



# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

MYPLACE

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## MYPLACE: MEMORY, YOUTH, POLITICAL LEGACY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

This THIRD and final policy brief of the Framework 7 Programme MYPLACE research project involving partners in 14 countries, highlights the cross-national research findings and their related implications for European policy agendas

Ongoing project

Commenced June 2011

DATE March 2015

## INTRODUCTION

**MYPLACE** ([www.fp7-myplace.eu](http://www.fp7-myplace.eu)) is a major 7.9 Million Euro EC funded project, running from June 2011 to May 2015, which uses a mixed method approach across 14 countries to map the relationship between political heritage, current levels and forms of civic and political engagement of young people in Europe, and their potential receptivity to radical and populist political agendas.

**Conceptually**, it focuses on the interconnections between young people's orientations to the past, present and future to show that while their civic and political engagement is structurally rooted in historical and cultural contexts, young people themselves are active agents of social and political change.

**Empirically**, MYPLACE combines survey, interviews and ethnographic case studies to show the interactions between local, national and transnational patterns of youth engagement and participation, providing a new and unique pan-European data set that not only measures levels of participation but also captures the meanings young people attach to it.

**Analytically**, through its holistic focus on the broader historical and cultural contextualization of young people's civic, social and political participation, MYPLACE replaces simplistic assumptions of a presumed 'disengagement' from politics with an empirically rich mapping of their understandings and orientations towards local, national and European political spaces.

**In policy terms**, MYPLACE works from this new evidence to identify both the obstacles and facilitators for young people's reclamation of the European political arena as 'my place'.

It has significant relevance for European policy agendas, particularly those promoted by the EU Youth Strategy 2010-18.

### **The Purpose of this Policy Brief**

While **Policy Brief 1** in 2013 profiled the research then being undertaken by the MYPLACE Project, **Policy Brief 2** reported in 2014 on the country findings of the quantitative and qualitative research in two contrasting local settings. **Policy Brief 3** now focuses on the transnational findings arising from the research and their implications for important European policy agendas. The policy brief covers findings from 4 work packages (WPs): research with museum partners on historical memory (WP2), attitudes to politics and involvement in political activism measured in a quantitative survey (WP4), a smaller sub-sample of in-depth interviews on these issues (WP5) and a broad range of ethnographic case studies showing young people's civic and political engagement in action (WP7).

At national level the research was conducted in collaboration with Youth Policy Advisory Groups (YPAGs) in each country, comprising a range of local and/or national policy partners in the youth field. YPAGs have also played a significant role in helping project researchers to interpret policy implications and disseminate country level findings. This policy Brief has similarly benefited from discussion of key research findings and their policy implications, held with policy partners at a European Policy Forum or 'European YPAG' in held in Brussels on 20 November 2014.

Since only selected key findings of this unique large-scale study can be reported here, summarizing the most significant policy-related results, the full research reports are available for study and analysis at: <http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/deliverables.php>

## **EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS**

### **Young People in Europe and the 'Politics of Memory'**

The family emerged as an important site for mnemonic socialisation in the research on historical memory with museum partners in which landmarks in family and national events often coincided. The most striking finding is that young people often – though not universally and sometimes with ambivalence - trust family accounts more than cultural sources or official representations. The research shows that historical narratives of the 'difficult past' remain influential in forming young people's attitudes, values and activity today. However this depends on the specific features of national and local historical experiences.

The research with museum and other 'sites of memory' partners showed that there were distinct political agendas pursued in representing the 'difficult past' to wider publics in the 14 countries, clustered in the following ways:

- **Cluster 1** Former socialist countries often through state action sought to preserve memories of both 'problematic' communist and Nazi eras in order to reinforce conceptions of a more 'democratic' and redefined national identity in contemporary times. There was sometimes a failure to be open about national collaboration with Nazi forces (Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Latvia, Estonia, Georgia, Russia).
- **Cluster 2** Other sites sought to interpret the difficult past of either dictatorship (in southern Europe) or deindustrialisation and the politics of the Thatcher era (in the UK case) in 'leftist' or implicitly critical ways (Greece, Portugal, Spain, UK).
- **Cluster 3** Official memory sites in both former 'west' and 'east' Germany sought to commemorate the victims of Nazi concentration and forced labour

camps, and conducted strongly moralist educational programmes with school students. However in former eastern Germany the socialist past is marginalised.

- **Cluster 4** In both Scandinavian countries (Finland, Denmark) collective memories of war sought to define the origins of contemporary conceptions of national identity, Denmark's loss of territory to Germany in 1864 and Finland's defence of it against the Soviet Union 1939-40. As with some Cluster 1 countries there was a tendency to be 'silent' about Nazi collaboration.

The focus groups with young people and intergenerational interviews showed a tendency for them to either be disinterested or distrustful of the officially promoted versions favoured by schools and many sites of memory. While some information was gained from cultural sources there was a tendency to value the accounts of parents and grandparents most. As one young person from Spain put it:

*It's better to listen to them than to search on the Internet, because maybe that isn't true... Your grandparents' experience is better.*

A politically active young person from eastern Germany stated:

*It was clearly influenced by my parents... We became self-confident and rebellious too.*

However young people are not passively socialised into their parents' or grandparents' viewpoints but actively co-produce them. Also, young people do not always accept their parent's views uncritically. A Croatian young person questioned their parents' hostility to Serbians that was the result of past atrocities.

*OK Mum, but that does not mean that some Serbians would do that to me now, I have Serbian friends.*

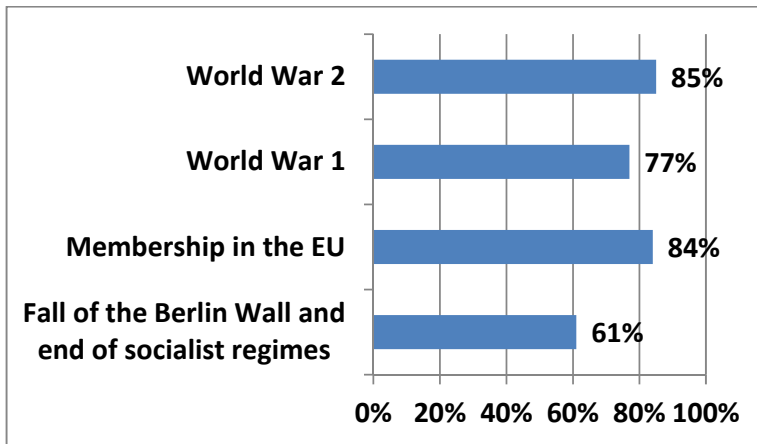
Young people were most likely to be interested in history where this was clearly relevant to the concerns in their daily lives. On both the left and right they might refer to history in constructing either contemporary xenophobic or antiracist attitudes. This was often linked with a widespread sense of nostalgia for the past across many countries in which present socioeconomic difficulties associated with a 'depressing present' of austerity and insecurity, and an absent future, was contrasted with a previous 'golden age of prosperity and or security. A young person from Hungary expressed it in this way:

*It was better to be young at that time. Then, the youth could go to good camps, for example at Lake Balaton, now they have nowhere to go [...] At least there were clear rules: 8 hours of work, 8 hours of rest, everything was settled. Now everyone has to do overtime jobs.*

Thus there is a connection between these 'critical' historical narratives and the wider socio-economic difficulties that have beset both Eurozone and post-socialist societies. It would seem that addressing the present and creating a future for young people is the prime policy task, as issue to which we will return to later. However, addressing perceptions of history is also important. While schools and museums were not always getting through to young people there were some cases where rather than promoting a single 'authorised' version, they encouraged discussion and debate. In Germany for example there has been a shift from a past-oriented 'duty to remember' to a more future oriented 'this must not happen again' approach which seemed to resonate more with young people.

Further evidence of the significance of history and memory also emerged in the survey and qualitative interviews. The survey results showed that majority of young people considered commemorating the past important. This was highest in both locations in Georgia and lowest in the mainly Russian populated part of Daugavpils in Latvia. Many young people recognised the importance of the two World Wars, particularly the Second World War, as significant influences on

their country's history. Where applicable, the importance of joining EU was given nearly similar importance as the Second World War.

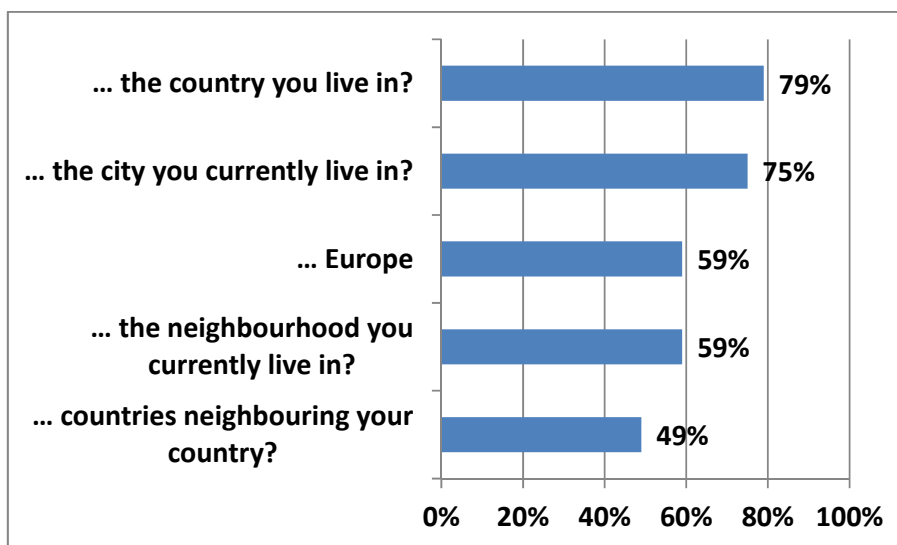


**Figure 1. Importance of four events (% saying important or very important)**

This emphasis on the significance of World War 2 was not surprisingly highest in both the western and eastern parts of Germany (over 90% in each case) while significantly lower, under 70%, in Portugal which did not actively participate in it. Not surprisingly too, the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the socialist regimes was generally seen as most significant in those countries most directly affected by it – in former East and West Germany respectively 99% and 98% considered it important or very important and 93% in Russia 93%. In Southern European country localities (Spain, Portugal, Greece) this event was accorded relatively little significance, below 50%.

### Young People's Interest in Politics and Participation in Formal Politics

Considerable concern has been expressed about the extent of disengagement of young people from formal politics and its implications for the future health of European democracy. The survey found that more young people reported that they were 'not interested' (58%) rather than they are 'interested' in politics (42%). However there was some variation, with young people being more likely to be interested in politics in localities in eastern Germany, Greece and Spain, while there were particularly low levels of interest in localities in Croatia, Latvia, Finland and Estonia. The level of interest was highest for one's country (79%) and city (75%) lowest for neighbouring countries (49%).



**Figure 2. How interested would you say you are in issues to do with ... (% very interested or quite interested)**

In terms of issues, young people were particularly interested in areas which had direct relevance to most young people's lives, with employment, housing and the environment being of greatest interest, and the European Union, immigration and LGBT rights scoring lowest. Television and the Internet were the two most significant modes of information used by most young people to obtain information about politics and public affairs. It can also be a means of participation:

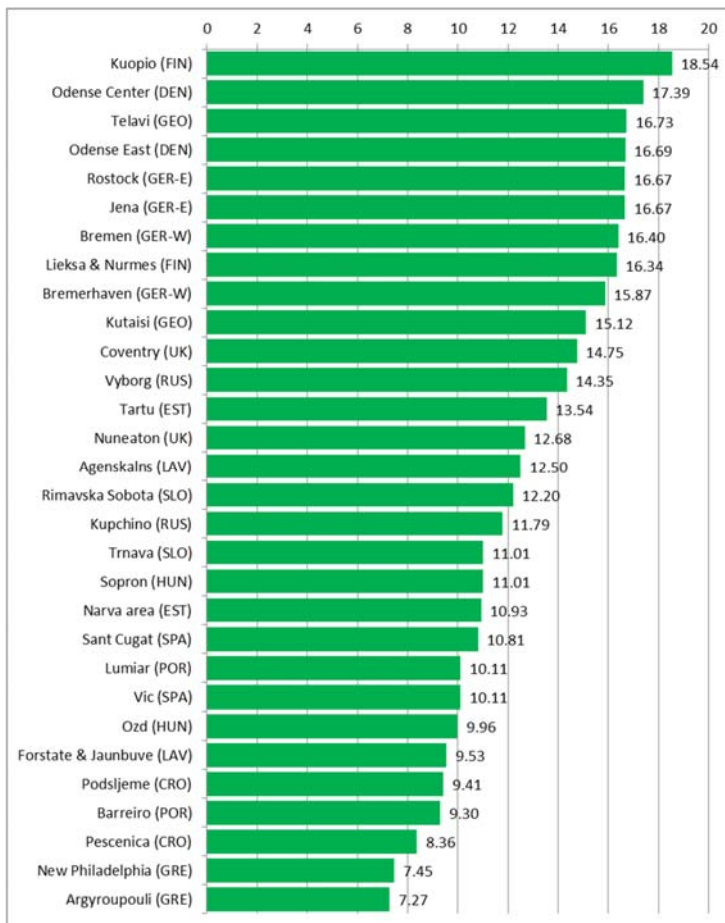
*I try to be actively involved in politics. At least to share some evaluations on my Facebook page, because I think that it affects all of us and this our life not anybody else's*

**Political trust**

The average level of trust in politicians and politicians on a scale from 0 (no trust) to 10 (maximum trust) was below the mean of the scale:

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| The Prime Minister | 4.3 |
| Parliament         | 4.5 |
| Political parties  | 3.8 |

However there were significant differences between countries and between localities within them. Young people in Greece, Croatia, Spain and Hungary were the least trustful, whereas Denmark, Finland, both parts of Germany and Georgia expressed the most trust, at around the mid-point of the scale. There are indications here, among other things, of a northern and southern European divide.



**Figure 3. Trust towards core political institutions by location (head of government PM, parliament and political parties) on a scale 0 (no trust) to 30 (complete trust)**

A widespread finding across the localities in the 14 countries was a rather negative image of politicians among young people: only 20% believed that politicians were interested in young people, 60% thought that politicians were corrupt and 69% were convinced that the rich had too much influence on politicians.

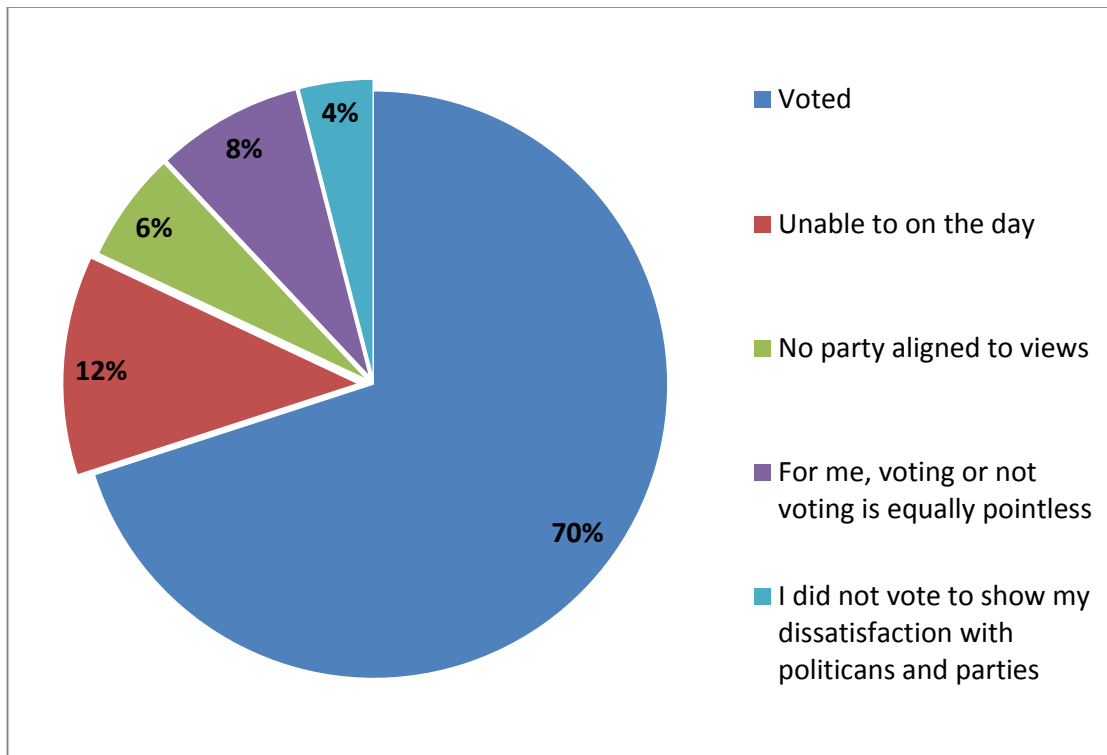
*A politician reminds me of one of those things we have today, it makes me think normally of fraud, bribes, corruption, it makes me think of all of this*

*It's like yeah, yeah, we'll do it, we're gonna do this, this and this, for the country and that and they ain't done nothing*

*But our government don't listen to us, do you know what I mean [...] At the moment all they care about is giving the rich tax breaks and taking, hitting all the poor people*

**Voting**

In spite of generally declining election participation rates among young people the survey found voting to be the most popular form of political participation among young people in the localities across the 14 countries, with 70.3% of those surveyed having voted, as shown in Figure 5 below. However there were significant variations, for example, young people in localities in North European countries, particularly in Finland, Denmark and Germany (where trust levels also tend to be higher) but also Vic in Spain have levels of voting in excess of 80%. The lowest level of voting (43%) was found in Nuneaton UK, which is white working class location badly affected by deindustrialisation and unemployment. We also found that there were common predictors of voting that emerged that could not be explained purely in terms of location contextual factors. Thus propensity to vote was strongly influenced by social structural factors such as class, gender, religion and ethnicity:



**Figure 4. Percentage of young people voting and not voting in elections, by stated reason**

- Higher levels of education and class background are linked to higher voting rates
- Youth unemployment decreases the likelihood of voting
- Males are more likely to vote in national elections, though these differences are not apparent in local elections
- A higher level of religious identity is linked to greater propensity to vote,
- Older young people are more likely to vote

Compared to other forms of participating in politics, voting was considered to be the most effective one (0 – not at all effective to 10 – very effective):

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Voting in elections                      | 6.9 |
| Gaining publicity through media exposure | 5.9 |
| Participating in illegal protest         | 3.5 |
| Participating in violent protest         | 2.9 |

However even young people who voted did not necessarily believe in its efficacy:

*Whichever way you're going to get screwed, is my personal opinion [...] I vote [...] people say if you don't vote you don't get to complain*

This may also be the case for those participating in demonstrations:

*My impression is that it is never very successful. But I think it is still better to demonstrate than to do nothing*

Those who do not vote are not necessarily disengaged but have made a reasoned based choice:

*I don't participate in the elections. I stopped doing it recently. Most probably because I think that my vote won't change anything*

### **Young people's political activism and participation in social movements and civic action**

An overall composite measure of organisational involvement in 11 organisations on a scale of 0 to 11 from low to high engagement, revealed an overall average of 0.3. Young people in Nordic locations in Finland and Denmark had the highest levels of membership of civic and political organisations while the lowest levels were found in Mediterranean localities (in Greece, Portugal and Spain, and post-socialist societies (in Hungary, Slovakia, Georgia and Latvia).

Socio-political involvement apart from organisational participation, as measured by 20 different political activities also varied widely. For example, both locations in Hungary represent a level of participation some 25 times lower than some locations in Eastern Germany and Spain. Low levels of involvement were generally recorded in civic and political organisations, with 11 kinds identified including political parties, religious organisations, peace and human rights organisations and anti-globalisation movements. Protest activism was highest in those country locations most hit by crisis such as Greece, Portugal and Spain. While (as we have seen above) social class and educational level are strong predictors for voting, this is not the case with involvement in protest activity.

Generally speaking political participation, including closeness to a party, is higher in those locations where the national political system is based on proportional representation and there is a more interventionist state, namely locations in northern Europe rather than southern Europe, the UK and post-socialist societies.

### **Propensity to Xenophobia, far right politics and overall satisfaction with democracy**

On the whole MYPLACE respondents held mixed attitudes toward immigrants and were not likely to believe that members of minority ethnic groups made a positive contribution to society, as shown in Figure 6 below. .

However, attitudes to migrant and minority groups are likely to vary according to country locality:

- In post-Soviet Latvia and Estonia views towards the significant Russian minority are largely positive
- Attitudes to minority groups are more favourable in northern European locations, the two parts of Germany being the most favourable
- Young people in post-socialist locations, and also those in Greece and to some extent Portugal, express the highest level of negative views to minority groups, and are also more likely to support policies to exclude migrants
- In Greece the least trusted group are Albanians

Attitudes to different minority groups vary:

- In many locations (e.g. in Denmark, Finland, Portugal, Spain, Russia and Slovakia) the ethnic group most prone to discrimination are Roma
- In Hungarian, Russian and Georgian locations, young people are more likely to favour limiting access by migrants to a range of state resources
- In many locations (especially in Finland, Germany, Russia and the UK) individuals with low levels of education and working class background are more likely to be negative towards minority groups and migrants
- However in Slovakian locations less educated young people from lower socioeconomic groups had more favourable views of Roma
- Males are more likely to express hostility to people from minority groups and migrants

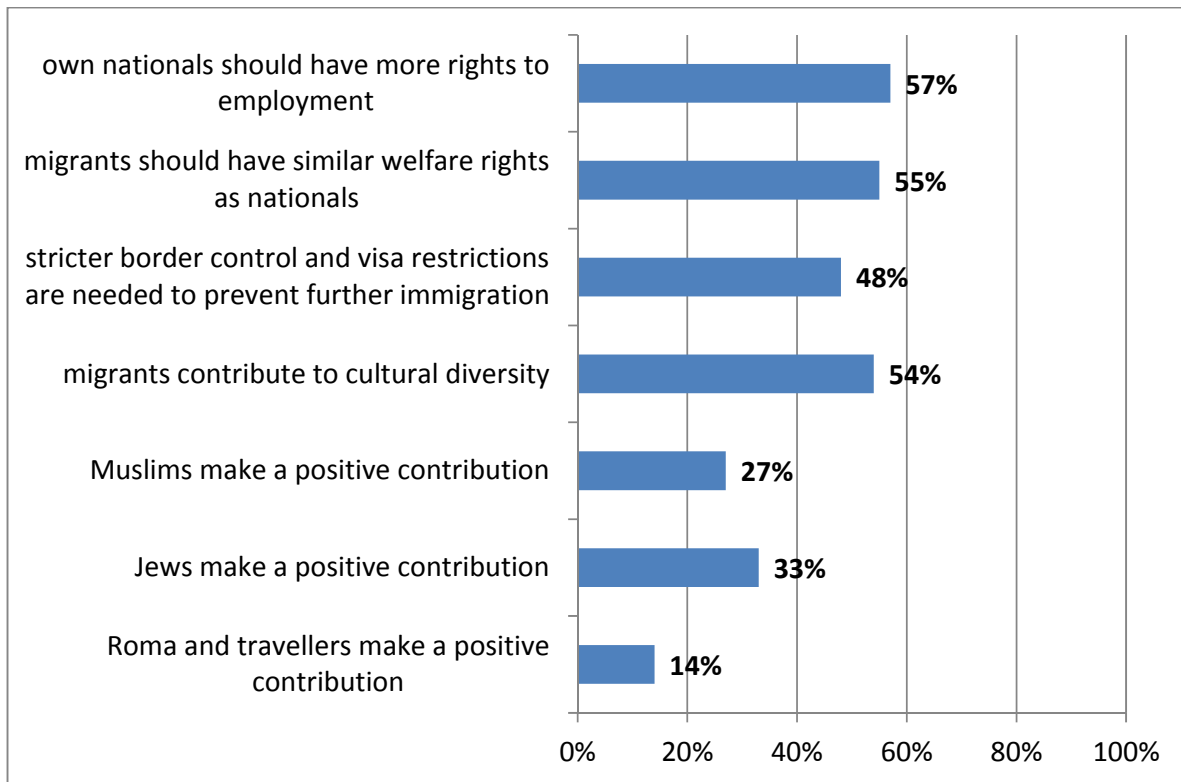


Figure 5. Agreement with statements about immigration and minorities (% strongly agree and agree)



### Satisfaction with democracy

The mean figure for support for democracy on a scale from 0 to 10 was 5.01, though Figure 7 below shows that this varied considerably according to country and location.

- The highest levels of support for democracy were found in locations in Scandinavia and Germany, with Odense in Denmark scoring the highest at 7.43.
- Support was lower in UK and post-socialist locations
- The lowest scores were to be found in in Russia and southern Europe, with New Philadelphia in Greece scoring lowest at 3.34

Levels of support for violence in pursuit of political goals, on a scale of 0 (never) to 32 (always) was in the main low:

- The highest support was in Rimavska Sobota in Slovakia (14.36), Podsljeme in Croatia (13.31) and the two Russian locations (both more than 13).
- The lowest levels of support were in Denmark (less than 6), Kuopio in Finland (5.67), and the two Latvian locations (4.62).
- Females were more often against violence than males.

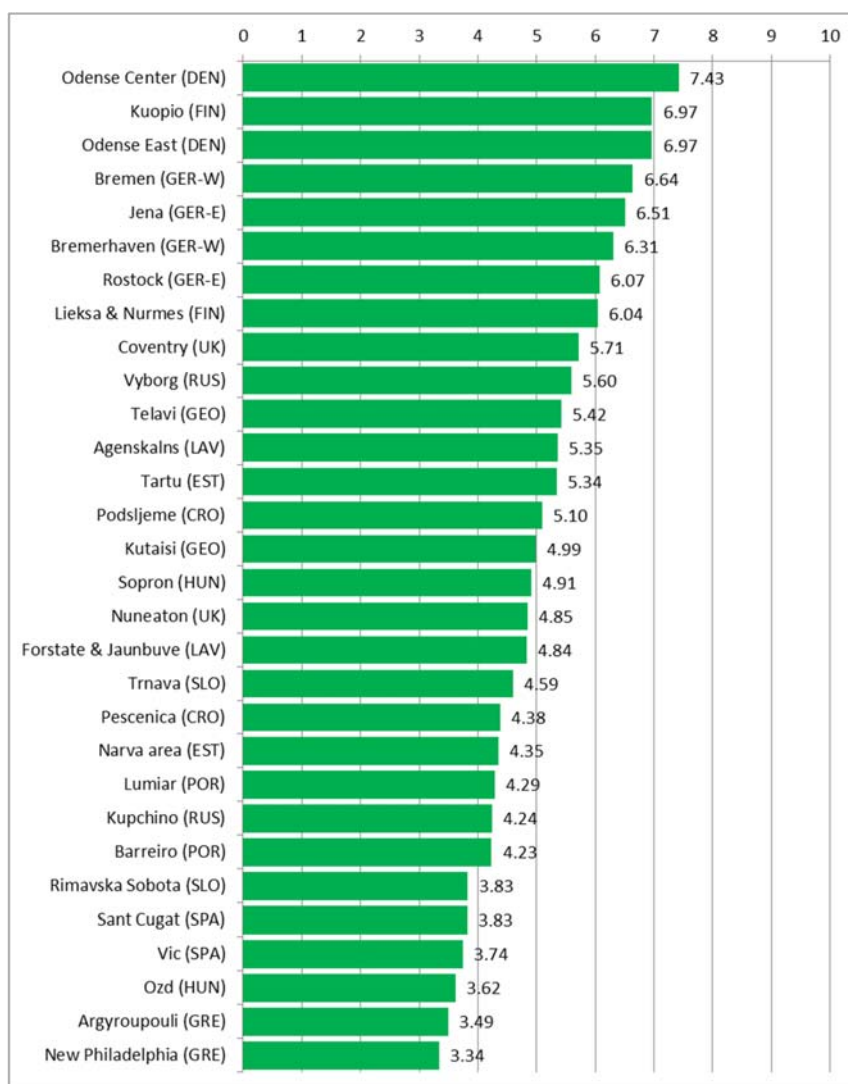


Figure 6. Satisfaction with democracy by location on scale 0 (extremely dissatisfied) to 10 (extremely satisfied)

## Young People and the European Project

More than half of young respondents reported they were very or quite interested in European issues:

|                       | Average % | Highest % (Lumiar, Port) | Lowest % (Trnava, Slov ) |
|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Very interested       | 16        | 32                       | 6                        |
| Quite interested      | 42        | 51                       | 29                       |
| Not interested        | 33        | 14                       | 51                       |
| Not at all interested | 9         | 2                        | 14                       |

In many instances the two locations in each country had broadly similar results. Both locations in Portugal and Germany are in the top third in terms of degree of interest, while both locations in Slovakia, Russia and Croatia are in the bottom third. There are also contrasts between locations in particular countries that reflects wider patterns of engagement or distance from interest in politics, for example, in the UK while Coventry was in the top third, Nuneaton was near the bottom.

Trust in the European Commission was slightly higher overall than trust in national parliaments, the overall mean being 5.17 on a scale from 0 (do not trust at all) to 10 (complete trust). The highest score was Telavi in Georgia (6.60). Both locations in countries such as Georgia Denmark and eastern Germany were all in the top third of highest trust, whereas locations in Greece, Croatia and Hungary were in the bottom third.

Overall the young people in our study were modestly supportive of the view that ‘membership of the EU greatly benefits our country’: 49% of respondents agreed or agreed strongly with the statement and 20% disagreed or disagreed strongly. While overall Rimavska Sobota in Slovakia had the smallest proportion who ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’, and also had the highest percentage of undecided. However, New Philadelphia in Greece had the highest proportion of respondents (39%) who stated they ‘disagree or strongly disagree’ that membership of the European Union greatly benefits their country.

## Young people and political activism: the Ethnographic Case Studies

This MYPLACE ethnographic research provides a unique database of 44 case studies of young people’s active involvement in social movements and political organisations. The results provide invaluable insights for policy makers into the motivations and experiences of the young people involved.

One cluster of movements was comprised of **radical right and patriotic movements**. They included organisations as diverse as the UK English Defence League (EDL), a street organisation eschewing electoral politics, to the Greek Golden Dawn Party which sought to combine street action with efforts to obtain parliamentary power and was the most extreme right wing organisation studied. It also included Russian Run, a strongly nationalist pro-sport and sobriety movement initiated in the New Year 2011. Many of those movements (with the exception of Golden Dawn) in fact sought to distance themselves from the far right as classically understood. Such movements typically combined a claimed openness and membership solidarity with a tendency towards in-fighting. What seems to figure most are contemporary concerns about immigration alongside respect for historical memory and commemoration. Patriotism was the single most common value expressed across the broad range of organisations and a key source of ‘belonging’.

Another cluster followed **anti-capitalist, anti-racist and anti-fascist movements** which similarly encompassed a diverse set of types of movements. Many emphasized mobilisation from below, disillusion with formal politics, an emphasis on openness, solidarity, informal action, and cathartic expression of marginalised viewpoints. The organisations in this cluster include cultural movements such as Anti-fascist Punk Activism (Antifa Punk) in Croatia, the ‘internet freedom’ organisation Estonian Pirate Party, a movement in Croatia for ‘free education’ i.e. publicly funded

education from undergraduate to postgraduate levels, and the Anti-Discrimination Working Group of Football Fans (Anti Dis AG) in Germany.

**Occupy and anti-austerity movements** we followed, such as the Indignados of Spain, and their counterparts the Aganaktismeni in Greece, initiated in 2011, have since led to parliamentary movements for change through Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece. This did not however occur with the UK and Danish Occupy movements. All have challenged austerity and the perceived limitations of current forms of representative democracy.

The cluster on **gender and minority rights** examined a range of movements such as the Indignant Feminists in Barcelona, UK Feminista and the Estonian LGBT movement. The Cluster Report on anti-capitalist organisations showed that though there was a formal commitment to equality, they did not in practice always implement it. These movements, like many of the ethnographic case studies, used the Internet prominently in their activities, and this helped to foster openness and horizontal forms of organisation. The expression of strong individual and collective emotion is a feature of many of the movements from below that we studied, and can be seen as a reaction to a political culture that seeks to constrain it.

The cluster on youth sections of **political, labour and state-sponsored organisations** include case studies of the right wing True Finns Party, the left wing youth party the Danish Socialist Youth Front, the Christian Democratic Party of Slovakia, as well as the youth section of the German Trade Union IGMetall. The research showed that young activists in such organisations were sometimes frustrated with the relationship with the larger 'parent organisation' and their perceived 'rule bound' nature, and the way this sometimes restricted their efforts to be independent and express their own identity.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section identifies the most significant policy implications of our research, particularly those connected to European agendas, the most important being the **EU Youth Strategy for 2010-18**. This was informed by awareness that 'Europe's future depends on its youth. Yet, life chances of many young people are blighted'. The EU Youth Strategy for 2010-18 has two overall objectives:

- **Investing in youth** particularly by providing more and equal opportunities for young people in education and the job market;
- **Empowering youth**, by encourage young people to actively participate in society in various ways.

In terms of **investing in youth** a wide range of 'supply side' measures are identified in order to enhance skills and education, employability and entrepreneurship, in order to 'nurture human capital', but there is also a focus on health and wellbeing. To deal with the fact that youth have particularly suffered through the economic crisis since 2008, with 1 in 4 young people under 25 years unemployed (1 in 2 in Greece, the country with the highest rate), the EC adopted a **youth guarantee** policy in April 2013. All young people should receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within 4 months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.

In terms of **empowering youth**, the strategy recognises the continuing 'gap between youth and the institutions and urges policy makers to address these issues by measures such as:

- Dialogue with young people, facilitating participation in shaping national and EU policies;
- supporting youth organisations and national and local youth councils;
- Promoting participation by under-represented groups;
- Supporting was of 'learning to participate' from an early age;

- Promoting e-democracy to reach out to non-organised youth..

The final point particularly relevant to this Brief is the emphasis on **evidence-based policy making** as MYPLACE evidence is relevant to helping the EU and its partner countries to realise these policy agendas.

- In many instance our evidence supports the strategies being adopted, though raises questions as to whether they are being implemented effectively enough
- Our evidence also questions arising from the critical voices of youth and evidence of significant dissatisfaction with current arrangements for both participation and investing in youth.

Our evidence on **participation** provides both good and less good news. Thus while research results do not generally show a 'lost legitimacy' among most young people for political institutions and democracy

- Much more needs to be done equip young people with the knowledge and insight into politics that they say they need to enable them to participate effectively
- More consideration should be given to ways of facilitating this through easier registration
- The trend towards lowering the voting age is a positive move that will help to facilitate participation.

In substantive terms, young people believe that the political system works more in the favour of older people than themselves, or richer people and this can discourage voting and create a vicious circle of political neglect reinforcing youth political disconnect. There is thus a responsibility on politicians to break this circle and help to promote a virtuous circle where as a result young people feel that politics matters to them and that it is worth participating. Politicians need to address the fact that:

- young people in the research stated that they were 'turned off' by the way that they perceive politics is conducted by older, formally dressed, 'boring people';
- perceived efforts by political establishments to restrict protest movements as a threat to 'public order' may deter participation and undermine faith in democracy;
- young people's disaffection should be regarded less as a 'problem' than as a positive desire for a more meaningful and less remote forms of democracy, which if addressed could reinvigorate democracy for all.

The research found that museums and sites of memory might need to tackle history in sensitive and exploratory ways rather than to be prescriptive, seek to forget or even suppress difficult national pasts. Our suggestion is to develop appropriate policy actions and to encourage museums and sites of memory to develop courses of action which would give a more balanced picture of the past, instead of presenting official understandings of event in the history.

In addition to this, the passive or active disaffection of young people is a response to a failure to tackle **substantive** issues that affect the whole society but particularly impact on young people, and their desire to seek a positive individual and collective futures, such as:

- Widening socio-economic inequalities within and between societies which are also taking on an intergenerational dimension;
- Continuing failure to tackle urgent and pressing problems such as climate change;
- Increasing exclusion of increasing numbers of young people from the labour market and from satisfying, meaningful careers, delaying indefinitely transitions to adult roles.

With the dominance of neoliberalism at country and EU levels, many young people feel increasingly that they are 'on their own' living in a 'depressing present' with diminished hopes for

the future. Thus policy makers need also to deal with the substantive issues associated with economic crisis and austerity if faith in democracy is to be restored, particularly in southern European countries.

Thus our research also has policy implications for the **investing in youth** agenda of the European Youth Strategy 2010-18 which currently prioritize dominant neoliberal supply-side strategies rather than advancing their collective social rights and enhancing the European Social Model. The **Youth Guarantee** is undoubtedly an attempt to put youth needs at the heart of policy. However critics have argued that insufficient EU resources have been allocated to it, and it is being implemented in a laggardly rather than concerted way by member countries. Austerity is also working contrary to the EU Youth Strategy 2010-18 in other ways. Although it is favourable towards informal youth work services this has in many countries been vulnerable to cuts in funding under austerity programmes. Our research supports appropriate youth participation sites – youth organisations and associations, local and national youth councils – to provide young people with more opportunities to get in contact with politicians and get involved in policy processes.

Many respondents in the MYPLACE research did not feel that schools were adequately preparing them, for example:

*There should be more hours on social studies in school, maybe more history too*

*What we need is education. Education is our weapon, nothing else*

However where opportunities through school Youth Councils existed these were appreciated, and many students valued the participation opportunities provided by student unions. Therefore more needs to be done to equip young people with the knowledge, insight into politics and practical participation skills through non-formal learning opportunities. This would enable them to participate more effectively. Lowering the voting age could be a positive move that would probably help to facilitate participation.

Thus our evidence is supportive the stronger EC focus on youth, but raises questions as to whether they can be adequately tackled through dominant economic strategies and soft forms of implementation through the Open Method of Coordination. While young people *have* problems, they are not *the* problem. As the EU Youth Strategy document puts it: 'Young people are not a burdensome responsibility but a critical resource to society'. Thus our evidence points to the need for politicians to make more efforts to reach out to young people and respond better to the messages coming from the young people who participated in the MYPLACE research. They particularly point to a need for politicians to achieve better outcomes on both procedural issues of democratic participation, and substantive issues of social justice, rights, poverty and equality, both generally and in the way that they impact on young people.

The qualitative and ethnographic research particularly uncovered rich evidence of young people's aspirations for a better society even where they did not espouse a strong political ideology or advocate radical change in contemporary society. They included the following statements which we do not claim to be 'representative' but feel that there is no better place to conclude this Policy Brief, in the hope that politicians and policy makers will take note:

*A society where people can earn a living, and not what we have at the moment*

*The total elimination of unemployment so that everybody could find a job and have less working hours*

*A more communicative society, politicians who really communicate with people and not with each other, pretending they are communicating with people*

*The state should not take away young people's dreams. They should be pushed in order to do more, and accomplish at least half of them*

*If everyone was a bit more considerate and everybody cared for each other a bit more, and was more tolerant, that would be important*

*A better society? It would be a society where people no need to judge each other and a society less biased, less racist, because there is still a lot of racism*

*Where people trust each other and there's honesty in, in business, in personal relations, in things like that*

*For me, there would be no fighting, there, it's really unrealistic but there'd be no fighting*

*Life should be based not on some material goods but on human values [...] All this is very hard to do. But yes, if we were to be less dependent on economics and the market, things would be better*

**The full research reports on which this Policy Brief is based can be accessed here: <http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/deliverables.php>**

## RESEARCH PARAMETERS

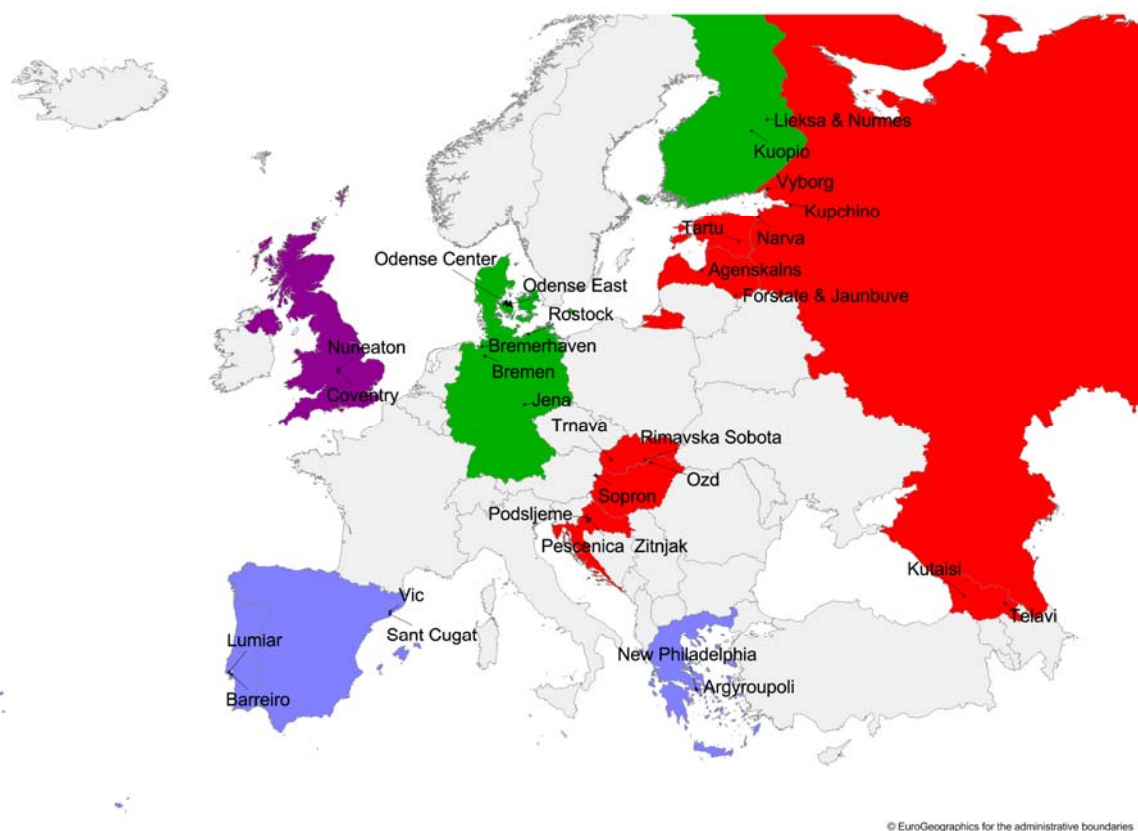
### **MYPLACE: (Memory, Youth, Political Legacy and Civic Engagement)**

- A four-year, €7.9 Million EC funded project
- Exploring how young people's social participation is shaped by the shadows (past, present and future) of totalitarianism and populism in Europe

MYPLACE combines survey, interview and ethnographic research to provide new, pan-European data that not only **measures** levels of participation but **captures the meanings** young people attach to it:

- **Exploring the construction and transmission of historical memory with focus groups and around 120 inter-generational interviews (Work Package 2)**
- **Measuring young people's participation using a survey delivered in 14 countries with almost 17,000 respondents (Work Package 4)**
- **Understanding that participation using 900 in-depth follow up interviews (Work Package 5).**
- **Interpreting young people's activism through 44 ethnographic case studies (Work Package 7).**

MYPLACE provides a hugely rich and sophisticated dataset, covering *young people's attitudes and beliefs in relation, specifically, to far-right and populist ideologies, but in practice covering issues such as class, xenophobia, racism, education and trust in democratic processes and associated social and political exclusion*. We welcome opportunities to work with interested policy makers as our data analysis develops. Please contact: [admin@fp7-myplace.eu](mailto:admin@fp7-myplace.eu)



**PROJECT IDENTITY**

**PROJECT NAME** Memory, Youth, Political Legacy and Civic Engagement (MYPLACE)

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**BUDGET**

EU contribution: 7 994 463 €

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**WEBSITE**

[www.fp7-myplace.eu](http://www.fp7-myplace.eu)

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**FURTHER READING**

All published deliverable reports are available here: <http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/deliverables.php>