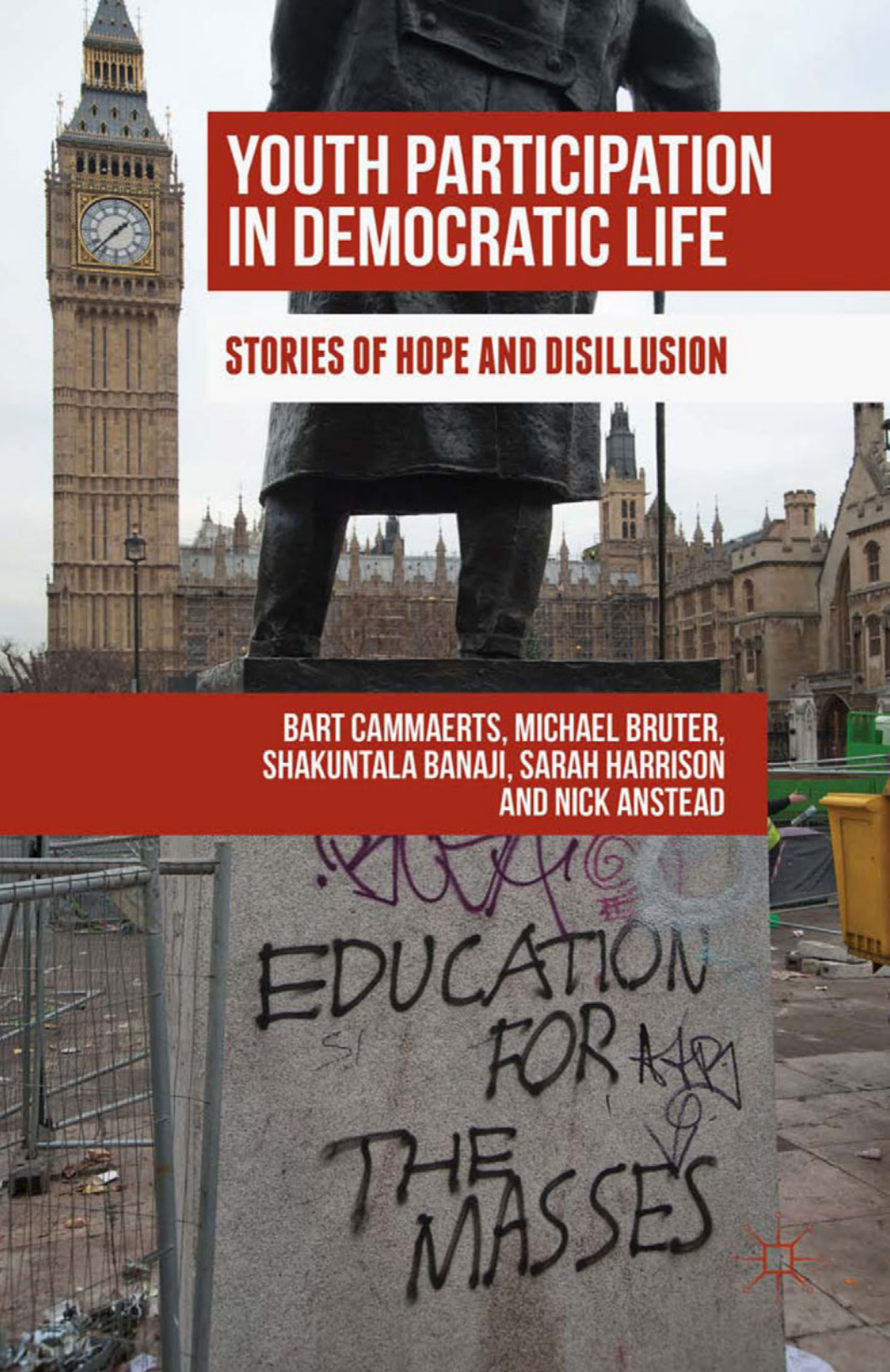

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC LIFE

STORIES OF HOPE AND DISILLUSION

BART CAMMAERTS, MICHAEL BRUTER, SHAKUNTALA BANAJI, SARAH HARRISON AND NICK ANSTEAD

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Bart Cammaerts, Michael Bruter, Shakuntala Banaji,
Sarah Harrison and Nick Anstead
London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

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1
Introduction: The Challenge of Youth Participation

This book emerges out of an extensive research project that was undertaken for the European Commission's Education, Audio-Visual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) between 2012 and 2013 during which we conducted a multi-method comparative analysis of the normative definitions and orientations towards contexts, practices and experiences of democratic participation by young people across six countries in the European Union. Our research team consisted of the five authors – Bart Cammaerts, Michael Bruter, Shakuntala Banaji, Sarah Harrison and Nick Anstead – all based at the London School of Economics and Political Science in London and eight methodologically trained field research assistants in carefully selected northern, southern, eastern and western regions of Europe: Austria, Finland, France, Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom.[1]

The research process took us through a number of recursive iterations in relation to the key concepts of youth, democracy and participation, leading us to rearticulate and reassess the significance of some questions: To what extent is youth participation in Europe in crisis? What are the causes of and explanations for the assumed crisis? What potential solutions are there that could rekindle young citizens' engagement with and participation in their political systems?

However, before we could answer these questions, other even more pressing ones presented themselves in relation to how participation and democracy are being defined, whether some category of young people are left out by the way in which they are organised and how these definitions can and do impact on and inflect the findings of studies such as the one we discuss in this book. We explored these key concepts and questions, as well as the implications of disjunctures between normative and empirical accounts of democracy and

participation via an analysis of key academic and policy literature on these and related topics such as voting, representation, activism, volunteering and exclusion. We also had recourse to reanalysis of data sets drawn from previous studies.

After establishing our own orientation towards the conceptual landscape (see chapter 2), we conducted a large-scale, stratified, representative survey targeting youth in the age groups 15 to 17 and 18 to 30, drawn up by us and administered by the survey company Opinium in seven countries; expert interviews with policy, political and grassroots stakeholders from six of them; a field-based e-participation simulation/experiment with older school-goers; and a set of focus groups with young people in a cross section of social and political strata from the most activist to the least, from the average students in local youth associations schools and colleges to those in homeless shelters, prisons and outside all institutional settings.

1.1 Democratic survival – concepts, definitions and research questions

One of the most pressing questions our societies are faced with today is whether our representative democratic system can survive a sustained collapse in political participation and the decline in legitimisation that goes with it? Will the democratic boat stay afloat if a large portion of a generation falls overboard in a storm of political crises of legitimacy, as well as a perceived lack of representation and political efficacy? European democratic systems are facing a profound crisis, which is often treated as one that nobody can do anything about. At one level, this crisis concerns the nature and quality of political participation by young people in European democratic life; at another level, it concerns forms of social, economic and political exclusion, both structural and self-chosen.

Between the early 1970s and the early 2010s, on average, turnout in major national elections in European democracies declined by over 20 percentage points (Bruter and Harrison, 2014). Not only has this decline been registered among young voters but young citizens who abstain in the first two elections when they are allowed to vote are highly likely to become chronic abstentionists. Reciprocally, they are more likely to become regular voters if they go to a polling station when they first become eligible to vote (ibid.).

Youth participation is, however, not just a question of participation rates or of waiting for disinterested youths to 'come of age' and join

the democratic participatory bandwagon. It is also a question that goes to the very heart of the sustainability of the representative democratic model. It concerns how young people will express assent, affirmation or discontent if they feel that traditional modes of expression of both affirmation and discontent are ineffective and inadequate. Ultimately, this is a question about whether as societies – as political communities – it is acceptable to exclude a generation or part of a generation of citizens from democratic life.

1.1.1 Defining youth

When we refer to young people, we refer to a diverse and heterogeneous societal group with a variety of complex identities – psycho-social, politico-economic and educational. Hence, we do not treat young people as a monolithic group whose members all feel the same, want the same things, or have convergent interests.

Distinctions between young people and older adults are culturally influenced and change over time. In some countries young people remain dependent on their parents for much longer than in others and this tends to be exacerbated in times of economic crisis. While some analysts take age as a 'numeric' indicator to differentiate youths from adults, others argue for functional or situational conceptions of the youth category (for instance, as students or as people who live with their parents). The research discussed in this book was based on a comparative study and it is important to be clear about how the category of youth was defined. It is also important to clarify whether this category is defined 'positively', that is, as an analytically meaningful life stage in its own right, or 'by default', that is, as the years between childhood and adulthood, however they are defined.

For the purpose of this study the focus is on young people in the age bracket from 15 to 30 years, but at the same time we do consider youth to be above all a hugely important and highly formative stage of life.

1.1.2 Defining political participation in the 21st century

Defining political participation is a complex but very important task. We will address the literature on participation in more detail in chapter 2, but it can be noted that it is complex, highly debated, and often contradictory, mixing descriptive and normative, top-down and bottom-up dimensions.

In this book, beyond the more descriptive components of participation such as those classically discussed by Almond and Verba (1963),

we choose to embrace the normative consequences of participation. In this sense, political participation is critically related to the perception of being part of a political community and therefore fundamentally related to notions such as representation and efficacy. Political participation is also crucially about being able to make a difference through participating, that is, being able to affect a course of action or an outcome of a decision. Positioning participation as such necessarily implicates the notion of power, which we approach at once as structural power, agency or empowerment, and efficacy (external efficacy being literally defined as the perception of one's influence on the system).

Political participation thus refers to the way citizens engage in forming opinions and taking actions to bring about change in society. It can take different forms. In the framework of this book the following participatory practices will be addressed:

- *Participation by young people in representative democracy*: standing for or voting in elections or being members of political parties.
- *Young people's involvement in participatory structures*: promoting involvement of young people through participating in youth organisations, issue-based NGOs or community media.
- *Participation in public debate*: on youth or community issues; opinion-shaping through the written press, broadcasting or online.
- *Seeking information and learning about democracy*: participating in mock simulations of political processes, attending training sessions or learning at school, engaging in youth organisations.

The question of where political participation starts and finishes and what it precisely constitutes is a highly contentious issue in political science. It is generally, but not unanimously, agreed that participation goes beyond traditional modes such as voting and joining political parties, but at the same time other modes of participation, such as demonstrating, debating and volunteering, are highly contentious. For instance, there is no consensus on whether reading about current affairs or talking about politics constitutes participation. While we do adopt a broad view of political participation which goes beyond the act of voting, we also believe that political participation needs to be connected to both feeling part of a political community and making a difference out there and thus with processes of representation as well as processes of power. We reject attempts to disentangle the notion of participation from processes of inclusion, representation, power and empowerment (see also Eulau and Karps, 1978; Carpentier, 2011).

1.2 Is youth participation in democratic life in crisis?

1.2.1 Scope of the book

The existing political science literature overwhelmingly argues that participation matters – be it for society, a vibrant democracy, legitimate policy outcomes or empowered citizens (Almond and Verba, 1963; Pateman, 1970; Barber, 1984; van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996; Held, 2006; Franklin et al., 2009; Hart, 2009; Soroka and Wlezien, 2010). In this literature it is thus argued that participation has the potential to foster a sense of citizenship, to make policy processes more transparent for all citizens and accountable to young citizens in particular (Almond and Verba, 1963; Lister, 2007). Participation in the democratic process is deemed to make citizens feel efficacious; it enables them to identify with their political system and leads to an increase in civic behaviour (Coleman (with Rowe), 2005; Bruter and Harrison, 2014). It has furthermore been found to increase systemic legitimacy and sustainability, encourage responsibility amongst elites and increase cohesion among subgroups of citizens. Participation is conducive to helping young people build self-confidence, take initiative and acquire and test skills that are relevant for the workplace and in their personal lives, such as communication, negotiation or teamwork.

However, at the same time we can also observe a serious crisis in the legitimacy of democracy and its ability to protect the interests of ordinary citizens and of young people in particular. This crisis is commonly countered by a discourse of increased participation and of 'bridging the gap between the governed and the governing' (Wind, 2001). However, it is important to state here that a *discourse of participation*, as witnessed by participation becoming a popular contemporary buzzword, is not necessarily the same as a *praxis of participation*. Hence our insistence throughout the book that participation is intrinsically linked to power and the ability to make a genuine difference. The danger of participation for participation's sake without any real change or of giving young people a voice without anyone listening to what they actually say is that it will engender even more frustration, disenchantment and a negative sense of efficacy.

Young citizens are at the heart of what many observers deem to be a 'crisis of representative democracy'. The more alarming accounts proposed by advocates of 'crisis of democracy' theories emphasise a perceived distrust of political systems, institutions and social elites by European citizens and by young citizens especially (see Kaase et al., 1996; Mishler and Rose, 1997; Seligman, 1997; Newton, 2001). Social scientists

have documented what many see as the growing dissatisfaction of citizens with what national governments and the EU can offer to them as citizens (Norris, 1999; Torcal and Montero, 2006).

A BBC study (2005) showed, for example, that European citizens tend to be more cynical and less trusting than those who are citizens of countries in other regions of the world, be it towards political leaders, religious authorities, administrations, justice systems or the media, and young citizens are more distrusting on average than older citizens. Growth in young people's cynicism has been accompanied by declining participation in most modes of democratic expression. Party and trade union membership figures are collapsing in most European countries and the remaining members are ageing at a rapid pace (Katz and Mair, 1994; Scarrow, 1996; Pharr and Putnam, 2000).

As for voter turnout, LeDuc et al. (1996/2002) concluded some time ago that the participation of young voters was in decline in national democratic elections. More recent studies have found a substantial decline in their participation in European Parliament elections (Deloye and Bruter, 2007). Polling organisations and companies that conduct large-scale surveys, focus groups and interview-based studies have examined transformations in patterns of participation, but in all this work the main 'missing link' is an analysis of the gap between *non-participation* and the *desire for participation* among young citizens. It may be that being distrustful and critical of representative democratic institutions is not necessarily synonymous with apathy and disinterest in politics.

In this book we pose and aim to respond to the following important questions:

> To what extent is youth participation in Europe in crisis? What are the causes of the assumed crisis? Are there any solutions that could challenge political exclusion, and rekindle more young citizens' engagement with and participation in their political systems?

The first question is about the 'crisis' of youth participation, and is indirectly also about definitions of participation and of crisis. To understand better the causes and consequences of this crisis, we need both to understand the extent of young people's political disenchantment and to consider the ways in which disenchantment and participation are constructed conceptually. In our research we examine whether there is evidence that youth participation is generally decreasing as compared to the 1970s and 1980s or whether it is only some forms of political participation that are affected. Some modes of participation may have been

replaced by others. We also explore whether youth participation has decreased across all regions of the EU and all social groupings therein or whether specific groups have been prevented from participating in democratic processes. Furthermore, we assess how various political stakeholders and policymakers have attempted to address the perceived and real barriers.

Insofar as we find evidence that there is a crisis of democratic participation by young people, we turn to an analysis of its causes, which represents the second main question we address in this book. The perceived crisis of participation may be the consequence of a lack of interest (O'Toole, 2004), a sense of powerlessness or inefficacy (Kimberlee, 2002), satisfaction with existing political outcomes (Olsson, 2006) or cynicism and alienation (Buckingham, 2000). Some of these explanations may lead young people to feel that the existing political offer is at odds with their political desires, needs and ambitions. Understanding the contributing factors is crucial here – if young people do not participate because they are disinterested in politics and apathetic, as those who accuse them of being a selfish and materialistic generation suggest, it is more difficult to recommend solutions.

If, on the contrary, political disengagement is found to stem from a perceived fundamental inadequacy between young people's political hopes and the available political offer, then we need to examine whether this arises from miscommunication between political elites and young citizens or whether it stems from widespread social and economic inequality and lack of political will to address the needs of large groups of young citizens. In both cases, different types of solutions are warranted. Should it be the former, that is, disconnection, political elites may urgently need to question their ability to address the issues young citizens care about. They may need to propose economic, political and societal solutions that would improve political systems in the eyes of young people and improve the representativeness of the democratic system. If it is the latter, that is, increased inequality, then the task of politicians and policymakers might be to reflect on their motivations to support and their implication in the current status quo, and to enact the normative promises of youth rights in ways which make democracy stronger. In this book, we examine the respective strengths and weaknesses of competing hypotheses that have been proposed to explain why young people may not be participating in the democratic process to the fullest extent.

One of the main limitations of the academic literature on political participation is that it often addresses the state of youth involvement

to a greater extent than the possible solutions to declining participation and their effectiveness, should they be implemented. The third question that we address in this book thus precisely relates to the political, technical and communicative solutions to what has been characterised as a participatory crisis among young people, but that we have come to see as a crisis of inclusion. We examine what young people think about these and whether they are likely to be effective. We consider how they have been implemented in practice in specific political systems and we review the results of experiments. We consider the solutions recommended by practitioners and by young people and the way they are deemed to be performing by pre-voting teenagers and young adults.

1.2.2 A pan-European paradox

While young citizens are likely to criticise the state of their political systems and apparently disengage from institutional politics (Banaji and Buckingham, 2013a), they are also significantly more likely to have idealist notions about what democratic participation should be like and to be extremely ambitious in terms of how involved they say they want to be (Bruter and Harrison, 2009, 2014). This apparent democratic paradox, also noted by Pattie et al. (2004), challenges researchers to examine how the participation of young citizens might be encouraged and increased by emphasising their apparent appetite for involvement.

The quotes below, taken from a variety of our focus groups conducted in different countries, clearly illustrate this general split between, on the one hand, understandings of the concept of democracy and, on the other hand, young people's experiences of the practice of democracy. Across all of the groups we can thus observe a general agreement that democracy is a good thing in principle, but less so in practice.

When it comes to the participation of young people in democratic life, Europe has no borders insofar as the concept of youth participation is shared. Young people's patterns of participation in society vary in relation to cultural norms, history and the geography of Europe. While the conclusions and recommendations emerging from our research are relevant to the member states of the EU and for countries in the wider European context (and other members of the Council of Europe), some of these conclusions and recommendations also apply more generally beyond the European context.

In this book we evaluate, critique and sharpen several conceptual models and theories that seek to explain the crisis in youth participation in democratic life. We do so in order to offer a viable way forward for young people who are civically active, for those who work with them as

Statements of young citizens regarding democracy

Focus groups with politically active youth

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. (France, 2012)
We do not have a democracy because people do not get represented. (Spain, 2012)
Most young people do not believe they have a democracy. (Finland, 2012)
Most young people feel that they are never consulted. (Austria, 2012)
Democracy is rare. It doesn't really exist. Too many are denied a voice. (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. (Hungary, 2012)

Focus groups with youth in secondary schools

We don't live in one or if we do, it's dying. (France, 2012)
We're losing it. The ideal is one thing. The reality another. (Spain, 2012)
It means equality but it's a contradiction. There's a power division between rich and poor. True democracy doesn't exist. (Finland, 2012)
There should be democracy everywhere. It means everyone has a say. (Austria, 2012)
It means freedom. I can speak out. But of course, some will always be heard more. (UK, 2012)
Hungarian version is inferior to that of 'the West'. Hungary is conservative. (Hungary, 2012)

Focus groups with excluded youth

Ideally, it's about equality. In reality, we don't have it enough. (France, 2012)
This [current situation] is not a democratic system. It's only mentioned at election times. Ideally, it's about equality. (Spain, 2012)
In theory, it's for the good of all. But in practice, minorities are always trampled on. (Finland, 2012)
We don't live in a democracy. Poor people are always excluded. No one listens to poor young people. (UK, 2012)

stakeholders in democratic processes at both grassroots and policy levels and for those young people whose voices are currently unheard, and even deliberately excluded from institutional political processes.

In order to do this, we first draw on the existing literature. We know, for example, that on the whole young people across Europe report that they feel far more 'European' than do older generations (Bruter and Harrison, 2011). The extent to which they report a European identity has increased during the major economic, social and political crisis since 2008 while the percentage of older citizens reporting a European identity has been declining. This means that our investigation into young people's participation in democratic life must address developments on the EU level in addition to those on the national level and within local communities.

An observation that is often missing from much commentary on youth participation in the democratic process is that while young citizens tend to vote less than the average for the whole of the population in elections in Western nations, they are also, by far, the most mobilised age group in many participatory events that involve high cost participation and which require a range of resources, time and sustained effort (see Dahlgren, 2009; Hands, 2011; Becquet, 2012; Cuconato and Waechter, 2012; Banaji and Buckingham, 2013a).

For instance, Bruter and Harrison's (2014) research suggests that the participation of young people is a distinct characteristic of demonstrations such as those that led to the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in 1989–1990, the demonstrations against the WTO, the G8 and the EU in the 2000s, the demonstrations that followed Jean-Marie Le Pen's qualification for the second round of the French presidential elections in 2002, the Georgian and Ukrainian Rose and Orange revolutions in 2003 and 2004, respectively, the post-2008 Occupy movements in Spain, Israel, Hong Kong, and the Arab Spring and the UK's anti-establishment protests in 2011. In fact, young people are very often the driving forces of political participation that aims to change societies and political systems (Dahlgren, 2009; Banaji and Buckingham, 2013a; Bayat, 2013).

1.2.3 Prototypical models of the youth participation crisis

There are several prototypical explanations for the youth participation crisis, three of which we briefly summarise here. We do not necessarily subscribe to these models, but they serve as the basic models to be evaluated by our empirical work throughout the book. The critical issue here is to 'locate' where a crisis of participation could stem from, and, notably, whether it constitutes a crisis of participatory intention or an

inadequation between the participatory will of young citizens and what their political system offers to them – in other words the absence of satisfactory political outlets for the social and political messages that they want to convey.

Model 1: Apathy. One of the most common explanations for the supposed non-participation of young people is said to be an apparent sense of apathy (see, for example, O'Toole, 2004; Pattie et al., 2004). The apathy model hypothesises that young people do not care about politics and political decisions. In this model, they are regarded as being members of a self-centred and materialistic generation with little interest in broader political issues that concern their elders. For young people, the model suggests, politics is perceived as being boring and irrelevant to their lives. This model could suggest that it is 'young people's own fault' if they do not participate. Proponents of this model – which effectively considers that there is no sufficient participatory intention on the part of contemporary young citizens – suggest that there is little that can be done to counter the crisis of participation, other than making voting compulsory, as is the case in Belgium, Australia and much of Latin America.

Model 2: Cynicism. Another common explanation is that young people do want to participate in politics (Kimberlee, 2002; Dalton, 2013). They show interest in and engagement with many crucial issues faced in their political systems, but they also feel that the political offer is not matched with their participatory needs for representation. While young people might be eager to find channels of participation that would enable them to affect political outcomes, none of the modes at their disposal respond to their needs in terms of representation, communication or involvement. In this model, young people are expected to perceive that parties and politicians do not address them and do not confront political issues that are their main concern, and therefore they look for radical modes of participation, which are at odds with politicians' fundamentally reformist or conservative attitudes. In the cynicism model, the participatory desire exists, but there is no outlet to capture it. Instead, the lack of participation is caused by a mismatch between participation desire and participation opportunities. The crisis of participation is thus regarded as being the fault of institutional politics and elites and could potentially be ameliorated or counteracted if political discourse and institutional arrangements are changed.

Model 3: Maturation. A third model hypothesises that the crisis of participation is not explained by a problem of declining participation by citizens as voters or by the discourses or actions of elites and political

institutions. Instead, it is attributed to a problem of timing (Franklin et al., 2009). In this view, problems are likely to sort themselves out as young people grow older, which they are said to do more slowly than previous generations. The reasons given for maturing slower are the extension of studying time, the lengthening time young people spend living with their parent(s) and the extension of life expectancy. In this model, there is no 'problem' that needs to be addressed, but instead we just need to be patient.

1.3 The challenge of understanding youth participation

In order to investigate the evidence for and against these models and their usefulness in pointing us towards a reinvigoration of youth political participation, a number of conceptual, analytical and methodological challenges need to be addressed. These are the challenge of diversity, of comparison, of expression, of institutionalism, of interactions and of youth effect.

The challenge of diversity: Observers often simplify a complex world in order to make it easier to comprehend. If we could depict 'the young', 'the old', 'the poor', 'the rich', 'men', and 'women' as homogeneous and essentialist categories it would be easier to explain the world that we live in and our place within it. The world is, however, far more complex than that. In fact, and importantly for the analysis in this book, young people are heterogeneous. Some are wealthy and others are poor, some are highly educated and others much less so, some suffer a lot in the first few years of their lives while others can recall a happy childhood. We seek to analyse the crisis of youth participation in a way that acknowledges this diversity. In our research, we aimed to unravel the consequences of some of these diverse characteristics of European youths. In addition to a consideration of gender diversity, we differentiate between young people excluded by virtue of lack of citizenship, economic circumstances, addiction or homelessness, as well as more integrated and less excluded young people. We also distinguish between politically involved, moderately involved and disengaged young people, and between young voters (aged 18–30) who have access to voting as a key mode of participation and younger pre-voters (15–18) whose political participation can only be expressed outside the polling booth.

The challenge of comparison: While young people are diverse within countries, acknowledging their heterogeneity is important when the aim is to investigate the state of youth participation across a political community as diverse as the EU. Some European democracies, such as the UK or France, have been democratic for many decades, while others,

such as Hungary or Poland, were still under authoritarian rule a quarter of a century ago. Some countries, such as Spain, have mass youth unemployment, while others such as Austria have near full employment. Countries vary in terms of how easy it is for young people to be educated, when they are leaving school and going to university and what proportion live in conditions of poverty and social exclusion. There are differences in political and electoral systems, the prevalence of extremist parties, the health, ethnic and religious diversity and much more. To address the challenge of diversity, we undertook a comparative analysis of a sample of EU democracies that was selected to ensure a reasonable coverage of these dimensions of diversity.

The challenge of expression: Capturing different attitudes, values and preferences is always challenging. As Bruter and Harrison (2014) emphasise, the researchers' understanding of a group's attitudes and behaviour may change depending on whether they rely on the self-perceptions of those they are researching, on the way others claim to perceive the group or on the behaviour that researchers can observe in the field. Researchers can speak to outsiders – experts and stakeholders – about young people and hear about the problems or evidence of youth participation. However, typically experts and stakeholders are not young people, or if they are, they may only represent a particular subpart of this generation. Alternatively, researchers can speak to young people and encourage them to explain their relationship to politics and participation. Researchers will then hear reports from 'the horse's mouth'. However, reliance on self-reported narratives raises another set of issues including a social desirability bias leading young people to convey their experience in an 'improved' light. In this book, we examine a variety of sources of information in an effort to ensure that we consider reports about and suggested solutions to the reported crisis of youth participation from several vantage points.

The challenge of institutionalism: The incidence of an apparent problem of youth participation may vary depending on whether analysis is undertaken on the national, local community, or EU level. Modes of participation, relevant issues and polity delineations differ across institutional levels as do participatory challenges, issues and opportunities. In our analysis, we consider the overall picture at various levels of youth participation and we examine these in the light of the multiple identities of youths and the different foundations of citizenship.

The challenge of interaction: Participation and representation do not proceed from citizens alone but also from their interactions with their political systems. A crucial challenge in analysing youth participation is to differentiate between what an empirical analysis can tell us about

young people and their participation, and what this may reveal in terms of a particular political system or of local and indeed EU political elites. If young people tell us, for example, that they feel that politicians do not represent or listen to them, it may not be clear whether this tells us that young people have higher requirements for representation or misunderstand political leaders' commitments to them or whether this tells us that young people are accurate in their assessment that political elites are failing in their duty to listen to them and are unresponsive to their needs and concerns. In order to address this critical challenge, the research we discuss in this book examined some of these possibilities through an assessment of media and social media use as well as experiments that confront young people with a number of actual political leadership messages.

The challenge of youth effects: Finally, almost any investigation into 'youth' raises a significant question as to whether any effect that we measure is due to generational effects or the consequences of age (i.e. life cycle effects). In other words, is youth in 2015 different from the people who are 50 years old because those young people will have 30 further years to 'mature' into 50-year-old adults or because they belong to a different generation with differences that will never fade away as today's young people grow older. While we do not have sufficient longitudinal depth in our empirical work to clearly distinguish between the two types of effects, we amply refer to differences between our findings and those of the existing literature or other existing data sources to arbitrate between the two types of effects with some level of reliability.

Altogether, every one of these key research challenges makes our task more interesting and more exciting rather than simply more complicated. We have tried to take these insights (and more) into account at every stage of the elaboration of our research design and give more details as to how this translated into actual research strategy in chapter 2.

1.4 Structure of the book

It is our ambition in this book to address both theoretical and empirical issues in order to examine the state, problems and solutions for the apparent decline of youth participation in the EU in the 21st century. Our analysis thus aims to contribute to studies of youth participation using a comparative research design with the aim of exploring possible solutions to rekindle the interest of young citizens in their political systems.

In chapter 2, our research is contextualised conceptually by embedding it in the past and current literature in the field of political theory,

youth participation, and media and communication studies. Besides this, the empirical methodology is set out.

In chapter 3, we focus on one of the key historical yardsticks of democratic participation: the vote. We assess the extent to which the youth vote can be understood to be in crisis and explore possible responses such as e-voting and lowering the voting age to 16.

In chapter 4, we examine the state of youth participation at the EU level to explore whether this political system has developed remedies that might be adapted or explored on the national and local levels and to assess specific barriers to youth participation that it has addressed.

In chapter 5, we consider not only some of the traditional high-commitment modes of participation such as party or group membership, but we also offer an analysis of non-traditional forms of participation such as protest, dissent and contestation by young Europeans. Finally, we also address volunteering as a form of participation in democratic life.

In chapter 6, we examine the impact of media – and social media – on the participatory patterns of young people. We consider how community media, social media and online platforms have influenced the European youth participatory scene and whether these can potentially constitute new tools that can be used to reconnect young citizens with their political systems.

In chapter 7, we address issues of inequality and exclusion in relation to youth participation. We focus on the conditions experienced by excluded youth – unemployed young people and children of immigrants and youths who have been in trouble with the judicial system. We offer an account of the participatory situation of the most marginalised segments of European youth and discuss the specific challenges they face in making social and democratic contributions to their political systems.

In chapter 8, finally, we present the conclusions of our analysis and highlight new questions. We also assess the value, feasibility and contribution of solutions to the crisis of youth participation.

A variety of issues and tensions are exposed by our analysis and these provide insights into various theoretical debates concerning participation and democracy – between representation and participation, between consensus and conflict. General patterns and trends across Europe are identified and we highlight what we regard as best practices and problematic phenomena. Throughout, we seek to highlight patterns and distinctive issues, problems and solutions. Our analysis of the empirical data reveals fears, hopes and expectations and, ultimately, possibilities for returning to young people the democratic voice they are entitled to, and, as we discover, they often appear to be yearning for.

2
Youth Participation: Theoretical Positioning and Methodology

As outlined in chapter 1, in this book we aim to address what is commonly called the crisis of democracy. We do this through an in-depth analysis of the nature and the quality of youth participation. We will focus on the ways in which young people are being represented, how (European) institutions are attempting to involve young people in their policymaking processes, and crucially evaluate possible solutions that could improve the quality and breadth of youth participation. Besides this, we will emphasise the importance of both formal and informal ways of participating in a democracy through voting, as well as demonstrating, and volunteering. Media and communication tools have recently been seen to provide important and distinct channels through which the participation of young people in democratic life can be promoted and enabled (or indeed impeded), be it in the way young people are represented by the mainstream media, the facilitation of participation by young people in media, or social media fostering engagement with and debate about politics. Finally, we will address the crucial issue of exclusion and inequality in participation. Before that, however, it is paramount to address a number of theoretical debates in relation to the concepts we use, as well as outline our research design and methodology.

2.1 Participation in democracies: treaties, legal rights and policies

Before addressing the conceptual and thus theoretical level of the concepts we work with we thought it useful to first highlight the common policy discourses relating to participation in democratic life and youth participation in the EU in particular. 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.

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.

The national policy context in relation to youth participation in democratic life is highly diverse across the EU and tends to coalesce around a series of issues such as training and higher education, the transition from education to employment, opportunities for volunteering and youth work as well as issues relating to 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 in 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.

Besides this, we can observe efforts to increase training opportunities for young people at risk of exclusion, to provide a counterbalance to social factors such as socio-economic class via educational initiatives and youth work and to enable underprivileged young people to participate in sport, volunteering or the arts. All these aims 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.

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 European Commission (EC) in terms of fostering youth participation and involving young people in policy-making have a long legacy before the Treaty of Lisbon. Since 1988, the EC 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 EC policymaking, amongst others, through the so-called 'structured dialogue', which will be addressed in chapter 3. 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 Closa (2007: 1053), 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'. 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 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, intermittently and longitudinally, 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. (European Council of Ministers, 2009: 7)

It is with these concerns and within this broader policy context that this book is situated. First, however, we deem it of crucial importance that

the core concepts of 'participation', 'democracy' and 'representation' are briefly contextualised as they are all what political scientists call 'essentially contested concepts' (Gallie, 1956). From a discourse perspective we could denote them as empty signifiers, under constant negotiation and never achieving complete closure in terms of what they actually mean (Laclau, 1996: 36).

2.2 Conceptual discussions

In chapter 1, we mentioned a number of key conceptual discussions which sit at the heart of the question of youth participation. In this chapter, with a view to laying out the conceptual framework utilised in this book, we examine the debates that surround them in the existing social science literature and scrutinise the implications of particular definitions.

In the fields of democracy, participation and representation, words and definitions matter a lot. A small change in the definition or operationalisation of a key concept may lead researchers to draw entirely different conclusions regarding the empirical or normative realities that we are dealing with, for instance, to conclude that participation is on the increase or on the decline, or that representation in a democratic system is satisfactory or not.

In this section we discuss six concepts in turn: participation, power, efficacy, democratic life, deliberative and radical democracy and finally the media and communication in relation to participation.

2.2.1 Participation

When examining and above all defining political participation it becomes apparent fairly quickly that many people have different conceptions as to what participation actually means and entails. Already in the 1970s, 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 participation has been 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: 70–71). Along the same lines, Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation differentiates the concept of participation even further specifically in relation to policy contexts. He identifies several layers from non-participation over tokenism to citizen power. Similarly, the OECD (2001: 2) distinguishes between information dissemination, consultation and active participation, which again points to different degrees of involvement and influence.

Such hierarchies of participatory practices point to the difficulty or even impossibility of achieving 'full' participation, as in 'equal power to determine the outcome' (Pateman, 1970), which is considered here as a normative ideal to strive for, knowing full well that we shall never quite reach it. Cammaerts and Carpentier (2005: 23) invoke the words of Samuel Beckett in this regard:

> Despite the impossibility of its actual realization in social praxis, its phantasmagoric realization serves as the breeding grounds for civil society's attempts oriented towards democratization. As the French writer of Irish descent Samuel Beckett once eloquently formulated it: 'Ever tried. Ever Failed. Never Mind, Try Again. Fail Better.'

Many scholars have also developed notions of participation that attempt to capture the reality, rather than the elusive ideal of full equitable participation. Realist rather than normative notions of participation acknowledge the subtle difference between on the one hand processes that enable 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 outlined in chapter 1, we do think that when speaking of participation we need to be clear that we mean a process in which the participants can potentially make a difference, can influence outcomes and can achieve genuine change.

2.2.2 Power

Pateman defined participation as a concept that is intrinsically linked to power and thus to the ability to make a difference, to affect outcomes.

Unsurprisingly, power is also theorised in different ways by different scholars. The traditional and dominant perspective on power approaches power as domination, as the 'power over'. This is the classic 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 (Weber, 1922).

However, as pointed out amongst others by Giddens (1984), power is not merely about domination and coercion, but 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, emphasising 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' accounts of power, such as Foucault's, 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 defining our position in society, professionally, but also in everyday life, as parents, children or young people. Foucault's analytics of power emphasises more the 'power in'; it shows us that power is not possessed, but embedded in relationships, in practices and in subject positions. Power can also not be approached without also considering the resistance against the exercise of power rather than against power itself, which is elusive and diffused (Foucault, 1978).

A final approach to power that is highly relevant in the context of policymaking and politics is Lukes' three-dimensional or radical view of power (Lukes, 2005). The one-dimensional view of power concurs with the Weberian definition above and focuses on (changing) behaviour and observable conflict, while the two-dimensional view points to agenda-setting rather than actual decisions as a source of power. However, Lukes argues that both the one- and two-dimensional views are inadequate because of their inherent focus on observable behaviour and he subsequently develops a three-dimensional view of power which is akin to the Gramscian notion of hegemony – rule by consent rather than by coercion. This three-dimensional view, which Lukes (2005: 27) calls 'the most effective and insidious use of power', also emphasises the power of the latent, the unconscious, that which is not observable, the non-visible. It thus also points to the importance of considering the power of a non-decision rather than merely focusing on the moment of decision-making.

> Nondecision-making power only exists where there are grievances which are denied entry into the political process in the form of issues. (Lukes, 2005: 28)

While we do find Giddens' dialectics of control negotiating structure and agency as well as Foucault's analytics of power emphasising power in discourse and subject positions useful, Lukes' perspective on the hidden and the concealed, that which is not said or made explicit, the non-decision, is equally relevant to our study.

It is, we argue, important to articulate a particular stance in relation to power as 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; Carpentier, 2011). 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.

2.2.3 Political efficacy

One concept that is of particular relevance when relating ideas of power to ideas of participation is political efficacy. In its broadest sense, efficacy relates to the perception of inclusion of a citizen within the political system. The ambiguous position of efficacy as a subjective hiatus between power and participation is well evidenced by the works of Finkel (1985) and Pollock Ill (1983) who address the consequences of political efficacy on participation, which stem directly from the very nature of efficacy as a concept.

This is because in many ways efficacy can be defined as two facets of the perception that one can influence the political system. On the one hand, internal efficacy is defined as the perception of one's ability to intervene in political debates or the relevance of their intervention. Without such internal efficacy, the likeliness of individuals to participate in democratic politics will be low because they will feel incompetent, irrelevant and inadequate. On the other hand, external efficacy can be defined as the perception that the system will react to one's democratic impetus (Craig and Maggiotto, 1982; Bowler and Donovan, 2002).

This latter concept is particularly important because, as Bruter and Harrison (2014) suggest, external efficacy is akin to the perception of a citizen's own democratic power. In this regard, 'projected efficacy' is also of importance. While few citizens are likely to believe that they could, on their own, have power and influence on democratic outcomes, projected efficacy refers to the feeling of an individual that *together with people like him/her* they could have that power.

In the context of youth participation, efficacy is thus a crucial concept that relates both to participation and to power. Internal efficacy – and thus the perception of one's ability to be a relevant and appropriate participating citizen – emphasises the crucial questions of education and exclusion. Furthermore, external efficacy relates to how political participation may be dependent on both the perception of one's power to influence society and political decision-making, and at the same time cause greater efficacy in its own right.

2.2.4 Democratic life

The precise nature of the relationship between political participation, political power and political efficacy is of course also at the heart of debates concerning the meaning and nature of democracy, democratic processes and democratic life for that matter. For some, democracy is mainly procedural – a method to elect the best leaders and to change the elites that rule us at given time intervals (Schumpeter, 1942 [1973]; Mills, 1956; Downs, 1957). For others, democracy is more about building and sustaining civic cultures and the main concern is about 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 somewhat competing views conform to the traditional representative and to more participatory models of democracy (see Held, 2006).

The dominant model is the representative one whereby power is delegated through voting and decisions are made by representatives rather than by citizens directly. While political participation is the path that enables citizens to influence their political system, representation works symmetrically as the system whereby the political system itself (or its representatives) responds to citizens' preferences, interests and concerns (Held, 2006).

The concept of representation is at least as controversial as that of participation precisely because the normative implications of representation are far-reaching when it comes to establishing the quality and above all the legitimacy of democratic systems and of democratic decision-making. Ideally, democratic representation needs to be a process of permanent responsiveness to the needs and inclinations of those being represented (Miller and Stokes, 1963; Eulau and Karps, 1978).

The problem of the representative model is that democracy tends to be reduced to a means of formalised decision-making and that the participation by citizens is limited to voting and legitimating a 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. Mill 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. (Mill, 1859: 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 amongst others Jean Jacques Rousseau, have re-emerged, suggesting the need for more direct citizen participation and involvement in politics (Pateman, 1970; Macpherson, 1977; Held, 2006). 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.

As pointed out above, democratic participation can be defined in a narrow sense or in a broad sense. In 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 four or five years. Dahlgren (2009: 108–123), expanding on Almond and Verba's (1963) notion of civic culture, identifies a dynamic circuit of six dimensions relevant to democratic/civic cultures:

1. **Knowledge:** relating to information provision, the key role of journalism, but also increasingly the internet

2. **Values:** substantive values such as equality, liberty, justice, solidarity as well as procedural values like openness, reciprocity, debate and accountability
3. **Trust:** relevant to the notion of legitimacy whereby citizens are the bearers of trust and institutions, political actors the objects of trust/distrust
4. **Spaces:** physical and increasingly virtual spaces where decisions are made and discussions held, issues of proximity and distance
5. **Practices:** voting by citizens, but also by parliamentarians, as well as extra-parliamentarian actions such as demonstrating and civic disobedience
6. **Identities:** dynamic, heterogeneous and non-essentialist identities, as well as the formation of communities and the relevance of collective identities

A broader conception of democratic participation not only stresses a set of democratic values and the various dimensions of a civic culture but also promotes 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 – emphasis in original) 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 line with this, 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 misleading simply to 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).

2.2.5 Deliberative and radical democracy

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

Theories of deliberative democracy are largely grounded in Habermasian models. For Habermas, 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. A deliberative process is thus defined as a rational argumentative dialogue, which

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

(see Habermas, 1984)

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 a good society (Galbraith, 1996).

Operationalisations of deliberative democracy have emerged as a response to the crisis of (representative) democracy. A recent example of this is multi-stakeholderism which emerged through the UN and EU institutions as a way to involve civil society actors in decision-making processes (see Cammaerts, 2008). It 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 thus championed as a way to bring the citizen, and more specifically the 'organised citizen' or civil society, closer to the decision-making process by making such processes more democratic, transparent, legitimate and accountable, raising support from a wider constituency. This form of deliberative

democracy is evident in attempts at structured dialogue between the EU and youth and grassroots organisations, which will be addressed in chapter 3.

However, there are also strong critics of the deliberative model of democracy and of multi-stakeholderism. One of the main problems they identify is the insistence on rationality and consensus building. Critics of deliberative democracy tend to emphasise the importance of passions in politics and the inevitability of conflict in a democracy (Mouffe, 1993; Howarth, 2004). They also argue that a 'common will' is never total or truly hegemonic. In other words, to varying degrees certain views, opinions, ideologies will be excluded and various forms of power (power over, the power to, power in and the concealed) will impact on who or what is included and excluded, on who gets to decide and who does not, even on what is possible to decide upon.

As an alternative to deliberative democracy, a model of radical pluralist democracy is foregrounded (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Smith, 1998; Critchley and Marchart, 2004; Little and Lloyd, 2009). In this post-structuralist account, democracy is not the expression of a social totality, of a unified collective will. Instead, a radical pluralism of identities is proposed whereby each identity is treated as equal and essentialism is rejected. Radical democracy 'is nothing other than the struggle for a maximum autonomization of spheres on the basis of the generalization of the equivalential-egalitarian logic' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 167).

The model of radical democracy also emphasises that conflicts need to be made explicit and visible rather than left latent or concealed. Contestation, protest and dissensus is therefore seen as a sign of a healthy and vibrant democracy (Dalton, 1993). As Mouffe points out:

> Public spaces should be places for the expression of dissensus, for bringing to the fore what forces attempt to keep concealed. (quoted in Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006: 974)

What all this implies in relation to participation is a valorisation of dissensus and contentious politics, but also the recognition of difference and of a radical pluralism amongst young people and their multiplicity of identities. While we see the benefits of dialogue and of rational debate, we also tend to agree with the critiques fielded against the deliberative model in terms of exclusions, the impossibility of consensus and the power dynamics inside deliberative processes.

2.2.6 Media, communication and participation

The media have long been theorised in relation to their role as mediators of democratic participation, and through the concept of mediation questions have been asked about their role in facilitating, increasing or discouraging democratic participation or engagement (Gitlin, 1979; Murdock, 1999; Dahlgren, 2009; Curran, 2011; Cushion, 2012). It has been argued that this role takes on many forms, including the circulation of political and civic information, normative expectations to watch and control the powers that be, the role of media in the construction of civic narratives, the consolidation of civic values as well as a visual and verbal articulation of political identities or the establishment of imagined communities at local, national, international and regional levels.

In this regard a distinction can be made between participation in the media and participation through the media (Carpentier, 2007: 88–89). The former relates to participation of non-media professionals in the production of media and in the decision-making processes inherent to content production. The latter refers to representation of citizens by the media, participation in public debates, but also to the ability of citizens for self-representation through media.

> Both participation 'in' the media and 'through' the media see the (mass) communicative process not as a series of practices that are restrictively controlled by media professionals, but as a human right that cuts across entire societies. (ibid.: 89)

While the research focus in political science and communication studies has tended to be first and foremost on non-fiction formats such as newspapers, broadcast news and talk shows (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994; Dahlgren, 1995), fiction's role in articulating and consolidating political identities of social groups, in framing political actions by governments and citizens and in representing the role of politicians and leaders has also been the subject of a number of studies (Jones, 2005; Van Zoonen, 2005; Banaji, 2006). The consumption of both fiction and non-fiction content can thus lead to civic engagement of both critical and compliant varieties and on occasion to civic or political participation and action; this is, however, not straightforward.

In multi-ethnic and multicultural societies such as those of the EU in the 21st century, theorising the role of media in enabling forms of cultural citizenship and political participation has arguably become

even more complex (Livingstone, 2005; Miller, 2008; Dreher, 2009; Zobl and Drüeke, 2012). Such theorising cannot, however, be fully separated from broader issues of media representation (Gitlin, [1980] 2003; Brookes et al., 2004; Brooks and Hebert, 2006), of consultation and voice (Couldry et al., 2007; Dreher, 2009) and of media production (Van Dijck, 2009; Carpentier, 2011; Banaji and Buckingham, 2013b).

Literature on the relationship between democracy, participation and media has increased exponentially in recent years in the wake of the emergence of the internet (McLeod et al., 1999; Delli Carpini, 2000; Dahlberg, 2001; Jenkins and Thorburn, 2003; Chadwick, 2006). Besides this, there are also quite a few publications that focus specifically on the internet's role vis-à-vis the participation of young people in civic and political life (Loader, 2007; Bennett et al., 2008; Calenda and Meijer, 2009).

Initial optimism about the ways in which the internet might solve issues of increasing distrust towards traditional media as sources of political news and values or how the internet will provide new opportunities for mediated political participation has recently been tempered by more cautious accounts. These critical accounts explore the negative consequences of taking everyday life and politics online, and highlight the missed opportunities for communication and political change, as well as substantive inequalities in online participatory offers and the anti-democratic content offered by new media (Vromen, 2008; Cammaerts, 2009a; Turkle, 2011; Banaji and Buckingham, 2013a; Collin, 2015). Besides this, it is also not entirely unsurprising to observe that the offline power structures of the state and market have been replicated online.

Additionally, the conception of the digital divide as encompassing a lack of access to hardware and infrastructures as well as a lack of access to political and technical literacy and skills has been further nuanced by work on race and gender at the intersection of geography and class (Cammaerts et al., 2003; Warschauer, 2004; Livingstone and Helsper, 2007; Warren, 2007; Hargittai and Walejko, 2008; Lee, 2008). All of these studies raise important questions about whether taking politics and participation online might not be deepening existing political and participation divides rather than alleviating them. They also show how a lack of access tends to be linked to other forms of exclusion, thereby further entrenching the position of those with more social and political capital. Some of these studies also call attention to the ways in which participation in alternative media and alternative usages of online

technologies has enabled strategies for political change such as campaigns via social media.

However, it has to be clear that the internet cannot be assumed to be a quick fix for democracy or a panacea for offline inequalities of representation and a replacement for other more substantive economic re-enfranchisement, a point that we will explore further via young people's testimonies in chapter 5.

Arguments in the realms of both old and new media turn on a series of presuppositions about the ways in which engagement might or might not lead to participation, and the ways in which visibility and representation in mass media and/or new media are either more or less possible for different groups of young citizens, more or less controlled by social and political elites and more or less effective at stimulating participation that is conducive to democratic values and ideals.

Let us now turn to the research design and methodology we will address in our conceptual framework.

2.3 Research design and methodology

One of the main contributions of our study relates to a sound research design, which triangulates qualitative data generated by us from original focus groups, stakeholder interviews, policy analysis with original quantitative data through an e-participation experiment and a large-scale representative survey. Besides this, reanalysis of statistical data[1] on young people's participation in and exclusion from democratic life across the EU generated by the European Social Survey and Eurobarometer was also used. In articulating and reinterpreting knowledge from previous large surveys, we acknowledge both the problematic peripheral positioning of young people and issues of participation in some of those previous surveys and the need for longitudinal and statistical research to complement the fine grain of our own original data.

As discussed in chapter 1 and in earlier sections of this chapter, our research design was driven by an interest in questions about the connections between age and political participation, the connections between different means and methods of political participation such as voting, volunteering, media consumption, critical practices such as dissent through demonstrating and occupying and non-participation or refusal to participate.

In this context, we selected and developed four methods of data collection and analysis in order to generate the evidence needed to better

understand the range and complexity of existing youth participation, barriers to different forms of participation and ways of encouraging:

- **Survey:** a large-scale representative survey using a stratified sampling strategy of pre-voters (16–18 years old) and young voters (18–30 years old) in seven countries (Austria, Finland, France, Hungary, Poland, Spain and 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 six countries (Austria, Finland, France, Hungary, Spain and UK) an experiment in e-voting and the use of social media for campaigning was conducted.
- **Stakeholder interviews:** in the six selected countries (Austria, Finland, France, Hungary, Spain and UK) and beyond, 77 interviews were conducted (face-to-face, telephone, Skype and some through email) with stakeholders.
- **Focus groups:** in the six countries (Austria, Finland, France, Hungary, Spain and 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 under-represented in existing research (unemployed, migrants, homeless, etc.).

We believe that this mixture of rigorous quantitative and qualitative evidence, balancing representative survey of two crucial age groups – 15- to 17-year-olds (typical pre-voters) and 18- to 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, not usually captured by traditional social science research designs (including unemployed youth, young people outside of education, young offenders, etc.) is unique.

2.3.1 The survey

Very few surveys target young voters, and even fewer target young people under the typical voting age of 18 years. We therefore decided to conduct a double survey of these key target populations using large representative samples in seven European democracies. Having worked to enunciate a questionnaire based on our research questions, we subcontracted the conduct of our survey to Opinium (see below) and ran our

survey with 7,201 respondents divided into two categories: pre-voting age (15–17.99 years old) and young voters (18–30 years old). In total, the survey garnered 2,721 respondents belonging to the pre-voting age category and 4,480 to the young voters category, allowing us to compare the two groups and assess aspects of the ways in which democratic and participatory perceptions, preferences and behaviours evolve after young people reach voting age – a crucial element in our enquiry.

We drew the respondents from seven member states of the EU 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, and (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 students 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), and strong presence of social and confessional civil society (Poland) (Table 2.1).

The survey was administered over the internet in November 2011. In order to conduct the survey, we organised a call for a 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

Table 2.1 The sample

Country	**Under 18**	**18–30**	**Total**
Austria	301	700	1,001
Finland	300	800	1,100
France	502	505	1,007
Hungary	300	702	1,002
Poland	302	722	1,024
Spain	506	505	1,011
UK	510	546	1,056
Total	**2,721**	**4,480**	**7,201**

Note: Entries are number of respondents per country and age group.

a member of the British polling council, ESOMAR, the Market Research Society (MRS) network and the Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA) and it 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. Respect for 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.

We purposefully 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 was 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 strongly represented in our data set. For instance, at least 12% of UK respondents came from households with annual income under £11,000 (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 annual income under €12,000 and 35% under 24,000 (29% preferring not to say or not knowing), and 34% of Hungarian respondents came 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 and Austria are very similar to the British situation, and for Poland quite close to the Hungarian situation.

The comprehensive questionnaire that we designed, statistical analysis of the results of which are reported in chapters 3–7 of this book, allowed us to measure 115 variables relating to young citizens' preferences, practices, perceptions, memories and projection about participation.

2.3.2 The experiments

In each country, we conducted an experiment with two components, which allowed us to assess the behaviour and perceptions of four different groups based on two dimensions:

- The effect of social media campaigning
- The effect of e-voting in a simulated election

This means that two groups were exposed to traditional campaign materials such as leaflets, while the other two groups were exposed to social

media campaigning on Twitter. Similarly, two of the groups were invited to vote in a polling station that had been set up at their school, while the other two groups were invited to vote electronically using the internet. The four groups were thus: (1) traditional campaign and traditional polling station vote, (2) social media campaign and traditional polling station vote, (3) traditional campaign and e-voting, (4) social media campaign and e-voting.

The experiments included multiple dependent variables including turnout, electoral choice, emotions felt like voting perceptions of the candidates, perceptions of democracy as a whole, and projected future turnout.

The election

The experiment targeted young people in high school or its equivalent. It was based on a simulated election for young citizens' representatives, elected according to a list system and defined by partisan affiliation. In each country, we and our country-based research assistants 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 had labels that make them readily identifiable but did not use the name of any actual parties running in national systems. The idea was that the young people would hypothetically vote for councillors that would sit in a young citizens' council intended to advise the government on youth policy in the country.

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. The research assistants carrying out the research in each country encouraged them to register as Twitter users and to 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. In each country our research assistant or assistants monitored his/her six Twitter accounts regularly, posted tweets in local and national languages 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 experimental groups of young people which were not subjected to the social media campaigning received an additional half-page flyer reminder a few days before the vote and only received a one-page description of each list's manifesto which the social media groups also received in addition to the twitter feeds.

We used an electronic voting stimulus, which meant that the groups subjected to the 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 country-based research assistants 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.

Additionally, we included a debriefing questionnaire, which 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.

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 four treatment groups (including control group) (Table 2.2).

Altogether, we invited 625 young people to participate in the experiment across the six 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 actually participated in

Table 2.2 Experiment invited participants by country and percentage completing questionnaire

Country	**Austria**	**Finland**	**France**	**Hungary**	**Spain**	**UK**	**Total**
Invited participants	94	125	98	97	131	80	**625**
Percentage who fully completed questionnaire	95.7	29.6	81.6	100	41.2	83.8	**68.0**

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 two 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 questionnaire exercise in Finland (more than 70%) and to a lesser extent in Spain (almost 60%) even though this is in effect significantly higher than typical one-shot survey response rates (evaluated at under 15% on average).

Overall, 411 participants were included in the analysis of the campaigning experiment questionnaire (211 exposed to the traditional campaign and 200 to the social media campaign), while 410 participants were included in the analysis of the e-voting experiment questionnaire (including 179 who were invited to vote in a polling station and 231 who were invited to vote using e-voting).

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 had 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 'weaker' in strength and interest compared to those elections that 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 that were 'mixed' or 'average' in terms of their social and economic backgrounds (in particular we avoided schools that serve primarily students from elite or upper-class socio-economic 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 head teachers 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.

We made every effort to reconcile academic rigour and stringent ethical guidelines. All participants were asked to read, show understanding of, and only then sign a consent form. All the head teachers of the schools involved received a description of the project and questions and answers sheet relating to the experiment, 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 represented only 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 data sets. 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.

2.3.3 Focus groups

Between December 2011 and March 2012 we undertook 18 focus groups with young people with 3 groups across 6 countries: Austria, Finland, France, Hungary, Spain and the UK. 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 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 *Occupy the London Stock Exchange* in the UK as well as the disarray and increasing isolation of the Hungarian government in Europe. Reflecting on 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 (Morgan, 1997; Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999), which included prior understanding of participation as going beyond voting, the stigmatisation of particular groups of youth in relation to democracy, the notion of a democratic deficit and its corollary, the need for greater participation and the need to conduct research on these topics with hard to reach groups of young people who tend to be underrepresented in traditional social surveys. As discussed in chapter 1 and taken up again in chapters 5 and 7, 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 potentially revitalise failing interest in politics and civic issues on the part of young people.

Analyses of data collected during our reanalysis of existing data sets 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. To gain further insight into suggestions from other dimensions of our research design that using the internet for voting might not be the panacea which brings young people in droves back to the ballot box, we selected in each of the six partner countries

1. a focus group of between five and seven 'average' 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 cohorts but no young people from the 'underclass'. The age range in these groups is usually between 15 and 21 years.
2. a focus group of between five and seven 'excluded' young people, 'NEETs' or not in education, employment or training, many of whom were either in care homes or homeless, young mothers, those who had been recently in the justice system or who had health or mental health issues. The social class composition of these six groups was quite homogenous with young people from extremely deprived backgrounds or from working-class families where some parental illness or unemployment had led to homelessness or fostering. The age range in these groups was between 15 and 24 years.
3. a focus group of between five and seven 'active' young people hailing from 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, conducted locally by trained research assistants and closely liaising with us, 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 focus groups

Focus group sessions lasted between 90 minutes and 3 hours with most of them tending to be around 2 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 research assistants in each country. Following methodological guidelines agreed with the authors during an extended training session, the research assistants 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.

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. Confidentiality and trust were key issues in all groups and pseudonyms provided some measure of safety. In several cases we managed to gain access to participants through dedicated youth workers or other older adult intermediaries. Young people's travel to and from the groups was reimbursed and vouchers given out to most of the young people for food or books as thanks for the time given to this project. 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 have also made a strenuous effort to ensure that the whole range of concerns and opinions of young people across the focus groups have been represented by us in this book.

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 was better at generating responses and discussion between participants than a tightly controlled series of questions to each participant in turn. In addition to a brief initial demographic questionnaire, and direct open questions about participants' backgrounds, the following topics were addressed: their uses of old and new media for all purposes of political participation, understandings 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', which were raised by participants in several of the groups.

Cues were provided in most groups during the discussions. These consisted of a 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 were also prevalent in the 'average' and 'excluded' focus groups. In terms of analysis, more than 100 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.

The empirical results are based on a thorough thematic coding and in-depth analysis of the transcripts and notes in light of 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.

2.3.4 The stakeholder interviews

This aspect of our research design provides a critical summary of how various stakeholders in each of our six countries research, conceptualise, access, plan for and/or act on youth participation in democratic life in their local, institutional or national contexts. Stakeholders included participants to the EU's Structured Dialogue, representatives of political parties, local or national governments, researchers, people active in broadcast and community media, representatives of local and national youth organisations and activist political organisations. Interviews with

51 stakeholders were carried out between November 2011 and April 2012. Table 2.3 gives an account of the categories and numbers in each country.

Selecting stakeholders

Our method for identifying stakeholders in relation to youth participation in democratic life was informed by the ways in which our research questions on barriers to and enablers for youth participation in all aspects of democratic life intersected with 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 the national and international levels 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 the national level and party politics. Evidence used to select experts included recommendations by the EC, 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 do not; some have no youth broadcaster at the national level while others have whole youth channels devoted to particular age cohorts; in other cases there is little distinction between academics researchers or policymaker stakeholders.

Table 2.3 Stakeholder interviewees per country

Country	National or regional broadcaster	Youth worker/ small youth NGO	Young politician	Student union/activist organisations	Structured dialogue/ government	Youth policy expert	Community media/youth journalist
Austria	1	1	2	2	1	1	1
Finland	1	2	2	2	1	1	1
France	1	1	2	1	0	1	1
Hungary	0	1	2	2	1	1	1
Spain	1	1	2	2	0	1	1
UK	1	2	2	1	1	1	1

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. Finally, the research team produced recorded and documented interviews with 51 out of 70 invited stakeholders in relation to young people and democratic participation across the six participating countries. In addition to this, 26 interviews were conducted by the authors through email.

In relation to these 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. Additionally, where they made statements 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 excluded these from the text, only making general and wide-ranging points arising from the insights.

Conducting and analysing the interviews

Most interviews were done either face-to-face or via telephone, and digital tape recorders were used 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. 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.

2.3.5 Dealing with social and cultural heterogeneity

Throughout the research discussed in this book, we took extreme care to embrace young people in their social diversity. A lot is always written about the impact of social background on political participation, but the evidence presented to substantiate this is often incomplete, partial, or uncompelling, 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 in 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 eight 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 reuse 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 survey component of the empirical research, we ensured that young people from a 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 are 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, correlating income as a continuous variable with our other variables of interest allows for a much finer analysis than creating arbitrary income categories.

In the experiment component, we deliberately drew our participants' schools with mixed social class intakes. 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 one-third of the total groups interviewed, and one in each country. As explained from the start, our team genuinely believes that a 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 and so on. 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.

2.4 Conclusions

In this chapter, we have defined a set of concepts – participation, power, efficacy, democratic life, deliberative democracy and media and communication – and highlighted a number of approaches. At a theoretical level, we have argued that it is paramount to define participation in a way that links it intrinsically to (both actual and perceived) power and representation, which, in our view, implies acknowledging a number of things:

1. the dialectic between structure and agency – the ability to make a difference individually and/or collectively, and the structural constraints impeding participation
2. a set of discourses and subject positions that shape participation, for example, political elites, students, young people
3. a definition of the scope of participation, what is at stake and what explicit or implicit modes and messages participation can convey
4. the question of the locus of the participation crisis – is there a lack of interest in participating, or is there, instead, a desire to participate which is not met and why

Subsequently, we deconstructed democracy, as a system of governance, but also as a culture. In this regard, knowledge and understanding are deemed to be of crucial importance, as are representation, efficacy and

legitimacy of the democratic system. Participation and a democratic culture require ritualised and non-ritualised/spontaneous spaces to be practised.

While we acknowledge the importance of voting as a democratic practice, other democratic practices such as demonstrating or indeed volunteering need to be recognised as equally important for a vibrant democratic culture, as should respect for difference and heterogeneous identities. Democracy and democratic life cannot be merely limited to representation, it is, nevertheless, quintessential to engage with this complex concept given its centrality in policy processes, citizens' perceptions and effective outcomes.

We also identified the media and communication tools as playing a pivotal role in democratic life. This refers to the normative roles of the media and of journalism in a democracy, to inform citizens, to provide a context to the day's events, to hold the powers that be to account and to provide a space for public debate and dialogue about controversial issues in society. It also refers to the ways in which citizens appropriate and use media and communication tools to self-mediate, to communicate and discuss matters of public interest, to organise and mobilise. However, we also warned for unwarranted optimism in terms of considering these tools as a quick fix for the many problems of democratic system we have.

All this fed into a set of questions to ascertain whether there is a crisis of youth participation, and if so, what are the nature and the causes of this crisis, and perhaps, even more crucially, how it could be resolved and young people given the voices that they should have never lost in their entirety and diversity.

The research tools we employed to answer these complex questions were varied and included both quantitative (survey, experiment, etc.) and qualitative (interviews, focus group, etc.) methods of data collection and analysis. As such, we aimed to provide breadth as well as depth in terms of the presented evidence.

We have now described our conceptual framework, theoretical model and the complex and multifaceted research design that we used to empirically test it. Let us therefore open this new and essential empirical phase by first looking into the state of youth electoral participation in Europe in the next chapter.

3
Participation of Youth in Elections: Beyond Youth Apathy

3.1 Introduction: the puzzle of youth electoral abstention and participation

Voting has historically been the gold standard form of political participation in liberal democracies, and the main point of reference of those who have tried to assess whether democratic participation of given groups has been healthy or in crisis. In this book, we are explicitly considering the various modes of political participation in its broadest sense, but there is no doubt that, as we will see in the next few pages, elections hold a special place in the heart of many young people themselves as a channel of democratic expression and efficacy.

Consequently, in this chapter, we focus on this 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 ad hoc survey. We continue by exploring 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 book.

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. The figures presented have been calculated by subtracting the overall number level of electoral turnout 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, a finding that confirms anecdotal evidence from multiple elections conducted in different European countries in recent years.

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

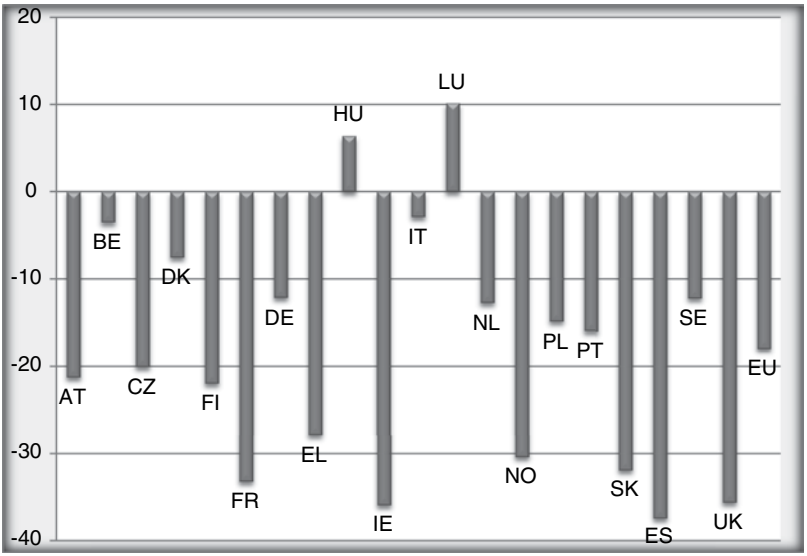

Figure 3.1 Differential turnout between young people and other citizens

Source: 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.

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 which 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.

In the context of our study, there are a number of key questions that can be addressed through our two complementary methods: 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?

The logic of the combination of those two methods is simple. Indeed, when it comes to understanding electoral behaviour, there would be a danger in relying solely on voters' self-reporting (Bruter and Harrison, forthcoming). The reason for it is that much of what makes us behave the way we do electorally is subconscious rather than conscious and even if a respondent is entirely truthful and honest, there are many thing that he/she might genuinely not be able to explain accurately about their behaviour or why they engage in it.

By contrast, this self-reporting issue is usefully fixed by the use of experiments which rely on an external observation of participants' behaviour following exposure to some stimuli. They allow us to escape the limitations of self-perception bias by introducing 'clean' measurement of external effects on young people's behaviour in electoral contexts. However, obviously, the narratives that stem from self-reporting answers to questionnaires as well as qualitative interviews provide an extremely important piece of information regarding citizens' – and in the case that interests us young citizens' – behaviour in an electoral context.

3.2 Problems, perceptions, memory and elections

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?

3.2.1 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 arguably less reason to worry, at least in the long term, and if anything, one should refrain from further lowering voting age, as it might 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 et al., 2009; 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. Furthermore, a new subset of young citizens are 'chronic abstainers' in terms of elections, 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. There is therefore a risk that not addressing young voters' abstention can lead to durable generational effects rather than mere short-term deficits that could hypothetically be fixed later as young generations grow older.

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 suggestion 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, it should be noted, are also rather dissatisfied with political life), young people are willing to take the route of voting abstention if nothing is done to improve the political offer.

3.2.2 Are young people bored with politics?

As discussed in the 'state of the art' section of our book, much of the existing social science literature – as well as many journalistic comments on the supposedly low turnout of young people in elections – assumes 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 EU. 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, in should also be noted that support for 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 regard 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 18 years old young citizens (in %)[a]

	<18 (*N* = 2721)	**>18 (*N* = 4480)**	**<18 (*N* = 2721)**	**>18 (*N* = 4480)**
Is citizens' participation essential to democracy?	Essential 67	69	Not essential 7	**7**
Should government have to directly consult citizens on important decisions or is it enough they have been elected?	Consult 62	64	Do not consult 9	**9**
Wish citizens had more opportunity to participate in political decisions	Wish 62	64	Do not wish 8	**8**
Country best governed if politicians listened to what people want or competent people say?	People 57	52	Experts 14	**18**
Can nothing replace elections, or could regular surveys and citizens consultation replace elections?	Elections **48**	**46**	Survey/consult **17**	19

[a]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.

Source Our own survey, 2011–2012.

Young citizens' appetite for democracy goes beyond the 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.

The correlation between income on the one hand and internal efficacy and interest in politics respectively are both negative and of –0.04 and –0.06 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 (Figure 3.2).

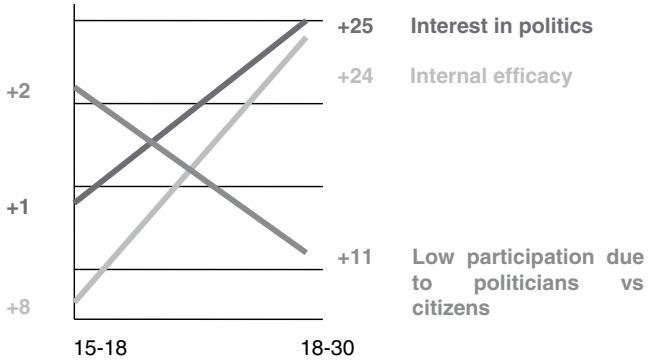

Figure 3.2 Differences in levels of interest in politics, efficacy and perceived responsibilities of political cynicism between pre-voting and post-voting young citizens

Note: 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.

Source: Our own survey, 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 substantially as citizens reach voting age, and that approximately a third of respondents hold politicians and citizens equally responsible, suggesting that there is a widespread belief that both political offer and demand may be equally responsible for the current crisis of democracy.

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, France, 2012)

> 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, UK, 2012)

> Those in power don't listen.
>
> ('Reference' focus group, UK, 2012)

> I think there's better ways of hearing young people than getting them to vote.
>
> ('Reference' focus group, 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, 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 on their own interest. They are all the same.
>
> ('Excluded' focus group, Spain, 2012)

In a similar vein, it was argued 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, 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, Finland, 2012)

A representative of the 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, f2f, Hungary, 2012)

What is interesting in this comment, however, is that in many ways, one could argue that the logic for not extending voting franchise to younger voters can only worsen the stated cause of its hypothesised insufficiency.

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 and 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 nor, as we see in other parts of this book, due 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. In particular, we need to understand what experience young voters have compared to young abstainers. 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.

3.2.3 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). They particularly insist on the role of family transmission as well as – and this is also an important consideration in this book – the role of schools and education.

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, that is, the way in which the experience of elections over time and particularly before a citizen reaches voting age will affect their overall perceptions and attitudes towards electoral democracy, participation and competitive politics.

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 friend and family discussing an election, and of their parents taking them to the polling station (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 The memory of elections (in %)

	Good memory		Total memory	
	<18 (*N* = 2721)	>18 (*N* = 4480)	<18 (*N* = 2721)	>18 (*N* = 4480)
Family/friends discussing the election	59	56	81	80
Parents taking respondent to polling station	46	52	60	66
Someone telling how they will vote	47	49	68	74
Watching election night	40	52	67	78
Discussing election with friends at school	46	45	69	70
Getting interested in elections on one's own	37	53	59	74
Candidates' debates on TV	40	45	73	79
People arguing/fighting over the election	35	29	55	63

Source: Our own survey, 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 to have been 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 vote in future elections as compared to those who have not (see Figure 3.3).

3.2.4 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

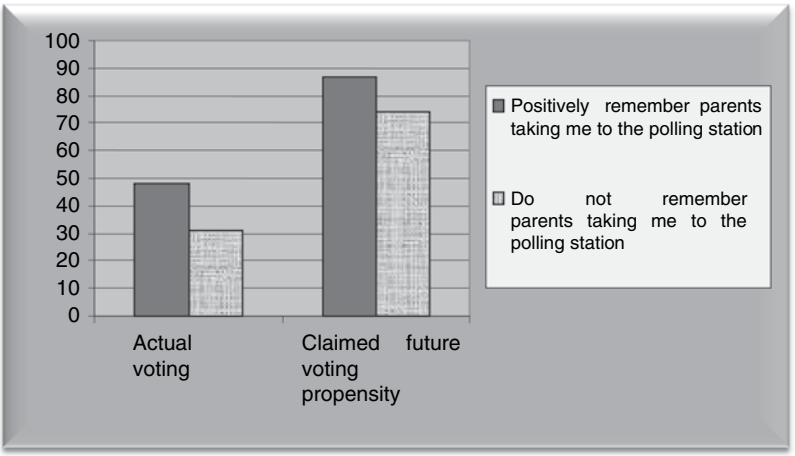

Figure 3.3 Effect of early memory of parents taking young people to the polling station on future likeliness to vote

Source: Our own survey, 2011–2012.

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 persons 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, a desire to see what it is like, and support for a party or candidate remain very important with young people of all social backgrounds (see Table 3.3).

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 the most dominant reason (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 answered 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 (see Table 3.4).

Table 3.3 Why young people vote in the first election when they are eligible to (in %)[a]

Main reasons why young people went to vote	**>18 (*N* = 4480)**
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

[a]Figures are proportion of total respondents who selected the listed explanations of why they went to vote.

Source: Our own survey, 2011–2012.

Table 3.4 Why young people fail to go to vote in the first election when they are eligible to (in %)[a]

Main reasons why young people did not go to vote	**>18 (*N* = 4480)**
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

[a]Figures are a proportion of total respondents who selected the listed explanations of why they did not go to vote. Multiple answers were possible.

Source: Our own survey, 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.

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 abstainers, 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, 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 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 (see Table 3.5).

Voting makes young people happier and 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' (see Figure 3.4).

Table 3.5 How young people feel when they do (or do not) go to vote (in %)

	Feeling while voting	**Feeling while not voting**
	>18 (*N* = 4480)	**>18 (*N* = 2721)**
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: Our own survey, 2011–2012.

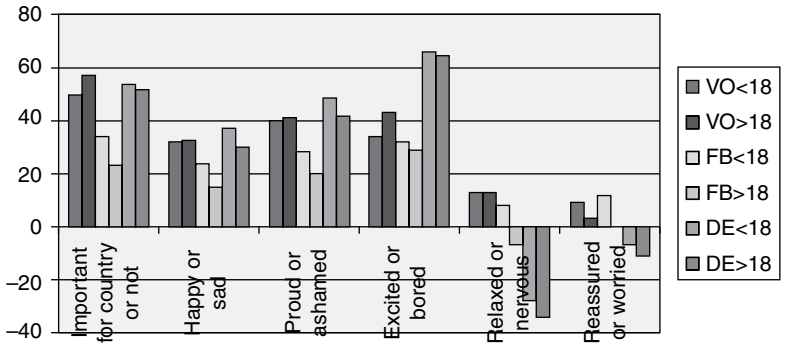

Figure 3.4 Emotions associated with voting, debating on Facebook and demonstrating

Note: Figures are the proportion of total respondents that mentioned the above listed emotions when voting, debating on Facebook, and demonstrating. 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.

Source: Our own survey, 2011–2012.

3.3 Solving the problem of low electoral participation: considering e-democracy, lower voting age and other solutions

We now understand better 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 their views and do associate very positive emotions with 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?

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 (VAAs) 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 (social media campaigning and e-voting) on young people's actual perceptions and behaviour.

3.3.1 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.

The complementarity between the two types of approaches is crucial, because technical fixes can address inequalities of access to electoral democracy between young people and the rest of the population, while by contrast, substantive solutions are necessary to ensure that the very message of electoral politics gets adapted to the needs, worries and hopes of young people instead of perpetually hoping that young people

themselves should adapt to existing democratic practice as though they had no say in how it should be organised and what it should provide.

Overall, some of those possible solutions 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 VAAs

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 that 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 EU 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- to 18-year-olds can also vote but only in local elections. The Scottish Government has piloted the extension of voting rights to 16- to 17-year-olds for the election of Health Boards and Community Councils; 16- and 17-year-olds were also given the right to vote in the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence. Prior to the vote, this generated some criticism as it was believed that 16- and 17-year-olds were 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). Counterarguments have been made against this position, with it being noted that the vast majority of 16- and 17-year-olds remain financial dependants rather than self-sufficient, and that the very principle of an age of majority requires a cut-off point of some kind. Those groups, hostile to the vote at 16, thus argue that young people's situation is not really analogous to other groups in society – such as women – who were previously disenfranchised (Cowley and Denver, 2004).

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 – that is, 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 EU, countries including Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK 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. It would 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 EU has established the Cybervote project as early as 2000 (Cybervote, 2003). Other experiments in e-voting

have included some votes in Switzerland and the use of e-voting for nationwide student representatives' elections in Austria.

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 it is vital to provide mechanisms for voter authentication, ensure confidentiality and allow the voting process to be reaudited 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 direct elections of youth representatives by young people. Already, multiple levels of governance (including the European level) have encouraged the development of youth parliaments, youth local councils and so on, 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 up to 16- to 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 the social media appear as a natural way to do so, not least because of the specific and more relaxed style of communication that they entail.
- A second substantive alternative would rely on 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 VAAs. These VAAs 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 widely available in countries such as Switzerland, Germany and 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 (see Alvarez et al., 2014; Garzia and Marschall, 2014) 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 – can 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 is then 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 or 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.

3.3.2 Discussing possible ways of increasing and extending youth participation further

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. In our survey, 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 instance, lowering voting age to 16, allowing internet voting, organising specific elections for young people representatives at the national or the European level), some political (for instance, organising school debates with parties' representatives at election time, developing VAAs on the internet, developing Facebook debates with election candidates). 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 noteworthy 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 that 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 the other is substantive. Indeed, under-18s would primarily favour the election of youth representatives while over-18s would also want to see the development of VAAs 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 over-18s). Attitudes to internet voting are more complex. It is 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.

This is one of the great paradoxes of internet voting as a possible solution to problems of electoral participation. 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. What is more, it is particularly the people who vote anyway who believe that this would indeed make a difference to 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 in favour of 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 underparticipation 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 their wealthier counterparts (–0.05) (see Tables 3.6 and 3.7).

In short, in terms of the most positive possible solutions to the perceived lack of youth participation in elections, young people would

Table 3.6 Evaluation of possible youth participation boosters – under 18 ($N = 2721$)[a]

	Positiveness	Expected effectiveness
Elect special young people representatives (national)	**2.9 (1.1)**	**2.7 (1.2)**
School and university students unions	2.8 (1.2)	2.6 (1.2)
VAAs	**2.8 (1.2)**	**2.7 (1.2)**
Elect special young people representatives (European)	**2.8 (1.1)**	**2.5 (1.2)**
Elect youth councils (local level)	**2.8 (1.1)**	**2.6 (1.2)**
Facebook interaction with candidates	**2.7 (1.2)**	**2.6 (1.2)**
School debates with party people at election time	**2.7 (1.2)**	**2.6 (1.2)**
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)
Allow internet voting	**2.5 (1.4)**	**2.5 (1.3)**
Mass demonstrations on major issues	2.4 (1.2)	2.2 (1.3)
Lower voting age to 16	2.3 (1.4)	**2.3 (1.4)**

[a]Figures 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.

Source: Our own survey, 2011–2012.

Table 3.7 Evaluation of possible youth participation boosters – 18–30 ($N = 4480$)[a]

	Positiveness	Expected effectiveness
VAAs	**2.8 (1.2)**	**2.7 (1.2)**
School and university students unions	2.7 (1.2)	2.5 (1.2)
Elect special young people representatives (national)	**2.6 (1.2)**	**2.4 (1.2)**
Elect special young people representatives (European)	**2.6 (1.1)**	**2.3 (1.2)**
Facebook interaction with candidates	**2.6 (1.2)**	**2.6 (1.2)**
School debates with party people at election time	**2.5 (1.2)**	**2.4 (1.2)**
Elect youth councils (local level)	**2.5 (1.1)**	**2.3 (1.2)**
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)
Allow internet voting	**2.4 (1.4)**	**2.5 (1.4)**
Mass demonstrations on major issues	2.30 (1.3)	2.0 (1.3)
Lower voting age to 16	1.5 (1.3)	**1.7 (1.3)**

[a]Figures 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.

Source: Our own survey, 2011–2012.

predominantly favour the election of specific youth representatives by youth under the voting age at national and European levels, the development of VAAs, the progress of social media interaction with candidates during electoral campaigns, stronger student unions and school debates at election time. Without personally 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 peoples' focus groups that we conducted. Indeed, when asked about the possibility of lowering the voting age, the suggestion 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 (1) detailed and thought-provoking political and civic education throughout schools which

allows for debates on key political issues and (2) 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 our 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 large proportion of the youth vote in many parts of Europe. Confirming this suspicion, a few members from our excluded focus groups in France, Austria, and Hungary, reported that they would consider voting for extreme right parties.

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?
>
> (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Finland, 2012)

In Austria, the only country where 16- and 17-year-olds can currently vote in national elections, a youth representative from the Austrian Nation Students Union told us: '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, f2f, Austria, 2012). He furthermore emphasised that since there is no serious political education for 13-, 14- and 15-year-olds which accompanies the right to vote at 16, those who can and do cast their votes are not as 'prepared' as they should be.

Focus groups often resulted in the same comments, as per the 'reference' focus group in Finland (2012) who responded as such to the question '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, f2f, France, 2011)

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)

It is worth noting here that our survey results clearly suggest that young voters are certainly not more likely to favour extremist parties than the rest of the population, and for that matter that this particular argument had also been largely used by those who opposed the extension of voting rights to women decades ago, and feared that they would be more likely to be easily manipulated by churches and populists.

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 in our interviews and focus groups 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 an important 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:

> 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)

3.4 Testing the e-voting 'solution' – an experiment

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. It seems that young people asked to vote over the internet were more than half as likely to turn out than those invited to vote at polling stations. This shocking 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,[1] 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'.

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- to 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 (see Table 3.8).

Unlike findings about 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,

Table 3.8 Actual turnout by campaign type (in %)

	Traditional vote (*N* = 179)	**E-voting (*N* = 231)**
Voted	36.9	17.4

Source: Our own experiment, 2012.

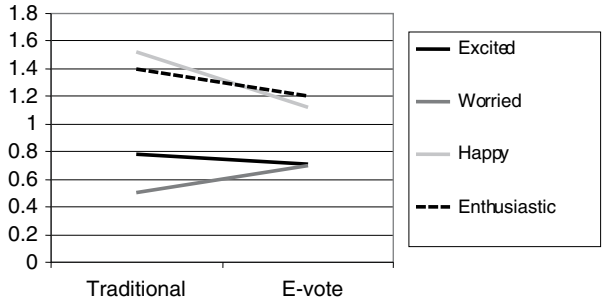

Figure 3.5 Emotions associated with traditional and electronic voting experiences
Source: Our own experiment, 2012.

Table 3.9 Likeliness to hesitate on whom to vote for (in %)

	Traditional vote (*N* = 179)	**E-voting (*N* = 231)**
Hesitated on which list to vote for	22.2	27.2

Source: Our own experiment, 2012.

and significantly less worried about the act of voting than those who voted electronically (see Figure 3.5).

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 (see Table 3.9).

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.
- 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.

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% vs 49%), while over two-thirds of non-voters claim that they would prefer e-voting (69% vs 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 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 advanced 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 advanced voting (see Figure 3.6).

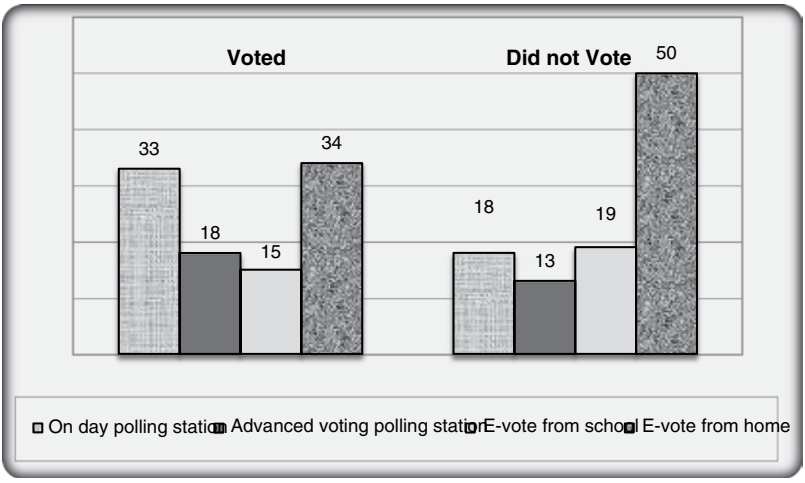

Figure 3.6 Percentage preferred voting mode by actual vote (voters/non-voters)

Note: Figures represent proportion of total respondents expressing a preference of voting mode comparing voters and non-voters.

Source: Our own experiment, 2012.

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 (see Figure 3.7).

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,

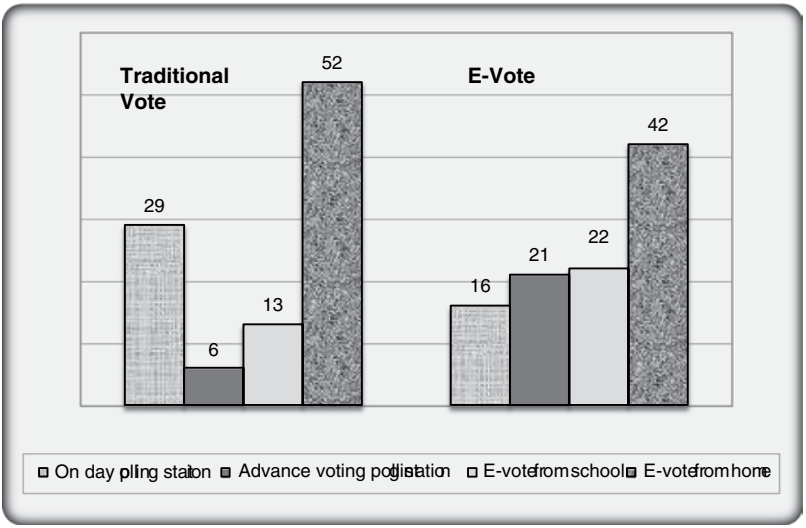

Figure 3.7 Percentage preferred voting mode by experimental vote organisation (polling station/e-vote)

Note: Figures represent proportion of total respondents preferring polling station voting versus e-voting across the two experimental groups.

Source: Our own experiment, 2012.

e-voting leads to significantly less positive emotions associated with the experience of 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 advanced 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 advanced 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.

3.5 Conclusions

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 or 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 EU. Furthermore, a vast majority of them *want to do this*. 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 whom 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 VAAs).

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. In fact, it could even be counterproductive as young people who vote electronically have a much less positive electoral experience than those who vote in person at the polling station. As electoral satisfaction and perceptions of efficacy are two of the most significant causes of further electoral participation (Bruter and Harrison, 2014), there is therefore a significant risk that undermining such satisfaction and efficacy would lead to strikingly lower probabilities to vote again in future elections.

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 VAAs 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. Conversely, it could put an end to the dramatic increase in the proportion of 'chronic abstainers' that we have described at the beginning of this chapter.

4

Youth Participation in European Policymaking: Representation and Limits to Participation

4.1 Introduction: the growing challenge to EU institutions

Since the onset of the 2008 financial crisis, and the subsequent problems with the Eurozone, the EU has been undergoing a crisis of legitimacy. While the roots of this crisis are economic, the history and form of the single currency project means that the consequences are profoundly political. As Marsh (2013: 15) has argued, 'the Euro house was assembled from the roof downwards [. . .] the builders planned to re-enforce the foundations later on'. This meant that the Eurozone lacked the necessary political institutions to respond to the financial crisis and cope with the conflicts that it generated. Furthermore, it also lacked the necessary consensus required to legitimise the creation of such institutions at the moment when they were most required.

In the countries hardest hit by the financial/Eurozone crisis – for example, Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Cyprus – the so-called *Troika* made up of the EC, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund essentially co-opted fiscal policy from domestic governments, the latter losing even more of their sovereignty in the process. In practice, this meant extreme reductions in state spending and greatly increased taxation largely based on decisions taken outside the auspices of national democratic politics. Elections would continue, and voters might be able to change the party in government but this had little impact over their particular state's economic and fiscal policies (Scharpf, 2013). Unsurprisingly, these developments had a negative impact on the popularity of the EU. In Greece, for example, in mid-2007, 55% of citizens felt that membership of the EU was a good thing, with only 11% saying it was a bad thing. However, by mid-2011, only 38% considered

membership a good thing, while 33% now said it was bad for Greece (Eurobarometer, 2014). While the electoral victory of Syriza in Greece is the most obvious current example, these trends are also being felt at the ballot box across the continent: across post-financial crisis Europe, a number of new parties, on either the radical left or the nationalist, reactionary or fascist right, have made strong showings in recent elections.

The democratic challenges raised by the financial crisis were even more acute for young citizens in the EU. Partially, the reasons for this are economic. The financial crisis has hit European youth particularly hard, with youth unemployment reaching unprecedented heights. In 2013, across the EU, 23.4% of young people aged 15–24 were unemployed. However, this EU-wide figure masks extreme disparities. In Italy, the figure was 40%, in Spain 55.5%, while in Greece it was 58.3% (EUROSTAT, 2014). Additionally, the EU faces a broader challenge in socialising young people into political activity. In liberal democracies around the world, young people are seen to be decreasingly engaged in formal political participation (Norris, 1999), creating what has been termed 'a crisis in citizenship' (Sloam, 2011: 4). While there are examples of young people becoming heavily involved in political activity – for example, protest movements in Spain and the UK or the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum – these events have tended to take place in political environments created by extra-institutional or direct democracy events.

As a result, recent years have highlighted a double challenge to the legitimacy of the EU. First, a broad crisis of legitimacy, relating to how political decision-making processes involve (or fail to involve) citizens of the EU, and whether mechanisms can be put in place that mend this democratic deficit and provide citizens with a feeling of control over their own political and economic destiny when it concerns decisions taken at the EU level. Second, there is a more narrowly focused question about how EU institutions relate to young people, some of who have been greatly affected by the financial crisis, and whose attitudes in future years will do much to decide the destiny of the European project.

In this chapter we attempt to understand the contemporary attitudes of young people to EU youth engagement strategies. We proceed with four sections. First, an institutional overview of current engagement strategies is provided. Furthermore, these practices are situated in a theoretical discussion about the logic of European citizen engagement, in particular the focus on participatory rather than representative consultation. The next two sections of this chapter use interview and focus group data to assess the strengths and then the weaknesses of current youth engagement practices in the EU. Finally, in this chapter we conclude by

arguing that, as currently organised, youth engagement strategies in the EU are unfit for purpose as they offer only very limited opportunities for marginalised groups to participate. Furthermore, the underlying cause of this problem relates not just to the participatory institutions themselves, but also to the norms of practice that have shaped them. Only by changing these norms can the EU's youth engagement strategy ever be improved.

4.2 Youth participation in the EU: the rise of participatory democracy

The past two decades have seen a profound change in how democracy is thought of and institutionalised in the EU. In particular these changes have occurred because of the growing acceptance of a distinct definition of political engagement that prioritises participation over representation as a norm within the EU (Saurugger, 2010).

The idea of representation can be defined in two ways. One view gives the individual representative a huge degree of autonomy – essentially, they have legitimacy to act because authority has been delegated to them by their fellow citizens. However, they are entitled to (and indeed should) draw on their own judgement in decision-making. 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 not just the preferences but also 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). However, since the late 1980s, EU institutions have moved away from both of these ideas of representation, or even the hope of achieving them. The much discussed democratic deposit within the EU, driven by remote institutions, public apathy and national governments keen to protect their own legitimacy, has undermined any claim to representative legitimacy that the Union institutions might make (Hix, 2008).

In contrast, the alternative model of participatory democracy has come to dominate EU institutions. This approach is most evident in the *Structured Dialogue* process, a model of participation introduced by the Secretariat General in 1992 and replicated in other spheres of EU engagement since, including youth policy (European Commission, 1992). Essentially, the Structured Dialogue is designed to create a model of institutionalised pluralism, and provide a space for various organised and

interested groups to engage and deliberate with policymakers. In theory, legitimacy is generated because these organisations speak on behalf of various interest groups and segments of the population. Between them provide a reflection of European civil society. This model of democracy is functionalist in its approach: it is based on the assumption that different groups within civil society can come together and, through deliberation, agree on an outcome that reflects their distinct interests.

Youth engagement in the EU has also followed this trajectory, embedding participatory norms in recent years. *The Treaty of Lisbon* explicitly gives a role to the EU in fostering participation among young people and 'encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe' (European Union, 2007: Article 165, subsection 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, 2003: 2)

Steps towards institutionalising these ideas began in 2005, when the European Council called for the development of a 'Structured Dialogue with young people and their organisations at national, regional and local level on policy actions affecting them, with the involvement of researchers in the youth field' (European Council of Ministers, 2005). As a result, the Educational, Audio-Visual and Cultural Executive Agency of the European Commission (EACEA) has been running a Structured Dialogue process for young people since 2010. This has become the main institutional mechanism for including the voice of young people in youth policy decision-making in the EU. To this end, it seeks to bring together young people and policymakers, to interact, debate and feed into the policy process.

The EACEA Structured Dialogue process is hugely involved: it lasts 18 months and takes place within all member states, and also at the EU level. It is run by a steering committee consisting of

- representatives of the Ministries for Youth Affairs from the trio of EU countries holding the rotating presidency during the 18 months the Structured Dialogue is ongoing;

- representatives from National Youth Councils from the trio presidency countries;
- the National Agencies for the Youth in Action Programme from the trio presidency countries;
- representatives from the European Commission;
- representatives from the European Youth Forum (EYF). (European Commission, 2014)

A range of groups are invited to participate in the Structured Dialogue process, including representatives of national, regional and local youth councils, and members of other youth organisations (European Council of Ministers, 2009. For further details on the Structured Dialogue process itself, see Ferandez et al., 2011).

Youth participation in Europe is not limited to the Structured Dialogue, however. The 2009 EU Youth Strategy made promoting youth engagement, in terms of both 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 Council of Ministers, 2009).

This quote points to a fundamental element of European civil society, namely, the emergence of the organisations necessary to conduct the Structured Dialogue and other activities, which is far from organic. Rather, the EU spends vast sums of money supporting various groups across the continent. Drawing on a database created by Mahoney and Beckstrand (2011), for example, it is evident that the EU supported 234 youth/student groups between 2003 and 2007. This represented the single largest sector commitment in EU organisational funding, including 26.7% of all groups supported (the next most supported sector were cultural groups, amounting to 19.8% of supported organisations). The allocation of these resources is a double-edged sword for youth participation in the EU. It certainly has the potential to create well-resourced and capable civil society groups. But at the same time, it can also privilege some segments of youth political activism, promote complacency, increase dependency and thereby create distance from the concerns of many young people in wider society, erecting barriers to broader-based participation.

The participatory turn in EU democracy raises a number of important questions. Exactly how legitimate is the participatory model of engagement, as opposed to the more representative models that have been rejected? To what extent can these mechanisms hope to include the voices of marginalised young people, on the fringes of society? Furthermore, given the backdrop of financial crisis and the possible 're-emergence' of more sectional forms of politics across Europe, how effectively will the deliberative–functionalist ideals embedded in the EU's brand of participatory democracy be able to reflect evolving debates among young people, both among themselves and vis-à-vis the rest of society? It is to these issues we will turn our attention in the next section of this chapter.

4.3 European youth participation in practice

Many of the young people already active in civil society organisations that contribute to the EACEA's Structured Dialogue process argue that the current institutional arrangements within the EU do a good job at allowing young people to engage with the policy process. For example, this view was clearly 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 the role of youth organisations.
>
> (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012)

Similarly, the EYF, one of the major feeder organisations for EACEA's Structured Dialogue, is deemed by many within the cohort of youth already engaged in EU processes 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' (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012). A representative of the EYF stated that that the organisation

> [r]epresents 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.
>
> (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012)

Among some members of the process, there was also an awareness of the participatory turn in European institutions, with it being widely understood that the structure dialogue was there to facilitate group involvement, rather than provide an environment to represent individuals or non-organised youth. Furthermore, there was an appreciation that this focus reordered the priorities of those taking part in the consultation, as a representative of the Dutch Youth Council made 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.
>
> (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012)

This argument offers a very clear articulation of the participatory logic that has recently emerged in EU institutions. There was further evidence of this view, when the need to represent all European youth was not directly equated with involving all European youth – indeed, the idea was actively rejected. For example, a board member of the EYF argued this position explicitly:

> 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 its member organisation so that decisions are made with the right knowledge.
>
> (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012)

However, even with this view, for the Structured Dialogue and the EYF to claim legitimacy, the challenge which remains is ensuring that no groups of young people (notably economically excluded young people,

but also those from other potentially marginalised groups) are institutionally exempt or structurally discouraged from participation, even if they then do not actively choose to take part.

One way to navigate this issue, articulated by some of our interviewees, is 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 EYF, as this quote from an EYF representative attests:

> 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, 2012)

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 the 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% 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, indicating the effort that the youth councils were making to better understand exactly which young people were participating in their processes (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012).

The issues being discussed in the Structured Dialogue process are both complex and nuanced, as is the policy document produced at the end of the process (for evidence of this, see EACEA, 2011a, 2011b). Considering the number of young people in attendance from many countries, getting them to engage at this level is an impressive achievement, in keeping with the stated aims of the process, notably to foster cross-border exchanges between young people, which in turn can promote

pan-European participation (workshop 7, preamble). Certainly, representatives who have participated in the process find it personally fulfilling and an important statement as to 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 is 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)

4.4 Challenges for youth participation in Europe

Despite the strengths articulated above, there are also a number of problems with and challenges facing the EU's efforts to engage young people in its processes. In particular, in the following sections we highlight three challenges for youth participation in the EU: (1) the extent to which the policymaking process is really controlled by young people, as opposed to being managed by a professional (and adult) political elite; (2) barriers to participation, leading to problems of unequal inclusion; and (3) how – if at all – these highly formalised forms of participation relate to less organised forms of political engagement.

4.4.1 Does youth participation actually influence policy?

The motto of the Slovene EYF is that 'nothing should be done about young people without young people' (as quoted by a member of the Slovene Youth Council in an email interview, 2012). However, giving young people a voice in the political process is one thing. To have it listened to and acted on is quite another.

There is now a common rhetoric of youth inclusion, consultation and empowerment used across youth organisations in the formal civic sphere drawn on by the EU (including schools/colleges, local and national governments, and some NGOs). In some ways and whatever its actual ramifications, the existence of this common rhetoric can be seen as an improvement on the past situation. At the very least, it goes beyond a sector which has historically been largely driven by adults with little direct contact with young people.

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 emphasises

that there is a distinction between organisations which intend to act on this rhetoric and those that do not (Morrow, 2000; Bessant, 2004; Vromen, 2008). 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 (Matthews et al., 1998) – that is, amounting to fake or manipulative participation.

Such approaches which simply offer the mirage of participation are clearly flawed. Academic research suggests that a more inclusive model, where young people's wishes and aspirations have a genuine influence over policy, 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 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.

Our research suggests that even young people who are participating in European youth projects do not always feel listened to and respected in the consultation process. As an academic expert who has researched European-level youth engagement argued:

> 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.
>
> (Stakeholder interview, telephone, UK, 2012)

Agenda-setting is one area where young people, even some of those participating in the Structured Dialogue process, feel excluded. The central theme for each 18-month cycle of the Structured Dialogue is set by EU youth ministers and is then implemented by the process's steering committee containing government and youth representatives from the trio of EU countries that will hold the rotating presidencies of the EU during the period of the dialogue, along with representatives of the European Commission. This group produces guiding questions that are then operationalised for the consultation process. This process has historically produced particular areas of focus:

- Cycle 1 (January 2010–June 2011): During presidencies of Spain, Belgium and Hungary. Focus on *youth employment*.

- Cycle 2 (June 2011–January 2013): During presidencies of Cyprus, Denmark and Poland. Focus on youth *participation in democratic life*.
- Cycle 3 (January 2013–June 2014): During presidencies of Ireland, Lithuania and Greece. Focus on *social inclusion*.
- Cycle 4 (June 2014–January 2016): During presidencies of Italy, Latvia and Luxembourg. Focus on *youth empowerment*.

As a result of this rather top-down process, the agendas actually being discussed in the Structured Dialogue may not reflect the concerns of young people across the continent. One Dutch participant saw this as a problem, and argued that far 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 people's views on things they sometimes do not have not have an opinion on.
>
> (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012)

However, it should be noted that our stakeholder interviews did not find universal agreement on this argument. 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, even if they were decided in a rather hierarchical way, had proved very useful in sparking discussion, and provided an important focus within their youth politics project (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Hungary, 2012).

However, there are also a number of other reasons why it should not be automatically assumed that the Structured Dialogue process, in itself, automatically leads to better and more engagement with young people or, for that matter, more appropriate policy outcomes. In fact, we were alerted by some Structured Dialogue participants to the narrow nature of the process and to tensions between a desire to be representative of a broader range of young people, and a desire to be practically effective. The agenda-setting challenge is therefore not just about access. After all, the Youth Forum chairs the Steering Committee and runs its secretariat and, through youth organisations at the national level, young people are actively involved in the management of the Structured Dialogue process. However, this access exists within a highly formalised and

hierarchical structure. As a result, many stakeholders do not feel they have much influence over the process.

4.4.2 Inclusion and barriers to participation

The most basic barrier to participation in EU youth engagement programmes is awareness. There is one very obvious reason for this. Our research certainly found that young people are interested in politics. Often they are angry about it too. However, and despite recent events in the Eurozone, by far the strongest vitriol in our focus group sample was reserved for national or regional politicians and political parties.

This creates problems for the EU. 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 the UK in 2010 and the subsequent outbreak of disorder can be taken as a good case in point. In contrast, for our participants, European-level politics was seen as being very remote.

As noted by a Finnish youth worker in our stakeholder interviews: 'Young people don't know that there are these opportunities for them [to participate]' (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.

This lack of awareness has an important consequence for overall participation in European-level youth politics. The evidence gathered through our research suggests that issues of youth representation are a key concern for many local, regional and national governments, as well as student bodies, and they work hard to engage young people. However, it is also 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 respond to these efforts and become engaged in dialogue or consultation processes with adult policymakers and politicians. They are certainly far more likely to become involved than their less educated, less experienced or less wealthy counterparts. There are a number of reasons for this imbalance (discussed further below), but at least one significant issue is that many young people are simply unaware about how to get involved.

Even if there is an equal awareness of the possibility of participation among a cross section of young people, political science research offers some insights into the problems faced by policymakers seeking to

encourage greater and more equal levels of participation. Morrow (2000) has illustrated that many young people from middle and lower socio-economic groups are particularly aware of the strategic exclusion they face in processes of formal 'consultation'. This is especially true in highly complex political environments, such as the EU Structured Dialogue process. One of our interviewees highlighted this point, arguing that the guiding questions 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 [sic] to implement. Now the guiding questions are written in jargon and are often not useful to consult young people' (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012). Consultation processes heavily reliant on their own institutional terminology and complex language will remain closed off to the vast majority of young people, as they seem to bear little relationship to their real-world concerns.

Fostering engagement is a multifaceted challenge, requiring an appreciation of the circumstances of a wide variety of young people. Highly formalised approaches will only ever be able to reach a small minority, and most of these will probably already have many of the skills required to participate effectively. In contrast, critical youth organisations who work with young homeless, young unemployed, school dropouts, young offenders, addicts, young mothers and young asylum seekers maintain that being included in democratic processes requires a four-stage, step-by-step approach (see Bynner and Parsons, 2002; Coussée et al., 2009):

- Authorities need to acknowledge excluded groups of young people as citizens;
- Social and spatial inclusion needs to be developed by face-to-face contact;
- Excluded young people need to be reintegrated through education, training and interaction and;
- Elite actors need to build efficacy by listening to critique from young people and acting on their concerns.

Evidence for the wisdom of this approach is found in our focus group data, even in the so-called reference group. This element of our data set offers insights into the some of the problems that young people who are only engaged in political and civic activity in a limited way face (i.e. groups of young people who did not suffer from causes of structural exclusion, but were also not highly active in politics). This did not mean, however, that all of them were automatically included or that none of them were at risk of future exclusion. In fact the whole purpose

of including this particular reference group was to obtain a wide spectrum of civic, social and political circumstances. For this reason, the views of this group are particularly instructive when considering the distance that exists between attempts to foster engagement by policymakers and the views and experiences of young people.

In the French reference group, for example, many participants expressed the view that political engagement required a particular skill set, which they themselves did not possess ('Reference' focus group, France, 2012). Even the more confident participants in our research from this subsample noted that they had a particular set of skills that allowed them to engage (and by implication would exclude others). 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, Austria and Finland, 2012).

Unsurprisingly then, the perceived requirement for political skills was even more evident in the 'Excluded' focus groups. Some examples in our data set 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, Austria, 2012)

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

Views of this kind pose a particular challenge to the Structured Dialogue process and environments like it, as they are, by their very nature, a high-knowledge form 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)

The fact that any form of political participation is likened to climbing Mount Everest in terms of its difficulty should certainly be a cause for concern. For many young people, the nature of the debate taking place in the Structured Dialogue process would be deeply alienating. That this is a serious problem is a view shared by many local groups seeking to engage excluded young people in civic life across Europe, who argue that current institutions fail to induct young people into political and civic life. For example, Perg is a youth group from Austria that seeks to provide 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 youth political engagement:

> 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.
>
> (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Austria, 2012)

Similarly, 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)

The ultimate barriers to participation for excluded youth may be socio-economic, however. As a youth worker for a UK-based organisation that works to engage socially excluded youth argued in our interviews, homelessness and overcrowding are major problems for the young

people she works with, and as such are the main barriers to their participation in civic life:

> All that [homelessness and overcrowding] 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.
>
> (Stakeholder interview, f2f, UK, 2011)

It is a long way from attempting to tackle these types of problems to engaging with European policymakers in a highly formalised and rule-governed setting.

4.4.3 Building bridges between formal and informal political engagement

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 young people do not engage or 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., 2007). This argument was articulated in our interviews, with expert members of our stakeholder sample noting 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)

This observation was reinforced by our interviews and focus groups with young people. They are far from being apathetic about politics – in fact, they are interested and wish to engage. Many have an interest in their own communities, and the issues that impact them, and also in broader issues on the European 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, imported from Canada (Focus groups, 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 ('Average' focus group, Austria, 2012). The Hungarian and Spanish 'average' focus groups (remembering that this is the group of young people who are neither specifically excluded nor particularly active in formal politics) also reported that every single attendee had been on some kind of demonstration in the year preceding the discussion ('Average' focus groups, Hungary and Spain, 2012).

Of the various school focus groups, it was in the UK and French samples where participants engaged in the greatest number of political activities. 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, France and UK, 2012). This breadth of political activity is not just the product of the recent anti-tuition fees movement in the UK, 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, Austria, 2012).

Similarly, the 'Average' 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.
>
> ('Average' focus group, Finland, 2012)

This evidence might suggest that the mission of European bodies in seeking to 'engage' young people is not such an uphill task as might first appear, especially if young people are more politically engaged than is popularly imagined. However, our focus groups also provide ample evidence of the challenge this realisation poses. For many young people – and despite their belief that political issues matter – formal, institutionalised politics has shown itself to be alien and unapproachable. While their level of activity certainly suggests that young people are not politically apathetic, the ways they are engaged can also be seen as a rejection of more traditional forms of political engagement.

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, Finland, 2012)

There remains a huge divide between institutions associated with formal participatory politics at the European level and other areas of political and civic participation, especially less formal and civically based groups. First, geography and distance are particularly challenging. This is especially significant for European engagement strategies. 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, especially as they become more distant from the individual.

There are also important cultural distinctions between the formal and non-formal political arena. Interestingly, our focus groups suggest that many young people (including those engaged in more non-traditional forms of activism) do not just feel alienated from the officials and politicians they might encounter in formal consultation exercises, but also from own peers who take part in such activities. An instructive example of this phenomenon appeared in our French activist focus group, when a young social activist referred to young people involved in formal politics as 'Jazz talkers', which can perhaps 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 not just the institutions of formal politics but also their peers who are engaged in

them. Similarly, young people who are engaged in participatory activities are conscious that through participating they are enhancing their future career prospects as this quote from a French representative of a regional Youth Council expresses:

> 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, f2f, France, 2011)

An additional problem for highly formalised and drawn-out political processes such as the Structured Dialogue is their lack of responsiveness in comparison with less formalised and local forms of youth engagement. According to one of our interviewees from a UK youth organisation, youth engagement needs to be flexible and open, and certainly not specialise on a limited number of issues, an approach that might ultimately drive young people away or make the group's endeavours seems irrelevant to them. Instead, it was argued, the attitude adopted should be that 'No problem is too big or small', as a mechanism 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)

Organisations with this ethos simply try to be as accessible as possible. Such an approach is argued to be extremely important because of the conditions under which young people now live:

> 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 is different cultures, different sexualities, different religions [. . .] They are just trying to fit in, find a space to fit in.
>
> (Stakeholder interview, f2f, UK, 2011)

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. This sits in stark contrast to the top-down approach taken by the Structured Dialogue and the Youth Councils.

There are some examples where formal and non-formal participation can be complementary to each other. This is especially true when the non-formal sector provides alternative entry paths into political engagement. This idea has already been acknowledged by the European Commission which, since 2009, has been attempting to engage more young people through creative and cultural projects. One of the aims of this is to promote 'active' citizenship and participation (European Commission, 2009).

For example, one London-based organisation we spoke to worked by counselling youth from multi-ethnic backgrounds. Their approach is based on a distinctly creative, inspirational model of engagement for young people. The activities they offer include art, drama and writing during half terms, and the Easter and summer vacations. Young people can spend the whole day engaged in these activities, 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, gradually gaining the confidence necessary to get involved in other activities and spheres of community life (Stakeholder interview, f2f, UK, 2011). However, such alternative approaches to engagement also provoke challenges for policymakers. As Zentner (2011: 13) points out, the structures necessary for enabling this type of youth participation need to be in place and also recognised by policymakers as having value.

4.5 Conclusions

The politics and institutions of Europe are at a crossroads. In many ways, youth engagement policies represent a microcosm of far broader challenges. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the functionalist-influenced Structured Dialogue process provided an acceptable institutional vehicle for civil society engagement, seeking to legitimise the EU's decision-making processes. This institutional model relied on two embedded assumptions. First, that a civil society of organisations (heavily supported by resources from the EU) could create a form of democratic pluralism, capable of engaging in high-level debate about policy issues and, through this, inputting into European policymaking. In so doing,

they would grant these policies legitimacy. Second, that, through deliberation, the various groups that made up this pluralism could arrive at shared points of agreement, and integrate them into policy documents and statements.

These assumptions may have been more convincing in the 1990s and early 2000s. In those years, controversial economic questions seemed largely settled in Europe, while the trajectory of the Union, especially in the years following the seemingly successful launch of the single currency, seemed assured. However, the financial and Eurozone crises have challenged these ideas of stable development and a broad political consensus. This raises a very important question: can the participatory model of engagement and legitimisation of EU policy continue to function in the more sectional and conflictual political age that we might now be entering?

A number of the matters highlighted in this chapter suggest that there are fundamental problems with this idea. Indeed, it might be argued that every issue we highlight above has the potential to get worse in the future, given economic and political circumstances.

The first issue relates to the impact that EU-level youth participation has on actual policy outcomes. In an environment where economic policies are increasingly tightly prescribed, often by authorities with very limited accountability, the ability of consultation to be meaningful greatly decreases. This can subsequently amount to fake participation, that is, giving people the impression that they can participate (i.e. have an impact on decision-making) while in fact they cannot. This can induce a negative sense of political efficacy and increase the distrust in politics and delegitimise decision-making processes.

The second issue relates to exclusion. Socio-economic inequality is a major cause of exclusion for many young people. At a time of increased youth unemployment and economic insecurity among young people, it makes sense to assume that these problems are going to grow even more. Additionally, only a small proportion of young people are going to have the skills necessary to take part in the type of participation offered by institutions such as the Structured Dialogue. This presents a serious barrier to broader levels of engagement, and accessing the voices of various strands of European youth (especially those from less-advantaged backgrounds).

The final issue is the disjunction between formal and informal forms of political engagement. Throughout the developed world, young people are gravitating towards low-threshold modes of participation, distinct from traditional and more formalised approaches to engagement.

However, the EU, and especially the Structured Dialogue approach to engagement, remains oblivious to these trends, only seeking to aggregate the voices of highly organised youth, acting through civil society organisations.

Perhaps the great difficulty though comes when these factors are combined. Young people who feel excluded from formal political consultation and/or believe it has limited impact seek alternative means of redress and airing their grievances. Catalysed by economic crisis, this distinction between formal and informal politics ceases to just be about form, but also becomes about content. While young people broadly satisfied with the status quo take part in highly institutionalised activity organised by a formalised civil society, young people with a more critical perspective practise their politics in other venues and spaces removed from formal politics. Such an outcome is good for no one, as it would marginalise more radical voices and, in so doing, create a form of stunted pluralism.

The major challenge for EU youth engagement is to move away from the participatory model that has been developed in the past two decades, with all its accompanying assumptions of functionalist deliberation. Instead, it seems to be far more important to acknowledge and engage with the very divergent opinions that exist among the continent's youth. Above all, the EU needs to speak to young people on their own terms and give agenda-setting power to young people.

5
Youth Participation Beyond Voting: Volunteering and Contestation

5.1 Introduction: broadening participation

This chapter goes to the heart of our research question about the extent to which youth participation in democratic life may be described as being 'in crisis'. We begin this chapter by building on our insights from earlier chapters 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; Coleman (with Rowe), 2005; Bennett et al., 2009; Hirzalla and van Zoonen, 2011; Hands, 2011; Banaji and Buckingham, 2013a). We have learnt through extensive interviews with youth organisations and young people 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 and chapter 2), 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, as also shown in Table 5.1 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, that is, Austria, France, Finland, Hungary, Spain, Poland and the UK, in this chapter we will examine participatory activities *not* as falling into distinct groups – for example, 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 become so.

In tandem, we are of course interrogating and setting these youth-driven practices against the different types of participatory offer identified in chapter 2, section 2.2.1 – pseudo-participation, non-participation and manipulative participation. We draw attention to contexts in which young people's participation may be viewed as civil disobedience by the local, national or transnational authorities and its innovation or civicness denied, thus warping any data on participation collected utilising an institutional framework. 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 chapter 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 coordinate campaigns and the use of public spaces to debate democratic issues.

In this context, whereas 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 McCullock, 2009: 9), the social positioning of young people in relation to institutions and the state is of paramount importance for participation as well as for motivation, an element far less discussed in the literature, but which we find to be of central interest. In what follows, and with the aim of answering the first of our research questions on the extent to which participation is in crisis, 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. We also include suggestions about overcoming barriers for particular groups and best practice case studies involving traditional and creative forms of participation.

5.2 The vote and vote-related participation: practice and perceptions

This part provides additional details to some of the data we summarised earlier in this book and also helps to differentiate between the participatory practices of under- and over-18s, a distinction which is neglected in existing research. In other words, we want to understand what role voting plays in young people's perception and practice of varying channels of political participation.

As young people leave childhood to enter what is defined as adult life, they experience increasing 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, despite its immediate connection with democratic processes in the minds of many policymakers and older adult citizens, voting may be seen as a less obvious way of influencing politics by young people, as illustrated in the comments of some of our stakeholder interviews and focus group discussions. A young centre-right UK politician told us: '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, f2f, UK, 2012). He compared this to young people engaging with members of parliament more directly during the tuition fee debate[1] 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.).

As set out in chapter 1, our enquiries for this book therefore led us to ask questions about the main modes of political participation that young people already indulge 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 experiences of under- and over-18s, suggesting that in many contexts it is not until the late teens that young people start actively engaging with politics.

In our survey, nearly half of the under-18 respondents discuss politics, a third follow current affairs, but also have signed a petition and donated money to a cause or charity (see Table 5.1). 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 or club president), voted in a specialised 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 specialised 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 positively 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 5.1 highlights that more young people tend to be involved in political participation once they pass their 18th birthday. The older peer group tends to discuss politics more and be more interested in current affairs than their younger counterparts. There is less difference between the two age groups in terms of 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.

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 aged 18–30 in terms of an overwhelming expectation that they will vote for a party ideologically close to them (nearly nine in ten respondents), sign a petition (85%), and probably participate in peaceful demonstrations and in strikes (see Table 5.4). Here again, we must emphasise that voting is still perceived by young people in contemporary Europe as the main channel of democratic participation.

So, 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

Table 5.1 Modes of participation experienced at least once by young citizens (in %)

	<18 (*N* = 2,721)	**>18 (*N* = 4,480)**
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 specialised 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: Our own survey, 2011–2012 (bold indicates more than 5% difference).

most experienced channel of participation, only one point behind discussing politics. Looking at other modes of participations 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 (3–6%) or send a letter to a politician or organisation (8–13%). However, one in six respondents aged between 18 and 30 claims to have already joined a union or pressure group, and an equal number also follow a charity or party on some social media.

Interestingly, however, beyond the modes of participation young people have already experienced, overwhelmingly they keep the door open to participating more in the future, and there, 'classical' modes of participation dominate their answers. This finding is confirmed when one

asks respondents to rank various modes of participation according to their perceived political efficacy, what is best for democracy and what they would individually prefer.

As shown in Figure 5.1, the perceived efficiency of peaceful demonstrations when it comes to affecting politics declines by 9 percentage points as young people reach voting age and that of signing petitions by 4 percentage points. By contrast, within the same context, the perceived efficiency of strikes increases by 5 percentage points and that of violent demonstrations by 3 percentage points. Only voting seems to remain perceived in similar ways by both age groups. In addition, we should note that though it is not the preferred mode of participation of *all* young people, voting is still perceived as relatively the most effective way to participate and even more so as the most beneficial to democracy. It thus also becomes essential to better understand where the move towards disillusionment in over-18s 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 important finding because it shows that while the perceived effectiveness 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 effective and confrontational modes as more effective as they become older (Table 5.2).

It is also worth noting that income has a strong impact on young citizens' preferences between the various modes of participation but that this does not really extend to voting. Standing in an election and

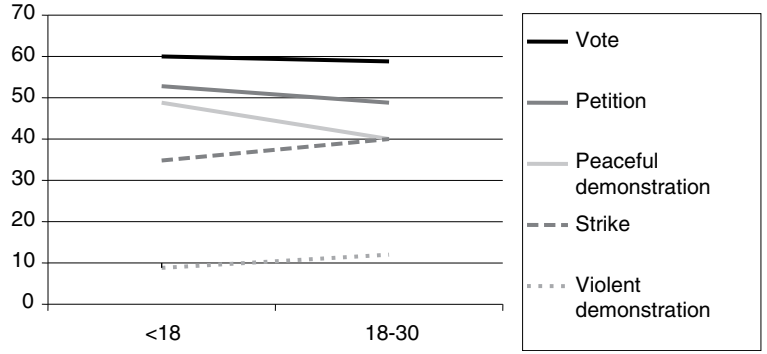

Figure 5.1 Perceived effectiveness of confrontational and non-confrontational modes of participation before and after reaching voting age

Source: Our own survey, 2011–2012.

Table 5.2 Ranking of modes of participation in terms of efficiency, democratic quality and preference (N = 7,201) (in %)

	Most efficient		Best for democracy		Personally preferred	
	<18 (N = 2,721)	>18 (N = 4,480)	<18 (N = 2,721)	>18 (N = 4,480)	<18 (N = 2,721)	>18 (N = 4,480)
1	Vote 60	Vote 59	Vote 61	Vote 61	Petition 56	Petition 60
2	Petition 53	Petition 49	Peaceful demo 56	Petition 55	Vote 54	Vote 57
3	Peaceful demo 49	Peaceful demo 40	Petition 55	Peaceful demo 50	Peaceful demo 54	Peaceful demo 49
4	Strike 35	Strike 40	Stand in election 28	Strike 30	Strike 32	Strike 35
5	Stand in election 25	Stand in election 26	Strike 28	Stand in election 26	Stand in election 28	Pressure group 24

Source Our own survey, 2011–2012.

joining a party is far more tempting to young people from higher socio-economic demographics (+0.08 and +0.12 correlation coefficient, respectively). Voting, however, is less affected by social class, with a positive correlation of only +0.04, which makes it seemingly the 'least divisive' participatory choice of young people across social backgrounds.

5.3 Joining and belonging as forms of participation: parties, unions and youth parliaments

Membership of organisations or associations has generally been considered a reliable variable with which to assess young people's high or low embeddedness in democratic life (Newton, 1999). Many 15- to 30-year-olds across the EU27 report being a member of an organisation (see Table 5.3). 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 5.3 suggests that sports clubs are the most popular organisations amongst European youth, followed by leisure clubs and youth organisations. Activist organisations dealing with issues such as human rights, development or climate change are much less popular. Political organisations and political parties are least popular amongst European youth.

Table 5.3 Percentage of 15- to 30-year-olds participating in civic and political organisations (N = 12,927)

	A sports club	Leisure club or any kind of youth organisation	A local organisation aimed at improving your local community	A cultural organisation	An organisation promoting human rights or global development	An organisation active in the domain of climate change/environmental issues	A political organisation or a political party	None of these
EU27	35	22	15	14	8	7	5	44
BE	46	32	17	22	13	10	8	32
BG	23	16	9	14	8	10	6	59
CZ	30	18	11	18	6	7	2	49
DK	48	28	16	10	12	7	8	28
DE	42	27	16	18	8	8	6	34
EE	26	14	7	6	1	2	3	57
IE	53	37	36	13	12	10	7	24
EL	30	15	12	10	5	10	7	52
ES	38	24	14	18	12	10	5	42
FR	44	23	13	12	5	6	4	39
IT	25	15	14	13	6	4	6	53
CY	19	8	5	7	5	4	7	67
LV	25	23	16	13	6	6	4	53
LT	15	14	7	6	2	4	5	63
LU	48	38	21	25	13	13	10	25
HU	19	11	10	7	3	6	1	63
MT	25	19	12	13	5	6	14	44
AT	36	21	16	16	11	10	8	38
NL	59	27	13	18	14	6	4	22
PL	19	13	12	10	5	1	2	60
PT	31	26	21	20	9	8	5	45
RO	16	12	8	8	5	5	8	60
SI	26	14	9	16	3	2	3	48
SK	32	23	13	23	11	9	5	43
FI	30	25	17	11	14	7	5	42
SE	48	24	14	12	13	9	7	28
UK	38	28	25	12	9	7	5	41
HR	20	12	8	9	4	3	6	59

*Source*Eurobarometer 375 – Participation in Democratic Life, 2013.

The number of young people not active in any of these organisations is also quite high. We can of course observe some regional variations in this regard. For example, engagement in political organisations tends to be higher in Northern Europe and lower in Eastern Europe.

Furthermore, in Table 5.4 drawn from our own 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.

It is also relevant to point to fact that there is little difference between the two age groups when it comes to voting for a party that is ideologically 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 likelihood 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 during the ages of 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 a suggestion from our statistical analysis (30% of under-18s and 22% of over-18s may join a party) that disillusionment with or scepticism about institutional politics and political parties seems to increase with age and experience.

Political parties and unions did traditionally play an important role in facilitating participation in the social life of a society. Whatever their

Table 5.4 Modes of participation in which respondents expect to participate in the future (in %)

Expected mode of participation	**<18 (*N* = 2,721)**	**>18 (*N* = 4,480)**
Vote for a party ideologically 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: Our own survey, 2011–2012.

actual role remains, their perceived political efficacy 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.

Scandinavian countries tend to score highest for participation in institutional forms of politics, as do Malta and Luxembourg, but in most other countries participation in activities organised by political organisations and parties is very low; this is especially the case in the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary. 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 cannot be taken as evidence that *all* young people are somehow less politically engaged than older adults, 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, Austria, 2012). In sections 5.4 and 5.5 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.

5.4 Voluntary and socially conscious participation

In 2011, DG Education and Culture at the European Commission commissioned the Flash Eurobarometer 319 study 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 report participating in institutional political groups, a substantive minority (24%) of young Europeans report engaging in voluntary organisations. This tendency, though not the exact statistic, is confirmed by our analysis of the focus groups and interviews with youth policy and youth work stakeholders conducted for the original research reported in this book:

> I volunteer at youth clubs.
>
> ('Average' focus group, 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, 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, Finland)

Approximately half of these voluntary actions (51%) surveyed by 'Youth on the Move' were directed at improving local communities. As argued by Banaji and Buckingham (2013a), these results also seem to 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 exemplified 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 what are traditionally surveyed as 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- to 30-year-olds (see Figure 5.2). The figure explores the way in which participation in elections, volunteering, European projects and international projects progress as young people age, and it unmistakably

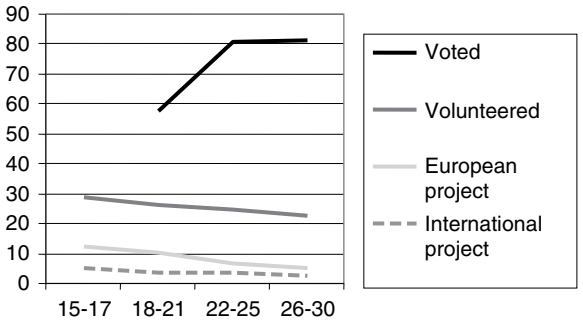

Figure 5.2 Evolution of four key forms of political involvement by age group
Source: Re-analysis of Flash Eurobarometer 319 data, 2011.

shows that apart from voting, most forms of political participation actually decline between the late teen years and the late 20s. Given that employment in the labour force rises with age, as may caring and/or childcare responsibilities, with the associated diminishing of 'spare' time, this is a completely expected trend that must be kept in mind when injunctions to volunteer are aimed at young people.

Finally, 9% of the young people interviewed in the Flash Eurobarometer 319 (2011) survey reported taking part in some activity aimed at fostering international cooperation, approximately two-thirds of which focuses on cooperation within the EU. 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- to 30-year-olds report being part of a project aimed at fostering European cooperation, 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.

Encouraging volunteering as a key aspect of civic consciousness amongst young people has been one of the EU'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. (European Commission, 2009: 9)

Furthermore, three out of four respondents in the 15- to 30-year-olds category report considering 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 5.3 suggests that on average about a quarter of young adults in the EU are involved in voluntary activity. Here again we can observe some regional variations with the Netherlands (40%), Ireland (38%), Denmark (36%) and Slovenia (36%) scoring highest with young people in Hungary (17%), Greece (16%), Poland (16%), Sweden (13%) and Italy (13%) least likely to engage in voluntary activity.

Our own survey for the Education, Audio-Visual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life' found an even smaller variation in volunteering activities between under- and over-18s.

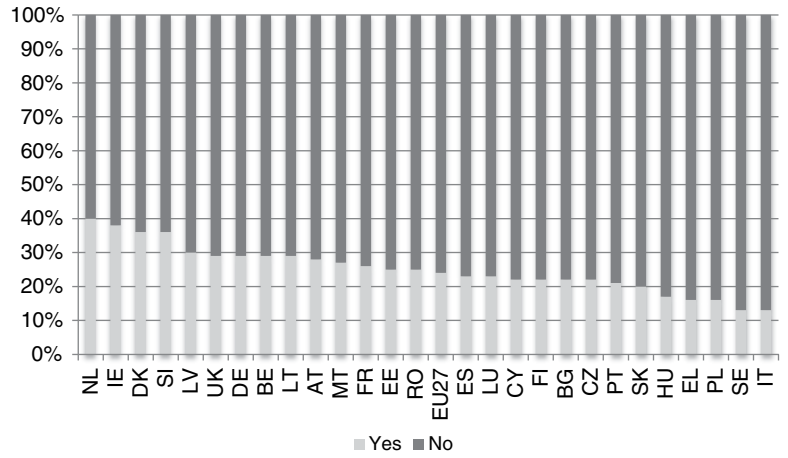

Figure 5.3 Engagement in voluntary activities of 15- to 30-year-olds
Source: Eurobarometer 319a, 2011.

Table 5.5 Percentage of youth engaged with volunteering or donations (in %)

	<18 (*N* = 2,721)	**>18 (*N* = 4,480)**
Volunteer time to cause or charity	23	24
Donate to cause or charity	31	45

Source: Our own 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 5.5 that there is a negligible difference of one percentage point 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 when they become older adults. 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 unless or until circumstances intervene.

Unsurprisingly, Table 5.5 also suggests that donating to a cause or charity, the ability to which increases with increasing income level, does increase past the age of 18. Just under half of the survey respondents over the age of 18 stated that they donated, whilst just over a third of

under-18s did so (45% and 31%, respectively). As young people progress in their working lives, they have more disposable income compared to their counterparts under 18 and, therefore, are more likely to be in a position to donate to charitable causes. In fact, 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 counselling, 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 and others low and the same goes for Eastern Europe.

Informal voluntary activities exclude activities undertaken for the household, work or within voluntary organisations. Examples emerging from our research include initiatives such as time banks where both older and younger members of the community exchange their services online without the need to exchange money. Instead, they offer their time in sharing skills, knowledge, physical and mechanical skills and other services and they receive in return what they need from others. Aikapankki – the Finnish branch of the Community Exchange System – was one of the examples we came across in research for this book. The Helsinki Branch has over 1,000 members and to date some 3,000 hours have been exchanged.

5.5 Autonomous activism

The conceptual framework we set out in chapters 1 and 2 established that, empirically, participation in democratic life cannot be reduced to volunteering or membership of organisations, but should also relate to the attempts made by young people to influence policymaking and politics, and their efforts to come together either in organisations or in autonomous groups to instigate, discuss, think about and plan for social change. This occurs in different forms and different contexts or fora.

As chapter 4 showed, engaging directly with policymakers is one possible way of attempting social change. In addition, looking across the data sets already existing and at our own survey data, 85% of young people report their belief 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

Table 5.6 Top five forms of active non-electoral political participation (i.e. excluding voting in political elections, discussing politics and keeping up with current affairs) reported 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 specialised election	Demonstrate	Vote in specialised 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 specialised election	Volunteer time	Follow causes/ parties on social media	Vote in specialised election

Source Our own survey, 2011–2012.

that their voices are heard by policymakers. Testifying to this is the fact that 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, much more so than when it comes to voting. Indeed, different countries seem to exhibit different tendencies relating to the importance of non-electoral forms of participation. Indeed, while signing petitions (see Table 5.6) 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, specialised elections in Poland and Spain, procotting in Austria and social media activism in Hungary.

Furthermore, in countries with strong collective and national activist traditions such as Greece and France, public demonstrations and even occupations are more accepted and thus also more common (this is line with the theory of political opportunity structure – Meyer and Minkoff, 2004). Many data sets also point to the tendency that young people in Eastern European and Baltic countries score lower with regard to activism – defined by us as open-ended attempts to engage in debate about and instigate changes in existing social, legal or other governance structures – than in other parts of Europe. 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. The stakeholders and young people in Hungary on the contrary showed a marked scepticism about political associations, social enterprise, volunteering or protest as ways of achieving social change or making their voices heard.

5.5.1 Demonstrating and occupying space

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 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 long-standing tactic used mainly by workers and students. This has recently been given a new twist in the occupations of public spaces by youth

Table 5.7 Types of involvement of young people across the focus groups

	France	**Spain**	**Finland**	**Austria**	**UK**	**Hungary**
'Active'	Organising debates. Building projects. Demonstrations. Daily exchange of information on the Internet. Publish newspaper articles. Public speech training. Dealing with journalists' training.	All connected to youth associations of trade unions. Meetings. Web page meetings. Protest events. Discussion groups.	Political emails. Peace camps. Theatre performances. Student lobbies. Volunteering. Inviting immigrant groups to scout meetings.	Demonstrations. Voting and elections. Commitment doesn't need to be conventional: video-making.	Demonstrations. Petitions. Marches. Slut march. 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 MPs. Demonstrating is no use.	Enjoy witnessing. Not any involvement – one interviewee admitted looting during riots.	Even though demonstrations are 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. 'Slut march'. 'Free Palestine' demo. Petitions.	Demonstrations. But usually, it does nothing more than signal (in a 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 – January–March 2012.

flash mobs,[2] 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. Table 5.7 is based on a detailed thematic analysis of our youth focus groups and documents the types of involvement of young people self-reported during these discussions.

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.

5.5.2 Punishing participation?

As discussed in chapters 1 and 2, our conceptualisation of participation when we designed the research discussed here encompassed many forms of activism, the sets of open-ended actions in which citizens show they are discussing and organising themselves into groups to challenge existing social, political, legal and governance structures, or social, legal and governance practices; or thinking and organising to keep particular structures and practices in place in the face of other citizens' challenge. In chapter 1 we cited data from the focus groups which we interpreted as showing that both normative and experiential visions of democracy clearly play a role in the depth and breadth of young people's participation. Shaw and McCullock (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, 2007; Edwards, 2007; Bennett et al., 2009) have 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. Our analysis of 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, 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, Spain, 2012)

Our data, including evidence drawn from the testimony of senior adult stakeholders in political organisations and interviews with youth participation experts and youth workers, can be interpreted as suggesting 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 contend that this is a way of 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, f2f, France, 2011)

It is clear that, as della Porta (1999: 91) also points out, the accommodation and normalisation of certain types of participation 'goes along with the stigmatization of others'.

5.6 The complexity of research about participation

Interestingly, qualitative data such as our focus groups (Table 5.6) yielded a wider range of types of participatory activities than seen in quantitative survey data. Confusion about the motives of adult audiences for social surveys and the reasons for asking questions about young people's

participation in demonstrations or occupations can lead some young people as well as older adults to under-report their activities, just as narrow understandings of the word 'politics' can lead young people to assert their lack of interest when questions are posed in quantitative surveys. The more dialogic contexts of interviews can contribute both to dispelling misunderstandings and to youth elaborating on different forms of activism. The following excerpt about creative ways of participation drawn from a focus group in Finland (2012) 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.

We interpret this excerpt as providing evidence of insistence by young people that political participation can be right wing or left wing, 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. There is, however, a wider point to be made here about the premium on participation of particular types.

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. 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 needed (and did not have) or currently used on a regular basis such spaces, and many mentioned that they 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. Indeed, our analysis reveals that economic cuts in social spending are seen by many stakeholder interviewees and most young people (except the most affluent) to be having a negative effect both on the existence of these spaces and on the length of time spent in education, leading to further difficulty in accessing and participation in time-consuming or complex democratic initiatives.

Notably, in Table 5.6, even though young people in the 'excluded' groups may seem cynical about the effectiveness of their protests in bringing about social change, thus speaking directly to the 'cynicism model' highlighted in chapter 1, 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' young people spoke about wanting to take part in a discussion of their issues with the young mayor of their area but did not know that precisely such a debate had been organised by some of the 'active' youth in the town hall across the street.

We use the words 'precisely such a debate' to indicate that the meeting which had been held with the 'young mayor' by activist young people had involved discussion of issues about exclusion, poverty and youth frustration, and showed a commitment on their part to taking up and considering these issues of social justice; however, it was also a debate which had managed to exclude the young people we were talking to, those already living in the most precarious, impoverished and risky circumstances. This highlights that information and communication about activism, like communication about institutional politics, can also miss its mark, and risk preaching to the choir.

5.7 Information and involvement: cases of youth participation

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 which follows shows how closely old and new forms of participation and action can be linked within a single movement and how the tendency amongst the 18–28 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 sidestepping 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 if not thousands of young people.

For instance, in May 2011, some 130,000 primarily young Spaniards protested against (youth) unemployment and austerity measures and for a better future. Camps were set up making the anger and frustration of a large part of the population very visible in city centres 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 in contrast to the fluid situation in Egypt they imposed a strict non-violence policy. The name of the movement was coined as *Los Indignados* or 'the indignant'.

Some of their demands were centred around measures to improve citizens' rights and enable participatory democracy and this was also reflected in their decision-making processes through assembly meetings. This was neither always straightforward nor 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.

In a combination of innovation and conventional participatory mechanisms, most occupation encampments are run through a basic democratic assembly system with subgroups responsible for various topics and tasks, for example, a legal team and a media team, but the ultimate decision-making 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 full-time employment or parenthood to participate on a regular basis.

As suggested in our analysis of the stakeholder interviews and focus groups with active youth discussed in this chapter and in chapters 4, 6 and 7, the case of the indignados is representative of a wide array of similar activist cases across European countries: In the UK the *UK Uncut* movement, the *Campaign Against Fees and Cuts*, and the *Occupy London*

and other cities' movements; in Austria the campaign against fees and for better education in vocational schools; in France *Generation Precaire* (discussed further in chapter 7), 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)

In other cases, media activism is at the centre of youth action. For instance, in the *Youth Voice News Centre* a project initiated in 2006 and funded by the city of Helsinki, 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. 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 in something.
>
> (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Finland, 2012)

Here, some 40 young people from 13 to 20 years old participate in the project; most participants are 16–17 years old. Participants meet twice a week to discuss the issues on which they want to produce media content. The project is run in 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. 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.
>
> (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Finland, 2012)

Such cases of youth democratic activity through exceptionally creative media projects remain part of the fabric of youth participation in Europe in 2015 and have been joined by multiplatform media projects at the community level and sponsored by national broadcasters (for instance, BBC 3, Channel 4 UK). These require the skills and commitment of intergenerational teams of citizens to making such things happen and a 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 reading of 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 licence 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.
>
> (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Austria, 2012)

If, in addition, community media is not protected, and is instead treated as a 'marketplace' and made to compete with large private media corporations, the most innovative civic youth projects and democratic initiatives are very unlikely to survive.

5.8 Conclusions

In this chapter we set out to elaborate answers to our first research question about whether there is indeed a crisis in youth participation in democratic life and to the second one, looking at possible causes for apparent youth disaffection or non-participation. Based on our survey of a sample of youth across seven European member states and on focus

groups with young people in six member states we can confidently confirm that youth participation in democratic life takes place in a diversity of ways and contexts. Far from being in crisis across the board, our analysis of survey data suggests that there are now more civic and political initiatives and efforts than even ten years ago in which young people participate, and our interpretation of qualitative data gathered in interviews and focus groups suggests that in many cases young people are either the primary initiators or playing a major role in these initiatives.

Consistent with other data in chapter 3 in this book, high levels of participation through political parties are minimal amongst young people, but the same can be said about the general population (with some notable exceptions). Our study shows that *most* politicians are regarded by *most* young people with distrust and even anger; and politicians have a lot to do with turning young people off from institutional politics and from voting. 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 are popular in countries with a strong Catholic tradition. Global charities and national NGOs which play an activist lobbying role on political issues are much more popular as a way of participating in democratic life in some countries than in others and are mentioned at least once in each of the focus groups but 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.

Volunteering, an established form of civic participation, 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 either from our survey or from 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 existing surveys such as Flash Eurobarometer 319 suggesting greater formal responsibilities of those aged 22 upwards lead to a small drop-off in voluntary work. Nor was it the case that only young people from more affluent backgrounds volunteer, although it is much easier for them to do so with the financial support of parents, and much more likely that their voluntary activities will be recorded as such through formal organisations. All of this suggests the need to widen discussions of volunteering so that the definition used in survey research is not circumscribed by formal regulations and institutionalised in ways which

benefit affluent youth who do not care for the elderly or for children and are able to get references from respected charitable institutions.

Our analysis also indicates 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 chapter 7 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. Indeed, even when there is broad participation, as in the Spanish indignados and the Austrian and UK anti-fees and anti-cuts protest movement, this tends to be galvanised by a core group of young people who have a higher level 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 and so on – are engaged in on an ad hoc basis by thousands of other young people.

Young people in all the seven countries where we carried out the survey, and in 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 innovative strategies in campaigning. The focus groups and stakeholder interviews emphasise that this is true particularly of those involving film, radio or new media that allow them to explore aspects of their lives and the social world. They are engaging in a variety of politically educative activities including starting cooperatives, 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.

In line with a section of academic literature (Coleman, 2005; Bennett, 2008; Montgomery, 2008), several of the stakeholder 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.

In this sense, and linking back to insights from focus groups where young people mentioned economic cuts and the challenges of finding spaces to learn, relax and debate, there is an urgent need for direct

action by the EU Parliament to guarantee that budgets for such spaces and for higher education funding remain in place or to replace lost funding. Whether this is done through a system of rewards or by direct funding is a context-specific choice, but the application process cannot afford to cater only to those with the highest literacy and social capital. Saliently, the effects of closures of such spaces are already being felt keenly in deprived youth communities and even in more affluent ones, according to both adult stakeholders and young people, in countries as diverse as Austria, the UK, Hungary and Spain. As we will delineate further in chapter 7, economic spending cuts thus have a serious deterrent effect on the everyday democratic participation of excluded and 'at risk' youth, affecting opportunities to participate and also motivation for participation. This is a phenomenon which could easily lead to a spiral of disengagement, and potentially to the increasing credibility and rise of far right populism across Europe, and the real effects on democracy might be masked for a while by the enthusiasm shown by such parties for getting elected.

In the next chapter we will tackle the role of media and communication in terms of fostering, but also potentially impeding, youth participation.

6

Participation of Youth In and Through Media: Traditional and New Media

6.1 Introduction: media and democratic life

In this chapter the role of media in terms of facilitating and potentially enabling the participation of young people in democratic life will be addressed in more detail. As is well recognised in democratic theory, media and information provision and literacy is an important prerequisite for participation in democratic life. On the one hand, the distinction between mainstream media and alternative media is of importance in this regard. While the former facilitates democratic participation through the media, the latter tends to facilitate participation in media and content production itself (Carpentier, 2011). On the other hand, we can also distinguish traditional media such as print and broadcasting from new media such as the internet and social media.

Traditional as well as new media fulfil important democratic roles, enabling the participation in democratic life and providing (political) information to citizens, a window to the world around us (Coleman and Ross, 2010; Curran, 2011). In line with the liberal legacy of democracy, Blekesaune et al. (2012: 113) point out that 'democracy functions best when its citizens are politically informed'. Besides this, we can also observe a participatory turn in media and content production with citizens increasingly generating their own media content rather than merely consuming content produced for them by mainstream media actors (Gilmor, 2004).

In this chapter, three types of media will be addressed in relation to youth participation. First of all, traditional mainstream media and their role in terms of democracy will be assessed more in depth; 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 what are commonly called Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), such as the internet and social media. We will now briefly address all three levels of analysis to highlight some of the issues that are discussed in the relevant literatures.

Media organisations and the journalists that work in them are pivotal actors in a democracy as they (ideally) are the official 'informers' of citizens about politics by producing news, by fulfilling a watchdog role and holding the political elites to account (Siebert et al., 1956). This is very much in line with 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 deemed essential. However, social responsibility theories have added additional democratic roles for the media such as providing a context to the day's events, representing different groups in society equally and fairly and facilitating public debate (cf. Christians et al., 2009; McQuail, 2010; Curran, 2011).

As many have observed, however, often news media do not live up to the expectations raised by normative theories and the ethical standards they foreground. Instead of a watchdog, the media is increasingly perceived to be a lapdog or even a guard dog – that is, protecting the vested interests they serve (Watson, 2003: 105). Furthermore, instead of facilitating public debate between a variety of viewpoints, the media tends to report 'the causes of disputes in one way rather than another' (Eldridge, 1995: 212).

It also has to be acknowledged, however, that young people increasingly produce their own media independent from commercial and public service media (Gilmor 2004; Van Dijck, 2009; Davies et al., 2014). In this regard, the notion of alternative or community media has gained traction. 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)

Community radio, one particular form of community media, is a salient case to illustrate the enormous participatory potentials of media in the hands of non-media professionals. Community radio 'aspires to treat its listeners as subjects and participants', not as objects to be educated or persuaded to consume (Lewis and Booth, 1989: 8). 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 produce their own media and through that participate in democratic life (Bailey et al., 2008; Bosch, 2014). 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 also increasingly being recognised by policymakers (cf. WSIS, 2003: Article 23j; European Parliament, 2008: 7).

While also used profusely by powerful interests in politics and the economy, new and especially social media potentially constitute additional alternative platforms to 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 (Dahlgren, 2007).

Young people across Europe are increasingly media, internet and mobile savvy and access is less of an issue for most, but not for all! Web 2.0 platforms such as Facebook and Twitter provide new ways of participating and 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 interested users to connect weak ties with a common purpose and determination (Shirky, 2008; Kavada, 2010).

However, the potentialities of new media to reinvigorate 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.

Several pitfalls need to be acknowledged in this regard. Norris (2001: 12) speaks not only 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 whereby those that participate offline also tend to do so online and vice versa those who are not active offline are often also not active online. 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 (often primarily 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. (quoted in Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006: 968)

Finally, all too often the use of the internet to conduct online policy consultations amounts to a form of fake participation. More often than not online consultations are smoke screens and PR exercises designed to convince rather than to listen. 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 harks back to the discussion in chapter 2 on the various degrees of participation and still runs true today (Cammaerts, 2008).

As such, online tools are often used to give citizen and young people the impression that they can or are able to participate, while in fact they cannot. Illustrative of this is that there is often no formal connection between online participation and the actual decision-making institutions they purport to inform. It is thus not entirely surprising that a lot of 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 (see Margolis and Resnick, 2000: 212; Cammaerts and Van Audenhove, 2005; Hindman, 2008). One of the main difficulties consists in reaching beyond those already active politically or at least interested in politics.

However, at the same time, 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 activists, for already connected young people, as well as adults, to participate

in democratic life and to become politically active in a variety of less traditional ways, such as volunteering or being part of a protest movement (Dahlgren, 2007, 2009; Cammaerts, 2012).

All this brings a number of issues to the foreground that we will develop further in the remainder of this chapter: (1) The degree of interest and disinterest in democratic politics through media will be addressed, followed by (2) trust in media institutions themselves to fulfil their democratic role and (3) the particular efforts of public service broadcasters to reach young people. Subsequently, (4) the nature of and opportunities for participation in community radio will be outlined, after which (5) 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. Furthermore, (6) the role of ICTs in facilitating the participation of young people in democratic life will be discussed as well. Finally, (7) the use of social media in political campaigning will be assessed.

6.2 Mainstream media

Mainstream media fulfils an important role in what a deputy head of the Austrian public service broadcaster called 'advocating democratic awareness'. This can be done through the provision of news and information, through raising awareness and building 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, 2011).

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

6.2.1 Interest in politics and political 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) – cf. Figure 6.1. The UK exhibits the lowest scores for the youngest age group, almost 40% of the 17- to 24-year-olds report never following politics through the media. Irish, Hungarian and Romanian youth also report high levels of abstention from following politics (23%, 18% and 19%, respectively). Age is thus an important determinant of

being disconnected from news – as another study also points out 'there are much more disconnected people among younger people than among older people' (Blekesaune et al., 2012: 117).

Our 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' focus group, Hungary, 2012 – emphasis added)

Contradicting this low interest in politics (somewhat) are results of online news consumption which refers to all kinds of news stories and not merely 'political news' (see Figure 6.2). Consulting mainstream news media online seems to be rife amongst youth, with the 25- to 34-year-olds accessing mainstream news media considerably more than the younger generation. This could be explained by higher degrees of

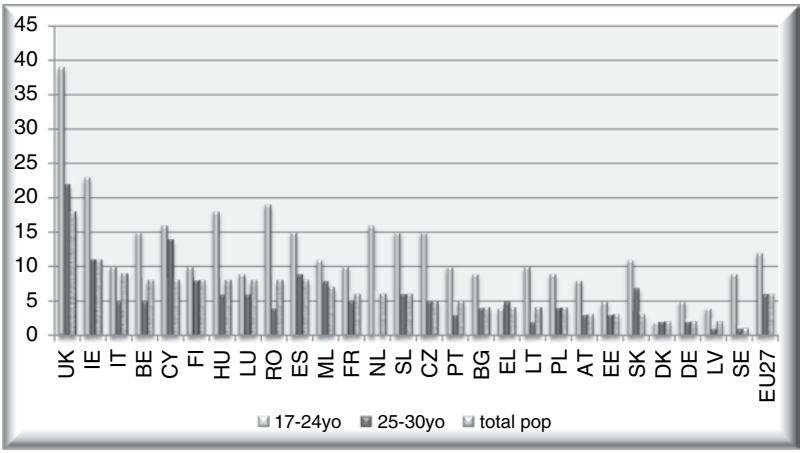

Figure 6.1 Percentage of citizens never following politics through the media
Source: Re-analysis of European Social Survey – 2008 wave.

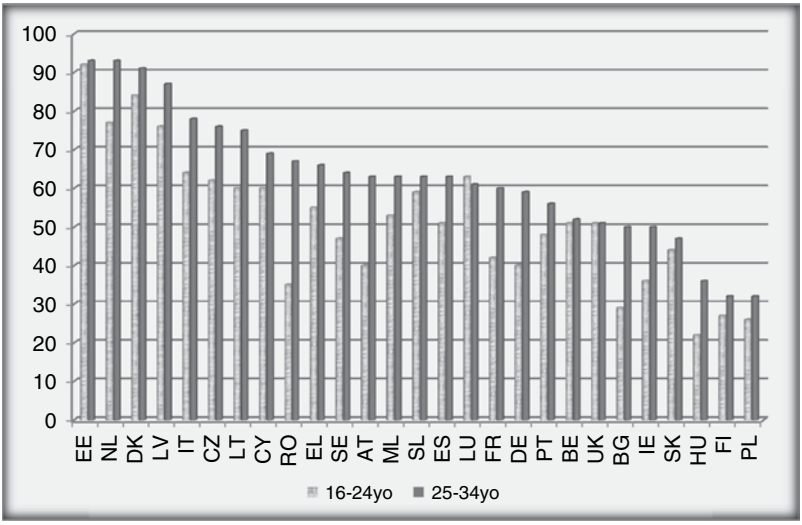

Figure 6.2 Reading or downloading online newspapers
Source: Re-analysis of European Social Survey – 2008 wave.

disinterest in news in general amongst 16- to 24-year-olds. Besides this, it is clear that younger generations tend to use the internet for different reasons than their slightly older peers (see Table 6.2 on page 153). 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' ('Average' focus group, Austria, 2012).

As the educational commissioner of Channel 4 in the UK also 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, 2012). However, we do need to take into account that despite the decrease in consumption of print news being partly compensated by a shift towards online mainstream news media consumption (see Figure 6.2), 'most of the time spent online is not dedicated to news and current affairs' (Blekesaune et al., 2012: 111; see also section 6.3.2).

6.2.2 Trust and distrust in the press

Distrust in the press is very high across Europe – on an aggregate level about 60% of European citizens distrust their media organisations (see Figure 6.3). Citizens in the UK, Greece, Italy, Germany, Hungary and

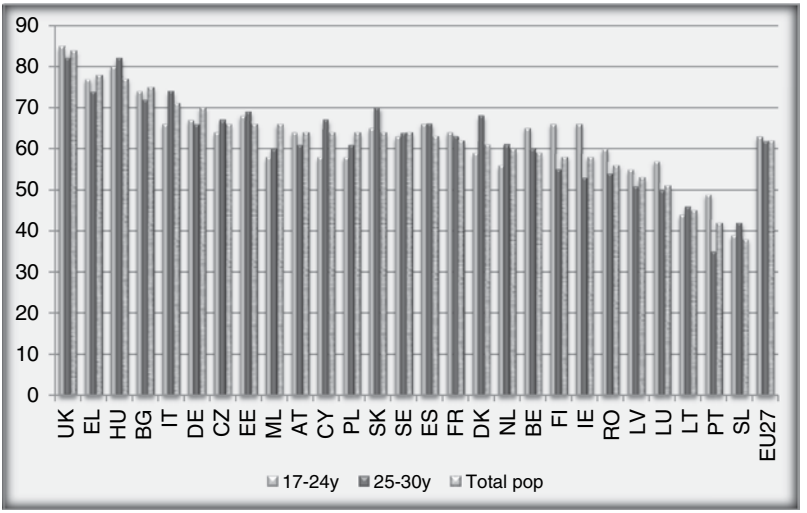

Figure 6.3 Degree of distrust of the press in the EU
Source: Re-analysis of European Social Survey – 2008 wave.

Bulgarians are most distrustful of media organisations (>70%), while citizens in Baltic states such as Lithuania and Latvia as well as in Slovenia, Luxembourg and Portugal display, relatively speaking, less distrust in the press (about 50% or less).

Furthermore, the variations between different generations are overall very limited, both at an aggregate level and in most individual EU member states. In Belgium, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg and Portugal 16- to 24-year-olds tend to be more distrustful of the media than the general population, while in Denmark, Italy, Slovakia and Hungary the 25- to 30-year-old cohort is more distrustful.

Exemplifying this group of responses, 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.
> ('Average' focus group, Finland, 2012)

Also illustrative of such a 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, Hungary, 2012). 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, Hungary, 2012).

This is particularly poignant in view of the much criticised 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.[1]

To some extent, this high degree of distrust of the news media and journalism amongst young people can be understood as a response to the media's negative bias when reporting on young people and democracy. At the same time, however, as Barnett (2008: 5) also points out, this high level of distrust is in line with rising distrust in other institutions. It could be argued thought that distrust of journalism is particularly problematic given its 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 of a focus group in Hungary were highly critical in this regard: 'The media emphasize sexuality. I think the media make young people look a lot worse than they actually are [. . .] they picture us in a bad light' ('Active' focus group, Hungary, 2012). In Spain another young respondent summed up their sense of frustration as follows: 'TV spreads the image of the Catalonia Square squatters as a group of lazy youngsters' ('Excluded' focus group, Spain, 2012). Concurring with this sentiment of misrepresentation, 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)

6.2.3 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 the state funded news or BBC than commercially financed, private things', one participant claimed, to which another responded by stating that

> [commercial media] make news that appeal to citizens and by which they can make profit, and they highlight things that benefit them, not showing the whole picture.
>
> ('Average' focus group, Finland, 2012)

As evidenced in our focus groups, many young people do seem to feel, however, that there is little content being produced that specifically caters to their lifeworld and to the issues that concern them. The educational commissioner of UK's 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, 2012). A 17-year-old participant to a media participation project in Finland concurs with this view 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, 2012).

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 over-12-year-olds does not watch that much television anymore, but is more active online. In the UK, television viewing as a proportion of media consumption in general decreases from 52% in the age category 6–11, to a mere 31% in the category 12–15; especially

gaming and social media use take up more time (Ofcom, 2014). This is also reflected in our interpretation of the data on news consumption presented above (see Figure 6.2).

In France, the only programme specifically targeted at the over 12 years old 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 on television in favour of the internet. That is why the French public broadcaster changed its strategy' (Stakeholder interview, telephone, France, 2011). The Austrian public broadcaster also does not produce any content for the 12–19 years 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, 2011). 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, 2012).

Despite all this, it is clear that some public as well as commercial broadcasters do attempt to address these issues by setting up media 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. They 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. The programmes 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, 2012 – emphasis added).

The French public broadcaster is also planning to set up a specific online platform directed at 15- to 25-year-olds, but this is still in the planning

stages. 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, 2011). Such restrictive regulatory measures for public service broadcasters to operate online, which also apply in Germany, are highly problematic in view of reaching an age group that has largely migrated online.

There are also examples of continuing scepticism amongst mainstream media regarding their responsibilities to promote youth participation. This blunt reaction of a director of a Catalan public youth channel is illustrative of this:

> Young 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 in providing these skills and knowledge.
> (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Spain, 2012)

6.3 Community media

Community media has been seen to contribute greatly to the participation of young people in democratic life (Howley, 2005; Carpentier, 2011; Bosch, 2014). The opportunities that community media offer to young people, to be creative and to gain media literacy skills through their participation in media production, are increasingly recognised. Community media organisations are thus considered to be '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 has also been adopted 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, 2010: 188). The Netherlands and France especially boast high levels of participation in community radio: with respectively 22,500 people and 40,500 participating in community radio stations, as employees, but more often as volunteers (European Parliament, 2007: 20).

Community media can be found in many forms and formats, such as print shops, radio and the internet-based platforms. It is clear that community media in all its diversity represent important spaces where young people can experiment and learn (Couldry and Curran, 2003; Bosch, 2014).

6.3.1 Participatory opportunities and skills offered by community media

As pointed out above community media offer ample opportunities for young people to participate and play an active role in their community by producing media content. 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, to gain knowledge and, most importantly, have a sense that they are doing something worthwhile, increasing efficacy. 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, for example in the UK, 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 multicultural 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. She referred to:

- 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 furthermore added 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 – emphasis added).

The role of community media in fostering engagement and learning is echoed by a youth worker who started a community radio in Hungary targeted at young people aged between 14 and 24: '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, 2012).

Community radio thus appears to offer a productive way to rebalance certain inequalities and forms of communicative discrimination

by providing opportunities to migrant communities and other disadvantaged groups in society to speak out and counter their often negative representation or under-representation in mainstream media. In this regard we can refer to Fraser (2000: 110) who emphasises the importance of 'new self-representations', thereby 'jettisoning internalized, negative identities and joining collectively to produce a self-affirming culture of their own'. This optimistic view of community media is echoed by two representatives of an Austrian community radio who stress the counter-hegemonic 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 participation in a community radio station can sometimes lead to better job prospects, as about two-thirds of young participants in the radio station, which is based in one of the poorer parts of Hungary, ended up in a communication-related job afterwards.

6.3.2 Convergence of media and communication

One of the main problems facing community media active in the broadcasting sector is a rather restrictive regulatory framework when it comes to the allocation of frequencies and funding. We are faced here with the strange paradox that while community radio is being heralded as a tool of empowerment in developing countries, it often tends to be marginalised in the West (Cammaerts, 2009b).

The convergence of media and communication technologies has, however, meant that the internet became an important tool for many community radio stations, to broadcast, to promote their station and connect with the communities they serve or both. Many community radio initiatives use streaming services in addition to their FM broadcasts or as a way to broadcast without needing an expensive official licence and a legal frequency. Besides this, social media is increasingly integrated into the media practices of community radio stations.

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)

As such, it also has to be recognised that most of the opportunities for young people to participate in democratic life through producing their own media situates itself online today. In the next section we will address the importance as well as constraints of the online context in view of facilitating participation in democratic life for young people.

6.4 The internet and social media

As already became apparent when discussing mainstream media as well as community radio, the internet plays an increasingly central role in young people's everyday life and in their daily media consumption, as well as their effort to produce their own media content. As one participant to a focus group stated: 'Our generation is different to that of our parents. We visit websites. Our parents watch the TV news' ('Average' focus group, UK, 2012). In this section we will address the opportunities and 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; they cannot be 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 internet to facilitate participation in policy contexts and to conduct political campaigning.

6.4.1 Digital and skills divides

It would be fair to say that access to the internet is very high amongst young people. As Figure 6.4 illustrates, in many European countries penetration rates of the internet amongst young people is fast approaching 100%. This is certainly the case for 16- to 24-year-olds, who tend to have access to the internet through schools, universities and/or youth centres, as well as increasingly through their smart phones. Another interesting observation is that when overall penetration rates are low, the discrepancies of access between 16- and 24-year-olds and 25- to 34-year-olds increase as well.

These discrepancies between pre- and post-25-year-olds can be explained in part by 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 (even) more internet and computer savvy than older cohorts.

It is clear, however, that digital divides in terms of access as well as skills are still a distinct 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.

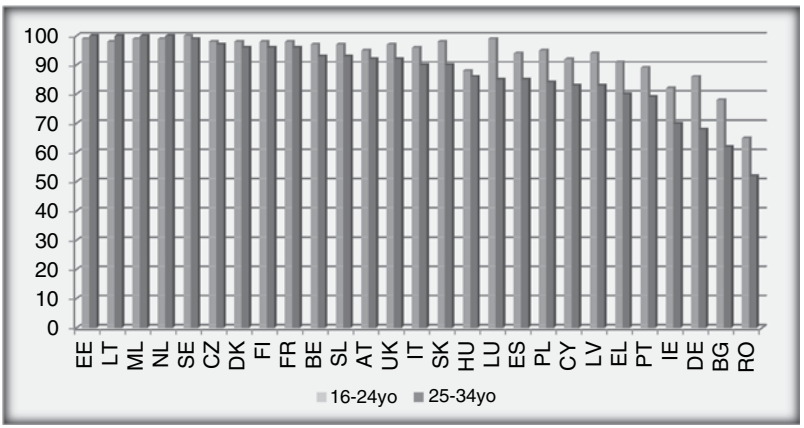

Figure 6.4 Internet access in the last three months

Source: Re-analysis based on Eurostat's Information Society Survey, 2010.

When comparing young people from poor socio-economic backgrounds with the average of the same age category it appears that the difference in terms of internet access are more marked for those in the age category of 25–34 than in 16–24 (see Figure 6.5). Across EU member states people in the age group 25–34 living in poverty have less chance of having had internet access in the last three months than the overall population in that age group. 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 young people from poor socio-economic backgrounds and between 25 and 35 years of age have more than 30% more chance of being on the wrong side of the digital divide.

In the focus group held in a Spanish prison, participants mainly spoke about television rather than the internet when discussing media ('Excluded' focus group, Spain, 2012). Also, during a focus group with homeless young people in Hungary, 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've sat down with a computer. I don't care' ('Excluded' focus group, Hungary, 2012). In France a focus group of vulnerable women exposed that while the women knew how to use the

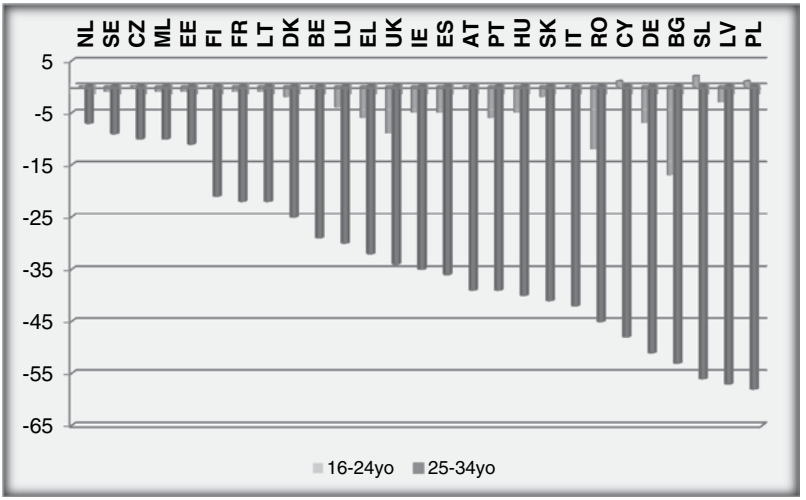

Figure 6.5 Percentage difference in access to the internet of poor young people compared to all young people of the same age category

Source: Re-analysis based on Eurostat's Information Society Survey, 2010.

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 internet. I try to go on Facebook but . . .
>
> ('Excluded' focus group, France, 2012)

Acknowledging that access to the internet is still a contentious issue for vulnerable young people in European societies is of crucial importance as it shows that exclusively using forums, websites and other internet-mediated spaces for the provision of information and the facilitation of participation neglects already vulnerable groups, especially somewhat 'older' youth in precarious conditions, possibly even increasing their exclusion from democratic and social life. (see also Livingstone et al., 2005; Vromen, 2008; Dahlgren, 2009; Banaji and Buckingham, 2010).

The internet and what it stands for is of course about much more than just access. Many scholars argue that while access to infrastructure is an important factor, additional efforts are needed to teach citizens, young and old, the necessary skills to navigate the internet, to seek out information, to assess the quality of information, to be aware of online risks and so on (Lankshear and Knobel, 2008; Hargittai, 2010; Livingstone et al., 2011; Lunt and Livingstone, 2012). These concerns have, in recent years, been addressed in relation to the digital literacies debate. On the one hand, young people are commonly thought to be among the most ICT literate in Europe – as one participant to a focus group suggests:

> 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.
>
> ('Average' focus group, UK, 2012)

On the other hand, however, as indicated in Table 6.1, young people from 11 to 16 that have access to the internet possess on average only four out of the eight safety skills surveyed by the EU Kids Online project (see Livingstone et al., 2011: 28). 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 much less prevalent. Furthermore, geographical differences occur with children in Northern Europe possessing more skills than those in Southern and Eastern Europe. And skills alone

Table 6.1 Children's digital literacy and safety skills (in %)[a]

	11–12 years old		13–16 years old		
Safety skill	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**All**
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

[a]All children aged 11–16 who use the internet.

Source: Livingstone et al. (2011).

do not equate to literacy. So we need to remain sceptical about the overall claims related to the ICT literacy of young Europeans.

6.4.2 Online usage patterns

It is, however, also relevant to analyse the usage patterns of young people when they do go online. Table 6.2 provides a detailed overview of different types of internet use by different age groups. Unsurprisingly, sending email is the most popular usage 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 and digital content. Unsurprisingly, 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

Table 6.2 Internet activities as a percentage of individuals who used the internet in the past three months by age group (in %)

	16–24 years old	25–34 years old	35–44 years old	45–55 years old
Communication				
Sending/receiving emails	89	88	84	82
Advanced communication services	83	65	49	43
Information and services				
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
Leisure				
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
Interaction				
Obtaining information from public authority websites	28	46	46	45
Downloading official forms	17	30	29	28
Sending filled-in forms	12	22	21	21

Source: EUROSTAT (2009: 152).

users compared to older ones (only 5–7% of 35- to 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 document back through the internet. The figures for the youngest age category (16–24) are much lower in this regard, respectively, 28% for seeking information, 17% for downloading a form and 12% for sending it back online. A possible reason for this might be that the 16- to 24-year-olds have fewer dealings with the state and social security system than older generations.

Differences between young people's social media use ('advanced communication services' in Table 6.2 and 'posting messages to social media sites or instant messaging' in Figure 6.6) and the general population are stark. Social media use is particularly high (>80%) amongst 16- to 24-year-olds in Scandinavian countries, most Baltic republics, in East European countries such as Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, the 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 25–34.

Differences between different generations of young people are also significant, with the youngest generation most eager in the take-up of

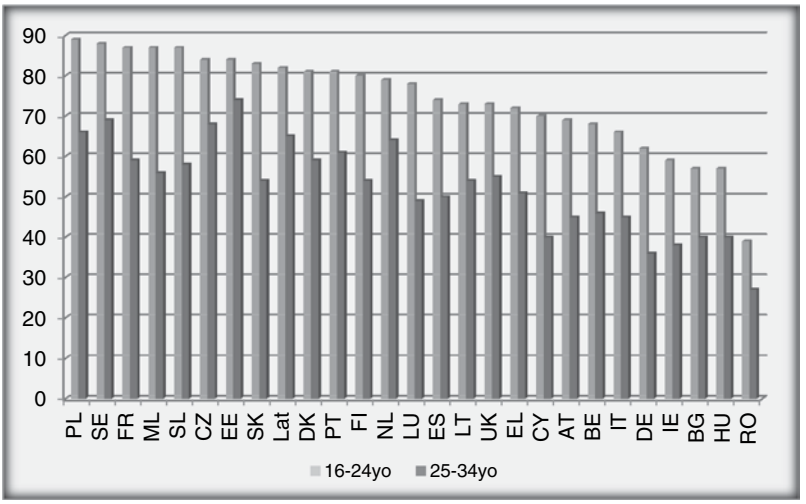

Figure 6.6 Posting messages to social media sites or instant messaging
Source: Eurostat's Information Society Survey, 2010.

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, 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.
>
> ('Average' focus group, 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 a lot: 'As an information medium, where you get your news from, I think Twitter is better because it's more concentrated; there is also a lot of trash on Facebook' ('Active' focus group, Austria, 2012).

Our survey provided us with some useful additional information on social media usage, which should be borne in mind when considering the best ways of promoting youth participation or interaction with democratic institutions using new media. As shown in Table 6.3, almost 87% 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. This concurs with survey

Table 6.3 Social media use in 7 EU countries (aggregated $N = 7{,}201$) (in %)

Which social media?		**Which people?**	
Facebook	78	Friends	72
Blogs	30	Family members	60
Twitter	25	Singers/musicians	40
Bebo	9	Actors	26
		TV celebrities	24
		Sports (wo)men	24
		Politicians	18
		Journalists	14
		Others	32
Overall	**87**	**Overall**	**87**

Source: Our own survey, 2011–2012.

results of EU Kids Online, which showed that about 80% of 15- to 16-year-olds 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 found that politicians and journalists, who represent the main 'channels' to political participation, suffer a major deficit of interest on the part of young people who use social media mainly to connect to friends and family members as well as to follow entertainment celebrities (see Table 6.3). Only 14.1% claim to have ever used the social media to follow politicians and 17.6% journalists, which is far less than sports people, TV celebrities, actors and singers.

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, the kinds of social media that 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 also has to be pointed out in this regard, however, that recent studies 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). Our interpretation of the data also suggests that at least some young people are acutely aware and self-reflexive of these risks when engaging online through social networking sites. However, at the same time, we also found evidence that very often young people do not know the people they befriend personally, and some acknowledge that this can be quite dangerous; 'Through Facebook, you also get to know wrong friends' ('Excluded' focus group, Austria, 2012).

6.4.3 Online platforms and participation in democratic life

The internet is by no means a quick fix to democracy. At the same time, the interactive features and open nature of the internet do provide opportunities for some young people, particularly those already interested and active offline, to engage and participate further in democratic life. While it might not be suited for the construction of Habermasian 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) points in this regard to 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'. Thus, while we have to accept these potentialities we must also acknowledge the serious problems in this regard.

Indeed, the internet in itself is by no means conducive to promote democracy and political participation; and some young people are acutely aware of this as one participant to a focus group pointed out: 'The danger [of social media] 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' ('Average' focus group, UK, 2012). It seems that issues regarding the reliability of information online require young people to be ever more vigilant and check a variety of sources, which was emphasised by several young people in the focus groups.

Besides being a source of information – accurate and inaccurate – the internet and especially social media are increasingly instrumental in terms of mobilising for action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Banaji and Buckingham, 2013a). 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' ('Average' focus group, 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, 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 and media production efforts: 'For example, this morning we had street interviews, and we are going to make a video with it and post in our website' ('Active' focus group, France, 2012).

Besides mobilisation and activism, the internet is also increasingly used to facilitate participation of young people in policy processes. However, research into young people's experiences and usages of online

platforms to engage in policymaking or with policymakers is mixed to say the least. 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). Vromen's study, as well as the data generated for the research on which this book is based, contradicts the all too common perceptions of widespread and unfocused apathy and cynicism towards politics and policy amongst young people. But neither our study nor Vromen's suggests that using the internet in policymaking processes avoids the pitfalls of fake consultation.

Indeed, we interpret some of our data as suggesting that the use of new media in policy contexts can run 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 (EYF) claimed 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 or tokenism, online platforms must be part of a broader process that also situates itself offline and needs to be embedded in forms of offline (deliberative) decision-making – the internet 'should not be an end in itself' as a representative of the Dutch Youth Council pointed out (email, 2012). 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 between what is occurring online and what is happening in the offline world, embedded in values such as reciprocity and genuine dialogue, not only giving a platform but also listening to the views and concerns of young people.

In their feedback, a representative of the EYF also pointed to these tensions 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.
>
> (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012 – emphasis in original)

Like these young stakeholders, other 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 – that is, young people not only want a voice, but they also want to be listened to. For some it is even a precondition as this statement by somebody from the Lithuanian Youth Council active in the EU's structured dialogue attests: 'if done interactively, social media can be a way to promote volunteering, non-formal education and reach many non-organised youngsters' (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012).

Regarding the latter, it still needs to be taken into account that for some digital divides in terms of access and skills remain a constraining factor when using new media. As pointed out above (in section 6.4.1) 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, 2012).

In addition to this, as already indicated above, some participants to the focus groups are also acutely aware of some of the limitations of the internet and social media to facilitate participation in democratic life. Especially issues relating to 'opinion reinforcement' (Davies, 1999: 162) and the creation of ideological 'echo chambers' (Sunstein, 2007) were foregrounded; the fact that those active online tend to be those that are already active offline was also mentioned:

> 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, Hungary, 2012)

> The thing is that as Facebook is a closed network, information only circulates between friends.
>
> ('Active' focus group, 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, Finland, 2012)

While there is also evidence out there that nuances the echo-chamber thesis (Banaji and Buckingham, 2013a), what is probably most disconcerting it that that same evidence also seems to suggest that '[w]hen online, many youth appear to get little exposure to any perspectives at all' (Kahne et al., 2011: 505).

6.4.4 The use of social media for political campaigning

Another component of our e-participation experiment, besides e-voting (cf. chapter 3) was concerned with the role and impact of social media in political campaigning. We chose to focus on a Twitter campaign because it is the single most widely used social media by politicians and political parties in their campaigning efforts. As discussed in chapter 2, we compared the impact on the behaviour of two groups of young people, all aged 15–18: one group was subjected to a traditional flyer campaign, while the other was additionally offered the possibility to follow a Twitter-based campaign whereby six political parties would post tweets and accept questions using their Twitter page.

First, we wanted to see if the social media campaign mobilisation had any effect on turnout. However, contrary to what is often claimed, our interpretation of the results of our experiment in six countries seems to indicate that participants who were exposed to a social media campaign were less likely to participate in the election than those who only received the printed flyers (cf. Table 6.4). It is worth noting that while the figures below are based on the actual vote, our participants were truthful about their behaviour in the questionnaire with a turnout overclaim of approximately 4% (across all groups), which can be considered as very low compared to most behavioural research (we typically expect a higher proportion of respondents to claim to have voted when they have not, when this cannot be verified individually).

The social media campaign – which is largely requested by young people according to our survey results – is thus not necessarily very popular in practice. Respondents exposed to the social media campaigning tended to find the campaign significantly less interesting/more boring, and also less relevant than their counterparts who only received the political parties' policy proposals in the form of a printed short manifesto (cf. Table 6.5). This apparent contradiction could be related to the fact that parties engaged in social media campaigning end up further developing their political arguments while printed pamphlets have to get 'to the point' quickly and succinctly.

While the campaign itself was judged more positively by participants in its traditional form, candidates' images did not really seem to benefit from extensive social media campaign interaction. On the one hand, the social media interaction made candidates come across as less arrogant and ambitious, but on the other hand it also made them come across as less approachable and less intelligent to a majority of young voters (cf. Table 6.6).

Table 6.4 Actual turnout by campaign type ($N = 625$) (in %)

	Traditional campaign	**Social media campaign**
Voted	**30.0**	21.5

Source: Our own experiment, 2012.

Table 6.5 Campaign perceptions[a]

Found campaign	**Traditional campaign**	**Social media campaign**
Interesting	**2.1 (1.2)**	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)	**1.9 (1.1)**
Complex	1.5 (1.2)	1.6 (1.2)
Relevant	**1.9 (1.2)**	1.7 (1.2)

[a]Figures are derived from a 0–4 scale where 0 is not at all and 4 is very much with regard 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.

Source: Our own experiment, 2012.

Table 6.6 Perceptions of candidates[a]

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	**2.5 (1.0)**	2.3 (1.0)
Ambitious	**2.5 (1.2)**	2.2 (1.1)
Approachable	**2.2 (1.0)**	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	**1.7 (1.2)**	1.5 (1.1)

[a]Figures are derived from a 0–4 scale. 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: Our own experiment, 2012.

Our interpretation of this finding suggests that the 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 does not hide the fact that there are undoubtedly marked differences in contents or tone from how young people's friends or indeed other public figures such as sports people or celebrities address young people through social media.

Indeed, it should be noted that while social media do enable candidates and parties to address young voters 'on their own turf', based on young people's answers on how they use social media, 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.

Based on our interpretation of the data we gathered during the experiment, one of the most interesting benefits of social media campaigning in terms of civic inclusion, however, appears to be that social media interaction makes it significantly more likely that young people will discuss the elections with people around them (cf. Figure 6.7). Overall, 70% of the young people exposed to the social media campaign talked to at least one of their close friends or relatives about the election, compared to only 58% of the young people exposed to the traditional campaign.

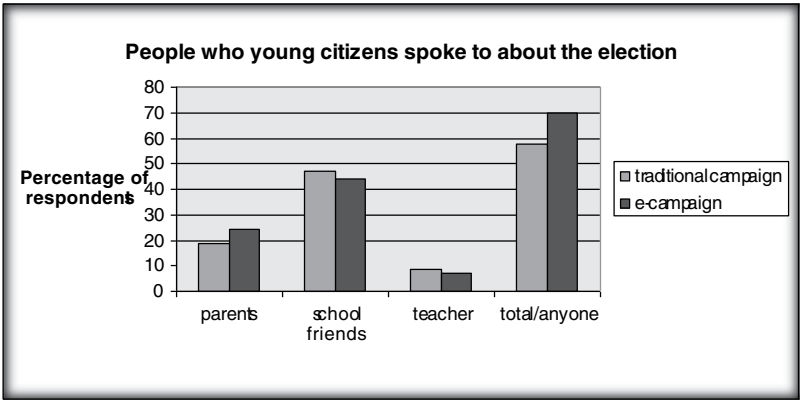

Figure 6.7 Groups that young people spoke to about the election

Note: Figures represent proportion of respondents from each experimental group (traditional campaign and e-campaign) that claimed to have spoken to the listed groups about the election.

Source: Our own experiment, 2012.

This, however, was almost entirely due to a greater likelihood of talking to parents about elections, as the likelihood of talking to other categories of people was not really affected by the campaigning mode. While this discussion may not have an immediate impact on turnout in this particular 'experimental' election, we suggest that it is likely that in the long run, such discussion with parents and the rest of young people's social network would build a greater awareness of and interest in political questions thus having a longer-term influence on young people's participation.

6.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, we positioned media and communication as one of the important prerequisites to participation in democratic life through the provision of information, as well as a potential tool through which the crisis of youth participation can be overcome. However, we must be very clear here that there is a distinct danger of overstating this potential, especially when it comes to the internet and social media. Media and communication technologies do not represent quick fixes to fundamental systemic problems.

When it comes to the role of journalism of informing (young) citizens about politics and about democratic life, we find on the one hand

a lack of interest in institutional politics and traditional political news amongst young people which is higher than amongst the general population, and this is especially the case for the 16 to 24-year-olds. In some countries, such as the UK, Ireland and Hungary the number of young people aged between 16 and 24 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.

Another issue of concern in terms of media and democracy is the high degree of distrust amongst young people regarding the news they receive through mainstream media. It has to be noted in this regard that in some countries public service broadcasters are trusted more than commercial broadcasters. The younger generation distrusts the media as much as the general population does and this is in line with a general tendency of distrust towards institutions. However, 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.

On the other hand, however, we also found ample evidence that media organisations are not producing much content that is specifically targeted at young people and teenagers. The issue here is one of the chicken and the egg. Young people are increasingly migrating online, which prompts mainstream media organisations to divest in media production geared towards young people, which pushes young audiences even more towards online media consumption. The regulatory limits on public service broadcasters' online presence in some countries is exacerbating this even more.

Community radio stations and youth media projects provide examples of some of the most innovative, diverse and effective participation opportunities for young people. Community media is considered to be an excellent way to involve young people in democratic life enabling them to produce their own media, learning (media) skills in a non-formal context, collaborating with others, and taking responsibility. Community media are often staffed by young people and can provide training and skills. 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.

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-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, to navigate through the internet, or to critically assess the quality of information found and so on is an increasingly important precondition to being a critical and active citizen in a networked and media saturated 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.

In relation to new media, most of the participants in our 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 enable individual information seeking, cross-checking of news, communication on intranets between organisations and members. However, it has to be acknowledged that there are still many excluded young people 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 balkanisation of the online environment. This phenomenon is characterised by internet users locking themselves up into ideological echo chambers where they are not confronted anymore with opinions and ideas that are different from their own. 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, online bullying and being approached by strangers online.

The use of new media in terms of policy processes to facilitate the participation of young people is deemed to be a productive way to extend the reach towards a more diverse and especially unorganised constituency of young people. It should be noted, however, that there needs to 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 left frustrated that they are not being listened to. Online

consultations can easily give the impression of being participatory while in reality they are nothing more than a form of tokenism or worse.

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 when it comes to consultations some young people, especially the vulnerable, are not reached through online platforms because of digital and skills divides.

Finally, our interpretation of the results from our experiment has shown that the often-celebratory claims being made about the use of social media in political campaigning need to be nuanced. 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. The use of social media furthermore highlights the differences between the discourse of political parties and what young people seem to want to hear. As such, a poor use of social media to address young people can lead to counterproductive results.

7

Youth Participation and Exclusion: Towards Equal Treatment in Public Space, Education and the Workplace

7.1 Introduction: the other side of the coin

In this chapter we address some of the overall research questions of the book by examining significant barriers to young people's participation, and pointing towards solutions that would recapture young citizen's engagement with and participation in their political systems. In the policy and research literatures, the incidence of youth inclusion and exclusion in democratic life has often been linked to that of youth inclusion and exclusion in economic life (Jones, 2005; Devlin et al., 2008; Leahy and Burgess, 2012). Following a policy conference summing up the links between youth exclusion at economic, social and civic levels and looking towards solutions, Colley et al. (2005: 3) note, however, that

> [d]espite 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.

A decade on, we write this book at a time of increased economic uncertainty across Europe. This threatens to exclude vulnerable groups of people further from democratic life by making transitions to employment or secure housing more difficult, and also, counter-intuitively, brings some excluded groups of young people onto the streets and to the ballot box in acts of political protest, with both democratic and anti-democratic

consequences. In this context, we focus on *exclusion* – a phenomenon affecting whole communities rather than individuals – as something that is theoretically distinct from voluntary isolation.

Drawing on policy documents, focus groups with politically active and inactive, economically well-to-do and economically excluded youth and on interviews with committed stakeholders in the field of youth participation (as outlined in sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.4), we have taken the perspective in this book that economic and political exclusion is almost never chosen voluntarily as is suggested in literature on the democratic deficit (Putnam, 2000; Galston, 2004) but results from intersections of psychological, social, political and economic circumstances. This chapter further illustrates and confirms that perspective. In the words of the 'EU Strategy for Youth', '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 . . . [and] may also lead to radicalisation and violence' (European Commission, 2009: 9).

In this definition, and pointing to the manner in which this chapter builds on and questions the model of participation simply in relation to political offer and participatory intentions introduced in chapter 2 (section 2.3), political exclusion is linked to social and economic justice; and a refusal to combat social injustice is tantamount to maintaining an ongoing injustice. This is a crucial addition, which challenges the idea that the full potential for political participation in democracies is the same for all groups of citizens with no reference to economic and social circumstances. Further, although the word 'radicalisation' is not defined in the above quotation, and its ideological connotations are 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: 3) contend 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. . . . 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.

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.

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 chapter 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 (1) greater social and economic inclusion and (2) sustained democratic participation. 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.

7.2 Conditions for exclusion: key factors

The foregoing discussion will reveal that in this book we take the view that exclusion is not a natural process. Exclusion, can, of course, be practised 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, 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, our analysis of the research literature, confirmed by our analysis of the results of our focus groups and expert stakeholder interviews, emphasises 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 YiPPEE (Young People from a Public Care Background: pathways to education in Europe) project (2008–2010) found that '[y]oung 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'. They continue, arguing that '[t]his disadvantage is acutely visible in comparison with all young people at the stage of tertiary education' (YIPPEE, Policy brief: 1). Theoretically, then, exclusion is a social state – 'to be socially/politically excluded' – as well as an intersecting set of material and social practices to be experienced and described.

Exclusion in terms of employment, low education, lack of adequate training and risks related to poverty are factors recognised by the EU. In relation to Education and Training, Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 suggests that the policy aim should be for the following:

> Equal access for young people to high quality education and training at all levels and opportunities for lifelong learning should be supported . . . [and] . . . [y]oung people's transition between education and training and the labour market should be facilitated and supported, and early school leaving reduced. (European Council of Ministers, 2009: 14)

These factors are also linked to participation in democratic life in a variety of ways. Participation in the democratic life of a society implies

inclusion into that society. This was a message we heard repeatedly in all our focus groups across Austria, France, Finland, Hungary, Spain and the UK:

> 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*.
>
> *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, UK, 2012 – emphasis added)
>
> People with no or less education have less say or possibilities to participate in our society
>
> ('Average' youth focus group, Austria, 2012)
>
> 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, UK 2012)
>
> 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, Hungary, 2012)

Young immigrants, those on low wages, the poor, those in debt, those with low educational attainment, those with no fixed homes, travellers, 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 surveyed in focus groups, they are supported by research carried out on dozens of European projects in diverse countries

and with different cohorts of young people. Amongst these, the most notable are:

- YiPPEE: 'Young People from a Public Care Background: pathways to education in Europe'
- 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'
- EUMARGINS: 'On the Margins of the European Community – Young adult immigrants in seven European countries'
- EDUMIGROM: 'Ethnic differences in education and diverging prospects for urban youth in an enlarged Europe'
- YOUNEX: 'Youth, Unemployment, and Exclusion in Europe: A multidimensional approach to understanding the conditions and prospects for social and political integration of young unemployed'

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 in focus groups 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, France, 2012)

Re-emphasising the findings of the European-funded research projects named above, another academic interviewee 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)

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.
>
> (Eurobarometer, 2007: 49)

Furthermore, young people across 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 although there is at times an overlap, this is a clear distinction from those who are economically disadvantaged as we discussed in chapter 5.

In previous chapters, and in the introduction to this chapter, 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 expressed

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 all 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 homogenises a wide variety of life circumstances and can disempower them further. Indeed, as discussed in section 7.4 it appears that young EU citizens (15- to 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).

7.3 Vulnerable and hard to reach citizens

The most excluded group of young people are those *not* in employment, education or training (usually discussed as NEETs) and a distinct subsection of 'excluded' youth.

The low level of participation of NEETs in political life remains a cause of concern. As Table 7.1 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 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 three 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- to 24-year-olds 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

Table 7.1 Percentage of young people aged between 18 and 24 not in employment and not in any education or training

	2003	2008	2011	Difference 2003–2008	Difference 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: Reanalysis of Eurostat data, 2012: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/income_social_inclusion_living_conditions/data/database

those with higher educational levels to end 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. Furthermore, they argue that 'NEET' is a 'problematic

concept which 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 such concerns, focus group data reported in this book was designed to include a subsample of 'excluded' young people with different needs and circumstances, not confined to but including some youth who would fall into the category NEETs, frequently understudied in such research projects due to difficulties faced by researchers and academics from higher socio-economic classes in reaching them and in gaining trust.

Our analysis of the 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, Austria, 2012)

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

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

These three focus group participants, whose views are broadly in line with a majority of 'excluded' focus group participants, argue that in comparison with their more affluent peers they have little opportunity to be inducted into a political and representative culture. They show little hope that they would be able to represent themselves or their own groups. Our analysis of data thus seems to reaffirm the long-established belief among political scientists that family and community culture, and perceptions of these, 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 the key question

addressed by this book – is the question of how representative organisations construct and articulate their responses 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 us to consider 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 that '[i]n terms of representation they are however representing only a small part of European youth, essentially those active within the organisations: unorganized youth, the majority of European youth, are left without a voice' (Stakeholder interview, email, 2012).

Achieving representation and participation amongst 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 (Banaji and Cammaerts, 2014).

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; Sweenie, 2009; Olsson and Miegel, 2010; Banaji and Buckingham, 2013a). 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.

The point we are driving at is that even the nominal democracy afforded by elections and the right to vote is weakly 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 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 analysis of focus group and stakeholder data points to some of these problems that help to offset them. However, at this point, it is important to separate out different elements within the sphere of exclusion and participation. First, we will address the traditional relationships between poverty, employment and participation before moving to consider partnerships, voluntary work and internships and their role in young people's democratic inclusion or exclusion.

7.3.1 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 'average' focus groups and by every single one of the young people in the 'excluded' focus groups.

Youth unemployment refers to those young people between the ages of 15 and 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 on to 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. As evidenced in Figure 7.1, the situation is most dramatic in Southern Europe, some Baltic republics and Ireland where youth unemployment is not only disproportionally high (above 25%), but as compared with the unemployment figure for the general population it is also high (often greater than 15%). Countries doing well, such as Germany, the Netherlands and Austria (under 10% youth unemployment), also tend to have more limited differences between youth unemployment and overall unemployment. However, across Europe young people are more at risk of being unemployed than the general population (see Table 7.2).

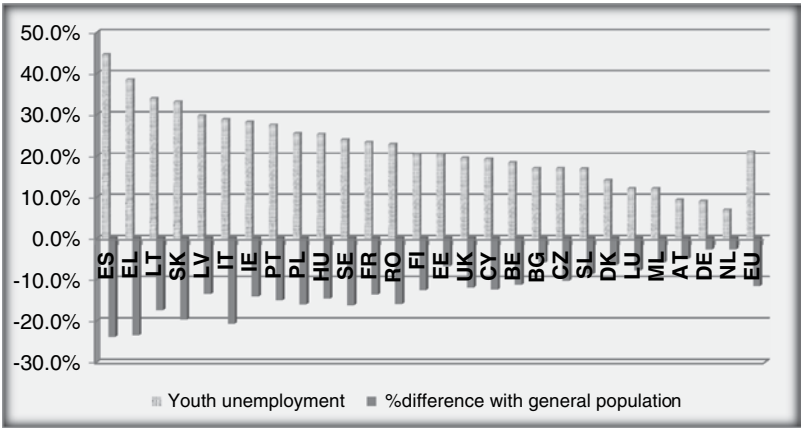

Figure 7.1 Youth unemployment in Europe

Source: Re-analysis based on EU Employment and Social Situation Quarterly Review, September 2011: 84.

7.3.2 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). Our reanalysis of Eurostat data shows that on average more than 20% of young people in the EU between 16 and 24 years are at risk of poverty (see Figure 7.2). The situation also seems to have worsened in most European countries over the last five years. In only six countries in the EU is the risk of poverty for young people below 15% (see Figure 7.3). 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.

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 face – for example, a lack of full-time permanent jobs, exploitation through internships, and low wages. 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

Table 7.2 Focus group comparison by category and country of political issues which most concern young people

	France 'Active'	**Spain 'Active'**	**Finland 'Active'**	**Austria 'Active'**	**UK 'Active'**	**Hungary 'Active'**
Concerns	Racial discrimination and existence of 'Front National'. **Jobs.** 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. Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA). The arts. **Jobs.**	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. Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA)	Apathy of contemporaries. Want to leave Hungary. Politicians don't represent the people.
	France 'Excluded'	**Spain 'Excluded'**	**Finland 'Excluded'**	**Austria 'Excluded'**	**UK 'Excluded'**	**Hungary 'Excluded'**
Concerns	Homelessness. Extreme right politics. Accommodation advice. Health. **Job training.** Social assistance. **Unemployment.**	Lack of opportunities for young. Economic crisis. Social inequalities and being able to talk about them. **Unemployment.**	Health, including mental health. Gender pay differences. Human rights. **Unemployment.** Drugs. Terrorism. Globalisation. Economy.	Health. **Unemployment.** Immigration. Education. Animal rights. Human rights. Austerity package.	Widening division between rich and poor. **No jobs.** Social class. Exclusion of poor youth. Cost of living. Growing importance of money. Cuts to education. Cuts to health system.	**Unemployment** 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'**	**UK 'Average'**	**Hungary 'Average'**
Concerns	Young not taken seriously. **Employment in future** 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. **Unemployment** Drugs. Globalisation. Family. ACTA. Health.	Drugs. **Jobs.** Peace and religion. Family. Education. Gender inequalities.	Tuition fees. Economics. **Unemployment** Sexualisation of the young. ACTA. Consumerism. Racial tensions.	Problems of the poor. Lack of representation of Roma. Politics are 'uncool'. Inferior version of democracy than the 'west' Europeans.

Source Focus Groups Thematic Analysis – January–March 2012.

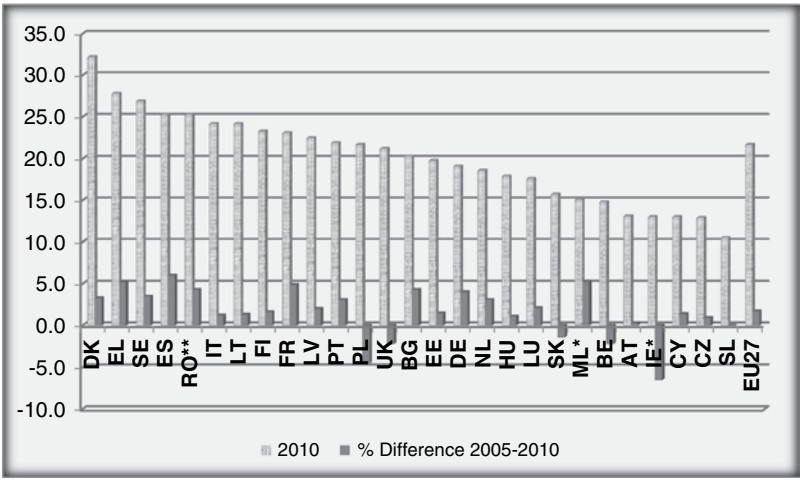

Figure 7.2 Percentage of young people aged between 16 and 24 at risk of poverty

Note: In this and 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.

Source: Re-analysis of Eurostat 2011 data. EUROSTAT (2011), http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/income_social_inclusion_living_conditions/data/database.

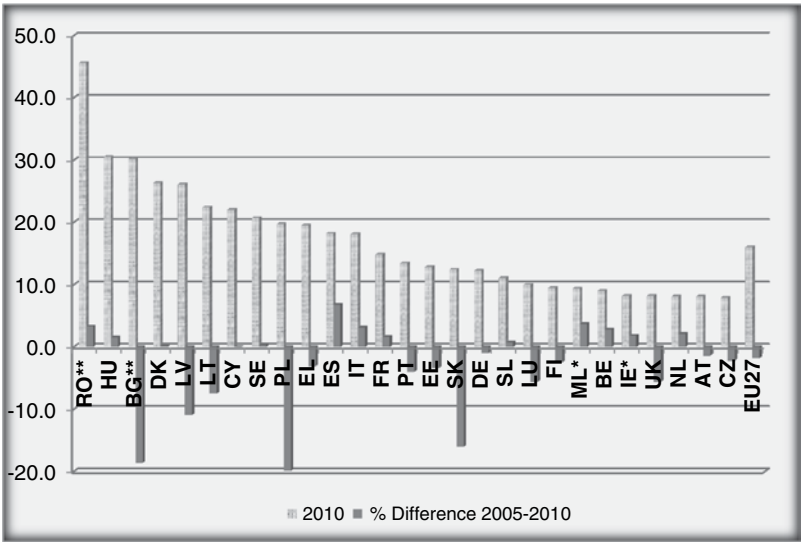

Figure 7.3 Percentage of young people aged between 18 and 24 at risk of poverty and in employment

Source: Re-analysis of Eurostat 2011 data.

for young people compared to that for older generations (see Figure 7.4). On average at an EU aggregate level young people are at 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 stark (>10%).

These figures clearly represent a tendency 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, f2f, Austria)

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

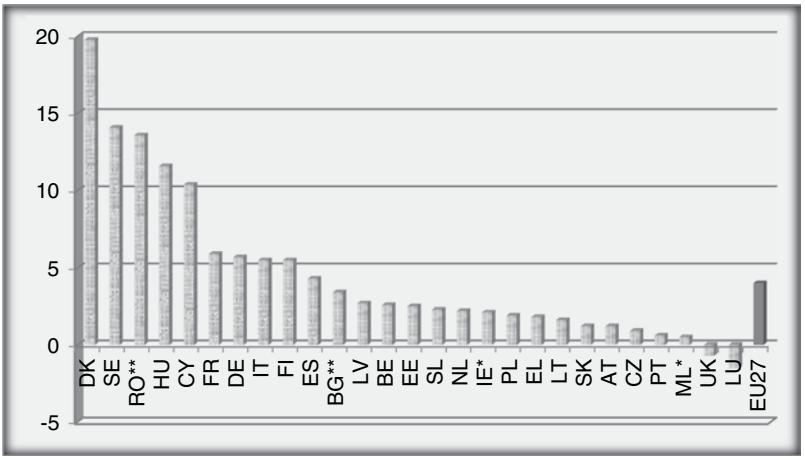

Figure 7.4 Percentage difference aged between 18 and 24 and between 25 and 54 at risk of poverty and in employment

Source: Re-analysis of Eurostat 2011 data.

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 discuss the laws criminalising homelessness, about which they appeared to be both incensed and pretty accurately informed:

> 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 8th 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 is 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, Hungary, 2012)

While 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.

7.3.3 Leaving school early

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 socio-economic 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)

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 (for instance, a BA costs about €600/year in Belgium compared to €11,400/year in the UK).

Such discrepancies in educational fees, and the concomitant rates of exclusion, raise additional issues, the first of which is the extent of early school leaving (see Figure 7.5).

Although the number of early school leavers has decreased consistently over the last decade, young men tend to leave school without or with very low qualifications more often than young women (almost 17% of EU young men leave school early versus almost 13% of women). For ethnic minority youth, here are additional risks of educational

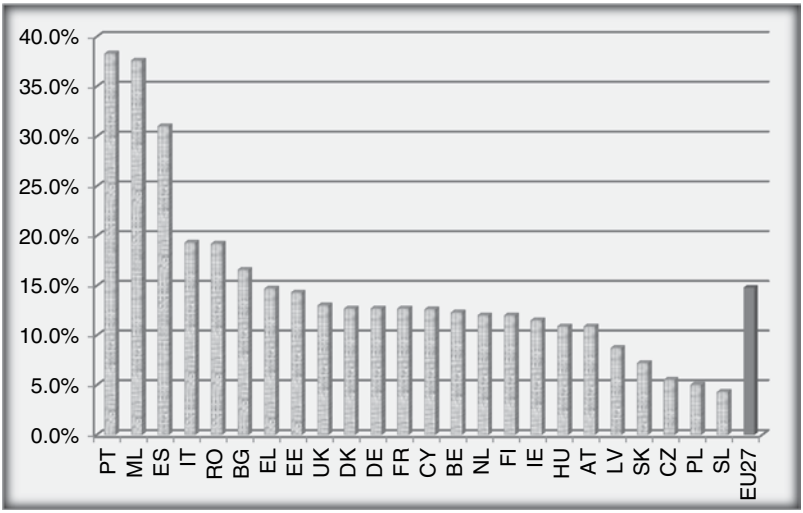

Figure 7.5 Percentage of early school leavers across Europe
Source: Youth in Europe (2009: 94).

exclusion leading to employment and democratic exclusion as discussed by researchers on another cross-national study:

> 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)

It should be noted, however, that even young people who have not dropped out or been pushed out of education at an early stage by structural conditions of policies can become marginalised through long periods of insecure or unpaid employment. This finding directly addresses the third core question of our book in chapter 1, in relation to ways in which young people's participation might be fostered and their interest in democratic systems and institutions reengaged. The model we represented in section 2.3 is not nuanced enough to attend to the dynamics of structural exclusions via employment and education. Likewise, of the three explanatory models for youth non-participation explored in

chapter 1, two simply ignore such structural barriers to participation, and the third (the cynicism model) articulates it only in so far as young people perceive themselves to be discriminated against in prevailing political systems, and allow these perceptions to influence their values and attitudes. We begin the following section with a discussion of highly educated youth in internships, before turning to other forms of work which can and often do walk a fine line between inclusion and exclusion.

7.4 Partnerships, apprenticeships and voluntary work

There is evidence of young people coming together to organise and resist on precisely this issue of structural exclusion within the workplace. A pertinent example of a youth group engaging with issues of structural precarity that we encountered during our research is *Generation Précaire* or Precarious Generation, a French organisation founded in 2005 which fights against what they consider the abusive use of training periods, work placements and internships by businesses, companies and public institutions in relation to young people. *Generation Précaire* has little or no funding and uses new media to mobilise and communicate among themselves. According to the stakeholder representative of this organisation, interviewed in November 2011, their members are primarily highly educated young people aged between 24 and 30. 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 positions, with wages way below their level of education and no security, in work, accommodation and life in general. Young people in such conditions, despite their high levels of education, tend to spend all their time pursuing security, building their CVs and avoiding negative confrontations with authority; many become increasingly distanced from critical engagement with democratic life in the process.

Generation Précaire mobilises both online and 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) weighed into 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 charters to change the realities of young people's experience. Before 2008, placements in industries or administrations could be unpaid, potentially unlimited and renewed many times. French legislation about the training period was changed in February 2008. 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). Despite this, *Generation Précaire* does not consider that any of the changes substantively improve the situation of young people: companies can still offer several training periods of less than three months; young people in training are still not considered as salaried and consequently do not get social security and cannot get contributions to their pensions, and there is no legal obligation to turn those training places into jobs afterwards. Indeed, it allows companies and the administration to keep on employing educated young people without spending what a real job could cost them.

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 despite severe difficulties, volunteering in the 16–24 years old age group when young people come from deprived backgrounds is under-reported 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 book 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.

The analysis of interviews with expert stakeholders working with young people and of focus group data from 'average' and 'excluded' focus groups shows that there is a high premium on acknowledging and extending such forms of democratic participation. Youth from more higher socio-economic 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 on 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

- housing issues – if they are housed on estates in the suburbs or far out of the city or in rural areas
- demanding childcare obligations
- 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. 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 socio-economic 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 [. . .] we 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)

7.5 Social exclusion, family income and political activism

For our survey of seven countries we ran correlations between actual forms of participation and family income. Our findings are clear and to some extent unsurprising. Young people from higher income socio-economic demographics are more likely to have written to a politician (statistically significant correlation coefficient of 0.07), initiated a new petition, stood in a non-political election such as for class representative (both 0.06), demonstrating (both 0.05), joining a political party, joining another organisation such as a union or pressure group or following current affairs regularly (all 0.03) (see Table 7.3).

As pointed out in chapter 5, however, besides socio-economic demographics, there are also quite a few discrepancies in relation to

Table 7.3 Relationship between forms of participation and family income

Form of participation	Pearson r correlations
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

Note: Significance at <0.05 (two-tailed).
Source: Our own survey, 2011–2012.

non-electoral political participation that exist across Europe and that can be explained by distinct political cultures that impact differently on popularity and attribution of efficacy of various forms of informal participatory practices.

What is also of importance here is the often quite negative sense of political efficacy amongst youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, which might also play a role in terms of them being less likely to participate out of a general sense of frustration and lack of voice. In this regard, it was quite telling that many of the young respondents in the 'excluded' focus groups expressed their satisfaction at spending an afternoon talking to adults/researchers about their concerns and ideas. Poignantly, most of them had never ever 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 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 three security guards heading my way and shove me away when I just want to tell him something.
> ('Excluded' focus group, Austria, 2012)

Our analysis and interpretation of our data suggests that some of the youth workers at a local level and some youth outreach organisations already attempt this. There is, then, a need for further financial and infrastructural investment in these types of youth services, something which has on the contrary been drastically reduced in many EU countries in the past four years as a response to fears about national spending (Mahadevan, 2011; Smith, 2011; Ruxton, 2012; Boura, 2015). 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 much more difficulties to be active and to participate [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, f2f, Finland, 2012)

Taking these precepts into consideration, we begin the following section with a discussion of a group attempting to increase both opportunities and motivations for participation, drawn from the empirical data, particularly from our stakeholder interviews in Spain.

7.6 Innovative and creative practices for combating exclusion

TEB, an association for young people, was started in 1992 in El Raval, an old town neighbourhood in Barcelona which is highly populated by new and transient migrants and their children from Latin America and Asia. Noting the problems associated with lack of supply of work, entertainment, training and space for young people over 12 years of age, the voluntary educators who founded TEB decided to form an organisation that promotes labour market and technological and social inclusion for young people who are marginalised and socially excluded. In 1995 TEB became an association, constituted as a legal entity. Seeing scarcity of

space and resources as an additional barrier for the inclusion of poor migrant youth, the educators who initiated the project found a venue that was repurposed and decorated to make it a genuine area for integration. According to one stakeholder interviewed, 'The first objective was to prevent young people from hanging around on the streets after school and in their spare time.'

ICTs are central to the practice of this group, 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 and so on. '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".' TEB's young people gather in a monthly assembly. They decide how to participate as a group in projects that affect the local community. The stakeholder 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) some years previously.

> They gathered in an assembly and decided to make a video interviewing people from the neighbourhood to make sure people understood what the local council was asking them for.
>
> (Stakeholder interview, f2f, Spain)

Other youth contributions tend to be of a cultural kind – for instance, the organisation of musical events and campaigns on the life of the neighbourhood – while yet other projects proposed by the older volunteers in the organisation do not go down so well with the youth and often end after a year or two. Nevertheless, 20 years after its inception, TEB appears to have become a benchmark in technological resourcing for the neighbourhood.

On an equally 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: 'When you give them a camera, they communicate in a brutal way, representing the misery or aspects of neighbourhood life you do not see. [. . .] some digital media are great amplifiers for soft voices.'

This case demonstrates not only institutional innovation 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.

7.8 Conclusions

Exclusion and non-participation are not the same. While isolation and non-participation may or may not be self-chosen, 'exclusion' from social and political life is very rarely voluntary. The academic literature, stakeholder interviews and focus groups all suggest 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. Between 2008 and 2014 youth unemployment has risen dramatically across the EU. Alongside this the number of young people suffering from or 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 amongst unemployed youth – who are often more likely to volunteer in caring roles than their employed counterparts – our analysis of the data in this chapter suggests a number of worrying connections between the exclusion of young people with regard to poverty, risks and exclusion from mainstream economic and democratic life. In response to the research questions outlined in chapter 1, we argue, it is in these connections that the traces of a real crisis, a crisis of democratic inclusion rather than of participation for particular groups of young people, can be delineated.

We interpret expert stakeholders, prior research studies and young people in focus groups as maintaining that there is a direct and worrying link between exclusion from education due to poverty, high fees, exclusion from employment and exclusion from the political and democratic

life of a country. Secondary analysis of existing data sets as well as our analysis of 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, higher levels of education are seen to reduce exclusion from democratic life. Concomitantly, there is a strong correlation between being in 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 and so on. 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.

Our interpretation of the stakeholder interviews with youth participation experts and with youth workers as well as of the focus groups with 'excluded' young people confirm the finding from policy literature and reports 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 sustained 'high-cost' community civic action such as that described in chapter 2. Across the EU, 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 counselling 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 of 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 not 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. If this were the case then all the middle class young people in focus groups would be, or at least report

themselves to be, highly politically active. Nevertheless, our interpretation of discussions amongst young people in all three categories of focus groups emphasises that exclusion from the democratic sphere of a nation appears to be increased rapidly when their basic needs are not met. 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 age range than it is in the 24–54 age range. Even groups of young people who have not grown up in poverty may become excluded or 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 (Banaji and Buckingham, 2013). 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. Like Lister et al. (2003), Walther (2012: 227), Banaji and Buckingham (2013a) and Collin (2015), we take the view that 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, and in recent cases documented in the UK,[1] 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 practices which combat the exclusion of young people from civic and democratic life and encourage their inclusion. These include but are not confined to: free and horizontal education systems including public higher education which do not selectively discriminate against pupils from particular geographic, class or cultural backgrounds and mandatory, imaginative and 'authentic' general, civic and political education lessons by trained political educators. Alongside this, in our opinion, legal guarantees of the equal rights of young people in public spaces, their freedom from undue harassment by police forces, and equal remuneration in workplaces are absolutely essential to guaranteeing the strength of their investment in democratic life.

In chapter 8 we will present our overall conclusions in relation to youth, participation and democracy.

8
Concluding Thoughts and Tribulations

We have written this book against a backdrop of great upheaval in Europe, the same backdrop against which the research was conducted. More than half a decade of austerity measures in many countries has seen the rise and fall of entire parties, of coalition governments, of the far right, of populist nationalism and new political movements based on attempts at direct and delegative democracy.

Based on a troubling set of complaints and assertions in both policy and academic communities about a perceived decline in young people's engagement with democracy, we set out to answer questions about this apparent disaffection and perceived distance from democratic processes on the part of young people. We wished to research whether this decline in voting, and the refusal to join political institutions, did indeed equate to a 'crisis' in all forms of democratic participation on the part of young people, and to search for some of the putative solutions to these disengagements. And, crisis or no crisis, we also sought to seek out the causes of the ways in which young people were engaging with and participating, or disaffected by and not participating, in politics and the civic sphere in Europe. We have argued throughout the book that our findings suggest that a complex intersection of factors is at play in relation to participation (and the lack thereof), both across young people as a cohort in Europe and in the definitions of crisis and participation which are applied to them. It is, however, clear from the analysis of our data that the dominant models to explain this apparent crisis – apathy, cynicism and maturation – are inadequate and at times even misleading.

Young people are important stakeholders in European democratic systems. They express ideas and preferences, defend diverse interests and live varied lifestyles. This is true well before they reach legal voting age. Young people are not uniform in their relationships with politics and

the civic sphere. They are politically active in a wide variety of ways: some are engaged but inactive; some are disengaged; some are even more active than a majority of adults, notably through volunteering or online platforms. Moreover, a clear majority of young people ask for more – and not fewer – opportunities to have a genuine say in the way that they are being governed. At the outset of this book we formulated three research questions:

1. To what extent is youth participation in Europe in crisis?
2. What are the causes of the assumed crisis?
3. Are there any solutions that could challenge political exclusion, and rekindle more young citizens' engagement with and participation in their political systems?

In answer to the first research question, the research on which we have drawn throughout this book leads us to conclude that it is important not to view young people as a singular entity: they are as diversified and fragmented as older adults are, they have competing political interests and also exhibit diverse perceptions on how best to influence political systems. As such, contrary to what is sometimes lamented, young people are not 'victims' or 'problematic', but rather diverse and generally critical stakeholders in Europe's democracies. It is, in this regard, important to recognise that many young people 'participate' in democratic life not through the formal democratic institutions or even through voting for their representatives, but rather through volunteering or through being part of a protest movement, an anarchist collective, a community radio station or a youth organisation. These more non-institutional forms of political participation contribute to a vibrant civic culture and they are as relevant to democracy as voting every few years or being a member of a political party.

However, a substantial number of young people do feel that their priorities and interests are under-addressed and at times even ignored in current social, economic and political discourses and processes. Indeed, the contextualised analysis and interpretation of interviews that were conducted with a diverse group of stakeholders, the analysis of the data generated in focus group with youth and the survey data of young people's views and attitudes in relation to democratic life have all clearly shown that *there is no crisis of democratic participation amongst youth across Europe*. Neither is there major disenchantment with political issues and civic concerns on the part of young people; we thus reject the apathy

and cynicism model. However, we did observe and highlight a clear and growing dissatisfaction with the way in which institutional politics is conducted and with 'politicians' in general which could indeed amount to a crisis, but rather one of legitimacy of the democratic system as it presents itself to young people today.

Our analysis of the available literature, of previous data sets, and of our own data leads us to conclude that local political contexts play a pivotal role in the extent and nature of young people's participation in democratic life. For instance, the presence of a radical 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 a positive impact on youth engagement. The same can be said about the Scottish independence referendum, which also allowed voting from 16-year-old onwards. With appropriate educational and community supporting measures in place, we argue, lowering the voting age to 16 could indeed improve participation.

In this regard, many stakeholders and young people whose views were sought for our research echo the important role of learning and of education in improving participation in democratic life. In this regard, they see free (political) education as a prerequisite for greater and deeper levels of participation. Most stakeholders recognise that it is essential to include a practical element in learning about democracy, both at a formal and at a non-formal level. Some even went as far as to assert that political education should be 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 likely to be in the school system. These are suggestions we all concur with.

Besides this, and specifically addressing our second research question about the causes of whatever crisis of participation might exist, our analysis of the data generated through focus groups with young people emphasises that they consider that specific institutional settings could do much more to improve young people's participation and representation. Suggestions made include the election of special youth representatives or special measures to make sure a diverse group of young people feels comfortable to participate. What is also apparent from the analysis of our data is that young people believe that politicians do not sufficiently address their issues, concerns and particular interests. This could be improved by formal political actors making an effort to take youth concerns more seriously or through the direct election of youth representatives, who could run a campaign on youth-relevant issues.

Media increasingly plays a vital role in democratic life; media organisations have a duty and a role to inform young and old and to hold the powers that be to account in the name of the people. From a normative perspective, media organisations are also required to reflect the radical plurality of voices in any given society, and to facilitate societal debates about contentious issues, regardless of the pressures of politicians and the market. However, our interpretation of the data we generated, gathered and analysed points to the fact that media organisations are increasingly seen by young people and those who work with youth as failing to fulfil these democratic roles. Even more problematic, the media are seen to represent narrow and elitist agendas; and many media organisations and journalists are also deeply distrusted by young and old citizens alike.

Increasingly the internet and social media are competing venues for opinion formation. These channels of communication arguably provide new and important opportunities to facilitate and increase participation in democratic life on a variety of levels. However, at the same time they also provide venues for misinformation, and for anti-democratic values and views to circulate. Many of the young people we interviewed and surveyed are reflexive about these possibilities and limitations; but many, like the adult members of the population, are not. It is clear that the extent to which the positive opportunities for democratic participation by young people materialise depends on the way in which online platforms are set up and how the online impacts and relates to the offline. There is, however, also ample evidence that the internet and social media can and will be counterproductive to democratic and participatory goals if poorly used and implemented.

Finally, at the other end of the spectrum from participation our book focused also on exclusion. Social and economic exclusion, and the accompanying political exclusion, are multifaceted and interlinked phenomena. All too many young people suffer the harsh consequences of exclusion at the levels of education, employment and housing as dictated by the current neoliberal paradigm. Often disadvantaged young people are not given a voice or heard. We deliberately sought out those young people that are excluded in order to give them a voice in this book; we conclude that they do have strong and highly pertinent views on politics and democracy, and they would eagerly like to take up more opportunities to have a say and influence the societies and localities they have to live in.

Besides these more general observations, we draw a number of more specific conclusions from the data in foregoing chapters.

8.1 Voting

It is evident that voting is an important means to an end, but also that voting is not all about numbers. We are confident that our analysis of survey data shows that young citizens both under and over 18 see voting as the most important mode of participation in democracies and one in which they believe as much as older generations did and do. Analysis of survey results suggest that young people would overwhelmingly welcome the spread of voting advice applications as well as the organisation of electoral debates in schools during election times.

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 very likely to become habitual abstainers, but those who do vote early on are also more likely to become habitual participants in elections. We conclude therefore that it is important to start encouraging and allowing young people to vote from a young age. However, stakeholders outside of institutional politics as well as 'active' and 'average' focus group participants also argue that voting and turnout rates in particular are not ends in themselves nor are they the only key indicators of participation in a democracy. Even when we consider the vote in its own right, what matters is above all what young people get out of it. Voting is thus not about ticking boxes (quite literally); it can only contribute to young people's participation if the experience itself makes them feel heard, included, and efficacious.

What also comes out strongly in our analysis is that low voting turnout amongst young people is not necessarily or solely the result of disenchantment or a lack of interest, but has a variety of reasons. According to our analysis of the data gathered from a majority of the expert stakeholders interviewed and most of the young people in our 'active', 'average' 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 our analysis of the overwhelming results of the survey: young people do not feel apathetic, but they do think that the political 'offer' at the moment does not care about or deal with their concerns, their interests or their normative ideals of what democratic politics should be about (see quotes in chapter 1). It should also be noted that there is a clear lack of opportunity and political inclusion for some young people who are systemically excluded (through poverty, unemployment, linguistic, ethnic or social integration, etc.).

Contrary to what is sometimes claimed, internet voting can be conducive to increasing negative perceptions of voting and can promote a

negative sense of political efficacy as compared to traditional polling station voting. In this regard, our reading of previous studies as well as of our own e-voting experiment suggests that voting at a polling station increases positive group dynamics while e-voting favours the individualisation of the voting decision. Additionally, 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 advanced voting across the EU (i.e. the opportunity for voters to vote, in a polling station, for a period – generally two to four weeks – before election day).

8.2 Representation and policymaking

The participation of young people in politics and policymaking regarding young people and youth issues involves the notion of representation, which we have discussed as being somewhat in contention with the notion of open participation and deliberation. The representation of young people at a practical and a conceptual level is, in other words, inevitably 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 sections of young people in the public sphere and in policy contexts and that this is desirable both normatively and practically.

At the same time, a majority of focus group participants (in 'active', 'average' and 'excluded' groups), and some expert stakeholders also maintain that those representing young people in youth parliaments, in student unions, in youth councils and in national youth organisations are themselves not *sufficiently* representative of youth in their *diversity*. Young people from 'active' and 'excluded' focus groups, as well as 'average' focus groups in Austria and the UK, were even more critical and questioning about representation and governance than their peers in 'average' groups in other countries (i.e. France, Hungary, Spain and Finland).

The analysis of our survey, interview and focus group data showed that there is still considerable scope for the deepening of democratisation in existing institutions and representative structures and for increasing the participation of young people in them. Evidence analysed in foregoing chapters points towards 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 that they are also often more distant from the concerns of many young people, especially those that are disadvantaged and excluded. Our reading of previous studies and our interpretation of some expert stakeholders and the 'active' focus groups lead us to believe that grassroots and community-based youth organisations are often more successful at motivating participation from a wide range of young people, despite having fewer resources and less access to those in power.

The participation of young people in policy realms comes with its own issues, however. Policymakers must first of all ensure that young people are aware of the democratic opportunities available. Many young people also expressed the concern that they feel that what they say is not taken seriously by adult policymakers when actual decisions are being made. Therefore, it also needs to be emphasised that if deep and committed participation in democratic life is to be fostered, young people must not merely be given a voice in a formulaic manner, they must also be heard and involved in follow-up processes. They must also be given chances to further shape and impact on the policy and political debates around crucial issues which affect their lives, notably neighbourhood spaces, free education at all levels, housing and the availability of training and jobs.

8.3 Volunteering and activism

Our book has also detailed many ways of participating in democratic life that are situated outside of the realm of voting, institutional politics and policymaking. Youth participation in democratic life, we argue, is situated on a spectrum from the traditional and conventional to the innovative, creative and, yes, also the disruptive. We argued that volunteering, for instance, is connected to youth participation in two ways. First it is, in its own right, an important form of political 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, with minimal extrinsic rewards. Second, and equally significantly for us, volunteering must be seen as a pathway to further participation in other spheres of democratic life from education to employment. Through increasing skills, knowledge, a sense of self-efficacy and the development of social networks, volunteering can play a pivotal part in empowering young people to become even more active citizens in their localities and countries.

Again addressing our primary research question, our analysis and interpretation of the survey, stakeholders' interviews and focus groups stress that volunteering by young people across Europe is alive and well and not in crisis. On the contrary, the financial and economic crisis since 2008, while increasing the stresses and everyday tribulations of already excluded young people, appears to have increased solidarity and community volunteering in some countries. The analysis of our various data confirms that young people typically volunteer their time and unpaid labour in a wide range of projects, activities and that they are devoted to a wide range of causes, both social and political. However, one major note of caution needs to be stressed here. While our analysis of data indicates that volunteering strengthens young people's sense of community and solidarity, it is not equally accessible for all.

Educated but unemployed young people often show the most willingness or rather ability to volunteer, which amongst other things leads us to conclude that young people are not disconnected *en masse* from the civic life of their communities. However, at the same time, disadvantaged young people are less likely to engage in formally recognised volunteering because their preoccupations are often more focused on meeting their basic needs in terms of housing, energy and food. At the same time it has to be recognised that many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds also volunteer in less recognised ways, for example, by caring for younger children or the elderly. It is thus not entirely impossible to engage this group in formal volunteering activities at the level of their local community (proximity plays an important role here), but this requires enabling infrastructures, free and open civic spaces and the essential specialised personnel that facilitate and assist volunteering by vulnerable groups, that provide skills training and support. It is, furthermore, also important that such infrastructures are sustained 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.

We also identified activism as an important pathway to political participation for a significant minority of young people. Activism strengthens political identities and is conducive to continued political participation in a democracy. The analysis of our data identified collective action as key to forming strong and lasting political identities among young people. The data from the expert stakeholder interviews and the 'active' focus groups can be interpreted as stressing that successful or effective collective action is an important factor in promoting a high degree of political participation in democracy life more broadly, and that even unsuccessful collective action can have an impact on increasing some young people's commitment to further democratic participation.

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 high levels of disenchantment, increasingly difficult 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, to increased support amongst young people for political extremes and even to violent acts, particularly against persons from immigrant backgrounds. In this regard, civic spaces catering to young people's needs and interests are instrumental to include 'excluded' young people in democratic life.

The analysis of data from the 'average' and 'excluded' focus groups, as well as testimonies of expert stakeholders working with excluded groups, highlight that free supervised public spaces for young people such as local youth clubs are at the heart of fostering democratic participation and preventing extremism and further exclusion. One way to ensure this happens 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 – for example, 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 skills. Another possibility would be to provide long-term support for schemes which provide training to members of a community in particular areas and skills such as e-skills and these youth in turn train others – for example, payment for training given in kind. Many of the expert stakeholders working with 'excluded' youth explained that such free civic spaces are important because they do not force young people to pay, buy something or consume anything, thus developing a civic consciousness beyond the market logic.

8.4 Traditional and new media

Despite all the hype regarding the internet and social media, it is important to stress that traditional media and offline means of accessing them remain important tools in fostering young people's participation in democratic life. This is reflected in the important normative roles and tasks which journalism needs to fulfil in a democracy, which include informing (young) citizens, contextualising events, facilitating public debate and defending citizen interests against those of, for instance, corporations and wealthy elites. Our analysis of secondary data and of

the focus group discussions suggest, however, that the media organisations and how they report on local and global issues is greatly distrusted by young people (as it also is by the general adult population for that matter).

In some countries with a strong public service tradition, such as Finland, young people consider public service broadcasters as more trustworthy and reliable than commercial media. However, stakeholders did also point out that media organisations, regardless of whether they are private or public service, are producing less and less content specifically aimed at young people in the category 14–19 years old. This can in part be explained by changing media consumption patterns amongst that age group; watching less TV, spending more time online, but also watching more media content that is targeted at adults. There are also commercial reasons tied to this explaining the lack of media content produced specifically targeted at teenagers.

In our analysis, community radio stations and community media projects are examples of some of the most innovative participatory practices involving young people and improving their skills in a spontaneous manner. Furthermore, community radio and free local newspapers are also often important sources of (local) news and political information for 'excluded' groups. As such, we discovered how important it is to have alternative media organisations that ensure quality content free of prejudices such as xenophobia or sexism. Also other local and grassroots campaigns would be well advised to try and get their content and concerns into the increasing numbers of free newspapers, since even homeless youth can and do get access to them.

The internet arguably provides a wide range of new opportunities to increase participation in democratic life in a variety of ways. However, there are also clearly a series of issues that remain and that need to be acknowledged; as argued above the internet is clearly not a quick fix for all the ills of current democracies. For one, the digital divide is still a concrete reality for many excluded young people who are not attending school or further education. Since mobile access to the internet requires regular and often hefty payments for data when there is no free or cheaply available Wi-Fi, access remains problematic in many EU countries for young people from a disadvantaged background, especially when they leave school, have no significant income and are not in training.

Besides access, the level of digital skills represents an additional barrier for some, across genders, though mostly with a low educational level.

While some progress has been made in this regard thanks to schools, libraries, civic spaces and the ubiquity of information and communication technologies in everyday life, protecting one's privacy online is a skill that has still not been mastered by a majority of young people in the EU; and information verification, content production and sustained critical understanding of issues to do with internet regulation are not on most young European's minds when they surf the internet.

Facebook and other social media have in a very short space of time become fairly ubiquitous in the lives of swathes of young people across Europe. Participants in most 'active' focus groups and stakeholder interviews held the view that the internet and social media can be very useful additional tools to connect with and inform some young people or even to organise protests. These tools can play an important role in individual information seeking, cross-checking of news, communication on intranets between organisations and members, getting messages across to political cadres, sending petitions to or contacting politicians and municipal officials and so on. However, a large majority of stakeholders and young people consulted through focus groups also insisted that that face-to-face contact is still 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 our analysis of 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 or social media campaigning. It also has to be noted that some focus group participants, as well as some stakeholders, point to the dangers and risks linked to online and social media. Particular issues that were mentioned in this regard include amongst others opinion reinforcement through echo chambers, online bullying, the inability to ascertain the precise identity of others and, linked to this, being contacted online by strangers.

Besides this, online platforms have the potential to stimulate and increase the possibilities for the participation of young people in consultations and in political debates. Online platforms could be designed in a truly interactive way fostering two-way and even multi-way patterns of communication. However, 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 and precise on their exact purpose, the nature of the input requested from young people, how that input will be used and what

participants can expect in return. Creating false expectations amongst young citizens regarding the efficacy of their participation should be avoided at all cost, as this would have the opposite effect from what is intended, namely, increasing frustration and a negative sense of efficacy amongst young people.

Our analysis of data from the e-voting experiment we conducted further showed that the use of social media during campaigns is not necessarily prone to boost electoral participation. Exposure to social media campaigning and systematic internet voting did not have a positive effect on turnout. The survey and experiment show a complex dynamic at play 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 as distant and an increased perception of the gap between political elites and the young.

8.5 Youth exclusion

Most worryingly, our research as discussed in foregoing chapters suggests that political exclusion is endemic, complex and growing across Europe amongst the age groups we surveyed and held focus groups with. However, and this is vital, exclusion and isolation are not the same. While isolation may or may not be voluntary, exclusion is almost never a choice; and we conclude that social and economic exclusion often also entails exclusion from most channels of democratic participation, including voting.

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 us 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 analysis of 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 often lack the confidence and experience to speak out which results in a withdrawal or shying away from participation in democratic life.

Our analysis of previous literature, the focus group testimonies and stakeholder interviews strongly suggest that a spiral of poverty exists. All in all, a significant risk exists that poverty in childhood and adolescence leads to a lack of opportunities to participate in democratic life as an adult. In countries where universities are much more likely to accept youth from 'elite' schools and with higher qualifications, this endemic situation of being disadvantaged is further reinforced. Youth from higher socio-economic backgrounds are also the most likely to be able to pay high tuition fees or to 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. Elitism in the educational system and the massive increase in the cost of education by shifting to a loan-based funding system represent a serious threat to the right to education and restrict the social mobility of those coming from disadvantaged and low socio-economic backgrounds.

While political exclusion in European democracies is linked to economic and social exclusion this is by no means confined to these issues. About half of our interviewees have experiences with exclusion or with excluded youth either personally or professionally. Excluded youth represent large numbers in each country. Furthermore, answering our third research question, analysis of data from stakeholders working with excluded youth stresses that in order to stimulate young people's participation in debating and building democracy certain basic needs, like housing, education, employment and health, have to be met first.

Focus group interviews with 'average' young people in schools and colleges 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 are never acted upon and their interventions are generally ignored unless they align with the interests of the authorities in their locality or institution. We are confident that we can conclude that this refusal by political parties and governments to engage with and listen to these young citizens also amounts to a form of exclusion. In addition to this, the increased closures of public spaces for youth due to austerity measures and neoliberal policies can also be seen as an indirect means of excluding young people even further. Reducing the spaces where young people and adults of different communities and classes can interact with each other, the loss of funding for youth clubs and community youth provision is part of a pattern that is geared towards increasing political exclusion in Europe.

8.6 To sum up

Sometimes, the most evident of findings are also the most important ones. Our analysis 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 earlier generations. Not only do young citizens in our study consider voting as an important form of political participation, 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 should play an important role. In fact, they view their first vote as one of the most important 'experiences' they go through when they grow up, and it is crucial to ensure that this rite of passage takes their needs into accounts through the way it is organised, and allows them to be heard, considered and influential within their society and democracy.

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. The emotions that they experience when voting in a polling station even for an informal consultation are significantly more positive than when voting electronically. In addition to this, the ritual of voting has a positive impact on young people's sense of efficacy and their perception of being a part of the democratic process. This should be taken into account when developing strategies to increase voter turnout amongst young voters.

Besides voting, mechanisms and organisations such as young political candidates, political parties' youth wings and students unions are also perceived as important by young people, 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 those young people from lower socio-economic and disadvantaged backgrounds. The stakeholder interviews but also the focus groups confirm many of the concerns from the literature about the low levels 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 works, prior to joining. This tends to favour certain types of young people and disadvantage others.

One conclusive aspect of our study regards the insight that participation should not be fetishised. While several stakeholders indicated to us that there is also a right to not participate, our research indicates that

official discourses of 'participation' actually fetishise certain forms of participation and sideline or marginalise others. At the same time we need to stress that non-participation is by no means the same as a lack of interest in politics or a general feeling of apathy. Our analysis of the survey, as well as the stakeholder interviews and the focus groups, has thus allowed us to categorically refute persistent claims of youth apathy towards democracy and politics.

Probing deeper qualitatively has confirmed that some young people are satisfied and participate in sanctioned ways; and that some are disenfranchised or perceive themselves as such, and become detached from politics. Many of these young people are, however, more critical rather than apathetic – that is, 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 politicised to greater and lesser extents and have strong though not always consistent views and opinions about politics.

Inevitably, as already argued above, education plays a pivotal role in relation to young people's participation in democratic life, and placing a premium on this through exorbitant tuition fees and loans increases most university student's sense that they have to choose between political participation, critical democratic activism and the grades that might enable them to support themselves economically in the future. We would like to take this opportunity to stress that the role of education and training in relation to democracy should not merely be confined to education in formal settings, but that young citizens can also learn about democracy in non-formal settings. For example, they learn by getting involved in campaigns to stop the demolition of local housing estates, to occupy their universities, or by volunteering in a youth club/centre, a community media initiative or a sports club and learning transferable skills.

In answering our last research question, we explored a variety of possible ways of increasing youth electoral participation with young people themselves. We found that the solutions young people suggest include having large-scale specific elections for young people representatives and having greater access to voting advice applications enabling them to get a better sense of what parties and candidates stand for. Many would also support a lowering of the voting age to 16. However, this should be accompanied by school debates and deeper more entrenched civic and democratic education. Finally, while the emergence of social media is a

great opportunity to reconnect with young people, we found that this can also be counterproductive if it reinforces the discrepancy between the way politicians address citizens and how young people actually want to be talked and listened to.

Many of the young people in our study expressed a wish to be at the heart of their communities, and to see governance moving closer to the normative ideals of democratic inclusion. The changes made to democratic processes and structures in Europe to enable this must 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, and present us with viable options in terms of whom to vote for so that we do it.'

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, to facilitate a true dialogue. This would avoid the perception of some young people that such platforms are like black holes in which their contributions/suggestions 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 what goes on there 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 a policy context aim to achieve, namely, less frustration and less disenchantment towards policymakers from young people, and particularly young people who feel excluded or have grievances.

As we made clear throughout this book, while voting and being active in policy processes are important ways of participating in democratic life, a variety of other ways through which young people participate in democratic life need to be recognised as valuable and relevant too. These forms are not always conforming to the normative preconceptions of rational debate and civility, but may also include acts of civil disobedience, dissent and critical protest. In fact, we have shown that oppositional cultures contribute to the vibrant nature of the overall

democratic civic culture engendering innovative democratic practices and constructing political identities. We also have come to recognise that an understanding and acceptance of the close relationship between emotions/passions and participation might allow us to understand how to potentially make participation more attractive to young citizens.

We, furthermore, identified certain types of accountable and democratic community media as a best practice at 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. It is therefore paramount that this sector is stimulated and developed further; it may also be used by policymakers and youth organisations as a channel of communication to reach out to young people. In order to do so funding and an enabling regulatory framework are of prime importance.

As we have tried to convey in terms of our theoretical discussion as well as through the empirical results of our study, participation is a complex concept that is often used too lightly. Political participation is intrinsically intertwined with processes of power, which we deconstructed as the dialectic between structure and agency, as subject positions and discourse, as the dialectic between the visible and the hidden and as political efficacy. From this perspective it is impossible to consider participation without also considering exclusion, which in itself is a multifaceted concept relating to the economic realm, the social realm and the political realm. Likewise, democracy is in many ways an empty signifier that needs to be contextualised and carefully defined; there are clearly serious problems at the level of representative democracy but also with more participatory models of democracy.

When it comes to young people's participation, we have shown that they feel short-changed by the political elites that purport to represent them and by the democratic system at large. They are highly critical of the current democratic system, the lack of opportunities to genuinely participate and we believe rightly so. In this regard, it would be fair to say that not only are young people being let down by the democratic system we have today, but society at large is too.

Notes

1 Introduction: The Challenge of Youth Participation

1 Itir Akdogan (Finland); Anna Clua (Spain); Judit Szakacs (Hungary); Melanie Pichler and Magdalena Schmidberger (Austria); Emmanuelle Reungoat (France); Maria Pini and Eri Bertsou (UK).

2 Youth Participation: Theoretical Positioning and Methodology

1 With reanalysis we refer foremost to the extraction of data relating to young people in particular from existing representative data sets.

3 Participation of Youth in Elections: Beyond Youth Apathy

1 Recent ongoing research by Bruter and Harrison (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.

5 Youth Participation Beyond Voting: Volunteering and Contestation

1 In 2010 the UK government decided to raise the cap on tuition fees for undergraduate degrees from £3,000 to £9,000 and to abolish the Education Maintenance Allowance to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds stay in school.
2 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.

6 Participation of Youth In and Through Media: Traditional and New Media

1 http://blogs.r.ftdata.co.uk/brusselsblog/files/2012/01/KroesHungaryLettter1.pdf

7 Youth Participation and Exclusion: Towards Equal Treatment in Public Space, Education and the Workplace

1 See: http://www.cherwell.org/news/uk/2014/02/09/birmingham-students-may-face-eight-years-in-prison

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