Reflecting these events or processes and their media coverage, economic uncertainty and social unrest became the focus for discussions of democratic participation in many focus groups. Additionally, local issues were raised in some of the focus groups.

### *The Sample*

The focus group selection was underpinned by clear theoretical and methodological concerns as discussed above (Kitzinger 1999). Our review of current literature on participation, democracy and youth engagement explored academic and policy fears about youth apathy in relation to government and voting. It also explored optimistic perspectives that specifically posited new and social media as a realm that might revitalise failing interest in politics and civic issues on the part of young people. Analyses of data collected during our re-analysis of existing datasets on youth participation across the EU and from our seven-country survey of young people's participation further suggested the endurance of various political and digital divides among the respondents in all countries and a rupture between politicians' and young people's understandings of what it means to participate in democracy and to be political. Further our survey's suggestion that using the internet for voting might not be the panacea which brings young people in droves back to the ballot box needed to be further explored. To give scope to further detailed responses on these issues we selected in each of the six partner countries as described above:

a) a “**reference**” focus group<sup>1</sup> of between 5-7 **young people** currently participating in education or employment – this was done intentionally and mainly through contacts at local schools or colleges and a ‘random’ sample of youth generated in each case. The social class composition of these six focus groups was quite diverse with both working and middle class young people represented even in the same school

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<sup>1</sup> No attention was paid prior to selection to their likelihood of having participated actively in democratic life or the possibility of exclusion. As such these school and college focus groups are not referring to the existence of a particular type of ‘average’ or ‘ordinary’ young person but to the group as a whole, where there is no necessary preponderance of excluded or highly active young people and no expectation that the young people will come from either underresourced or well connected families. In some of the focus groups we labelled ‘average’ therefore, there may be young people from low-income backgrounds who participate constantly in civic life; there may also be young people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds who happen to be attending a local school or college

cohorts but no young people from the 'underclass'. The age range in these groups is usually between 15 and 21 years.

b) an “**excluded**” focus group<sup>2</sup> of between 5-7 **young people**” either from care homes or homeless shelters, young mothers, those who had been recently in the justice system, in prison or who had health or mental health issues. The social class composition of these six groups was fairly homogenous with young people from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds or from working class families where some parental illness or unemployment had led to homelessness or state care. The age range in these groups was between 15 and 24 years.

c) an “**active**” focus group<sup>3</sup> of between 5-7 young people belonging to youth organisations with affiliations to all areas of the political spectrum from right to left; young people from Churches or counselling organisations; those active in the occupy or indignados; young greens and environmentalists; and those who had taken part in structured dialogue, media work or formal youth participation organisations. The social class composition of these six groups varied somewhat, although with a preponderance of young people from lower-middle and upper-middle class backgrounds. The age range in these groups was between 16 and 26 years.

All the focus groups were set up with a rationale that encompassed both demographic and specific research-related criteria pertaining to young people's participation in democratic life.

### *Conducting the groups*

Focus group sessions lasted between **90 minutes and 3 hours** with most of them tending to be around two hours; they alternated between locations, which were sometimes more or less private and sometimes involved the use of public spaces such as civic rooms in town halls, libraries, parks or cafes. All were recorded digitally and extensive parts of these transcribed and translated by the researchers. The researcher/s invited and received the young people's trust over the course of the focus groups, and generally frank discussion both of concerns and of prejudices occurred. Young people's travel to and from the groups was reimbursed and vouchers

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<sup>2</sup> An 'excluded' group consisting of young people drawn from any of a series of 'at-risk of exclusion from social and democratic life' sections of the youth population as defined in policy documents on this subject taken from the European Commission: for instance, homeless young people, those in care, those taking refuge from family violence, refugees or asylum seeker youth, those with addictions or parental addictions and those on extremely low incomes or without financial support. In this instance, we made no assumptions that the concerns of all these groups would be the same across all countries, or that their attitudes to democratic participation would be entirely conditioned. These groups contained young people described in national policy literature as 'NEETs' (Not in Education, Employment or Training) but they also contained young people still at school or those working in low income, insecure jobs.

<sup>3</sup> The 'active' group consisted of young people acknowledged to be participating frequently in civic and political life through their connection to a network, group, party, activity or movement. As such this group was the most heterogeneous group. It contained young people from different geographical locations and with differing socioeconomic backgrounds and political interests. The only factor which could be said to connect some of the young people in these groups was their active participation in some aspect of the democratic life of their locality, city, nation or the world. In line with the requests by our funders, efforts were made by all research teams to include in these groups young people from different political and ideological standpoints, as well as a selection of institutional and non-institutional civic activities. The logistics of research and the pressure of time notwithstanding, in most of the national research teams an excellent balance between ideological and institutional factors was achieved in the groups in order to give expression to interesting group interactions. In one case, Hungary, the logistics entailed that the group was smaller and more homogenous: however, since national comparisons are not aimed for and the focus groups are to be treated in conjunction with each other this has not been seen to have an adverse effect on the data gathered.



were given out to most of the young people for food or books as a thanks for the time given to this project.

**Permission** to record the interviews on digital voice recorders and to transcribe and use parts of the interviews in reports and publications was sought from the young people themselves both before and during the focus groups. For the sake of the young people's safety, a decision was made by the team to give all the participants pseudonyms in reports despite a few requests to be named. Confidentiality and trust were key issues in all groups. In each of our six case study countries groups appeared to follow a very **distinct logic** in terms of the issues that were of most interest to participants and those that the researcher needed to cover. An open and flexible schedule with occasional prompt questions in all the groups to move the discussion forward were better at generating responses and discussion between participants than a tightly controlled series of questions to each participant in turn (See Appendix 6). In addition to a brief initial **demographic questionnaire**, and direct open questions about participants' backgrounds (Appendix 5), their uses of old and new media for all purposes of political participation, understanding of politics and government, intentions to vote and particular relationships to civic or political groups and identities, specific questions were asked about entrepreneurship, activism, creativity, volunteering and structured dialogue. Responses were used to clarify or refine and to open up areas of disagreement within the group initially noted through body-language or brief asides and to alert participants to contradictions or confusions taking place between themselves over particular issues or uses of language. In particular this happened in relation to the notions of 'migration', 'democracy' and 'participation' that were raised by participants in several of the groups.

**Cues** were provided in most groups during the discussions. These consisted either of list of topics which might be of social or political interest, questions about politics and politicians, or images of young people. While there were occasional instances where one participant tried to dominate a group, in general, the young people listened respectfully to each other even when they frequently disagreed deeply with each other about both factual and ideological issues. The disagreements about democracy and participation were most profound in the activist groups where young people came to issues from clear political positions. However, when it comes to the issue of racism, the far right and immigration, such positional divides are clear even in the 'average' and 'excluded' focus groups.

In terms of **analysis**, more than a hundred pages of notes have also been generated by the focus groups, in addition to the various websites, flyers and papers given to the researchers as background by some of the contact organisations involved. Presenting all of this in our brief report means inevitably that both the detail and passion of many of the young people's testimonies is sacrificed. However, the report is based on a thorough **thematic coding** and **in-depth analysis** of the transcripts (see Appendix 9) and the notes in the light of the major concerns of the project and on a triangulation of these concerns with the findings of the other data collected by the survey, experiment, stakeholder interviews and desk research. The young people are not taken as being representative of all young people across the whole of Europe but as outlining concerns and positions which are indicative of particular experiences, trends, positions and tensions amongst groups of young people living in Europe. As such their testimonies are highly informative both for debates over participation in democracy and for further research in the fields of youth and politics.

### ***Stakeholder interviews***

This aspect of our project provides a critical summary of how ten stakeholders in each of our 6 countries from Structured Dialogue, Political Parties, Local or National Government, Research, Academia, Broadcast and Community Media, Local and National Youth Organisations and Activist Political organisations research, conceptualize, access, plan for and/or act on youth participation in democratic life in their local, institutional or national contexts. Interviews were carried out between November 2011 and April 2012. Table 0.3 gives an account of the categories and numbers in each country:

**Table 0.3**

<b>Country</b>	<b>National or regional broadcaster</b>	<b>Youthworker/ small youth NGO</b>	<b>Young politician</b>	<b>Students union/ activist organisation</b>	<b>Structured Dialogue / Government</b>	<b>Youth Policy expert</b>	<b>Community media/ youth journalist</b>
<b>Austria</b>	1	1	2	2	1	1	1
<b>Finland</b>	1	2	2	2	1	1	1
<b>France</b>	1	1	2	1	0	1	1
<b>Hungary</b>	0	1	2	2	1	1	1
<b>Spain</b>	1	1	2	2	0	1	1
<b>UK</b>	1	2	2	1	1	1	1

On top of the interviews conducted in the six selected countries and represented in table 0.3, 25 additional interviews were conducted with stakeholders beyond the six countries included in the study.

### *Selecting stakeholders*

Our methodology for identifying stakeholders in relation to youth participation in democratic life built on the project themes of media, governance, party-politics, structured dialogue, exclusion, creative participation, activism, social enterprise and political education. The methodology comprised a range of different strategies to take account of the different groups of stakeholders involved and, if possible, to triangulate the perspectives received. We **identified expert stakeholders** via an extensive review of current and ongoing work at national and international level in the intersecting fields of structured dialogue, democracy, participation, youth studies, NGO work, activism, local community building, charity work, local and community media, youth programming at a national level and party politics. Evidence used to select experts included recommendations by the European Commission, news reports, website profiles, recent research reports, conference papers, ongoing projects in this area, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy briefings and personal recommendations by one expert of another to take their place.

In some cases, the **categories** of ‘broadcaster’, ‘politician’, ‘activist’ or ‘youth worker’ with which we were initially working did not easily map from country to country. For instance, some countries have regional assemblies while others don’t; some have no youth broadcaster at a national level while some have whole youth channels devoted

to particular age cohorts; in other cases there is little distinction between academics researchers or policy-maker stakeholders.

We **contacted** respondents initially by email, following the first contact with a second or third written reminder about the request in some cases and in others with one or several telephone calls if such details were available to us. Issues encountered during the contact process were varied and generally related to the high standing and hectic work schedules of our stakeholder contacts. Many respondents simply did not have the time to take part and other were not comfortable providing their 'perceptions' rather than factual data and felt that they did not have appropriate expertise. On these grounds, several stakeholders declined to participate.

Finally, the research team produced recorded and documented interviews with 77 stakeholders in relation to young people and democratic participation across the six participating countries (see [Appendix 11](#)).

### *Conducting and analysing the interviews*

We conducted most interviews via telephone or face-to-face and used digital tape recorders to record these with the explicit permission of interviewees. Interviews lasted between 40 and 75 minutes, depending on the availability and engagement of the stakeholders being interviewed. These were not transcribed in full but were written up by our research team to coincide with areas of interest as outlined in the thematic questions for stakeholders (see [Appendix 7](#)). At the outset of the project we developed a series of broad thematic questions for stakeholders based on the main research questions of the project and the keen interest of the research team and funding body in the areas of e-voting, democracy, youth participation, pathways to education and employment, cases of creative participation, barriers to participation, the role of new media and so on. These initial questions on politics, media, government and official understandings of participation and democracy were utilised by the team both in documenting the interviews for inclusion in the final report and in contextualising both national and cross-national trends in relation to the data collected via desk research, the survey, the experiment and the focus groups. There are, additionally, broader and better-known national factors that inform our perspective and that of our stakeholders. Regional political, cultural and civic traditions, histories of occupation, suppression or dictatorship, patterns of migration, the inevitable influence of different economic conditions on democratic and governance structures in institutions are all named repeatedly by interviewees as affecting the context in which youth participation policies are made and implemented both institutionally and *ad hoc*.

### *Robustness of the data*

Stakeholder interviewees emphasise four different levels of certainty about aspects of the perspectives and information contributed. Due to restrictions in the space allocated for writing up notes from interviews, these cautions and caveats about differing levels of knowledge and experience are not always reflected alongside each point made. However, overall, **levels of certainty** expressed fall into the following categories:

- 1) personal opinions/knowledge of these stakeholders, supported by personal or anecdotal evidence;

2) professional opinions/knowledge based on extensive work-life experience of politics and political parties and/or broadcasting and/or community media and/or youth work and/or practical and policy research with and on the topic of young people and participation.

Interviewees move between these levels when talking about subjects most familiar to them and those less so in relation to our topic guide. Additionally, our stakeholder interviewees often qualify statements by explaining that they *cannot* speak for and about all young people, all politicians or all parties. In this context, quotations from these interviews must only be viewed as insights about ***trends and circumstances*** to guide further research and not as precise factual accounts: professional and personal opinions and knowledge are inflected by the interviewees' degree of association with the political system or institutional context that they are speaking about. In light of the above caveats, it is imperative that any data based on talk and summaries of talk, as well as opinion, translation and relative knowledge has to be viewed within a qualitative interpretative framework (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Kvale 1995) but with a constant analytical orientation towards triangulation (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Nevertheless, the high levels of coincidence in the views, knowledge and opinions of many of our expert stakeholders in relation to national patterns of democracy, youth participation and exclusion, political knowledge and efficacy, strategies for involvement and political education suggest that collecting data from expert stakeholders in a careful, systematic and rigorous manner as undertaken here can yield sharp and pertinent insights for policy and practice.

### ***Dealing with social and cultural heterogeneity***

Throughout the project, we have taken extreme care to conceive a project that would embrace young people in their social diversity. A lot is always written about the impact of social background on political participation, but the evidence is often incomplete, partial, or unconvincing, and we wanted to be more systematic in our approach.

In terms of the ways in which we dealt with the issue of translation of terms in the interviews, focus groups and then in the analysis of the findings, several issues arose. First, we were very conscious that working with terms such as 'participation', 'engagement', 'inclusion', 'exclusion', 'politics', 'civic action' and 'activism' across seven different languages – Catalan, Spanish, French, English, Finnish, German and Hungarian – and 8 if we include the survey where Polish was also used – we would encounter difficulties. It was a challenge, sometimes, even to locate the precise word to use which would be measurable across all countries but would not shape the respondents thinking before eliciting their views. All researchers thought about this in advance and chose not just one word for a single aspect but several similar or synonymous words, using them again and again during interviews and focus groups at different points in order to elicit the broadest possible sets of responses and so as to ensure that interviewees or focus group participants did not simply re-use a vague term without having thought about its meaning.

In coding and analysing the data gathered, researchers took great care in the translation not just of these terms and words but also in explaining the particular connotations that some of the terms have within specific national and historical contexts – for instance the terms 'political' in Hungary or the term 'intern' in France and 'apprentice' in Austria. Every care has been taken in the interpretation and meta-

analysis of data to pull out the broadest possible findings which link or contrast the country and demographic contexts.

In the desk research, we endeavoured to take particular attention in reviewing the alleged impact of social differences on participation in the existing literature. In the survey component of the empirical research, we ensured that young people from poorer background, who are far too often entirely missed out in existing research were fairly represented in our samples. We then systematically ran correlations between family income and relevant variables in order to see which aspects of youth political participation is really affected by this and which are not. Correlations are a far finer way of assessing relationships as compared to arbitrary bulk categories. Indeed, the manipulation of category borders can potentially lead to entirely different results while, by contrast, correlations analysis is both far more robust and far more universal.

In the experiment component, we voluntarily drew our participants from mixed schools. This is very different from much of the existing research – for instance that conducted with university students – which can lead to an over-representation of wealthier or better educated young people. By contrast, our participants genuinely are typically ‘average young people’ and as such, we have a more robust case extrapolating their reaction in the context of our experiment into the likely effect of policy decisions intended to improve the participation of all young people. Finally, in terms of the focus groups, we took great care to specifically select some groups from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. They represented 1/3 of the total groups interviewed, and one in each country. As explained from the start, our team genuinely believe that part of the young people who do not participate are typically overlooked by existing research and we wanted to put the spotlight on them in order to better understand them. The disadvantaged groups that we reached out to included unemployed youth, homeless youth, young people who had recently faced judicial problems, young mothers, etc. It took considerable effort to understand what these young people from disadvantaged backgrounds think of political participation but we genuinely believe that only thus could we offer a valid analysis of how youth participation can be improved and strengthened both quantitatively and qualitatively in the future.

### **Ethics**

For academics, dealing with young people represents both an incredibly exciting avenue of research, and a tremendous ethical responsibility. Throughout the various components of our project, we did our very best to fully subscribe to and go beyond the most stringent national, European, and international guidelines on research ethics in general and the ethics of research on young people in particular.

In terms of the survey, the respect of national and European ethics guidelines was part of the prerequisites mentioned to the survey companies invited to submit proposals for the project, and part of the contract implemented by the chosen provider.

In terms of the experiment, we made every effort to conciliate academic rigour and stringent ethical guidelines. All participants were asked to sign a consent form (see [appendix 8](#)). All the headteachers of the schools involved received a description of the project and questions and answers sheets relating to the experiment (again, reproduced in [appendix 8](#)), and competent authorities were also consulted when required by national ethics guidelines and by the age of the students (different

countries have different age thresholds for consultation of public authorities and/or parents for research involving young people).

In describing the project, we explained to the participants that they would take part in an 'informal consultation' on youth representation to stress that this was not a real election without explicitly discouraging them to participate and thus biasing our results. Our research team also provided full debriefings after the end of the experiment.

All experimental behaviour (including whether individual members voted or not and for which list) as well as answers to our post-test questionnaire – which was conducted either in person by the researchers (based on a self-completed questionnaire) or online using Survey Monkey were fully anonymised and respondents only represented by a four digit code that corresponded to the type of campaign (traditional or social media) and voting (in polling station on paper, or electronically over the internet) they were proposed in the datasets. Respondents were also offered ways to ask questions or formulate feedback on the questionnaire and given directions if they wanted or needed to consult the research team. Finally, they were offered a chance to receive some of the study results if desired, and the participating schools were compensated by receiving a digital camera or equivalent equipment or books if preferred.

In terms of the focus groups, respondents were asked for permission to record the discussion, to transcribe it, and to use it in reports and other academic publications. Here again, respondents were all voluntary, and duly compensated for their time and participation in the focus group with supermarket, travel, book or music vouchers. The themes and objectives of the focus groups were discussed with them and they were given a chance to ask questions if desired during the informed consent at the beginning of the focus groups. We were well aware of the need to gain the trust of vulnerable interviewees in focus groups, and to this end assurances of anonymity and confidentiality were repeated not just at the beginning when we obtained informed consent but at various points during the focus groups. Efforts were also made to ensure that the whole range of concerns and opinions of young people across the focus groups have been represented by us in the different sections of the report. In several cases we managed to gain access to participants through dedicated youth workers or other older adult intermediaries, who were always thanked for their time and who will be sent the key findings of the report when it has final approval.

In relation to Stakeholder interviews, the implications of using expertise had to be weighed against the impossibility of complete confidentiality, particularly where interviewees are from small organisations or occupy unique positions in political parties or may be identified by demographic features. Nonetheless, an effort to reduce the vulnerability of expert stakeholders has been made in the form of their **anonymisation within the text of the report**, and the removal of their names from the appendices. Additionally, where they made statements to us which aided us in the research process and in our thinking but which might have compromised their employment because it was critical of an organisation or party for which they worked, we have excluded these from the text, only making general and wide ranging points arising from the insights.



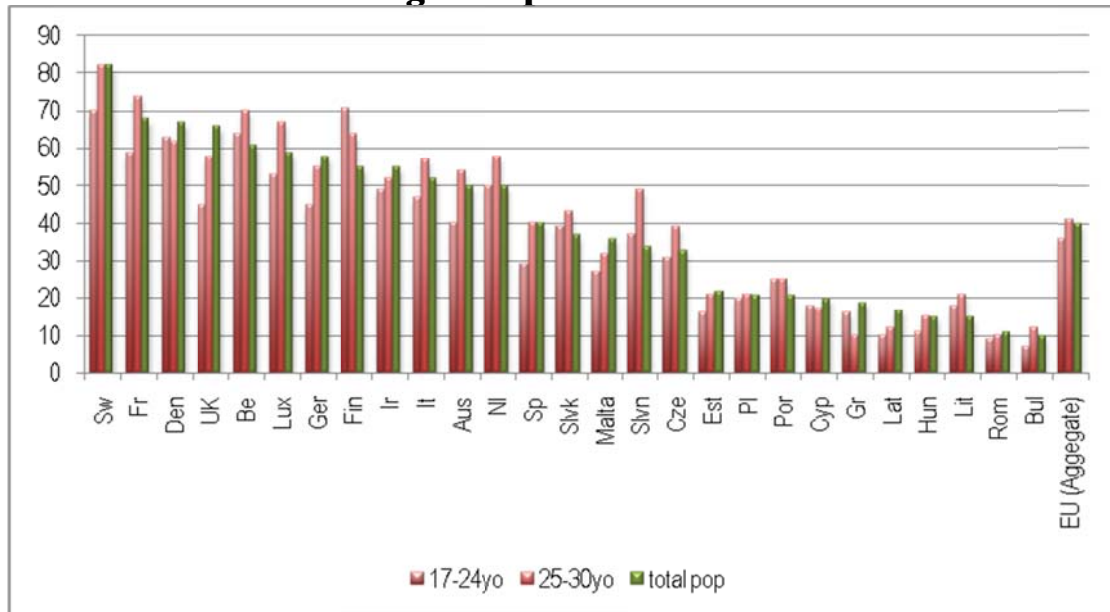
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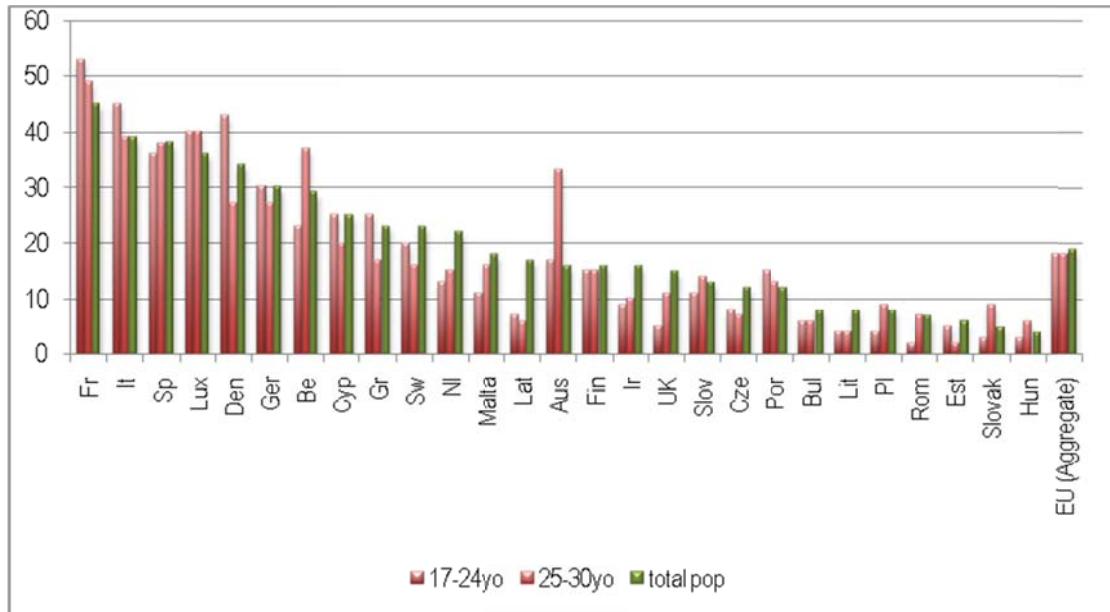
**Appendix 3:**

**% of citizens that have signed a petition**



**Source:** re-analysis of the European Social Survey – 2008 wave

**% of citizens that have attended a demonstration**



**Source:** re-analysis of the European Social Survey – 2008 wave



## APPENDIX 4

Folder/ Job number S:\2011\Survey Directory 2011\OP2262 LSE Young Peoples Participation in Europe  
Inception date 19<sup>th</sup> September 2011  
Client company name LSE  
Client contact name Michael Bruter  
Client contact email M.Bruter@lse.ac.uk

Research title/ name LSE Young People's Participation in Europe  
**Estimated Fieldwork Date – Mid November**

	Sample 15-17.9 year olds	Sample 18-30 year olds
United Kingdom	500	500
France	500	500
Finland*	300	700
Hungary	500	500
Austria*	300	700
Spain	500	500
Poland	500	500

## QUESTIONNAIRE

### ASK ALL - Open end question

**Q1:** Democracies are political systems which **are intended** to put citizens at the heart of decisions and give them control of their country.

Not worrying about what is realistic or possible, what are the **three words** that come to your mind when you think of the place that citizens should have in an ideal democracy?

Please use the space below:

- (1) Open text box
- (2) Open text box
- (3) Open text box

### ASK ALL - Open end question

**Q2: And now, still not worrying about what is or is not realistic or possible, what are the **three words** that come to your mind when you think of the place which you, personally, would like to have in your democracy?**

Please use the space below:

(1) Open text box

(2) Open text box

(3) Open text box

### ASK ALL – Multi choice question

**Q3: Which of the following statements apply to you?**

Please select all that apply.

1. I have voted in a national or European election
2. I have voted in a local election
3. I have voted in a sectorial election (student council, union, etc)
4. I have participated in a demonstration
5. I became a member of a political party or young party organisation
6. I became a member of another organisation, such as a union, pressure group, etc.
7. I have donated money or gifts to a cause or a charity
8. I have volunteered my time to a cause or a charity
9. I have Initiated a new petition
10. I have signed an existing petition
11. I have sent a letter or message to a politician, newspaper or organisation
12. I have posted a comment about politics or an issue on Facebook or another social media
13. I have voted on a survey about politics or an issue on Facebook or another social media
14. I have discussed a political question with your friends or family
15. I have ran for a political election
16. I have ran for a non-political election (school or class council, sports association, club, etc)
17. I have boycotted a product or company for reasons associated to politics or a cause
18. I have paid more for a product because it supports a cause (fair trade, animal rights, come from a country I want to help, etc)
19. I regularly follow current affairs
20. I follow or befriending charities, associations, or people representing a cause or party on twitter, Facebook, or another social media
21. I subscribe to a newsletter or blog updates from a charity, association, cause or party

### ASK ALL – Multi choice question

**Q4: Imagine that there is an issue someone strongly cares about. Regardless of whether you would consider doing it or not yourself, can you indicate the **three forms of action** which you believe would be the most likely to **have an impact on government decisions****

Please tick up to three

1. Vote in an election for a party which is close to me on this issue
2. Participate in a peaceful demonstration about this issue
3. Participate in a violent demonstration

4. Become a member of a political party
5. Become a member of a pressure group
6. Sign a petition about this issue
7. Stand in an election
8. Participate in a strike

**ASK ALL – Multi choice question**

**Q5: Regardless of whether they are efficient or not, it might be better for society as a whole if people choose some modes of participation rather than others. Still imagining that there is an issue someone strongly cares about and regardless of whether you would consider doing it or not yourself, can you indicate the **three forms of action** which you think are best for society as a whole?**

Please tick up to three

1. Vote in an election for a party which is close to me on this issue
2. Participate in a peaceful demonstration about this issue
3. Participate in a violent demonstration
4. Become a member of a political party
5. Become a member of a pressure group
6. Sign a petition about this issue
7. Stand in an election
8. Participate in a strike

**ASK ALL – Multi choice question**

**Q6: Finally, imagine that you are the person who strongly cares about an issue. Can you indicate the **three forms of action** which you would prefer to engage in yourself?**

Please tick up to three

1. Vote in an election for a party which is close to me on this issue
2. Participate in a peaceful demonstration about this issue
3. Participate in a violent demonstration
4. Become a member of a political party
5. Become a member of a pressure group
6. Sign a petition about this issue
7. Stand in an election
8. Participate in a strike

**ASK ALL – Single row Grid question**

**Q7: And in the future, do you see yourself regularly engaging in any of these activities?**

**Columns**

- Yes certainly
- Yes probably
- No probably not
- No certainly not

**Rows**

1. Vote in an election for a party which is close to me on this issue
2. Participate in a peaceful demonstration about this issue
3. Participate in a violent demonstration
4. Become a member of a political party



5. Become a member of a pressure group
6. Sign a petition about this issue
7. Stand in an election
8. Participate in a strike

### ASK ALL – Paired statement

**Q8: Please look carefully at the following pairs of statements. Each pair represents different ways of thinking about things and people maybe closer to one or to the other. For each of them, can you indicate the position that best corresponds to your own opinion?**

### Scale

Statement – 5 points to statement

### Statements

1. Politicians care about the opinions of people like me / politicians ignore the opinions of people like me
2. Political questions are too complex to have an opinion / I tend to have an opinion about most political questions
3. I am generally interested in political debates and causes / I am generally uninterested in political debates and causes
4. It is only a few people who are interested in participating in politics / It is most people are interested in participating in politics
5. It the fault of politicians if people do not participate / it is the fault of citizens themselves if people do not participate
6. Elections are the most efficient way to influence politics / Direct action such as demonstrations and strikes are the most efficient way to influence politics
7. Our country would be best governed if our politicians mostly listened what the people want / Our country would be best governed if our politicians mostly listened to the recommendations of competent people even if many people disagree
8. Citizens' participation is essential in a democracy / Citizens' participation is not essential in a democracy
9. Nothing can replace elections in a democracy / Elections could be replaced by regular surveys and citizens' consultation
10. I would be interested in regularly sending my opinions to the government if it was easier to do than now / I would not be interested in sending my opinions to the government even if it was easy to do
11. Government should be obliged to consult citizens directly on really important decisions / Government should not have to directly consult citizens even on really important decisions because they have been elected anyway
12. I wish citizens had more opportunities to participate in political decisions / I don't wish citizens had more opportunities to participate in political decisions
13. I prefer a country where government is in charge of providing the best for the community / I prefer a country where citizens mostly organise themselves to provide for their community
14. I tend to feel well represented by the groups that say they represent young people in our country / I tend not to feel well represented by the groups that say they represent young people in our country
15. To defend the interests of young people, I would prefer someone young from a political party I do not like / To defend the interests of young people, I would prefer someone no longer young from a political party I like.

### ASK ALL – Single row Grid question

**Q9: Consider elections that took place in your life even if you were too young to vote. For each of the following aspects of such an election, can you tell us if you have any good memory, bad memory, or no memory at all of the following aspects of any such an election?**

#### Columns

Good memory

Bad memory

No memory at all

Does not apply to me

#### Rows

1. Memories of my parents taking me to the polling station
2. Memories of parents, friends, or family discussing the election together
3. Memories of discussing the election with friends at school
4. Memories of watching election night and discovering the results of the election
5. Memories of election debates or discussions on TV
6. Memories of people I knew arguing or fighting over the election
7. Memories of someone I knew telling me how they would vote
8. Memories of getting interested in elections on my own

### ASK ALL – Single answer question

**Q10: And now consider the first major election when you were able to vote yourself. First, did you or did you not vote in that election?**

1. Yes I voted
2. No I did not vote
3. I do not remember

### Ask Those that said they voted at Q10 (Q10 = code 1 “Yes I voted”) – multi choice question

**Q11: You said that you went to vote on that occasion. What are the three main reasons why you decided to go to vote on that day?**

Please tick up to three

1. I thought it would be interesting or fun to vote
2. There was a candidate or party which I wanted to win
3. I thought it was my duty to vote
4. My parents or family told me I should go and vote
5. I wanted to see what it is like
6. Many of my friends were going to vote
7. There was a candidate or party which I wanted to lose
8. My family was going and proposed me to go with them
9. My friends were going and suggested I go with them
10. I had nothing important to do that day
11. Other (specify)

**Ask Those that said they did not vote at Q10 (Q10 = code 2 “No I did not vote”) – multi choice question**

**Q12: You said that you did not go to vote on that occasion. Which are the three main reasons why you decided not to go to vote on that day?**

Please tick up to three

1. I thought it would not be interesting or fun to vote
2. There was no candidate or party which I wanted to win
3. I did not think it was my duty to vote
4. My parents or family did not tell me I should go and vote
5. I was not interested in seeing what it is like
6. None of my friends were going to vote
7. There was no candidate or party which I wanted to lose
8. I had something important to do that day
9. My family was not going so I would have had to go on my own
10. My friends were not going so I would have had to go on my own
11. I forgot
12. Other (specify)

**Ask Those that said they voted at Q10 (Q10 = code 1 “Yes I voted”) – multi choice question**

**Q13: And trying to remember the day of the election, can you tell us how it made you feel to go to vote for the first time on that day?**

1. Proud
2. Interested
3. Worried
4. Happy
5. Bored
6. Excited
7. Old
8. Important
9. Part of my country
10. With a responsibility on my shoulders
11. Different
12. Other please specify
13. Nothing special
14. Don't know

**Ask Those that said they did not vote at Q10 (Q10 = code 2 “No I did not vote”) – multi choice question**

**Q14: And trying to remember the day of the election, can you tell us how it made you feel not to go to vote for the first time on that day?**

1. Proud
2. Interested
3. Worried
4. Happy
5. Bored
6. Excited
7. Old
8. Important
9. Part of my country

10. With a responsibility on my shoulders
11. Different
12. Other please specify
13. Nothing special
14. Don't know

**ASK ALL – Single row Grid question**

**Q15: Thinking of the elections, could you tell us whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

**Columns**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

**Rows**

1. Many of my family members went to vote in the election
2. Many of my friends went to vote in the election
3. Some of my friends or family told me it is important to vote
4. Some of the media I follow mentioned the election and encouraged people to vote
5. Some personalities I admire mentioned the election and encouraged people to vote
6. Some people close to me strongly wanted some party or candidate to win the election
7. Some people close to me strongly wanted some party or candidate not to win the election
8. I heard that the election would be quite a close call
9. I received some flyers at home or in the street about the election

**ASK ALL – Single row scale question**

**Q16: Think of when there is an election and the moment when you are casting your vote. Would this make you feel:**

Excited	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Bored
Sad	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Happy
Emotional	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Unmoved
Intense	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Light
Worried	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Reassured
Feeling it is important for me	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Feeling it is unimportant for me
Feeling it is important for my country	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Feeling it is unimportant for my country
Nervous	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Relaxed
Pessimistic	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Optimistic
Proud	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Ashamed
Feeling close to my fellow countrymen	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Not feeling close to my fellow countrymen

**ASK ALL – Single row scale question**

**Q17: And now think of when you get a chance to give your opinion in a political debate, for instance on Facebook or some social network. Would this make you feel:**

Excited	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Bored
Sad	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Happy
Emotional	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Unmoved
Intense	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Light
Worried	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Reassured
Feeling it is important for me	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Feeling it is unimportant for me
Feeling it is important for my country	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Feeling it is unimportant for my country
Nervous	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Relaxed
Pessimistic	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Optimistic
Proud	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Ashamed
Feeling close to my fellow countrymen	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Not feeling close to my fellow countrymen

**ASK ALL – Single row scale question**

**Q18: Finally, think of participating in a street demonstration or action about something you strongly care about. Would this make you feel**

Excited	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Bored
Sad	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Happy
Emotional	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Unmoved
Intense	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Light
Worried	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Reassured
Feeling it is important for me	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Feeling it is unimportant for me
Feeling it is important for my country	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Feeling it is unimportant for my country
Nervous	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Relaxed
Pessimistic	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Optimistic
Proud	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Ashamed
Feeling close to my fellow countrymen	1 2 3 Neither 5 6 7	Not feeling close to my fellow countrymen

### **ASK ALL – Single row Grid question**

**Q19: In your opinion, how positive or negative would the following initiatives be for you?**

#### **Columns**

Very positive  
Quite positive  
Quite negative  
Very negative  
Don't know

#### **Rows**

1. Allow young people to vote from the age of 16
2. Allow people to vote in elections on the internet rather than at the polling station
3. Organise sit downs about big issues such as fighting against the high cost of things
4. Organise mass demonstrations about big issues that are relevant to young people such as tuition fees or students' financial support
5. Organise mass demonstrations about big issues that are not specifically related to young people such as big international conflicts or pensions
6. Have special elections of young people's representatives who would advise government on youth issues
7. Have special elections of young people's European representatives who would advise the European Union on youth issues
8. Have strong unions to represent school and university students
9. Have elections of youth councils at the local level
10. Have school debates with young representatives of political parties when there is an election
11. Have Facebook pages where young people can address candidates during election campaigns
12. Have internet programmes which allow you to enter your preferences on issues that are important to you and find out which parties or politicians are closest to you on these issues



### ASK ALL – Single row Grid question

**Q20:** And in your opinion, how **successful or unsuccessful** would the following initiatives be at increasing the participation of young people in politics in European democracy?

#### Columns

Very successful  
Quite successful  
Quite unsuccessful  
Very unsuccessful  
Don't know

#### Rows

1. Allow young people to vote from the age of 16
2. Allow people to vote in elections on the internet rather than at the polling station
3. Organise sit downs about big issues such as fighting against the high cost of things
4. Organise mass demonstrations about big issues that are relevant to young people such as tuition fees or students' financial support
5. Organise mass demonstrations about big issues that are not specifically related to young people such as big international conflicts or pensions
6. Have special elections of young people's representatives who would advise government on youth issues
7. Have special elections of young people's European representatives who would advise the European Union on youth issues
8. Have strong unions to represent school and university students
9. Have elections of youth councils at the local level
10. Have school debates with young representatives of political parties when there is an election
11. Have Facebook pages where young people can address candidates during election campaigns
12. Have internet programmes which allow you to enter your preferences on issues that are important to you and find out which parties or politicians are closest to you on these issues

### **ASK ALL – Single row Drop down list**

**Q21: Finally, could you please tell us for all of the following things if you: have done it and would do it again, have done it but would not do it again, have not done it but would if given the chance, have not done it and would not if given the chance:**

#### **Drop down list**

Done it and would do it again  
Done it but would not do it again  
Have not done it but would if given the chance  
Have not done it and would not if given the chance  
Don't know

#### **Rows**

1. Voted in any election when you are or were under 18 year old
2. Voted via the internet for an election (political election, student council, etc)
3. Joined a school or university student union
4. Demonstrated about an issue that affects young people (tuition fees, financial support to young people, etc)
5. Demonstrated about an issue that does not specifically affect young people (war in Iraq, pensions reform, etc)
6. Used a website that calculates which parties or candidates are closest to your own policy preferences
7. Attended or participated in school debates organised with party representatives during electoral periods
8. Participated in a sit down protest organised against the cost of living or the way the economy is organised
9. Stood as a candidate for a youth council in your community
10. Joined a civic, cultural, or religious group with strong positions on social or political issues

### **Control on social media usage:**

#### **ASK ALL – Grid – multi choice**

**Q22: Could you please tell me if you use any of the following social media to discuss with or keep up with the news of the following people?**

#### **Columns**

Facebook  
Twitter  
Bebo  
Blogs  
Other social media

#### **Rows**

Actors  
Singers/musicians/bands  
Friends  
Sportsmen  
Family members  
TV celebrities  
Others

**END**

## **Appendix 5:**

### **Starter Questions**

**Circle up to five issues on this list that interest you the most**

Arts

Capitalism, consumerism

Drugs

Economy

Education

Environmental issues

Family

Gender

Globalisation

Health

Human rights

Hunting

Lifestyle

Immigration

Party politics

Patriotism, nationalism

Peace

Protection of animals

Religion

Sexual orientation

Social inequalities

Sports

Terrorism, military conflict

Unemployment

Voting



**Information about you:**

Name (just for our information, you will not be named in public reports):

How old are you?

How many bedrooms are there in the house/flat you live in?

What work did or do your parents/carers do?

Do you have broadband internet where you live now?

Do you have a computer in your bedroom?

Three words to describe politicians in general would be....

What kind of school did you go to – Government/Private?

What was your last qualification? (GCSEs? A-LEVELs? Degree?) [Replace with national specific quals]

Have you ever voted in a local election?

Do you think you will vote at the next election?

What's your dream job?

Do you think that 16 year olds should be able to vote in local and national elections?

## Appendix 6

**3 Focus groups with 1) 'typical young people/school students/college students' 2) excluded and marginal youth – e.g. Very poor/homeless/in care or in the justice system/asylum seeker youth; 3) young people highly active in campaigning for justice and rights, the civic sphere and/ or politics.**

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Name of the focus group (if there isn't one, give an easy name or place name)  
Number of interviewees and different organisations represented if appropriate  
Date of interview  
Location of focus group  
Length of focus group  
Incentives offered?

### Focus group topic guide for moderator

1. Tell me a little bit about yourselves – did you grow up in this area? Are you in education? Employed? Training? Etc. Would you say that most other young people in the [area]/[country] are like you? If yes – move on. If no, then ask for explanation.
2. Tell us about how you think of the politicians in your [area][country]?
3. Do you feel that your politicians listen to you when you voice your opinions?  
<Examples>
4. What kinds of issues and topics do you feel strongly about [paper list provided for discussion if needed] <examples. Why? Why not?>
5. What political activities, if any, do you take part in?
  - Voting? Are you old enough? Would you if...? Why/Why not?
  - Joining a party?
  - Demonstration?
  - Activism in group – eg. Environment? Anti-capitalism? Higher wages? Against fees?
6. Can you tell us a bit about how you personally think about the concept of 'democracy'. Have you heard this term before? What does it mean to you? {I Would like to live in a world where .... Imagining exercise for younger focus groups}
7. Do you think everyone – including all young people - can participate in democracy equally? <Examples/Why/Why not>
8. Do you think that 16 year olds should have the vote? Why/Why not?
9. Do you feel confident enough to [participate in a demonstration/write a letter/become a politicians when you're older.... Etc] What gives you confidence – is it education? Or experience? Or?...
10. What makes you want to take part and speak up in the politics and life of your [area][country][town][school/college]?
11. What do you understand by democratic activity or engagement?
  - What are the most common ways to participate?
  - What are the most interesting, new and creative ways to engage in protest or democratic activity? Give examples.
  -



12. **What would motivate young people that you know to become more involved in democracy and in the everyday-life of your community? What is your evidence for this?**
13. **Have you any evidence that policy or politics has changed after young people have made their views and opinions known?**
14. Do you know of any organizations or groups that promotes communication flow between young citizens and political authorities? **How? Please give us some examples. And how did you hear about/get involved with them? Was it on the internet or on Facebook/Social network?**
15. What are the major limitations of the current system of democracy in your country in relation to young people? Are there particular groups who are left out or not involved? What are the reasons and what are the possible solutions according to you?

## Appendix 7

### Interviews with key figures in youth parliaments, youth democracy organisations

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This task focuses on representatives of youth parliaments or people and organizations who play a key role in facilitating the democratic participation of young people nationally or who are at the interface of an organization which is involved in grassroots youth democratic action. The aim is to gain an understanding of how they view a) young people; b) the concept of democracy with particular relevance for young people; c) the opportunities and practical barriers for participation by young people in democratic life generally and in the specific country. We will also specifically seek their opinions on the role played by media generally and new media in particular in facilitating and motivating participation by young people in democratic life as well as on the issue of votes at 16 and participation through social enterprise.

We should aim at obtaining as much information as possible, but not constraining the interviewees to a specific set of answers. The interviewees should be encouraged to qualify, exemplify, argue, motivate, reflect on, specify, concretize, etc. **which is the aim of face-to-face interviews.**

Name of the interviewee

Name and scope of their organization/role

Number of years in post

Date of interview

Type of Interview: Face to face Telephone

#### Interview schedule

#### [Organisational scope and philosophy]

1. How would you describe your organization/website/group/department?

Purpose, aim, ideology, standpoint

Type of democratic remit

- Local issues
- National issues
- Global campaigns
- Politics
- Social activism
- Volunteering
- Religion
- Race/ethnicity – (i.e. ethnic, political, religious) **for examples and brief definition pls. ref. Raymond Franklin's directory: <http://www.bcpl.net/~rfrankli/hatedir.pdf>**
- Lifestyle politics
- Others (specify)

2. Can you describe the organization/unit's background? - When was it established? By whom? Why?

- Civic organization
- Individual
- Governmental body
- Political organization
- International network
- Other

3. How representative of the youth population in the whole country would you say the young people you work with are in terms of their social class/gender/education level?
4. What political activities, if any, does your organization/unit/group aim to inspire?
  - Skills
  - Knowledge
  - Practices
  - Level of education - employment

### **[Conceptualisations of Democracy and Participation]**

5. Can you tell us a bit about how you personally think about the concept of 'democracy'. What does it mean to you?
6. How does this link to the idea of 'participation'? Do you think everyone can participate in democracy? Do you think everyone should participate?
7. What do you understand by democratic activity or engagement?
  - Were there ideological debates over aims of the unit/organisation
  - Skills necessary for democratic participation
  - Knowledge necessary for democratic participation
  - Investments (public and private) necessary for democratic participation
  - What is the best way for young people to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge for participation
8. What are the most common and mundane types of participation that you are aware of?
9. **What are the most innovative and creative types and methods of participation by young people that you are aware of?**
10. How does this fit with your organization/group/unit's understanding of democracy and participation?
  - a. **Do you know young people who are engaging in 'social enterprise' – setting up their own businesses or organisations? Give examples if yes.**
  - b. **Is this a form of 'participation' that you feel can be scaled up to include young people from all cultures and backgrounds across [NAME Country] Why/Why not?**

### **[Conceptualisations of Youth]**

11. What kinds of qualities and issues come to mind when you think about young people in your country?
12. Does your organisation have a target age group in mind when you think of young people? Who did you want to reach? How would you describe your audience/users/members/target group?
  - Age, gender, ethnicity, education, social class, language, political views
  - National, local or global users invited? Why?
  - Are they seen as being individuals or groups?
  - Interests
  - Motivations
  - **Relationship with the Internet, social networks and other media**
  - Attitudes towards civic participation and previous experience of it
  - Degree of involvement in politics

- Do you think there are certain age groups you can better reach by the Internet than by face-to-face communication or old media? Which are these?

**13. What would motivate young people to become involved in democracy and in the activities of your organization/unit? What is your evidence for this?**

**14. Do you think that 16 year olds should be able to vote in local and national elections? – why/why not?**

**15. Do you think your organisation promotes communication flow between young citizens and political authorities? How? Please give us some examples.**

**- Have you any evidence that policy or politics has changed after young people have made their views and opinions known?**

- Potential for organizing existing civic or political activities
- Potential to attract new participants/activists
- Potential for building communication among those already involved – simultaneity created by internet (e.g. videoconferencing)

**16. What are the major limitations of the current system of democracy in your country in relation to young people? Are there particular groups who are left out or not involved? What are the reasons and what are the possible solutions according to you?**

**17. How is your organisation team organized and funded? (Age, gender, education, leadership, hierarchies, bids/funding structure)**

**With regards to your work strategies, can you describe any specifics that appeal to young people? Is there anything specific which is targeted at different demographic groups of youth – eg. Migrants, workingclass, homeless, young women/girls? Etc.**

How is the work of your unit/organization/group publicized and promoted?

- Language or languages used. Differences in the information related to the language used when it is translated from another language.
- How to reach potential users/young people and encourage them to use the organization and be involved – internet? Social networks? Mainstream media?
- Publicity of the organisation. Purpose and evolution.

### **Interviews with key figures in media / community radio**

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**Nb. This survey instrument is a variation of the main instrument for the project, with additional questions making it more applicable to those who work in the media.**

This task focuses on representatives of youth parliaments or people and organizations who play a key role in facilitating the democratic participation of young people nationally or who are at the interface of an organization which is involved in grassroots youth democratic action. The aim is to gain an understanding of how they view a) young people; b) the concept of democracy with particular relevance for young people; c) the opportunities and practical barriers for participation by young people in

LSE EACEA youth participation in democratic life project. Interview instrument.

democratic life generally and in the specific country. We will also specifically seek their opinions on the role played by media generally and new media in particular in facilitating and motivating participation by young people in democratic life as well as on the issue of votes at 16 and participation through social enterprise.

We should aim at obtaining as much information as possible, but not constraining the interviewees to a specific set of answers. The interviewees should be encouraged to qualify, exemplify, argue, motivate, reflect on, specify, concretize, etc. **which is the aim of face-to-face interviews.**

Name of the interviewee

Name and scope of their organization/role

Number of years in post

Date of interview

Type of Interview: Face to face Telephone

### **Interview schedule**

#### **[Organisational scope and philosophy]**

18. How would you describe your organization/website/group/department?

Purpose, aim, ideology, standpoint

Type of issues covered

- Local issues
- National issues
- Global campaigns
- Politics
- Social activism
- Volunteering
- Religion
- Race/ethnicity – (i.e. ethnic, political, religious) **for examples and brief definition pls. ref. Raymond Franklin's directory: <http://www.bcpl.net/~rfrankli/hatedir.pdf>**
- Lifestyle politics
- Others (specify)

19. Can you describe the organization/unit's background? - When was it established? By whom? Why? Does it have any particular remit to cover young people and politics?

- Civic organization
- Individual
- Governmental body
- Political organization
- International network
- Other

20. How representative of the youth population in the whole country would you say the young people who interact with and consume your media output are, in terms of their social class/gender/education level?

21. What political activities, if any, does your organization/unit/group aim to inspire?

- Skills
- Knowledge
- Practices
- Level of education - employment

### [Conceptualisations of Democracy and Participation]

22. Can you tell us a bit about how you personally think about the concept of 'democracy'. What does it mean to you?
23. What is the role of the media in facilitating this process and in a democratic society?
24. How does this link to the idea of 'participation'? Do you think everyone can participate in democracy? Do you think everyone should participate?
25. What do you understand by democratic activity or engagement?
  - Were there ideological debates over aims of the unit/organisation
  - Skills necessary for democratic participation
  - Knowledge necessary for democratic participation
  - Investments (public and private) necessary for democratic participation
  - What is the best way for young people to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge for participation
26. What are the most common and mundane types of participation that you are aware of?
27. **What are the most innovative and creative types and methods of participation by young people that you are aware of?**
28. How does this fit with your organization/group/unit's understanding of democracy and participation?
  - a. **Do you know young people who are engaging in 'social enterprise' – setting up their own businesses or organisations? Give examples if yes.**
  - b. **Is this a form of 'participation' that you feel can be scaled up to include young people from all cultures and backgrounds across [NAME Country] Why/Why not?**

### [Conceptualisations of Youth]

29. What kinds of qualities and issues come to mind when you think about young people in your country?
30. Does your organisation have a target age group in mind when you think of young people? Who did you want to reach? How would you describe your audience/users/members/target group?
  - Age, gender, ethnicity, education, social class, language, political views
  - National, local or global users invited? Why?
  - Are they seen as being individuals or groups?
  - Interests
  - Motivations
  - **Relationship with the Internet, social networks and other media**
  - Attitudes towards civic participation and previous experience of it
  - Degree of involvement in politics
  - Do you think there are certain age groups you can better reach by the Internet than by face-to-face communication or old media? Which are these?
31. **What would motivate young people to become involved in democracy and in the activities of your organization/unit? What is your evidence for this?**



32. **Do you think that 16 year olds should be able to vote in local and national elections? – why/why not?**
33. **What information do you think young people need in order to participate in civic and democratic activity? Do you seek to provide that in anyway?**
34. Do you think your organisation promotes communication flow between young citizens and political authorities? **How? Please give us some examples.**
- **Have you any evidence that policy or politics has changed after young people have made their views and opinions known?**
  - Potential for organizing existing civic or political activities
  - Potential to attract new participants/activists
  - Potential for building communication among those already involved – simultaneity created by internet (e.g. videoconferencing)
35. What are the major limitations of the current system of democracy in your country in relation to young people? Are there particular groups who are left out or not involved? What are the reasons and what are the possible solutions according to you?
36. How is your organisation team organized and funded? (Age, gender, education, leadership, hierarchies, bids/funding structure)
- With regards to your work strategies, can you describe any specifics that appeal to young people? Is there anything specific which is targeted at different demographic groups of youth – eg. Migrants, workingclass, homeless, young women/girls? Etc.**

- How is the work of your unit/organization/group publicized and promoted?
- Language or languages used. Differences in the information related to the language used when it is translated from another language.
  - How to reach potential users/young people and encourage them to use the organization and be involved – internet? Social networks? Mainstream media?
  - Publicity of the organisation. Purpose and evolution.

## **Appendix 8 – Consent Form, Experiment Guidelines and Post-Test Survey**

### **Consent form:**

I hereby accept to participate in a study organised by academics from the London School of Economics on behalf of the European Commission and concerned with the representation of young people. The project will last two weeks, is strictly anonymous, and exclusively serves academic purposes. There is no known risk to the study as it simply comprises of participating in an informal consultation on young people representation, and answering a final questionnaire. The study does not entail any obligation on my part. At the end of the project, I will be able to be debriefed about the purposes of the study and to access some of its main outcomes or ask questions about them if I wish.

I accept to participate in the study.

In \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / 2011

### **Purpose and Guidelines of the Experiment**

As you know, the experiment is one of the five key architectural elements of the primary research that our team is undertaking in order to assess how the participation of young citizens can be encouraged and increased throughout Europe. It is particularly concerned with the use of social media in campaigning and electronic voting as two possible routes that many have envisaged in order to foster greater interest and participation amongst the youth.

In a nutshell, social media are being increasingly used by the private sector not only as a 'free advertising' tool, but also as something which is perceived as an opportunity to create freer and more fluid dialogue between an institution and the people it wants to address (possibility to simplify questions and answers, greater dynamics of debate, impression of freedom and greater proximity, etc), create an implicit sense of community between users, and a sense of involvement and ownership of a debate. Implicitly, part of the use of social media in politics relies on the same hopes and assumptions – such as the notion that people who are not typically involved enough to become party members might still feel more 'in control' of a campaign debate, politicians can send clear, apparently spontaneous, and understandable brief messages and updates (particularly through twitter), answer fans, supporters, or critics, receive feedback on their walls/feeds, etc. Moreover, the hope of those who engage in social media activities is to connect with a clientele which is supposed to be demographically different from those who would typically watch political programmes on tv or attend meetings, and first and foremost younger citizens.

Conversely, the use of electronic voting is defended by those who think that it is easier and more convenient to vote online than to vote at a polling station. The underlying assumption is that some people might not vote because they might resist the 'effort' to go and vote or would be unable to do so in constrained times and places and that by contrast, some of them might make the effort to express their choice should they be allowed to do it electronically with the time and place constraints relaxed. Many electronic voters supporters also believe that e-voting can give elections a 'hip factor'

which will rejuvenate their image. Once again, for practical as well as philosophical reasons e-voting supporters expect that allowing electronic voting would particularly affect the likeliness to participate of young voters.

It is important to note that there are plenty of arguments against both avenues, but we shall not discuss them here yet.

### <The experiment>

The experiment that we are proposing to conduct is in fact a double experiment, which allows us to assess the behaviour and perceptions of three treatment groups as well as a control group. The two dimensions are:

- the effect of social media campaigning –
- the effect of e-voting

#### *The election*

The experiment targets young people in high school or equivalent. It is based on a fake election for young citizens representatives, elected according to a list system and defined by partisan affiliation. In each country, we propose that the lists running include a moderate right wing, a moderate left wing, a centrist/liberal, a green, an extreme left, and an extreme right lists, so five lists in total (we can discuss labels at the meeting). The lists must have labels that make them readily identifiable but should NOT take the name of the actual parties running in your national system. The councillors elected would be supposed to sit in a young citizens council intended to advise the government on youth policy in the country.

#### *Social media campaigning stimulus*

In the context of this experiment, we shall assume a two week electoral campaign. The groups subject to social media campaigning would receive twitter feeds from the five lists. We would suggest that they are encouraged to register as twitter users and asked to subscribe to feeds by the five lists. Those who for whatever reason refuse to take up a twitter account could be sent links to the five lists' twitter accounts and consult them freely. Each country researcher will monitor his/her five twitter accounts regularly, post tweets on each account at least every other day and answer some of the queries/comments received at least three times a week for the two weeks of the campaign.

The groups which are not subjected to the social media campaigning will only receive a one page description of each list's manifesto which the social media groups will also receive in addition to the twitter feeds.

#### *Electronic voting stimulus*

The groups subjected to the electronic voting stimulus will receive an invitation to vote electronically on the election (most certainly using survey monkey). They will benefit from a 24 hour period to vote.

By contrast, the groups not subject to the electronic voting stimulus will be invited to vote in person only at a 'polling station' manned by the country researcher for either two

or three periods totalling at least 2 hours (typically a 30 minute morning period plus a 1 hour lunch break, plus 30 minutes after the end of classes, but we can discuss details with each of you depending on typical country school times).

### *Debriefing questionnaire*

Each of the participants will be asked to participate in a short post-experiment questionnaire. It is really important that AFTER then end of the experiment we try and get everybody to answer those, and could be a good idea to ask teachers to encourage participants to do so. However, it is also essential that this prompt only comes after the end of the experiment itself as we do not want to bias turnout which is one of the dependent variables that we are monitoring.

The questionnaire will be assessed electronically using survey monkey, so people voting electronically will be invited to fill it in just after their vote, others will receive separate invitations. Questionnaire reminders will be sent out in all cases.

### <Target and recruitment>

For this particular experiment, we wish to target high school students, so typically in most cases, people who do not have the right to vote yet (except in Austria) but would get it soon.

We ask that you recruit a minimum of 100 participants per country, so typically, 4 classes corresponding to each of the 4 treatment groups (including control group), as it might be easier for you to keep classes homogeneous in terms of which type of treatment they are being exposed to.

Ideally, we would like you to select schools which are 'mixed' or 'average' in terms of their social backgrounds (in particular it would be good to avoid schools from highly favoured backgrounds as this could skew the results).

Please, also do try to avoid specialist politics students (e.g. politics A levels etc). When approaching and selecting schools, it would be good to discuss with the school administrators or the teachers what computers are available for participants to consult tweets and participate in the survey if they do not have access to a personal computer at home. Please do encourage teachers/administrators to help as much as possible in terms of this computer access.

### <Experimental set up and start>

- You must first secure agreement from a school to take part in the project. We have planned a small 'thank you' gift in the form of a digital camera for them to keep. We also suggest that you offer a little debriefing and short one page report on the results explained in very simple words at the end of the experiment, which the teachers can use and discuss with the students if they want.
- It would then be advisable to select classes (in collaboration with administrators and teachers) where you would be able to introduce the election to all the students. We suggest that it might be easiest with teachers in history or social science and humanities disciplines (but again, please, avoid politics as such).
- We suggest you go in each of the four classes at the beginning of the experiment

and briefly introduce the election – what it is about, what are the lists that will be competing (remain as brief and detached as possible) and hand out the manifestos, what the campaign will consist of (i.e. for classes which have the twitter stimulus, explain that part), how will the election be organised (again, only mention the version which is relevant to each specific class – so EITHER in person – where and when – OR electronically – when and how). Also in this briefing visit, please do reassure everyone about the complete anonymous character of the vote.

- For the classes with the twitter stimulus, please do explain how to subscribe to the twitter feeds for the candidates, how to register for twitter if not done, and how to access the feeds for non-users if they refuse to have a twitter account.
- Please do take everyone's email addresses in order to be able to send vote (if applicable) and questionnaire invitations to all the participants.

#### <Campaign Running>

- The first stage will be the finalisation of the manifestos. We will discuss that part of the project on the 31st. They should then be printed out and distributed.
- The second stage will be the twitter work for half the groups. You will need to set up twitter accounts for each 'list' before the beginning of the experiment, ideally prepare a short description. Please throughout the experiment, while there is an element of role play in your 'embracing' each of the lists, do make sure that there is never any use of inflammatory, racist, xenophobic, etc language.
- Then please do ensure that each of your list posts new tweets at least every other day for the two weeks period. This could be about some of their events, their programme and proposals, campaign experience, reminders to vote, etc. Again we'll discuss specific details on the 31st to ensure that all parties and countries get harmonised stimuli.
- Also, please monitor posts on your 'wall' and answer some of them at least three times a week for the two weeks for each list.

#### <Election running>

- For electronic voters, please send a voting invitation 24 hours before the vote opens to all the relevant email addresses with a link to the vote, anonymous id, and guidelines of when the vote will open and close.
- There should then be a further email reminder when the vote opens ('the vote is now open etc and will close at...') which will again feature a link to the voting page and anonymous id.
- At the same time, you will need to organise the 'in person' vote. This would be best organised with the school. Please ask them if they can provide you with a dedicated space which you could try and organise as much like a polling station as possible. We would like you to have that polling station opened at three convenient moments during the day, for a total period of at least 2 hours (so typically a morning break, lunch break, and time at the end of the students' day of classes).
- The day before or the morning of the in person vote, please ask teachers to distribute a one page voting guidelines description indicating where the polling station is located and what are its opening times.

#### <Debriefing>

- All students will receive an invitation to complete a debriefing questionnaire which is crucial to our study. Please do ask teachers after the end of the vote to insist on everyone

filling one in, or do so in person.

- We suggest that you propose to teachers to offer a brief debriefing about the project in class in the weeks that follow the experiment if they are interested, and/or to provide them with a written summary when we calculate the first results.
- It may also be a good idea to offer a chance to the participants themselves to write to you if they have any question. Finally, please don't forget to delete your twitter accounts!

### **Post-test survey**

Thank you for participating in our project. As a final step in our study, we would really appreciate it if could please complete the following questionnaire. It will only take about 3 minutes of your time and it will be very useful to hear your feedback. At the end of the survey you will get a chance to ask for information about the study if you wish to receive it. Thanks again for your help.

When you kindly accepted to participate in our study, you were provided with a unique respondent number. Please indicate your respondent id number in the box below

Q1: You just took part in an election, could you tell us if you voted or not?  
- Yes, I did vote - No, I did not vote

Q2: 'Could you please tell us which list you voted for, or if you did not vote which list you would have been most likely to vote for?  
- list all six party lists in your country - don't know

**If you did not take part in the vote, could you please tell us what are the main reasons why you did not vote (please choose up to three):**

- I am not interested in politics –
- I am interested in politics in general but not in this specific election –
- I did not think that it would make a difference –
- I did not have time –
- I could not really choose who to vote for –
- None of my friends went to vote –
- Someone else told me I should not vote –
- I did not have enough information about the lists and candidates –
- The election was boring - All lists sounded the same to me - Other (specify)
- 

Q4: Using the following scales, on the whole, could you please tell us if you found the campaign? [all use 1-5 scales: not at all, not really, I'm not sure, quite, very much)  
- Interesting - Exciting - Informative - Boring  
- Complex - Relevant to me

Q5: Using the same scale and thinking of the moment when you went to vote, could you please tell us if you felt (same scale)

- Excited - Worried - Enthusiastic - Happy - With a responsibility on your shoulders

**If you did not vote in the election, how has it made you feel? (same scale):**



Happy Sad Worried Guilty Proud Lonely Cool Defiant

Q5: During the two weeks that preceded the vote did you hesitate at all on which list to vote for? Not at all, not really, yes a little bit, yes a lot.

Q6: Over the past two weeks, did you at all speak about the election with (please tick all that apply)

- Your parents - Your brother or sister - Your school friends - You friends from outside school - Your boyfriend/girlfriend - A teacher - Anyone else (please specify)

Q7: If you spoke with anyone about the election, what did you speak about (please tick all that apply)

- who I wanted to vote for - who someone else wanted to vote for - some list I really disliked - some element of the party programme - something I read on twitter about the campaign or the parties - something I heard on the news - Anything else (please specify)

Q8: If you had a choice would you have preferred to follow the campaign (please tick up to three):

- receiving the lists' programmes and details of their policies - on twitter - on tv - on facebook  
- in newspapers - attending debates or discussions with the candidates - anything else (please specify)

Q9: If you had a choice, would you have preferred to vote

- at the polling station on the day of the election - at the polling station but with a voting period of one week - online from the school - online from home

Q10: Finally, on the whole, did you have the impression that the candidates competing for your vote were: (yes really, yes to a certain extent, not really, not at all, I'm not sure)

- competent - disconnected from reality - intelligent - ambitious - approachable - close to people like me - nice - hypocritical - capable of making a difference - arrogant

Thank you!

If you would like to find out more about our study and the findings, please write your email in the box below.

If you have any comment or question about the project, please feel free to mention it in this box

**APPENDIX 9**

**1. POLITICIANS ARE ...**

<b>Politicians are:</b>	<b>French 'Active'</b>	<b>Spanish 'Active'</b>	<b>Finland 'Active'</b>	<b>Austrian 'Active'</b>	<b>U.K. 'Active'</b>	<b>Hungary 'Active'</b>
	Too distant from youth. Should be judged on policy, not necessarily left or right.	Overpaid . Out of touch. They change nothing. Different Caste. Don't listen to young. Protect self-interests.	Depressing. Slow to deliver. Some deserve respect. Far right makes for a bad atmosphere.	Boring. Hot air talkers. Conniving. Pragmatic. Ignorant.	Corrupt. Greedy. Male. Rich. Fake. Unfair.	Money-focussed. Not interested in the young. Shockingly disorganised.
<b>Politicians are:</b>	<b>France 'Excluded'</b>	<b>Spain 'Excluded'</b>	<b>Finland 'Excluded'</b>	<b>Austria 'Excluded'</b>	<b>U.K. 'Excluded'</b>	<b>Hungary 'Excluded'</b>
	Manipulative. 'Us' and 'them'. Distant from lives of the young. Dream-sellers. Some are ok.	Overpaid . Liars. Make empty promises . Don't listen.	Out of touch with issues affecting the young. Don't listen. Don't make changes.	Stupid. Disabled. Full of empty talk. Imbeciles.	Overpaid. Corrupt. Force for no good. Out of touch. Dishonest .	Out of touch with young. Distant reality. Not helping young. From different planet.
<b>Politicians are:</b>	<b>France 'Reference'</b>	<b>Spain 'Reference'</b>	<b>Finland 'Reference'</b>	<b>Austria 'Reference'</b>	<b>U.K. 'Reference'</b>	<b>Hungary 'Reference'</b>
	Liars. Egotistical. Power-hungry. Distant from reality of young.	Not to be trusted. Useless. Overpaid . Don't listen to the young.	Arrogant. Evasive. Some listen. Liars.	Hypocritical. Wrong. Liars. Quick-witted. Sly. Aggressive.	All an act. Hypocritical. Not trustworthy.	Uncool. Self-interested. All contact-based.

## 2. DEMOCRACY MEANS...

<b>Democracy means:</b>	<b>France 'Active'</b>	<b>Spain 'Active'</b>	<b>Finland 'Active'</b>	<b>Austria 'Active'</b>	<b>U.K. 'Active'</b>	<b>Hungary 'Active'</b>
	Associated with equality. Absence of hierarchy. Social integration.	We don't have one because people do not get represented.	Believe that most young people feel they have no say in it and that they can't make change.	Young people are not consulted. Youth organization is important for getting voices heard. They believe in elections.	It's rare. It doesn't exist. Too many are denied a voice – youth, poor, and travellers, those who disagree with authorities, homeless.	Democracy is now in danger in Hungary. In principle, about equality but in practice can never be realized in entirety. Can only try to get close.
<b>Democracy means:</b>	<b>France 'Excluded'</b>	<b>Spain 'Excluded'</b>	<b>Finland 'Excluded'</b>	<b>Austria 'Excluded'</b>	<b>U.K. 'Excluded'</b>	<b>Hungary 'Excluded'</b>
	Ideally, it's about equality. In reality, we don't have it enough.	Dictatorship. This is not a democratic system. It's only mentioned at election times. Ideally it's about equality.	In theory, for good of all but in practice minorities always trampled on.	Only certain people are heard. Problems with current situation but isn't really anything better. Supposed to mean everyone has say but in practice, it's not the case.	We don't live in democracy. Poor people excluded. No one listens to poor young people.	Bureaucracy. The poor aren't heard. Heard if you have money
<b>Democracy means:</b>	<b>France 'Reference'</b>	<b>Spain 'Reference'</b>	<b>Finland 'Reference'</b>	<b>Austria 'Reference'</b>	<b>U.K. 'Reference'</b>	<b>Hungary 'Reference'</b>
	We don't live in one or if we do, it's dying. Politicians live in ivory towers. Ideally, it's 'power to the people'. In reality, 'us' v 'them'.	We're losing it. It's a general problem. The ideal is one thing, reality another. But popular movement/uprisings are good re: Greece.	Means equality but it's a contradiction. There's always a minority. There's power-division between rich and poor. True democracy doesn't exist.	It means everyone has a say. There should be democracy everywhere.	Means freedom. I can speak out. Of course, some will always be heard more. Immigrants and others who don't understand system get left out.	Hungarian version's inferior to that of "the West". Associated with western Europe and U.S. Hungary behind/conservative. Some disagreement about how 'behind' it is.

### 3. SHOULD 16 YEAR OLDS VOTE? – WITH REASONS

<b>Voting. Yes/No why?</b>	<b>France 'Active'</b>	<b>Spain 'Active'</b>	<b>Finland 'Active'</b>	<b>Austria 'Active'</b>	<b>U.K. 'Active'</b>	<b>Hungary 'Active'</b>
	Mixed opinion but in the main, no. They're too immature.	Mixed opinion. With more guidance/ education, it could be good.	Mixed opinion but in main, with greater education about process, yes.	Most agree it's a good thing BUT with more education about process.	No. They wouldn't bother.	Disagreed. Some say too immature. One, that it's a good idea.
<b>Voting. Yes/No why?</b>	<b>France 'Excluded'</b>	<b>Spain 'Excluded'</b>	<b>Finland 'Excluded'</b>	<b>Austria 'Excluded'</b>	<b>U.K. 'Excluded'</b>	<b>Hungary 'Excluded'</b>
	Opinion here is divided. Some say it's important and others, a waste of time.	Divided opinion.	Undecided. On one hand, no harm trying. On other, young voters might vote for extremes or simply follow parents. They are not all intelligent enough.	Mixed opinion but general agreement that it changes nothing for them.	In theory, good idea to have your say. In practice it doesn't matter – especially for young working-class.	No. Too immature at 16. 16 yr olds don't understand.
<b>Voting. Yes/No why?</b>	<b>France 'Reference'</b>	<b>Spain 'Reference'</b>	<b>Finland 'Reference'</b>	<b>Austria 'Reference'</b>	<b>U.K. 'Reference'</b>	<b>Hungary 'Reference'</b>
	Mixed opinion.	Divided opinion.	Seem to feel that this would work better in local elections. But, in bigger, national elections, 16 yr olds lack critical thinking, would not take it seriously and would simply follow their parents.	Mixed opinion.	Mixed between yes, I would and No, it would be a wasted vote.	They'd like to vote themselves but think lowering age is bad idea because of lack of information. In short, "a nice idea". But information is lacking.

## 4. Use media, internet and social media

	<b>France</b>	<b>Spain</b>	<b>Finland</b>	<b>Austria</b>	<b>U.K.</b>	<b>Hungary</b>
<b>'Active'</b>	Facebook. Twitter NOT very present.	WebPages	Helsinging Sanomat newspaper. Facebook.	Online versions of newspapers. Facebook.	Facebook . Internet. Trust community newspapers more. Websites more reliable than papers. General distrust of newspapers.	Facebook. Following Politicians' WebPages.
<b>'Excluded'</b>	All aware of Facebook and Twitter but don't have easy access.	Prisoners with no access to Internet. Only mention television.	Internet searches. YouTube hits. Facebook. "But the ones following politicians' blogs are the ones who already know about the issues.	Heute, Osterreich and Kronen Zeitung newspapers. Internet searching. Facebook but not really for political information.	Prefer consulting variety of non-mainstream news sources. Word of mouth. Prefer local to national newspapers.	Facebook. News portals. "Mainstream news is only 15% reality." Word of mouth. Discussion groups.
<b>'Reference'</b>	Don't really use Internet and social media for political purposes.	Internet. Twitter. Facebook.	Internet searches. Internet forums. Facebook. MP WebPages.	Facebook	Facebook Variety of sold and free newspapers. Follow blogs and podcasts. Emphasised importance of consulting more than one news source in order to get fuller picture.	Use Facebook but it's generally "uncool" to use Facebook for political purposes

## 5. Ways to improve situation and involvement

	<b>France</b>	<b>Spain</b>	<b>Finland</b>	<b>Austria</b>	<b>U.K.</b>	<b>Hungary</b>
<b>'Active'</b>	Make politics less about old, rich, white men. Politicians should attend poorer areas.	Political change would motivate more to participate.	Greater political education at schools. Show the young that they are interesting and that they're listened to. Volunteering systems.	More discussion groups. Education. Community college involvement. Learning cafes for young. Space and a contact person.	Education.	Discussion groups. Politics are 'uncool' at the moment.
<b>'Excluded'</b>	Meet the young of poorer areas. School education should include more politics.	"The market has the power."	Discussion groups. Suggestion of possibly more social security payments for those who participate in politics.	Listen to young people. Discussion groups. A room/ space. Meeting with those in power.	More information about process. Make involvement fun. Give a budget for young to organise events.	<b>Listen to young. More young people in parliament. With work. With change.</b>
<b>'Reference'</b>	You need skills in order to participate. More discussion groups. Greater social integration.	Policy as a school subject. Politicians should motivate the young. More information and communication.	More education in school. School cooperation with political youth groups. Politicians to address more relevant issues.	Generate concern for the situation. Greater political education.	Politics more central to school curriculum. More discussion groups.	More Roma in govt. More political street workers.



## 6. Types of creative political expression

	FRANCE	SPAIN	FINLAND	AUSTRIA	U.K.	HUNGARY
<b>'Active'</b>	Video-making. Distributing flyers.	Fighting (sic). Street performance. New media campaign – facebook memes.	Theatre performance. Teaching campaigns. Art and drama camps. Bringing older people into contact with migrants to provoke dialogue.	Theatre workshops with civic themes. Funded civic spaces for youth to meet. Student-led magazines in schools. Twitter.	Carnival. Filmmaking. Getting attention from mainstream media through public stunts. Dressing up and occupying public spaces.	Street protests. Placards. Stunts.
<b>'Excluded'</b>	Documentary made and put on YouTube.	Activist video-making. "Camp Protest".	Would like to create popular discussion canteens.	Not mentioned.	Shows. Music cds. Placards. Prisons with creative education programmes for youth.	Volunteering.
<b>'Reference'</b>	Facebook pages on campaigns.	Viral videos. YouTube.	They haven't participated but like idea of graffiti, dressing up, creating animation.	Demonstrating with interesting placards in shopping centres and streets. Writing on politician's facebook page.		

Focus Groups

**YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC LIFE PROJECT**

Appendix 10

**Focus Groups**

**Austria**

<b>Group Type</b>	<b>Name of Group</b>	<b>No of People</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Incentive Offered</b>	<b>Group Facilitator</b>
'Reference'	Austrian secondary school pupils	5	01 February 2012	20Euro cinema voucher	
'Excluded'	JUCA residents (Homeless shelter for young people)	4	15 February 2012	40 Euros supermarket voucher	
'Active'	Female rep from Conservative Youth Female former rep from Left wing youth org Male rep from catholic youth organization Male rep from muslim youth organization Female rep from muslim youth organization Female rep from student movement	6	08 February 2012	20Euro book voucher	

**Finland**

<b>Group Type</b>	<b>Name of Group</b>	<b>No of People</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Incentive Offered</b>	<b>Group Facilitator</b>
'Reference'	High school pupils	7	24 January 2012	2 movie tickets	
'Excluded'	VAMOS-project youth	6	15 February 2012	2 movie tickets + gift card	
'Active'	Helsinki Student Union- HYY (female) National Youth Council- Allianssi (female) Finnish Red Cross (male) Amnesty International Finland (female) Changemaker (male) Scouts Kassandra (female)	6	07 December 2011	2 movie tickets	

**France**

<b>Group Type</b>	<b>Active Youth's Organisation</b>	<b>No of People</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Incentive Offered</b>	<b>Group Facilitator</b>
'Reference'	High school pupils	6	09 February 2012	2 cinema tickets	
'Excluded'	Marginalised Young Women (FIT)	4	17 February 2012	50Euro Gift Cards	
'Active'	FIDL (Trade Union for High School Students)	6	11 February 2012	Microwave for their premises	

Focus Groups

**Hungary**

Group Type	Active Youth's Organisation	No of People	Date	Incentive Offered	Group Facilitator
'Reference'	High School Students at Radnóti Academic Grammar School, Budapest	3	24 February 2012	Cinema Tickets	
'Excluded'	Recruited through civic organisation for the homeless A Város Mindenkié ('The City is for All')	11+6	22 February 2012	HUF 10,000 (about 35 euro) Tesco or Spar gift card	
'Active'	Activist: Bea, activist involved in LMBT and general political issues, Marcsi, activist involved with various LMBT organisations Aron, activist involved with Critical Mass, the Student Network, and editor of a university paper	3	26 January 2012		

**Spain**

Group Type	Active Youth's Organisation	No of People	Date	Incentive Offered	Group Facilitator
'Reference'	High School Students in the Secondary School 7 Secretari Coloma		23 February 2012	No incentives	
'Excluded'	Young Prisoners: Centre Penitenciaris de Joves 6 (Youth Penitentiary Centre) at La Roca del Vallès (Barcelona)	6	21 February 2012	No incentives	
'Active'	Avalot (The UGT union youth)	5	29 February 2012	No incentives	

**United Kingdom**

Group Type	Active Youth's Organisation	No of People	Date	Incentive Offered	Group Facilitator
'Reference'	College students and youth group	3+4=7	28/01/12 and 23/02/12	£20 Tesco voucher	Maria Pini
'Excluded'	Youth - unemployed and homeless	6	21st January 2012	£30 Tesco voucher	Maria Pini
'Active'	Male rep from Hackney Youth Parliament Campaigner from Occupy London Slutmarch Demonstrator Muslim Women's Org Filmmaker Youth Parliament (female)	6	11th February 2012	£20 Tesco voucher	Maria Pini

## YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC LIFE PROJECT

### Appendix 11: Details of the stakeholder interviews

#### Austria

Name and scope of organisation/role	Date of Interview	Type of Interview
Senior Researcher at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, Department of Economics and Finance	19 December 2011	Face to face
Austrian National Union of Students	21 December 2011	Face to face
Austrian National Youth Council	01 February 2012	Face to face
FP5 Public Broadcasting Organization	30 January 2012	Face to face
Head of youth centre Perg, board member of the Austrian Open Youth Work Association (boja)	04 January 2012	Face to face
Socialist Youth Austria	13 December 2011	Face to face
Head of the Austrian School Student Union, member of the 'Pupils Union' (Schülerunion), affiliated with the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP)	16 January 2012	Face to face
Radio Fro, local community radio in Upper Austria	16 February 2012	Face to face
Head of the Department for "Youth Politics" at the Ministry for Business Affairs, Family Affairs and Youth	01 March 2012	Face to face

#### Finland

Name and scope of organisation/role	Date of Interview	Type of Interview
Finnish Youth Research network / researcher	13 December 2011	Face to face
m-cult, kotomedia project/producer	09 December 2011	Face to face
Ministry of Education and Culture, Youth Division / Head	05 January 2012	Face to face
YLE (Finnish Public Broadcasting Service) Children and Youth Department – Executive Producer	03 February 2012	Face to face
City of Helsinki, Youth Voice News Centre Project / producer	01 February 2012	Face to face
Greens – MP	13 December 2011	Face to face
Helsinki University Student Union/Chairperson	02 December 2011	Face to face
City of Helsinki/ youth dept/ Ruuti (youth participation)	07 February 2012	Face to face
Allianssi – National Youth Council	30 January 2012	Face to face
Head of International Affairs and the contact person for the EC's Structured Dialogue Youth Voices News Centre & YLE youth programmes/Journalists	08 February 2012	Face to face

#### France

Name and scope of organisation/role	Date of Interview	Type of Interview
member of the council since 2009 until the end of 2011. In the past years, he was also member of the Youth Council of the city of Nantes, the youth council of the city of Paris and President of the European Youth parliament.	09 November 2011	Face to face
Organization: Member of youth grassroots organization : "Génération Précaire" (precarious generation).	25 November 2012	Telephone
Representative of a student organization Trade Union: "SUD Etudiants"	08 December 2012	Skype
President of the youth organization of the main French right-wing party: the UMP. The organization is called "les jeunes populaires"	19 November 2011	Telephone
General Secretary of Young communists ( <i>Jeunes communistes</i> - JC) since 2008. Member since 2002. He entered the national council in 2005	07 March 2012	Face to face
Director of youth programs at France télévision	02 December 2012	Telephone
Academic Expert, directrice de recherche, Science Po Paris, author of numerous publications about youth participation.	07 March 2012	Face to face

#### Hungary

Name and scope of organisation/role	Date of Interview	Type of Interview
Executive Committee member – National Union of Students in Hungary (Hallgatói Önkormányzatok Országos Konferenciája, HÖÖK)	20 December 2011	Face to face
Hallgatói Hálózat (Student Network) Position: co-founder/member, since May 2011	20 December 2011	Face to face

#### Stakeholders

Editor in Chief in Mustár FM community radio	30 January 2012	Skype
Chair of the National Working Group on Structured Dialogue	01 February 2012	Face to face
Young Politician (Jobbik Party)	07 February 2012	Face to face
Young Politician (Lehet Más a Politika (Politics Can Be Different) or LMP Party)	14 February 2012	Face to face
Youth Policy expert at the National Family and Social Policies Institute	20 February 2012	Face to face
Chair of Fiatal Alternatíva Társaság, FAT (Association of Young Alternative)	31 January 2012	Face to face

#### Spain

Name and scope of organisation/role	Date of Interview	Type of Interview
Initiative for Catalonia Greens (ICV)	12 December 2011	Face to face
Director of the Child and Youth Channel at the Catalan Public TV	07 March 2012	Face to face
Coordinator of TEB Association Youth	12 December 2011	Face to face
Youth Academic Expert, Researcher at the Institute of Government and Public Policy (IGOP)	29 February 2012	Telephone
National coordinator of Joves d'Esquerra Verda (Green Left Youth), Town Councillor in Barcelona	26 January 2012	Face to face
New Generations of Catalonia (NGC) of the Catalan People's Party (PPC) (right wing)	10 February 2012	Face to face
Student Association - Sectorial Association of Students of Engineering Building (ASAT)	18 February 2012	Face to face
Assemblea per la Comunicació Social-LaTele	26 February 2012	Face to face and telephone

#### United Kingdom

Name and scope of organisation/role	Date of Interview	Type of Interview
Qualified Youth Worker and Radio Show Host	11 January 2012	Face to face
Director of Operations - National Youth Agency	19 January 2012	Face to face
National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (Grassroots Youth Organisation)	16 December 2011	Face to face
Senior Counsellor - Step Forward (Youth Organisation)	14 December 2011	Face to face
Academic Expert on Youth and Disadvantaged Youth - Professor at the School of Social Sciences and Law at Teeside University and the Convenor of the Youth Research Unit	11 January 2012	Telephone
British Youth Council and Structured Dialogue Representative	12 February 2012	Face to face
Channel 4 Education Commissioning Editor	28 February 2012	Telephone
Young Politician - Member of Parliament (Labour Party)	13 March 2012	Face to face
Young Politician- Elected Councillor in Sutton (Liberal Democratic Party)	11 January 2012	Face to face

#### Additional Stakeholders

Name and scope of organisation/role	Date of Interview	Type of Interview
European Youth Parliament Finland	16 August 2011	email
European Youth Parliament Netherlands	16 August 2011	email
European Youth Parliament Romania	16 August 2011	email
European Youth Parliament Poland	16 August 2011	email
European Youth Parliament Belgium	21 August 2011	email
European Youth Parliament Ireland	15 August 2011	email
European Youth Parliament Estonia	15 August 2011	email
Junior Chamber International	20 March 2012	email
Dutch Youth Council	26 January 2012	email
European Youth Forum	30 December 2012	email
National Youth council of Latvia	09 March 2012	email
European Youth Forum	08 February 2012	email
Lithuanian Youth Council	10 February 2012	email
National Youth Council of Slovenia	09 December 2012	email
Greek Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs	14 February 2012	email
EMSA representative	10 June 2012	email
ICYE representative	11 June 2012	email
IFM-SEI representative	12 June 2012	email
CESIE representative	14 June 2012	email
jfc Medienzentrum representative	14 June 2012	email
Lunaria Representative	20 June 2012	email
European People's Party Youth Wing (YEPP) representative	28 June 2012	email
Peace Child International	28 June 2012	email
CEJA representative	03 July 2012	email
AGRYA Hungary Representative	28 July 2012	email