

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

**Deliverable 8: «Collection of Working
Papers on Qualitative Research Findings»/
GERMANY**

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

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1 Section 1: Data Collection

To gain explicit insights into the group of politically inactive young people, the EUYOUNGART project consortium agreed to concentrate work in its focus groups on this target group. Four focus groups, differentiated by gender and education, were to be set up. In addition, individual interviews, which tended to be biography-based, were held with people.

1.1 Recruiting of participants

The German Youth Institute (DJI) held five group discussions with politically inactive and four individual interviews with politically active young people. Five to ten young people participated in each group discussion. In order to find such a large number of young people willing to participate in this project, various strategies were employed.

For the first group discussion, which was intended as a pre-test (P), the student assistants and interns of the DJI were recruited. The group consisted of four female and two male participants (PA-PF), four of whom were students, one an intern and one a pupil doing work experience at DJI. The group was thus heterogeneous as far as gender was concerned but homogeneous in terms of education, since all participants can be allocated to the higher-education group.

School contacts were an important resource. One of the researchers established contact with Münchner Volkshochschule, a Munich-based institute providing adult education programmes. This institute offers special courses for pupils who have failed to pass the "qualifizierender Hauptschulabschluss"¹ at a Hauptschule². These pupils can repeat the examination in order to obtain this qualification at the Volkshochschule. A teacher from this institute agreed to support the DJI researchers in their project. Both the male and female participants for the group discussions targeting young people with a lower education standard could thus be recruited from persons attending the Volkshochschule. Eight male (DA-DH) and nine female students (BA-BK) from the Volkshochschule participated in the group discussions (D = interview with male participants, B = interview with female participants).

¹ Qualifying general education certificate awarded in some German *Länder* after the ninth school year by a Hauptschule and other schools to pupils who have attained certain marks and/or passed an examination.

² Elementary school leading to basic qualification

Additionally, contact with the headmaster of a Gymnasium³ in a Munich suburb was established. The headmaster agreed to accompany one of the researchers and visit all year-12 pupils in their courses. There the researcher introduced the project and pupils could enter their names in lists. In the end, as many as four young women and three young men from the Gymnasium participated in the group discussions targeting persons with higher education.

The other participants in the group discussions for young people with higher education (interview C) were mostly recruited via personal acquaintances of the researchers or word-of-mouth recommendations (snowball system).

The fifth participant in the group discussion for young people with higher education had heard of the project by one of the student assistants and contacted the researchers on her own initiative. This university student thus discussed with the four female pupils from the Gymnasium. With its total number of five participants, this discussion group was the smallest group in the project (CA- CE).

The three young men from the above Gymnasium were joined by three young men from the circle of friends of one of the researchers. Another participant was a student assistant working at the DJI. The two other participants in the group, with a total of 9 members (AA-AI), were informed about the project by colleagues of the researchers. This group with its 9 participants, was also relatively large.

Overall, the research team found the search for young people willing to participate in a discussion relatively effort-intensive. As their efforts extended to many different possibilities and contacts, however, the discussion groups were relatively large in the end. The possibility that some of the participants might not show up was always borne in mind. However, this was only the case with two persons. All other participants could be relied on to attend the discussions. This fact can probably also be attributed to some extent to the fact that researchers phoned participants the day before to remind them of the interviews and discussions.

The participants in individual interviews, too, were recruited by means of various strategies. One participant was found via the Internet and called up. This young municipal councillor agreed on the spot to participate in an interview (interview E).

A former school-council representative from the above Gymnasium entered her name in the list when the project was presented at the school by the researcher (interview H).

Researchers obtained the phone numbers of a young Greenpeace activist (interview G) and a young CSU⁴ member (interview F) from acquaintances.

Generally, the search clearly demonstrated that, relatively speaking, there are few politically active young people. The two young people mentioned last were only

³ Secondary school leading to university (university of applied sciences) entry qualification.

⁴ Christian Social Union, the conservative party in Bavaria

"tracked down" after researchers had contacted and asked many colleagues and acquaintances who, in turn, asked around in their respective circles of friends. Politically active young people, however, were quicker to agree to participate in a discussion. Apparently, they were more interested in the subject and motivated to report their experience.

1.2 Procedure

Two researchers were present at all discussions and interviews (except interview F). One interviewer acted as facilitator in the discussions or asked the questions in the individual interviews. The second researcher present could, however, ask further questions at any time and address other, potentially important matters. In the discussions, the presence of two researchers proved useful. One researcher could always make a note of who was talking. These minutes proved extremely helpful for group-discussion transcription.

Almost all discussions were held at the DJI. Group discussion D and individual interview G had to be held offsite. This point will be addressed at a later stage.

Discussions and interviews were recorded on tape. During each discussion, two small, relatively discreet microphones were placed on the table centre. Every discussion and every interview was transcribed completely by the researchers.

2 Section 2: Short Summaries & Observations of Focus Groups & Interviews

To ensure the interviewees' anonymity, group and individual interviews are identified by a letter (for example "P" for pre-test) followed by another letter referring to the individual in question.

2.1 Focus Groups/Discussions

2.1.1 Pre-test on 9 February 2004 (duration: approx. 1 hour)

As already described, six young people participated in the pre-test. The atmosphere was relaxed and informal. Contrary to expectations, participants had not taken part in a group discussion before. The situation was thus new to all of them. Apart from two participants, the young people taking part in the group discussion did not know each other.

Basically, participants' attitude to politics tended to be pessimistic, as seen throughout the discussion. Participants stated, for example, that they voted in elections but did not, in fact, believe that they could exert any influence by voting. They also thought that they were not sufficiently well informed about politics, and, at the same time, not interested in most of the subjects. "I think that current politics are not really relevant for most of us, who are not yet working; I'm not really interested in taxes; as far as pensions are concerned, I have resigned myself to the fact that I won't get one anyhow, so why should I care about social benefits?" (interview P, participant PB).

2.1.2 Group discussion A on 17 February 2004 (duration = 1:23:00)

Nine young people took part in this group discussion held at the DJI building, all of them actively. The participants did not interrupt each other and some of them even talked for quite a long time.

In spite of the relatively large group, the atmosphere was reserved. Researchers could not ascertain whether the participants were enjoying the discussion. When questioned after the interview, however, various participants replied that they had found the discussion very interesting.

The "art of lying" was an important keyword in discussion A. The group talked about this issue a lot and about the abuse of power by politicians. There was no clear, uniform opinion on this subject, however. When expressing their points of

view, participants used conflicting arguments. AH, for example, described the relationship between politicians and representatives from business and industry as follows: "... instead, the following occurs, the politician sits in parliament and, ahem, issues a lobby card to some industry representative, so that the latter can come and go in the Reichstag as he wishes and the industry representative then visits, drinks a cup of coffee and discusses, so to speak, the latest changes in some bills well, considering this, the whole procedure has very little to do with the original idea, that's how I see the matter, anyhow (interview A, interviewee AH). AE, for whom it is a matter of course that politics is influenced by industry, contradicts him however.

2.1.3 Group discussion B on 18 February 2004 (duration = 1:06:44)

Nine young women from the above-mentioned Volkshochschule were accompanied to the German Youth Institute by their teacher; the latter did not remain for the interview. This measure was considered necessary by the Volkshochschule to ensure that the young women, aged 18 to 22 years would actually appear at the interview.

Right from the start, the atmosphere was very relaxed. The women knew each other and apparently got along very well. They joked among one other and were also very open-minded towards the women conducting the interviews. All participants except one were migrants from various countries.

The discussion was very lively. Participants also frequently interrupted each other. What was noticeable was that four of the women hardly joined in the discussion at all. Among other things, this was probably due to insufficient proficiency in German. Nevertheless, the discussion was not impaired by this lack of participation. Quite the contrary, the participants obviously felt at home in a group they were familiar with. The participants also thanked the interviewers at the end of the discussion and told them they had enjoyed the discussion immensely. They were visibly pleased to have an audience and to see that their opinion was of interest.

One theme apparently occupying the minds of all members of the discussion group is war. Participants tended to say that politicians made war without the approval or support of the population. The media, above all, are responsible for constantly confronting the participants with war, which has become a daily topic. Participants' foreign origins and their religious denominations most probably can be assumed to have played a role in the presence of war in the young women's thoughts.

2.1.4 Group discussion C on 19 February 2004 (duration = 1:25:30)

As mentioned before, this discussion involved four participants from the above Gymnasium and one sociology student. Three participants (CA, CB, CC) from the

Gymnasium arrived together and were very quiet and reserved in the beginning. The fourth young woman from the Gymnasium (CE) came alone and was surprised to find that the others had already arrived. CE had only enrolled in the above school in year 12 and was obviously not yet fully integrated.

There was a lot of discussion among the participants, with some people talking at relatively great length. Tension between CA and CE could be felt throughout the interview. This tension may have been moderated by the presence of CD, whom the others had not yet known prior to the interview. CD should, in fact, have been "supported" by two other students, who failed to show up, however.

One relatively major theme in this group centred on young people's opportunities to participate in politics. Almost all participants came from a Munich suburb and thought they had relatively few opportunities to participate in politics. They assumed this might be different in the city. They therefore tend to focus their activities on sports clubs and the church; they do not regard such activities as political involvement, however.

2.1.5 Group discussion D on 25 February 2004 (duration = 1:13:38)

The discussion with the eight young men was not held in the building of the German Youth Institute, as there was no teacher available to accompany the participants to the DJI. The interview was therefore conducted in a classroom of the Volkshochschule. The building is near Munich central station and in rather bad repair.

Participants were open-minded and curious about the interview. Keeping the discussion going proved difficult, however. Participants only spoke in short sentences and did not give lengthy replies. They frequently talked or laughed quietly among one other, so that the noise level was very high. They did not take each other seriously and laughed about each other's comments. As time proceeded, participants became more and more restless.

Nevertheless, interest in what was going on was noticeable and some of the participants frequently volunteered to make a contribution to the discussion. All in all, the interviewers felt they had held a productive discussion despite the lack of focus.

Basically, it could be seen from this discussion that these young people consider politics to be very complicated. In their opinion, they know too little to be in a position to make a real contribution to the discussion. Apparently, they do not talk about politics very much at home or at school. In their circle of friends, politics is not a topic at all.

On balance it can be said that the group discussions went off very well and satisfactorily. All participants arrived on time for the interviews and there were no major disturbances or excessive reticence. On the contrary, conversation flowed freely and needed relatively little input from researchers.

2.2 Individual interviews

2.2.1 Interview E on 2 March 2004 (duration = 0:47:22)

The individual interview with EA (female), at 21 years already a municipal councillor in a Munich suburb, proceeded very well. EA was very open-minded and talked fluently when prompted by the interviewer. Researchers were especially interested in her political career. They tried to ascertain her biography and, above all, her motives for political participation. The latter were, however, still not fully clear to researchers by the end of the interview, in spite of repeated probing.

2.2.2 Interview F on 9 March 2004 (duration = 0:57:38)

At the time of the interview, the interviewee FA (male) was 20 years old. He is a member of Junge Union, the CSU's⁴ youth organisation, and a co-opted member of the board of a local party chapter in a district of Munich. Currently, however, he has suspended his activities and is devoting more of his time to his studies and an internship in the Communications department at BMW. He made a purposeful and very self-confident impression. He pointed out several times that party work was good "networking", that one benefited a great deal from it and "a party card would not be detrimental to one's curriculum vitae." His focus of interest is on foreign affairs.

2.2.3 Interview G on 11 March 2004 (duration = 0:29:27)

The interview with GA (female), a 24-year-old Greenpeace activist, was held at the participant's home. GA has a 7-month old son and was understandably reluctant to take him along to the German Youth Institute. The atmosphere was laid back and relaxed. The participant talked extensively about her political activities and her motives for participating in politics. Questions asked by the interviewer were answered comprehensively and in detail.

2.2.4 Interview H on 11 March 2004 (duration = 0:32:36)

The interview with the former school-council representative HA (female), 19 years old, also went off well. One of the interviewers met her on the way to the DJI already and the two thus had an opportunity to get to know each other a little before the interview. During the interview, however, HA did not really talk at great length on her own initiative. The interviewer had to ask questions fairly often, to which the interviewee gave relatively brief answers. The latter did, however, tell the interviewer quite a lot about her participation and motives. The fact that she provided less information of her own accord than the other interview partners may be due to her political career being relatively short.

All interviews went off well and were highly informative. Participants talked a lot and all were clearly interested in the topic and the project.

MAIN RESULTS

Below, the analyses are illustrated and underpinned by text passages from interviews. For this purpose, the following letter codes are used to ensure the anonymity of the interview partners:

- P Pre-test discussion, women and men, high level of education
- A Group discussion, men, high level of education
- B Group discussion, women, low level of education
- C Group discussion, women, high level of education
- D Group discussion, men, low level of education

The second letter of the code stands for a certain person in this group in each case.

- EA Interview, female, municipal councillor
- FA Interview, male, member of Junge Union
- GA Interview, female, Greenpeace activist
- HA Interview, female, (former) school-council representative

3 Associations

Discussions with focus groups were launched with the help of association tests. Participants were asked to jot down their spontaneous associations with the terms "politics" and "political" on three cards. These cards were displayed on a pinboard for all to see. Individual associations in all groups are listed in Annex 1.

DJI researchers used this method to survey initial and intuitive associations – also outside the agreed discussion guide of the European research consortium – with the subject field. The discussions with the young adults were commenced and conducted on the basis not only of the associations jotted down by the participants but also on the basis of associations that should have been included in the eyes of the interviewers.

It soon became clear that most terms included in the associations referred to "conventional politics", e.g. politicians, elections and parties. Closely connected with this is a tendency towards a pessimistic and critical view of politics ("art of lying", (abuse of) power). NGOs (non-governmental organisations), as an example of "non-conventional politics", were only mentioned in the pre-test group. Participants in the high-level-of-education group tended to use abstract terms more frequently than participants with a lower level of education. Gender-specific differences cannot be seen in the associations (which may also be due to small case numbers). What is noticeable, however, is that the subject of "war" clearly predominated and was the topic of very heated debate throughout the discussion in the group of young women with a lower level of education.

4 Section 3: Theme 1 – 'Belonging and Identity'

One important subject area in the interviews was the sense of belonging and identity of the young people interviewed. The researchers considered it important to learn to what extent young people felt they belonged to society and how they assess their own position in society.

4.1 The terms 'citizen' and 'fellow citizen'

Among others, the concept of 'citizen' plays a major role in this context. Participants were confronted with this term and asked for their opinions.

Some of the participants considered the term too mundane to be able to explain it. The task left them at somewhat of a loss. For them, all people are citizens, as "there are only citizens!" (CA). This group of interviewees did not see any difference at all between citizens and non-citizens. AC, for instance, said: "it's just a word, when all's said and done, we're all people". Among this group of young people, the opinion prevailed that it is easy to be a citizen, as you cannot be anything else but a citizen!

In contrast to the above, some of the interviewees considered being a citizen a very difficult task indeed. For those who considered it difficult to be a citizen the term 'fellow citizen' also played a role. In this context, the term 'fellow citizen' was always associated with foreigners, regardless of whether foreign interviewees consider themselves fellow citizens or German interviewees use the term when talking about foreigners. And apparently, it is precisely when racial issues are concerned that it is difficult for participants to be a citizen. According to AE, citizens should "be able to be open-minded, adopt a more cosmopolitan view" and not have to "grapple with" racial issues. In his opinion, there are simply "many things...with which one is simply confronted, especially as a citizen". In this connection, one is confronted, above all, with a certain responsibility for one's fellow citizens. This involves, first and foremost, integration of foreigners in society. Every fellow citizen has to "adapt to society, in order to make it possible to live together" (PB).

For some, the term 'citizen' is also strongly associated with community.

"PA For me, the term 'citizen' means being part of a community, regardless of the level concerned... ."

According to PA, a community comes into being as a result of all citizens being equal. PA quoted the German Chancellor as an example, who "(is) a citizen just like me". In this context, PB compared the term 'citizen' to the term 'inhabitant'. He thought that the concept of 'citizen' involves more individual responsibility.

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"PB (...) for me, a citizen (...) is part of a whole, i.e. integrated in the community. And an inhabitant is.... somebody residing or living there.... ."

The term 'fellow citizen', which apparently produces common spirit and responsibility for one's fellow human beings even more clearly than the concept of 'citizen', is also mentioned in this context.

Some of the interviewees immediately associated the term 'citizen' with rights and duties. These rights and duties define the individual as a citizen:

"CE You live in a country and living in this country means that you just have certain rights and duties by which you are defined as a citizen."

When asked after the rights, the right to vote sprang into the minds of most interviewees. Duties were always immediately associated with paying taxes. According to the young people, these rights and duties also make you feel a citizen, for example, when you go to the polls. In everyday life, in contrast, the sense of being a citizen is absent:

"CB In my everyday life, I simply live my life, but not necessarily ... as a citizen."

Among the foreign participants, the question cropped up more frequently, of course. Without a German passport, a family cannot vote. AG addressed this issue quite clearly by saying

"AG I'm a 'fellow citizen' in Germany, too, so to speak, but, I can't vote, I can only work, live... ."

The duties, on the other hand, do have to be fulfilled by this section of the population. BF made the following contribution regarding this point:

"BF My father has been living here for 30 years; he pays taxes like all the other German families, why shouldn't I feel like a citizen? Actually, I do feel like a citizen, in fact, I've worked and paid taxes, too".

Some of the young foreign people interviewed, however, stated that they did not consider themselves citizens of Germany due to their status as foreigners.

4.2 Approach to politics in interviewees' own lives

4.2.1 Feeling of helplessness and resignation

What is especially notable in this context is that many of the young people interviewed did indeed name topics which are or would be interesting and which, in fact, concern their own lives. Interviewees, however, did not see any meaningful way of influencing politics. They do not hold any hopes of achieving anything. AH expressed most clearly what the others also stated in a similar manner:

"AH I also think, well, when I watch the news or ... read a newspaper, ... there'll be at least ten topics I can't accept at all, from tuition fees to genetic engineering and God knows what else -- the war in Iraq, for example -- but I don't think I can change anything, well, I mean there'd be enough topics but I've simply given up, yes, that's how I see it."

AA also thought that there are topics that would interest him in all areas, but for him, too,

"(...) the main point is... resignation, one simply thinks, yes,... there have been lots of demos, not much has been achieved, they were simply, um, symbolic more than anything else, and, yes, then one thinks, okay, it's not worth it anyhow, I won't do it, save the hassle, yes, I think this is the main reason, or the main obstacle, the reason why these things are realized so rarely". This quote shows that ways of participating in politics are, indeed, considered but not regarded as meaningful.

Voting, as a means of bringing about changes, is also called in question. AC thought it didn't make any difference who you vote for, since business and industry "call the tune first and foremost, anyway". This opinion was supported by others, who also felt that business and industry have a lot of clout and thus regarded their own opportunities to influence things reduced or even completely non-existent. AH expressed this idea as follows, thus reflecting the opinion of the other young men with a higher level of education participating in the discussion:

"AH Yes, well, I think that's a very good point; it has already been mentioned that business and industry are incredibly powerful and, well, I think, considering what one hears and reads, their influence is really, really unbelievable, the individual citizen, after all, doesn't really have such a strong lobby, he can't really get hold of politicians any longer, he can't influence anybody or anything directly, he has voted and that's it."

According to the above opinion, business and industry exert an extremely powerful influence on politics, while voters' opinions are ignored.

Apart from demonstrating and voting, other avenues of influence are taken into account and again rejected. AE mentioned that one could write newspaper articles or try to mobilise television stations, but, he, too, arrived at the following conclusion:

"AE ...well, as a human being, I say there's simply nothing I can do at the moment and that's why I don't do anything either; so, I've given up to a certain extent."

AI added a new aspect, viz., that another factor, apart from resignation, plays a role in young people's attitude to politics. This discussion partner felt he was too uninformed and this feeling was expressed again and again at other places.

"AI (...) that, well, especially here, what goes on in German or Bavarian politics, too, is over my head, that is to say, I've relatively little to do with what's going on, even if I want to inform myself, I've few possibilities of influencing things, or even of actually gaining full insight into political affairs, I mean, even when you read the newspaper, you get the impression that not everything that might be of interest to me is actually reported there."

4.2.2 Certain life-influencing themes

The fact that the majority of young people interviewed felt they were unable to exert much of an effect on politics is also reflected in the fact that some of them did not consider any of the themes important for them. For PB, for instance, politics does not involve topics "of direct relevance" for him.

Taxes

Nevertheless, there are some areas and themes that other participants considered particularly important for themselves.

One of these themes was taxes.

"AF Yes, taxes affect you most, because, after all, it's politicians who decide on the tax rates we have to pay that's the area in which politics affects us most."

Many of the interviewees agreed on this point, although only very few of them already pay taxes themselves. Still, they regard the consequences that taxes have for personal life as a concrete effect.

Tuition fees and university reform

University reform and the introduction of tuition fees was an important theme in the discussions among participants with a higher level of education. The introduction of tuition fees is currently the subject of debate in Germany and there have been various cuts in the funds provided to universities. Some German *Länder* have already introduced tuition fees, in spite of student protest marches in many cities. This is a highly topical subject that directly impacts on the lives of some of the young people interviewed.

"CD Generally, I believe that cuts really make themselves felt ... in everything connected with schools and studies. Or one simply notices that somehow more teaching materials or whatever are needed but, on the other hand, more and more cuts are effected."

Several personal experiences showing how students, in particular, tackled this problem were also collected on this theme.

"CD Well, basically, I think that students can act on a broader basis because students as such are a relatively large group in the population, although, I suppose, solidarity is not quite as strong as one may think."

The young woman interviewed was referring to the fact that many students from higher semesters apparently did not join the demos, since they will have finished their studies soon and will not have to pay tuition fees anyhow. According to CD's experiences, for the most part, only students who are affected themselves took part in the protest marches. Being personally affected thus makes politics more interesting and increases one's readiness for political activities. PB also expressed this very clearly:

"PB Yes, I was also there (*at the demos, author's note*), but they are really topical events, events that affect you personally, interest you, which you think about and which you are ready to take part in, meaning, these are really, so to speak, specific political issues, whereas general politics is, at least for me, uninteresting."

Cuts in youth clubs and youth services

Logically, tuition fees were not a topic of discussion in the groups composed of participants with a lower level of education. Cuts in youth work spending were, however, brought up here. Interviewees frequently spend their time in youth clubs and talked about the closing down of such institutions in Munich.

DC "That's what they wanted to do, they wanted to close down all the youth clubs in Munich permanently. That's what all the youth workers said at a brunch (?)...".

The person interviewed, however, could not provide the researchers with more details on the topic. But the group talked about the fact that some of the young people had signed a petition in this context. Nobody could tell the researchers, however, whether the petition has been successful. The subject of cuts in spending on youth clubs had, however, interested the young people interviewed to such an extent that they had even become active. Subsequently, however, they had apparently found it too much bother to follow up the topic and, above all, to find out whether their campaigns had been successful.

One of the young women interviewed also talked about her problems with the social services department, in her case, Youth Social Services. BF is personally affected by the cuts in youth services and feels unfairly treated compared to German applicants. In her opinion, politicians should look into such matters. BF, however, did not mention activities of her own or attempts to improve the situation.

Europe

Europe was another important issue in the discussion groups. It should be noted that the researchers introduced this issue even if it was not mentioned by the young interviewees themselves. Interviewees tended to express a favourable opinion about Europe. PD even reported that according to her own experience, Europe has a positive image with young people:

"PD Yes, I also think that Europe is "in". At the FOS⁵, we have a Europe project, meaning you can do four weeks' work experience abroad, anywhere in Europe, from Romania to Finland, and work in a company there. And, in fact, everybody who could afford it applied for this project. This is why I think, Europe is most certainly "in"."

PB even said that foreign European countries interested him a lot, although he was not overly interested in other continents.

PB (...) if I go abroad, it should be close to here, I mean, I can see myself going to England perhaps, even to work there after my studies. France I'd find very interesting, if only I spoke the language a bit more fluently, well, for myself, I'm not

⁵ Secondary school leading to university of applied sciences entry qualifications

really keen to leave Europe at the moment, as far as a job later on or even holidays or other things are concerned, there are various things that appeal to me here."

For some, Europe mainly has economic significance, as also stated by CA:

"CA Well, for me, Europe, for example, has purely economic significance. Um, its political significance is rather restricted,..., well, its origin was also an economical one, that is for economic reasons."

This view was also shared by some of the other participants.

DH, for example, thinks of farming in connection with the topic of the EU.

"DH The EU is actually very important for the individual countries. Last summer, for example, was a scorcher for the entire, what you call it, agricultural economy, I think they call it. It did very badly that's why they got money from the EU. A single country on its own, I reckon, would not be able to finance this, give them money."

CB nevertheless considered it highly important that the individual European countries should grow together. For her, growing together applies, above all, to the military sector.

"CB...Well, I could really imagine a European army or something similar...and I also think that this is important."

Of course, some of the young people also took a critical view of the EU. BF, for example, is opposed to so many countries acceding the EU. She is afraid that people in Germany "BF will suffer as a result of this". However, she did not underpin her reservations with any arguments.

War

Another theme affecting the lives of young people, in particular, young female interviewees with a low level of education, is war. In this group, eight cards associating this term with "politics" and "political" were collected at the start of the discussion. This clearly illustrates how deeply the young female interviewees were affected by this theme. It is possible that war, as a subject, was especially present in this group, as many of the interviewees are migrants and thus especially aware of their countries of origin, which may have been or still are at war. In this context, the young women mostly blamed politicians for wars.

"BE And only because of politicians. Thousands of soldiers have to go to war, most of them commit suicide because they can't bear it, the war."

Discussion group B, viz. the group of young women with a lower level of education, talked in a highly emotional manner about this subject, with participants showing anger and lack of understanding for politicians, who in their opinion were the ones who cause the wars. War was also a theme in other discussion groups, for example, in the group of young men with a higher level of education. This group addressed the subject less emotionally, however.

"AE Well, for me politics also means talking about ... war etc. and then, of course, also across borders... that one perhaps discusses... relations between countries...how are things with the EU." War, in this group, is related to relations between countries and not projected to persons, such as politicians.

4.3 Levels of integration

The level on which interviewees consider themselves politically involved is, of course, closely associated with the topics affecting and occupying young people. Whether this sense of integration is on a local or more on a global level, however, not only depends on the topics but also on the opportunities that interviewees see for themselves. School represents one of these opportunities for young people. School will therefore be regarded as a level offering opportunities for participation.

4.3.1 School

In the discussion group of young women with a higher level of education, in particular, the question of the extent to which pupils have a say in decisions at school was discussed. The majority of participants thought pupils were not sufficiently informed and involved.

"CB Yes, of course, but still you don't really get to know everything. Well, at our school, there are often things pupils don't hear anything about. School life continues in normal fashion, everybody pretends we're living in an ideal world, as a normal pupil however, you hardly get any information about what's really going on, unless your parents are members of the parents' council or teaching staff... ."

The problem in this specific case was a petition on the part of the pupils which was ignored by the headmaster, who thought pupils hadn't really understood the issue. One of the participants (CA) supported the headmaster's view. CA, however, may be regarded as better informed, since her mother teaches at the school. CB may thus be right in claiming that pupils are insufficiently informed about decisions at

school and therefore cannot participate in them. A parallel can be drawn between the arguments put forward by young people in this context and those expressed in connection with "big politics". When talking about "big politics", interviewees also, as already mentioned, felt too uninformed to really take a stand. This feeling thus already prevails on the school level.

4.3.2 Urban and rural areas /"macro" and "micro" levels

The focus group of women with a higher level of education also addressed another important issue related to the level on which young people feel a sense of integration. Four women from a Munich suburb participated in the discussion and debated where it is easier and also more sensible to be active: in urban or rural areas.

Interest in their local area and the events happening there was very evident. In the case of CA, this interest is already apparent when she reads the newspaper in the morning. She and her family like reading the local section about her district, "CA simply because it contains quite a lot of information about our community". Local politics is thus experienced much more personally. According to CA, on a local level "everything is really very personal..., who people vote for, etc. and one does not really fight for a programme but more for a person... And, yes, in our community at least, politics is strongly associated with personality." What CA wants to say is that in a small community, people are more likely to know each other. This leads to the conclusion that individuals tend to be more involved in political processes. CA nevertheless felt that "political participation by young people is easier in urban than in rural areas. In our community, there are local councillors of long standing and you're lucky if one of the parties gives a 21-year old a place on the list high up enough to give him or her a realistic chance of being elected. And this applies across all parties". CA felt that political participation was easier in urban areas, because town people are more open-minded towards new members. The other participants also confirmed that they saw more opportunities for themselves in Munich. In their community there are no political offerings for young people. For this reason, CB is involved in the church, for example, while CA is active in the sports club. The young people interviewed could, however, participate politically in town, since they do not live too far away. They are probably more interested in local events, however, and therefore only considered participation in other local institutions.

Participants in the discussion thought about the different political levels in a concrete manner.

"PC On a higher level, one may not be able to achieve a lot, that is to say if you went to change state or federal laws, but on a small scale, if I think about here, in the city."

Matters such as finding suitable premises for youth events etc. thus concern interviewees more directly than international politics. In this area, discussion participants feel more confident about being able to achieve something.

"PA I think it's, well it's like a sort of key opening doors for somebody wishing to be politically active, too, for slowly growing into your role, starting with small steps, I mean small steps you're able to make and with which you achieve something and then you can go on to larger-scale matters. This, however, is the problem I also often face... that you've got certain goals ... which somehow are on a higher level and then you'd need so many small steps beforehand and this is why you often simply feel completely powerless, because you forget these small steps that'd be necessary in the runup to things, well, that's how it is in my case, anyhow, I tend to forget these steps."

Of course, interviewees did not focus solely on subjects in their direct vicinities. AH mentioned topics on the most varied levels that are important to him.

"AH That's right, a good point actually, it really affects us both on a larger and smaller scale, Ude (*Lord Mayor of Munich, author's note*) decided to close down the libraries... this has affected me directly, because one of the libraries that will be closed down is right at my doorstep...I do not think that's right and the same, of course, somehow applies on a state and national level, to education, for instance, Germany now plans to introduce tuition fees, and I also consider this a bad decision ... and, of course.... on the level of international politics, I mean in the EU, for instance, I think we're facing major changes with the new countries now becoming Member States, for example, this is somehow a major challenge."

There are also voices speaking out directly in favour of a political level and making concrete statements about why they consider this level to be more important.

"AA (...) You should, however, start on a small scale, I mean domestic politics and make a clean sweep there, before starting to expand to other areas and discuss things on a more global scale."

These opinions, however, were all theoretical, since the discussion partners are not politically active, neither on a local nor on a national or international level. To be able to look at more concrete opinions also referring to a person's own participation, the individual interviews must be consulted. The young people participating in the individual interviews also thought about the levels of their political participation.

4.4 Individual interviews and levels of participation

4.4.1 Individual interview E: municipal councillor in a Munich suburb

"No, well for me, participation on a municipal, regional level is more than sufficient. There, at least, I can see when something happens. Well, anyway, that was what appealed to me most in this context that I thought, o.k., I decide on matters where I can really see something happening, there are changes or there are no changes, and I'm not voting on passing a bill etc., where I don't even notice what's going on. My local activities affect me directly. Take construction of the byroad, for example, this is one of those topics where I think I'd really benefit directly. Well, concerning the offices that I hold, well, I'm a member of the main administration committee and of the board of the Youth Trust which is a typical consequence, there we are currently debating reconstruction of the Blue Box, which is our local youth centre, um..."

4.4.2 Individual interview F: former member of Edmund Stoiber's election campaign team

FA is active in the Junge Union (JU), the CSU's youth organisation, in a district of Munich. According to him, his key motivation for joining the party was the possibility of building up a network of persons whom he would otherwise not get to know. JU also works on a regional and local level. FA is not very interested in these activities. He says: "A waste of time may be the wrong expression, but I think one could focus one's activities differently, somehow... this Pan-European Union, for example, this is very, very good... a union of young people, there, I think, one would have more of a choice of putting one's energies to good use in some way or other in order to achieve something. But I only know political activities from my work in the JU and there I see relatively few opportunities of being able to move things, that's why it's uninteresting."

FA has always been more interested in international and foreign affairs.

"Yes, well, what I've always been interested in is foreign affairs. Well, Germany or Europe as a whole, also the world, that was very interesting, this was also connected ... with my interest in history...and goes back to Bismarck and his foreign policy, well, that's what I've always been interested in, international affairs..". FA focuses especially on the United States of America, as he spent six months there.

All in all, he considers local and municipal politics rather unimportant. Although he was very interested in hearing about the young municipal councillor also interviewed by the researchers, he spoke almost disparagingly about her council activities. He does not consider this "micro" level significant enough.

"Well, I'd like to tackle and deal with important subjects, subjects that I consider important, I mean, important for a German *Land*, for oneself, for Germany or even the EU or whatever you want to call it, I mean goals that are a bit higher, I would like to tackle them and achieve something there. This is probably much more difficult, one may have to deal with more 'encrusted structures', red tape and, yes, even opposition, but that also holds a certain appeal, to "get things moving" there."

4.4.3 Individual interview G: Greenpeace activist

GA, too, is less interested in local politics. Her motivation, however, is different. GA is more interested in "(...) global politics. Well, even more international affairs, which affects me most..., because I think, o.k., the social reforms they're in Germany, they are also important, of course, but, I, what is most on my mind and interests me most is international politics, where I have the feeling.... certain conflicts, for example, trouble spots, that's what, yes, occupies my thoughts a lot. I mean, much more than social reforms, for example. I'm not very interested in the local level, um, well, urban planning, of course, is interesting, but there's so little happening somehow. Well, I don't feel that in Munich there's a large field of action in this respect, that a lot is being achieved ecologically-wise in urban planning, there may be a few achievements now and again, that's right, but that's not what I'd be normally interested in."

4.4.4 Individual interview H: former school-council representative

HA had enjoyed her position as school-council representative very much and learnt a lot. However, the researchers could not discern strong motivation on her part to exert an influence on a higher level. While she was a school-council representative, she could also have moved on and become a district representative. This position, in which she and other district representatives would have decided on Bavaria-wide issues, seemed too strenuous, to be with too few benefits. In her opinion, she would not have learnt as much on this level.

HA can imagine becoming politically involved in her community, but, so far, she has not tried to intensify her political participation. HA thus did not have much to say on the topic of Europe, for example. In other words, she had not yet thought about this specific higher level at all, for example.

What is noticeable in this context is that the sole male interviewee is very purposeful in his thinking and actions. He wants to achieve something and considers the local and communal level too unimportant to do so. He wants to be successful on a higher level and does not want to bother with what he sees as "minor" problems.

Two of the politically active female interviewees are completely satisfied with their offices on a "lower", viz. local level. The young municipal councillor EA is pleased to see the concrete success of her actions. She does not wish to pursue any higher objectives and orients her life to her local office. HA, too, was content with her office as school-council representative and was not interested in taking on more far-reaching tasks

GA, like FA, is also more interested in international and global affairs, but her motives are different. She focuses less on personal success and achievement of personal goals and concentrates more on the feeling of being able to bring about changes. She wants to help and "change the world", but her own career is completely unimportant in this context.

It would have been highly informative to continue research into this matter. Are such differences also evident in studies conducted on a larger scale? Do men tend to pursue higher objectives when it comes to their careers? Why do women tend to be more satisfied on a local level? Do women focus more on the community than men when it comes to politics? Unfortunately, all these questions cannot be answered on the basis of the available data.

4.5 Voting as an opportunity to participate in politics

As already mentioned under 4.2.1, the opportunity to vote was regarded very critically by some. Although a certain amount of importance is attached to voting as an expression of one's political attitude and way of participating in politics, in the opinion of the young people interviewed, there are a number of arguments in favour of not going to the polls.

4.5.1 Participants with a lower level of education

In discussion D, held with young men with a lower level of education, 'election fatigue' was particularly evident. Hardly any of the young men interviewed said he voted.

"DC I would not go (*to the polls, author's note*), because I don't really like any of the politicians. These blokes are the ones that cause all the wars."

DA, in contrast, thinks that there is no point in voting.

"DA I wouldn't vote, because...whoever I vote for, you know, I don't really understand the whole scheme and everything, because I'm not really interested in what politicians are doing and so, in the end, one thinks nothing comes of this anyhow, because, regardless of who you vote for, they all promise a lot, you know, and after the election it's always the same, nothing happens. That's why people are not interested in voting and don't even bother to go to the polls."

This again clearly shows that, to some extent, young people feel that they do not know enough about the subject to participate. Additionally, they do not trust politics and for this reason do not participate.

"DC After all, most people haven't got a clue, have they? Well, I mean I haven't got a clue. If somebody came and said, come on vote, I'd say what should I vote for, I haven't got a clue anyhow, nobody has ever explained anything to me, I mean, what it's actually all about, yes that's right, what it's all about. Okay, somebody's elected, oh, but that's all I know."

At some stages in discussion D, the participants' ignorance became obvious. DC, for example, asked the other participants whether voting is actually compulsory. A brief discussion ensued and participants agreed that voting is voluntary. DA justified the fact that he does not vote as follows: "I'd rather leave it up to people who are really interested and so on, adults, you know, because they, they concentrate on what candidates promise, but, I don't know, when you're only 18...you're not interested in these things and....it's pointless". DF, too, thought only people who actually know what's what should vote. DB also agreed with the other participants: "(...) if you haven't got a clue anyhow and you're not interested, why, before I'm forced to put a cross next to any odd thing, I prefer not to vote at all".

4.5.2 Participants with a higher level of education

Almost all of the participants in the groups with a higher level of education claimed that they voted, although they were also sceptical to some extent. AC, for example, said that it was actually unimportant who one voted for, because none of the parties fully reflected and represented one's own opinion.

"AC Yes, it doesn't matter. Well, I am, I definitely vote, because, otherwise, I would not be entitled to join in, but, well, I really think that when all's said and done, it doesn't matter, only, I want to vote for those people who are less 'crappy' than the others, I mean, people who somehow share my political orientation."

Although CD himself goes to the polls, he can now understand those who don't. He can well understand the argument that these people "simply do not trust any party anymore".

"CD (...) no matter what I do, I somehow always have the feeling that my trust is being abused somehow, before the election they promise this, that and the other, and after the election, well, somehow it's always the same. Well, anyway, I really understand those people ... who... at some point become completely frustrated and then simply say, well, why should I... ?"

This view is that taken by quite a few participants in almost all discussion groups.

Participants with a higher level of education, in particular, nevertheless agreed that it is important to vote.

"PA In elections, I vote or every single person votes or every single member of a nation makes a contribution to electing the party or representatives who are... probably... the most suitable given his opinion, lifestyle and personal interests And, ahem, diversity in a state, I think, helps achieve democracy."

PB shared PA's opinion. Additionally, PB felt that voting patterns allow conclusions to be drawn regarding voters.

"PB I think, first of all, that elections are the basis of democracy, and, secondly, that elections, in particular, allow the political interest or behaviour or the political views of voters and the people to be measured. Because, on the basis of voting patterns, it is easy to judge, well I'm not even talking about conclusions regarding the parties here and who is elected, but how people vote, I mean do I vote at all? Is my vote based on a personal liking? Do I vote out of conviction or as the mood takes me?...I mean, I think this is decisive for political behaviour, political participation."

According to CA, an individual's level of education is also important for this form of political participation.

"CA Well, I rather think that this is more dependent simply on the level of education....what school I went to."

Our interviews confirmed CA's assumption to a certain extent. In CA's opinion, people with a low level of education, in particular, are simply overtaxed by elections: "I think that many of them cannot handle this at all. If you have never addressed this subject, if it has never been talked about at home".

CE, who attends a Gymnasium, however, also admits that in her first local election, she had problems with the situation in the election booth.

"CE At first, I was shocked when I unfolded the thing (*ballot paper, author's note*), there was this huge thing in front of me, I thought this must be a bad joke, the election booth is so small and the thing in front of me was about as big as the booth, um, well, I mean, the people there didn't really tell you much and then you

more or less decided, yes, o.k., this is the party I'm going to vote for and this name sounds quite nice."

Participants also cited other factors, however, that make people decide to vote or not to vote. CD, for example, thought that many people simply find it too much effort to inform themselves prior to an election. The discussion partners also admitted, however, that they find it difficult to prepare themselves adequately for the election.

"PF (...) but I also find it quite strenuous and you really have to invest a lot, you know, to stay up to date somehow, to know what's going on and you should actually read the paper and so on, and you don't really have time to do so."

CB also thought that some people are simply too lazy to go to the polling station on Sunday. CB also believed that younger people, in particular, "have other plans, somehow" on Sundays.

Basically, the theme of elections seems to be a difficult one for young people. They realize that voting is important for the functioning of a democracy. Most young people, however, also know that it is not only important to go to the polls but that you also have to be sufficiently informed. Without the requisite knowledge, many young people do not feel able to vote. Acquiring the necessary information and knowledge is experienced as "not easy" and "strenuous". This dilemma is valid for almost the entire relationship between young people and politics. Young people are aware that it is important to join in and play an active role, but, at the same time, they do not feel entitled to do so because of their lack of knowledge.

The only real difference between participants with a higher and a lower level of education is that participants with a higher level of education tend not to surrender their responsibility as quickly. They affirm that they always vote and, in so doing, try their best to do the right thing. However, they are not absolutely sure of themselves. Participants with a lower level of education, in contrast, admit their lack of knowledge and take the offensive by quoting it as a reason for not voting.

4.5.3 Discussion on voting age

In the focus group of women with a higher level of education, the subject of voting age was discussed very intensively. This group also addressed parental influence on young people's voting habits to a greater extent than the other groups.

Regarding voting age, young people took various stands. One party was in favour of lowering voting age to 16 years, while others were in favour of keeping the voting age at 18 years.

CA spoke especially vehemently in favour of keeping the voting age at 18 years.

"CA All I can see is that, at 16, you're still in the middle of your personal development and that, at 16, your thoughts are somewhere else completely and, at 16 and 14, you're at a hell of a difficult age when you don't even know yourself where you stand and I think that at 18 you're simply more aware of such things than at 16."

She thought that at 16 young people can be influenced very easily, while at 18 they tend to be more mature and ready to take on duties.

"CA And at 18, considering all the other duties that lie ahead of you, you're far more mature in terms of your personal development and you're slowly outgrowing adolescence; I think that at this age you're far more likely to cope with something like this." "Take for example boys and girls, are they really intellectually mature at 16? When I look at my brother, he's 15 going on for 16, I wouldn't allow him to vote now, because he can simply be influenced far too easily. In my opinion, many young people can be very easily influenced at the age of 16 by their parents, the media, school, by everything."

CD supplied an argument in favour of lowering the voting age: "Well...I think that you should have the possibility... you don't have to take advantage of it; if you don't, not much is lost, I think. But I believe that somebody who is interested in politics at the age of 18 is mostly already interested in politics at 16". CB, too, thought it would be of advantage if young people could vote at 16 already. She thought that, in this case, politics would be more interesting for younger people, too. "At least, I think, politics would then be more exciting, even at 16,... I think that in this case it would have to be more discussed in school, too, so that 16-year olds also have more of an idea, but I believe that you can actually make politics more rewarding for 16-year olds... because then you can play an active role, by voting,... and I think, if this was the case, you would be more interested."

Both parties agreed, however, that school plays an important role when it comes to the subjects of politics and elections. Those in favour of lowering the voting age to 16 admitted that school, in this case, would have to prepare young people in a more targeted manner for this subject. They criticise the fact that not enough importance is attached to the subject of social studies at school. The young women attending Gymnasium³ considered it important to lay more stress on this area, above all, for pupils attending Hauptschule² and Realschule⁶. They are, however, also dissatisfied with the instruction they receive in this subject at Gymnasium.

⁶ Secondary school leading to intermediate qualifications

"CD: (...)I consider it incredible that, in a democratic state, you have more lessons in religious education and mathematics, I mean really nine times more religious education than social studies."

Interviewees thus agreed that both for 16- and 18-year olds it would be an advantage to learn more about politics at school.

"CB But I think that's the problem among both 18- and 16-year olds, ...I think that many 18-year olds, too, know relatively little about politics... well, I think, school really should do more in this area, encourage students a bit more to formulate political demands and objectives, simply provide more information about what's going on and call on students to educate themselves..."

The key problem of young people being too poorly informed also applies to and dominates this subject area. Young people might be more active and participate more, if they were better informed. Of course, the question of why they do not inform themselves remains unanswered. There is no lack of media offerings. However, it seems likely that the media offerings are not transparent enough for the young people interviewed and that they cannot judge which statements in the media they should believe and which they should not believe (cf. comments about young people's critical attitudes towards the media in section 4, theme 2).

5 Section 4: Theme 2 – 'Organised Activities/ Participation': Activities Apart from Political Participation

The young people interviewed did not talk in detail about their leisure activities, either in the focus groups or in the in-depth interviews. Some of them stated partying and playing music, dancing at youth clubs and also singing and rapping.

The group of young women with a higher level of education discussed to what extent political participation was possible, at all. The women argued that as soon as their lives – school and friends – began to be oriented away from their village area (Munich catchment area) and towards the city, they would be excluded from the village community, including the possibility of playing an active role there.

"CB (...) that you no longer have any chance of really getting a hold there."

The church and sports clubs, where social behaviour, such as interest in community concerns and acting unselfishly are trained, remain as potential fields of activity. Such behaviour is also a prerequisite for possible political participation.

"CE This does not really lead to political participation but you are more socially committed and you develop a different type of social behaviour, you know (...)"

"CE Yes, that's what I'm saying, its social commitment, it leads to the development of different social behaviour and this, I think, may give rise to political participation."

Young men with a higher level of education, in particular, consider it highly important to talk with their peers about political subjects.

"AC I consider it very important to talk with somebody about things, I think that it's important and rewarding, simply, that everybody is aware of the fact that many things are not right, yes, that in the first place, and then simply that, yes, that one talks to people about these concerns, that is, well, I don't know whether you can call this politics, but I think it's important."

"AI It's politics in so far as you're confronted, in the ideal case, with other arguments and have to defend or possibly change your point of view and thus either reinforce or change your opinion as the result of other people's arguments, well, in this respect it's most certainly politics; how far, well, how far such discussions move out of your personal sphere, your circle of friends, is another question, of course."

Groups from both education levels shared the opinion that they have few possibilities of influencing matters. The young people with a lower level of education concluded from this fact that there is also no point in talking with their friends about politics, while young people with a higher level of education consider talking about politics with their friends an important route towards forming their opinions.

"BH Yes, from time to time, we talk about it, but then you mostly get so upset, you know, that you stop immediately, because, there's nothing you can do anyhow, it only makes matters worse, and why should one even bother..."

"BF I actually think it's quite good if you don't talk too much about politics, because it drives you mad thinking about it, because you can't....well, politicians don't know themselves what they're doing, because they do something and then they think it's no longer right and then they say, well, we'll do it the other way round, and, yes, I think it's a good thing, if you don't (...) talk that much about it..., that it's not a topic of discussion among young people."

Discussions on political issues among friends generally take place among people sharing the same (political) opinion.

"AC You don't have to hide your opinion from your friends then, because actually you all share the same opinion anyway. I mean, you don't have to struggle to find an argument, because everybody roughly knows what's involved, anyway. In this respect, no constructive discussions take place, but you exchange views and I find this, in itself, important and good."

"PD I also think that in a circle of friends one can see a certain political orientation, well, I myself hardly know anybody hanging out with people who have completely different attitudes and political opinions. I mean hardly any, let's say very left-wing people will hang out or be friends etc. with ultra right-wing people, well, politics also plays a certain role in this context."

Generally, information about politics is obtained via daily newspapers (which are frequently regarded as too comprehensive, however, even by young people with a higher level of education: "CD: Well, I personally, for example, I'm not really keen on daily newspapers, I'd have the feeling of being too much, well, of having to read it on a daily basis and then I feel I don't really have the time to do so".), print magazines (e.g. Spiegel), television, here mainly via news broadcasts, and the radio. The Internet is hardly used at all for information purposes, since there is not enough confidence in reporting there.

"CE Well, not necessarily to inform myself about news, because, well, I don't know, the news you can read there, at least some of the news there is really very, well, let's say "shaky", because, one minute you read something and then you click to another site and read more or less the same heading but the contents are completely different and then you think, well, hang on a minute, I just heard the complete opposite of what I'm reading now. And that's why the Internet is somehow, yes, "shaky"."

The group of young adults with a lower level of education also said that they "informed" themselves "in the street", "in the underground" about politics.

"BA You can also hear that often in the streets, people talking about the fact that nobody gets anything done"

Generally, participants across all groups doubt the credibility of reporting by the media. In this context, the fact that young people form their opinions on the basis of media contents is seen as a problem.

"AC This is the big problem of the media altogether. Everybody uses the media to inform themselves and the media focuses in its reporting on certain opinions tending to prevail in the respective editorial department, for example, or on certain topics that sell well (...)"

"AC But that's just what I think that opinion, I mean our opinions, are, in turn, shaped to a large extent by the media and that the latter are also often not really convincing."

"CD (...) Well, I find this media-created opinion especially negative. Perhaps many citizens don't even see it in such a negative light as I do, I don't know. It's always a question of the extent to which the media actually represent what people think."

Young men with a higher level of education regard analysing political subjects in discussions (with the peer group) as an important process of active opinion forming in contrast to the passive consumption of readymade opinions and points of view. They call this active process "politics".

"AA But, I think, you just addressed a very important issue here, that is to say, politics is, or should be, an active and not a passive opinion-forming process. "Passive" meaning you sit at home, in front of your television set or with a newspaper and are constantly spoon-fed by the media, so to speak, and then you form your opinion on this basis, because it's a kind of readymade set of answers that you simply absorb. Instead, you should exchange views with others and then

simply weigh up this basic knowledge because this will lead to completely new ideas and opinions and that's what politics is for me.“

6 Section 5: Theme 3 – 'Politics/ Democracy'

The first thing that strikes one, when one is analysing the interviews is that the young people interviewed used the terms "politics" and "politicians" almost synonymously. They thus define politics and political action almost exclusively as "party politics". Even large, internationally known and active non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as Greenpeace, amnesty international or attac, were not seen as vehicles for exerting an influence on politics, or only after prompting. Informal groups and new social movements, such as civic action groups and peace initiatives, are not recognised as political players at all. Additionally, politicians, as such, are associated exclusively with male persons –by both male and female interviewees. In view of the fact that young people, as mentioned above, are fixated on the party scene, as far as the term 'politics' is concerned and in view of the parties' personnel structure, this is hardly surprising, however.

Most of the young people interviewed quote negative characteristics when asked about politics. In their eyes, politics is boring and dull, incomprehensible; half-truths, if not even lies, are told; politicians tend to manoeuvre, lack a clear stand to achieve re-election, benefit from their positions and feather their nests.

"AE (...) I regard politics, political, as something that cannot really be tied to clear statements etc., as something where you're actually sometimes led astray (...)"

"DH Because politicians do have to cheat people to get into power.

"DC Well these blokes, um, they just want to be elected and they say, yes, I'll do this, that and the other for all our citizens and for blah, that's why the word lie is very appropriate. Most of what they say never gets done anyhow."

Those of the young people interviewed who are active members of a political party confirm this impression literally from the inside.

"FA (...) all this power struggle in the background. The fact that you constantly have to re-position yourself, that you always have to be careful what you're saying, it's the same in business and industry, but(...) Yes, above all, the matter is, seen from a purely pragmatic point of view, if you back the wrong horse, let's say politician A, for example, who is then ousted by politician B, then other troops come into power, and you're left out in the cold (...)"

Even young people with a higher level of education criticise the fact that political statements are often incomprehensible and resignedly compare "politics" with the deliberate deception of citizens in order to maintain one's own power.

"AF Because mostly you don't even understand the words they use, well, in my case anyway, they use words where I haven't got the faintest idea what they really mean, what they really want to say with these words (...)"

"AG The sentences spoken by politicians are mostly open to interpretation, I mean, a sentence open to twenty different interpretations, there are always gaps where different people, persons have understood different things, I think politicians do this intentionally, they don't want us to know what they actually mean, so that it's always unclear, what they want to say (...)"

"AH Again and again I'm fascinated by what goes on, when you see them sitting in talk shows, etc. and they're asked a very clear question, yes, they could simply answer with one sentence but then they waffle on and on, and talk for five minutes, but they don't really give an answer, I don't know, somehow this is..."

"AE That's politics"

Self-critically, the young people interviewed admit that the comprehensibility of politics also depends on how well one is informed oneself. Insufficient knowledge of political facts and contexts, in particular, is referred to as one of the key barriers to political participation by many of those interviewed.

"CB Yes, I also think the fact that politics is boring is very closely connected to the fact that you don't really know anything about politics. You sometimes learn a few things here and there and if you then hear something about a highly complex tax reform, that you don't understand anyway, and then you hear ten politicians talking about it, and each of them says something different, then it's always the same and I also think, okay, it's not really very exciting, but if you always stay on the ball and keep up things and consequently also know about, or know more about, what's going on, then it's not so boring, I reckon."

The interviewees also criticised the "ageing" of politics, which does not offer any topics for young people. However, the young people do not draw the obvious conclusions from criticism, viz. they do not become active themselves. Instead, they assume the role of passive observer.

"PD I think, they have difficulties in identifying with politics, because, after all, well let's say roughly 90% of politicians are no longer young and you only see them on television and then you hear again and again from your parents or you read in

papers that this or the other reform has failed and you think "Um, what's going on there?", and you don't really find a point where you think, yes, I need to do something here or I'd need to be more interested etc., there are simply no incentives..."

"BK Politicians should be a bit younger, perhaps, younger people would be more committed, more enthusiastic and more ... somehow, I don't know, perhaps they would get more involved than those who are a bit older (incomprehensible) but younger people may have a few more ideas and may identify more with younger people... because we don't really have much of a say. We read about it in the newspaper and watch it on television, well, I don't know a lot about politics."

High moral standards are expected of politics, which are not satisfied in the young people's eyes. Disappointed, the young interviewees describe how former idealist principles are sacrificed to stay in power. Parties thus become shapeless.

"AC Power also means, above all, that principles are lost, because you simply have to pursue completely different policies, political goals, when you're at the forefront, on top, well, then you can no longer ... your former principles...then you can't go on governing somehow. You can see this effect in the Green Party, the Green Party now simply engages in the same kind of politics as everybody else, how, that has nothing to do with it, only that somewhere underneath there is still a principle, yes, we're still 'green' somehow, but, in a way, I think when all is said and done, it doesn't really matter anymore "

The fact that the young people interviewed saw themselves as having little scope for influencing politics was clearly evident across all levels of education. The negative image of politics is also partly due to the idea that it is open to corruption and can thus be manipulated and roped in. According to the young people interviewed, influence can only be exerted by people with sufficient financial resources.

"AH Yes, well, I think that's a very good point; it has already been mentioned that business and industry are incredibly powerful and, well, I think, considering what one hears and reads, their influence is really, really unbelievable, the individual citizen, after all, does not really have such a strong lobby, he cannot really get to see politicians, he cannot directly influence anybody or anything, he has voted and that's it".. (...)"

"Getting to see" politicians, direct communication, is desired but obviously so inconceivable that it is put on a par with "a conversation with God". Politics thus becomes something very abstract and unapproachable.

"PF Yes, but even if a decision remained unchanged, it would still be good if reasons were again provided for it (...), to explain why one considers this the right way. So that there was really a kind of interaction (...), somehow there's no communication any longer."

"BF That's just as if you asked, um, how can I now talk to God, it can't be done. So it's not possible for us to sit down with politicians and talk to them (...)"

The group of young women with a lower level of education displays more resignation than any other group in its appraisal of the situation:

"I1 BK has already said that the fact that you, or very many of you, almost everyone, jotted down the word 'war' is rather striking. What's behind this?"

"BH That's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear "politics"."

"BE Because war is associated with politics, because war, in fact, takes place because of politics. You can see it everyday in the newspapers and on television."

Nevertheless, politics is regarded as something that provides structures, as something necessary, despite the following comment: "BK it's poorly organised... "

"BK Somehow, however, I also think, if there was no such thing as politics, if everybody did whatever he or she likes, then there would be chaos, everybody would steal, shops would be open 24 hours..."

"BH That would be pure anarchy"

7 Section 6: Theme 4 – 'Political Participation'

All of the young people interviewed had already been politically active in one form or another. Be it by participating in or even initiating a petition, participating in demos or by voting⁷. Across the board, however, the fact that such political activities were hardly ever perceived as political participation could be observed. Additionally, the young adults interviewed regarded their influence on politics and political decisions as minimal.⁸

Since most of the young people interviewed think that, as an individual, you cannot achieve anything, protest marches are regarded, on the one hand, as a quite suitable instrument for expressing one's opinion. Although their effect, on the other hand, is doubted. Prominent example: demonstrations against the war in Iraq.

"AA I think public campaigns are another point. Take current university reforms, for example, um, student protest marches or other demonstrations in other fields. I think this is also a point where you can simply demonstrate to the general public and to politicians that people are making a move, that people are opposed and, um, above all, where you have the opportunity to shake people out of their lethargy and, um, tell them, look, there's something that's not right, here, join us in the struggle. A point, where you, as was already done in 1968, only against another, um, another background, where you simply, yes, together with a large crowd, can oppose politics and, um, politics soon notices or politicians soon notice that they have to change their political line and that they have to adjust to stay in favour and, um, I think that's one of the key points when it comes to influencing politics. This does not work for individuals, however, I mean, an individual can start the ball rolling, perhaps, but it takes larger crowds to be successful, I think."

"AG And then we're back to the issue of the "art of lying". Um, once politics decides something, has made a decision, politics, I mean politicians, they will do it, regardless of whether 50,000 or 100,000 people are protesting in the streets (...)"

"AC Yes, that was also very clear in the whole Iraq affair. The entire world was protesting and, was it any use whatsoever? None at all, you see."

"AH Well, I agree. One should count how many demonstrations have been held recently, I mean, nothing against demos, I think they're really a good idea and I respect everybody who joins a demonstration, but, actually, it's absolutely frustrating, because it's totally irrelevant, hardly anybody is really interested in

⁷ Re voting patterns see analyses in section 3, theme 1.

⁸ Cf. section 7, theme 5.

protest marches. The war in Iraq really is a good example. It doesn't make any difference whatsoever whether you join a protest march or not. When all's said and done, they still do whatever they want to do.(...)"

"BK Yes, me too, signatures at Marienplatz and so forth. But to stand somewhere with banners, etc. that is (...) only you know from the outset that there's no point."

Young people not only doubt that they are taken seriously by politicians; they are also suspicious of their peers' motivation.

"CD (...) I have the feeling that many people join in without a real reason, well, they don't really know why they are on a demonstration, it's simply, hey, today there's a demo and we have a day off school, or something similar, and then they go there and join in, but, when all's said and done, they don't really believe in the issue concerned, and then when it is a question of being consistent and of perhaps showing commitment beyond the first demonstration, which may not be on a school day, when one naturally benefits from a day off, then commitment starts to flag and I think this is a real pity (...) well, the event aspect plays a bit of a role here and going on a protest march represents a change and is exciting (...)"

Another form of political participation is to provide information which one considers important and which one regards as insufficiently or incorrectly represented in the media. This is described in one case by a student attending Gymnasium, who reports about movable walls at his school on which coverage of current political subjects is provided.

8 Section 7: Theme 5 – 'Opportunity Structures for Participation'

8.1 Focus groups

One argument frequently put forward by politically inactive young people is that they allegedly know too little about political connections and facts. On the surface, at least, they have very little confidence in their ability to assess political facts well enough to aspire and be able to derive personal activities from them. This point is addressed, above all, in the context of voting, an area apparently characterised by major insecurities. Young people are in a dilemma here. They consider it their "civic duty" to vote to the best of their knowledge and belief, but feel inadequately prepared to do so. School is blamed first of all for this situation.

"CB (...) well, that's what I think, it's school, yes, I really think it's school that is simply called upon to do more in this respect, to simply encourage students to formulate demands and objectives, to provide more information about what's going on and to call on students to "educate yourselves, that is to say form your own opinion."

"CD (...)I consider it incredible that, in a democratic state, you have more lessons in religious education and mathematics, I mean really nine times more religious education than social studies, well, when looking at this, you have to ask yourself somehow, what actually somehow... “

"PB I think it would be possible during history lessons, above all, because everything repeats itself, but I don't have any... either, so, I'd say I can actually fully agree with what you said, you know, I haven't received any political education in school. I've never developed any interest in politics either. When I go to the polls nowadays, I really don't vote for a party that I find convincing, but I select certain points of a political programme which I see as important for me or which could be good and I then make my decision on this basis, but not according to which party I find particularly meaningful or good at the moment and I also notice when it's not so convenient... well, last time I missed going to the polls...“

Further arguments which, in the opinion of politically inactive young people, stand in the way of more intensive political participation mainly derive from the negative general attitude they have towards politics in general (cf. section 5, theme 3). Paired with the feeling "of not being able to change anything anyhow", this negative attitude results in a resigned attitude that prevents action.

"AA I also think that there are subjects in all areas, well, you wouldn't really know, or I wouldn't know, at least, where to start, but I think the main point is simply... resignation. One simply thinks, yes, as AH said before,... there have been many protest marches, they didn't achieve much; they were simply, um, symbolic more than anything else, and, yes, then one thinks, okay, it's not worthwhile anyhow, I won't do it, save the hassle, yes, I think this is the main reason, or the main obstacle and this explains why such things rarely happen."

A different tone is adopted, when the young people, looking at themselves, realize that they do not play an active role in the political life because they are "too lazy" or because "they have too many other things to do". This can be observed uniformly across all different levels of education, because, even if people with a higher level of education reflect more about their "laziness", this self-awareness does not change the result, in any way, i.e. their non-participation, at least not at present.

"CD Mm, well, I could imagine that on the one hand, you've simply got lots of other things to do that you consider more important at this stage and that perhaps everything that's got this, well, this touch of politics and of participation is associated with certain concepts, well somehow boring and dull, um, and I, well, I imagine, if you haven't had anything to do with politics or perhaps just because you've had something to do with it, you simply do not wish to become involved that much, perhaps; it's somehow all very boring and you prefer to have your leisure time, I imagine...."

"PB I think it's got a lot to do with laziness, that laziness plays a major role if people are not politically involved or interested. Because, I know people who are far more involved than I am, also among my friends, and I, um, I simply do not feel like it. Well, I don't want to blame frustration all that much, I think you've simply got enough other things to do and enough other things you're interested in and as I don't see any direct effects, in my case it's simply laziness, disinterest. If I wanted to, I could achieve much more in terms of politics, I think."

"DA Yes, and you don't have specific information anyhow. You only hear in the news that you should pay attention etc., but to really pay attention to all the details and so on, we don't do that. Well, I, for my part, at least, I don't, I don't know about the others, but I don't do it, hey, why should I? I can't influence things, why should I worry, I have other things on my mind."

The feelings of not being taken seriously or heard, of not making any difference, of sheer impotence are strong and do not depend on gender or education.

"PA Well, in addition to this, I often feel kind of helpless, simply because you don't really know what it's all about, you feel you can contribute relatively little apart

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from marking your ballot paper with a cross now and again or, I don't know, stand at Marienplatz from 3 pm to 5 pm and... Well, I do do these things, but often it's ...well, I often have the impression that this doesn't have any impact, because, as an individual, I can contribute relatively little to bringing about changes."

"PB (...) yes, but especially when we young people try to participate actively in politics, before we're allowed to vote, I believe we're not taken really seriously, because, well especially in school council or wherever, you can start to develop an interest and become active, but you're not yet allowed to vote, you're not perceived as an adult person and people think, well let them talk..."

"CE (...) And I reckon, we really tried, but we nevertheless didn't get any information and, at some stage, you simply think, alright, all we see are closed doors, let's forget it "

"BH Besides which, they couldn't care less what we say anyhow."

"BA No, really, when you're young, you don't have any rights whatsoever, because everybody thinks we don't know a thing, we haven't got a clue..."

Proceeding from this pessimistic basic attitude, young people dismiss their own ideas as crazy and those who felt they could achieve something seriously doubt the long-term success of their efforts. Referring to the student protest marches against the university reform, held in Munich in early 2004, one of the young women interviewed says:

"CD Well, this is why, at least in this context, I felt you can actually achieve a little bit, but o.k., it's a question of the extent to which it will help in the long run."

The contradiction between wanting to be active, on the one hand, and clearly seeing things to criticise about current politics while feeling helpless on the other hand is seemingly solved by surrendering responsibility to other young people who are more "the type" for political action.

"AH (...) well, in my opinion, the other possibility would be to become politically active yourself, but then it's got to be your sort of thing of course. Firstly, it is extremely time consuming, I think (...)"

"AC Well, one possibility would be to join a party yourself, but then, as you already said, one needs to be a certain type to do so, and then, you know, you have to be very self-sacrificing and simply focus on politics in order to be able to change anything. And that's something you have to feel like doing."

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Being a good speaker and able to sell yourself were quoted as "useful" and necessary qualities. The comment by a young man (FA) who is active in (party) politics and sees political participation from a cost-benefit perspective is quite remarkable. He was contradicted by a politically inactive young woman (CD), who considers selfless thinking and acting as particularly important prerequisites for social and also political commitment. This observation is confirmed by empirical results, according to which women not only put more time and energy into (new) social movements but also apparently do so for other or additional reasons than men.

"HA (...) Well, I do think you have to be able to assert yourself, you also, um, well, I always could and still can talk relatively well, talk to people and that's what brought it all about, that I was simply pushed to the front in a way (...)"

"FA (...) I think the main point is that you want to achieve something, that your personality, that you wish to make something out of something, yes this shaping element, that's important (...)"

"FA Yes, I simply have difficulties imagining it, if somebody is interested in politics but, plainly speaking, never opens his or her mouth and somehow always takes a back seat and never tries to get to the bottom of things. This person is not of any help to politics, but this also applies vice versa, for sure. He will never be happy there, I think. That's also somehow..., I don't think you can get anything out of it yourself, because, after all, because people always also try to act for themselves, not only for others. And it's also very important to understand this element. But nobody does so for purely unselfish reasons; a certain amount of egoism is simply always part of it. And then you have to make a careful decision, you know, when is it o.k. to be selfish and when should you do something for others and engage in social action? But I think it's a question of give and take."

"CD (...) Well, and I think, if you're more used to this kind of thing from childhood on, from home or somewhere else, perhaps because you've got sisters and brothers or perhaps you were born into a family where this kind of thing was a matter of course or whatever, if you're more used to doing things from which you do not benefit all that much, more out of a sense of community or solidarity, well, then I think one is more one of those types who consider it very natural to help out, to be involved in sports clubs, the church or wherever or, well, also, to, um, become involved in politics. And to do so not on a basis of "Hey, that's what I want now, I'll go out and speak up for it this one time" but to do so out of a sense of solidarity somehow."

Young women with a higher level of education, in particular, talked about the structural barriers that make it hard, if not worse, for young people to engage in

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political activities. In this context, they mentioned the traditional party political set-ups that have become firmly established in the individual German *Länder* to varying degrees, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, they quote the differences in opportunities between urban and rural areas. According to the young women, the range of political offerings in rural areas is limited, so that young people have no real choice about where to become politically active. Another factor, which does not depend on area, is that "youth organisations" are perceived as being established for pseudo reasons, so that young people do not feel they are taken seriously enough in their commitment.

"CB Well, yes, what I also believe is that, with us, well what do I mean by 'with us'? Well, in our area, the problem is that those who really want to become active, they tend to do so in the city (...)"

"CA Well, I myself, I live in the country and, well, I believe, as a young person, political participation by young people is easier in urban than in rural areas. In our community, there are local councillors of long standing and you're lucky if one of the parties gives a 21-year old a place on the list high up enough to give him or her a realistic chance of being elected. And this applies across all parties. (...) and it's really difficult. In town, there's also the Jusos⁹ and so on, so that there's simply more opportunities and people are also more open-minded in this respect (...)"

"CA The question is, to what extent can I, in Bavaria, engage in political activities (laughing), against a 2/3 majority, and, well, I don't know, but I feel, regardless of what party I support, they all do what they want to anyhow. Well, for Bavaria at least, this is true. In my experience, it's different in other German *Länder*, where I have friends. There, if you become active, you can actually, at the right age, reach a suitable position where, in general, you even have a say, whereas in Bavaria, you don't stand a chance. As a young person, you can, of course, join a political party but you won't have a say."

"CA (...) In our community they also had something like that, but it's really more of a fake thing, nice that they offer it, but at the end of the day it's pointless. Well, it has not caught anybody's interest really and very few people joined up and, well, the ones that were there, they were allowed to talk, but that was it. Thank you very much for your presence. Well, it's really difficult to get a foot in; it's a bit like a tribe. You're either born into it or you'll be an outsider for life, that's how it is..."

8.2 Narratives from in-depth interviews

As described above, the narrative interviews were held with a young woman and a young man with party functions, a (former) school-council representative and a

⁹ Youth wing of SPD, Social Democratic Party of Germany

Greenpeace activist. Analysis of the interviews reveals two differentiating variables (in various contexts): gender and party membership versus NGO activist.

Both party members and the school-council representative were introduced to politics by their parents. In one case, political discussions were held with the father, a teacher at a Gymnasium, in another case with the mother, a local councillor, or the father, also an active party member. The Greenpeace activist, in contrast, started her political activities to dissociate herself from the adult world (mainly because of frustrating experiences at school). In spite of their political family background, the young people, active in what are more conventional forms of politics, described their entry into political participation as "coincidence". According to them, they became involved in politics by accident. None of them could say that there was a point where they deliberately decided on political participation. Not so the NGO activist. She said she was clearly motivated by the wish to dissociate herself and the clear goal of wishing to change, improve the world.

All of the young women interviewed cite personal, to some extent even empathetic qualities, such as "being a good talker", "being good at organising" or "wishing to help socially disadvantaged people", when they describe what motivated them to become involved in politics. The young man interviewed argues almost exclusively on a cognitive level, describing how, even as a child, he took an interest in politics, was, at one time, a follower of the "idealist left wing" and is now pursuing his professional and political career in a highly targeted manner, having completed various internships with parties and large-scale enterprises.

All four can indeed envisage further active participation, to some extent even a career in politics. While the young women interviewed want to be involved in regional politics, perhaps in prominent positions, possibly mayor, or, still motivated by ideals, to dedicate their time and efforts to environmental protection, the young man interviewed is driven by other motives. He is deliberately using his "party card" to advance his career: "(...) or whether you're a bit more ambitious, thinking to yourself, o.k. what's the benefit involved? Um, well there are really very few people whom I'd believe if they told me they were party members and didn't, at the back of their minds, think of the networking, of getting to know people and of benefiting themselves as well. And yes, this applies not only to the JU but to every other youth organisation of a political party too. (...) Well, I wouldn't really believe anybody who says that absolutely no self-interest is involved whatsoever. But I don't think this is wrong, either."

When asked why they thought other young people did not become politically active, the young interviewees again referred to certain personal traits that are useful:

"FA Yes, on the one hand, there's also a certain amount of curiosity involved. You tell yourself, I'm interested in what's going on and, from the perspective of a

child, that you wish to know how everything works, poke around a bit and find out how everything works. On the other hand, I think, you're also influenced very much by your home. As is normal in families, you watch the news together at night, discuss the news in the family, at least, we always discussed everything at length with my father, sometimes disagreeing with arguments, and that was always very interesting (...)"

"FA Yes, one needs to be very assertive and thick-skinned. That's very, very important. Because it can happen very, very easily that you've backed the wrong horse and then things get pretty rough and in such cases you need to be one of these people who can submit without losing their ideas and ideals."

"EA Well, I also think, either you're a talker, somebody who can inspire others and carry them along, or you stay more in the background and organise things."

9 Section 8: Any Other Themes you Consider Relevant

Within the scope of the EUYOUPART project, the intern assisting in the DJI project investigated the understanding and meaning of the left-right positioning frequently used in empirical studies.¹⁰

"The descriptions of political tendencies, viz. left-wing, middle and right-wing date back to the seating plan in the National Assembly of France introduced in 1789. Since that date, the following seating plan has applied to all parliaments: seen from the Parliamentary President's position, 'progressives' (liberals, socialists, communists) sit on the left, conservatives on the right wing" (Lenk, 1994, p. 11). Even the parties themselves, however, frequently find it difficult to commit to one of these poles. "The large parties in the Federal Republic of Germany, for example (SPD, CDU, CSU), attach great importance to being considered middle-of-the-road national parties" (Lenk, 1994, p. 11). Although one constantly comes across them in political discussions, the terms left wing and right wing are thus not as clear-cut as it seems at first sight. These terms are used in an attempt to make a huge field, viz. that of politics, transparent. Whether the categories left wing and right wing make things clearer for individuals, however, can only be ascertained by means of targeted interviews.

Many quantitative interviews have been conducted on this subject in which interviewees were asked to position themselves either on the left or right wing. In youth surveys, too, such as the Shell survey "Youth 2002", young people are asked to determine their position on a scale. This personal positioning is used to measure the underlying sentiment among the interviewees.

The wisdom of such measurements has also been called in question, however. This is implied in the Shell survey, for example, which says that the categories of left wing and right wing are being increasingly called in question "as categories with a meaningful content". (Shell, 2002, p. 95). Additionally, within the scope of quantitative interviews, the terms left wing and right wing are not defined. An everyday understanding of the terms is taken for granted, although it may well be the case that the terms are defined differently from person to person. In light of the above, it would be important to find out how interviewees define left wing and right wing. As far as the researcher knows, a survey on this subject has not been conducted, however. The only surveys on this subject she knows of are quantitative surveys.

¹⁰ References:

Lenk, Kurt (1994): Rechts wo die Mitte ist. Studien zur Ideologie: Rechtsextremismus, Nationalsozialismus, Konservatismus. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft. Baden- Baden.
 Deutsche Shell (2002): Jugend 2002. 14. Shell Jugendstudie. Zwischen pragmatischem Idealismus und robustem Materialismus. Konzeption & Koordination: Klaus Hurrelmann, Mathias Albert in Arbeitsgemeinschaft mit Infratest Sozialforschung. Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag.

The question of the meaning of the terms left wing and right wing has now been investigated within the scope of the qualitative survey of the EUYOUNGART project in Germany. Participants in group discussions were asked to position themselves on a left-right scale and then provide reasons for their positioning. The scale used in group discussions had a centre, whereas the scale used in individual interviews offered only an even number of boxes.

Amongst other things, it was assumed that young people, when positioning themselves, would also take into account aspects associated with clothing, looks, lifestyle and music. The assumption was that the concepts of left wing and right wing went beyond assignment to a political party and that young people therefore associate these concepts with aspects of everyday life. What was important in this context was whether such an association exists and what is its precise nature. The aim was to uncover these hidden aspects and analyse them here.

Basically, it can be stated that this question of positioning oneself either on the left or the right wing tended to trigger a feeling of unease among all interviewees. None of them wanted or was able to commit himself/herself on the spot and spontaneously. This became especially evident in the individual interviews because interviewees could take more time for their answers there. They all immediately criticised the fact that there was no centre position on the prepared scale. EA, for example, expressed this by stating: "Well, I personally, don't really like this left or right, I'd prefer to simply position myself in the middle".

Generally, interviewees did not really know how to approach the terms left wing and right wing. Some could say which parties they would classify as being left rather than right and vice versa. Individual interviewees were also able to assign basic political points of view to a certain side of the scale. Overall, however, terms were seen as too undifferentiated. In most cases, interviewees differentiated clearly between the two extreme positions, but, as FA said: "... I think, in between, there's very, very much latitude".

In the group discussions, most interviewees thus positioned themselves in the middle, with a tendency towards the left. This also matches the results obtained in the majority of quantitative surveys. Researchers explain these leftist tendencies with the fact that positioning on the right is associated by most with the negative aspects of right-wing extremism. This is a position from which the young people interviewed wish to differentiate themselves. "...well, for me, right wing is connected with the term extreme right wing, well, National Socialism, that kind of thing, that's something I am most certainly not, that doesn't interest me at all " (individual interview G, GA).

Thus, there were more associations with the term right wing than with the term left wing. For most interviewees, right wing was equivalent to Nazis, right-wing extremism and xenophobia. The majority of young people interviewed had more difficulty in assigning meanings to the term left wing "...right-wing extremists, I

know that's what they're called, but I didn't know, that people who are not against foreigners are referred to as left wing" (interview B, BK)

Especially surprising to researchers was the fact that there were quite a few interviewees to whom the terms left and right meant nothing. They even explicitly asked again what this scale was all about. In these cases, the terms left and right were not associated with parties or political contents at all. This case occurred in the group discussions among young people with a lower level of education. Student HA, however, who attends a Gymnasium, could only explain the terms incorrectly: "... well, I haven't yet looked into this left-wing and right-wing issue thoroughly,... so, for me, left wing has always been associated rather with a Nazi background, these leftists" (Individual interview H, HA).

Interviewees also stated clearly that for them the terms left wing and right wing are rather unimportant. A link with everyday life, as researchers had initially suspected, was not established. As already mentioned before, interviewees were rather hesitant to position themselves on the scale and clearly expressed their doubts and unease.

These doubts are not revealed in a quantitative interview using such a scale. Thus, the answers obtained to such a question could be interpreted as an indication that interviewees were sure about their political position, whereas, in fact, left-/right-wing positioning seems to have lost its meaningfulness. Whether such questions re political positioning should be omitted from quantitative surveys in future and replaced by open questions is worth considering. Possibly, more interesting and informative results could be achieved via questions about the meaning of the terms left wing and right wing.

CONCLUSIONS

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10 Section 9: Comparison of Focus Groups versus Individual Interviews

10.1 Recruiting of participants and their interest in the project

One basic difference between the focus groups and the individual interviews is the differentiation between politically active and politically inactive participants, as already briefly described in Section 1.1. In this section, it was already stated that one difference between politically active and politically inactive young people already became clear during the recruiting of suitable participants. Politically active young people were more difficult to "find" but agreed more readily to participate in an interview on politics.

To researchers, the politically active participants of the individual interviews appeared more interested in the subject and willingly described their political development. What was also noticeable was the fact that they were more interested in the EUYOUPART project than the young people participating in the focus groups. Interviewee FA expressed a strong wish to be kept updated on the results of the project.

There was a tendency for politically inactive participants to have to be "persuaded" to participate. This was especially clear to researchers when they visited the Gymnasium. The young people there were rather sceptical and put off by the subject of politics. This being the case, it must be assumed that the young people participating in the focus groups are, at any rate, more interested in politics than their peers who were not prepared to participate.

10.2 Conduct of participants during the interviews

It was distinctly easier to talk about politics for participants in the individual interviews. Each of them could talk about their personal experience and felt relatively confident about the topic. They had already thought more about politics and had relatively firm opinions on most subjects.

In the group discussions, participants had to talk about a subject that otherwise seems to play a minor role in peer-group discussions. The impression that participants had obtained new insights during the discussions with their partners was frequently gained. For some of them talking with their peers about politics for a lengthy period of time was most certainly a new experience.

Overall, however, all participants were very open-minded and cooperative. Both the young people participating in the individual interviews and in the group discussions

showed an interest in the questions asked by the researchers and strove to explain their points of view.

11 Section 10: Definition of Key Concepts and Terms

11.1 "Citizens"

Re citizens, cf. Section 4.1 hereunder in detail.

11.2 "Democracy"

In connection with the term "democracy", what occurred first to most of the young people with a higher level of education was its derivation from the Greek. They tried to reproduce the origin of the word, which they had heard or learnt in school.

"AH It actually means, I think, well, I've never learnt Greek, but "demos", I think, means people and it means something like "the power of the people" or "participation of the people" "ruling of the people..." or something similar..."

"AC Government by the people"

Participants found it harder, however, to describe what democracy means, as implemented in the Federal Republic of Germany, and what it means for them, in particular.

"CE Division of power. For me, somehow, and that one has a say as a citizen (...)"

"CD The government represents the majority, the opinion of the majority of the people"

"DH I associate capitalism with it"

"DH (*Softly, not to the group*) Hey, everybody has a say in a democracy,...."

"PA Via the elections I vote or each of us votes or every single person of a state helps to elect the party or representatives of the people who are the most suitable in terms of our opinions, lifestyles and, I don't know, personal interests, yeah mainly or, probably, above all, our personal interests. And, um, thanks to the diversity in a state, well, I think, through this diversity, we achieve democracy."

"AA Well, yes, but in a democracy you should actually hand over your, um, or at least some of your responsibility and, ahem, all these, um, well, administrative tasks to the representatives of the people, whom one can also elect, and where you thus have at least a minimum of influence, and, well, seen from this point of view, that's how a democracy has to work and well, if things don't go well in a

democracy, well, I know that's easily said now, but, if things don't go well, then you should put your own house in order first and ask yourself whether you're not to blame because you were the one who elected these people..."

"FA Well, it actually does not depend very much on the person, i.e. what you perhaps ... basic political conviction... I think that democracy, as it was handled in ancient Greece, that it's the choice between the lesser of two evils also in relation to parties. (...) But, for me, politics and in this sense, democracy, too, should work without any, yes, colourful personalities, such as Franz Josef Strauß or Willy Brandt or Helmut Schmidt, on the other side. Rather it should represent human reason that it's the only, yes, the only practical solution, but now this is turning into a philosophical discussion (...)"

The old familiar theme that runs through almost all analyses, that is that the young people feel underinformed, also crops up again in connection with the term democracy. The young people interviewed criticise the fact that they are too little prepared, "trained" for democratic action, for example.

"CD Well, what I think is, how is it possible in a democracy that you have (*only*) one year of social studies, I can't understand this at all somehow."

"PB Because, I think, what's missing is simply an overview, otherwise, if everybody voted and if everybody really knew what they were doing, whom they were voting for, well if everybody voted out of conviction, well, I think, then, democracy would,... could function perfectly."

"PF Well, I fully agree. This is exactly the point, that democracy has to be developed and organised, that everybody has to make a contribution. But the good thing about it is, we have a system that we can further develop and organise; the only problem is that most of us are not sufficiently well informed (...)"

Inconsistent with the above is the call for more "grassroots democracy", for which being informed is an absolute 'must'.

"AH (...) So, instinctively, I would see it as a kind of grassroots democracy, meaning you can somehow vote directly on important questions. The way it works in Switzerland, for example; in Switzerland it's really interesting. There, they have an incredible number of a kind of referendum or canton poll, where citizens are actually asked, do you like this or not, and if citizens vote no, then the bill is not passed, and I think this is really brilliant (...)

"AH Yes, but I generally believe that democracy really means more than putting your cross once every four years or something similar. Well, I really think

that each one of us should be asked in the case of very important questions, questions with extreme consequences, (...)"

"AB Yes, I have a similar opinion, I think people can be involved in these decisions. It's not asking too much for people to inform themselves a bit and this would probably also be very well accepted by the population, feeling that you can exert more of an influence."

12 Section 11: Stimuli for Quantitative Work

First, reference is made to the explanations concerning left-right positioning in Section 8. As demonstrated by the investigations on this theme in Germany, young people did not associate this empirical instrument in their minds with everyday life. This fact should be taken into account, at least when interpreting the results of such a scale-based survey.

It also became clear that the young people did not associate non-governmental organisations with "politics". This impacted on the phrasing of questions and/or answer categories.

The place of residence (size and location) proves an opportunity for or barrier to political participation. Therefore, it seems to be important to also include questions on this subject (code numbers).

Young people themselves quoted activities in (non-political) institutions, such as the church or sports clubs, as conducive to developing social skills. In our opinion, this should be taken into account by inquiring about "functions" in clubs, associations or other organisations.

13 Conclusions

In the minds of the young people we interviewed "politics" is a male domain and predominantly influenced by party politics.

On balance, it could be seen that the interviewees were interested in discussing politics but that the majority of them did not see any incentive for political participation. "Politics", parties and politicians are viewed sceptically. Active participation in an area that is considered "dull" and "boring" and associated with abuse of power and lies seems to hold little appeal. Most of the young people interviewed did not have a strong desire to change the criticised structure and situation either. Most of them, for instance, consider it too "strenuous" and "time-consuming" to inform themselves about political matters. The blame for their knowledge deficit, which serves as an excuse for non-participation, is quickly laid on school. The young people interviewed were of the opinion that they would be better informed and thus also more interested, if politics was a more important subject at school. The majority of interviewees across all levels of education agree that they do not get enough political training at school.

The differentiation between old and new politics frequently found in the literature could not be made in relation to the young people interviewed. NGOs, for example, which are part of new politics, were not mentioned by the young people within the scope of these interviews. In addition to NGOs, differentiation in the literature mostly also includes demonstrations among the new forms of political participation. Although young people regard demonstrations as a possible form of participation, they do not differentiate between demonstrations and voting as a form of participation, above all in terms of their effects. Interviewees assess the impact of their possibilities of action as very small. They do not believe in the success of their (potential) actions.

Illegal actions or violence, for example, which are also frequently defined as new forms of political participation, did not crop up at all, either. These forms of participation were out of the question for the interviewees. It could be assumed that young people might consider this kind of behaviour, if the forms of participation they consider conventional were unsuccessful. This, however, was not the case, at least not among the group of young people interviewed. Their attitude is not an aggressive one. They do not wish to bring something about by force; instead they tend to be resigned and simply do not know how they can bring about changes.

Gender-specific differences tend to be marginal and diffuse. The group discussion among young women with a lower level of education, for example, showed a lot of empathy with people suffering from war and its consequences. A glance at the politically active young women and their motivations for political participation also reveals more empathetic, emotional factors ("help those who are weaker") as

compared with the politically active young man interviewed. Apart from the above, there were no further factors indicating more frequent participation on the part of young men, for example, than young women or vice versa. Although the course of discussion differed in male and female groups, this may also have been the result of group composition. To some extent, participants in the groups of young women knew each other better than in the groups of young men. In the individual in-depth interview conducted with the male participant, FA, a single-mindedness can be seen, however, that is not evident in this form in any of the interviews with female participants. Female interviewees want to "do a good job". admittedly but they are not thinking, or at least not openly, about improving their own (career) prospects thereby.

From the German researchers' point of view, a "typically German feature" cannot be detected here. One theme that may, however, be addressed differently in Germany than in other countries is the left-wing/right-wing theme. In Germany, right wing is more frequently put on a par with right-wing extremism. In other countries without historical burdens, this is most certainly not the case.

ANNEX: 1

Overview of the results of the association tests across all focus groups

	Men	Women	Men and women (pretest)
Higher level of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "After the election is before the election" - Right to vote - Elections - Parties - Art of lying - Trust? - Macchiavelli - Lobby - Speeches - Party (mentioned on 2 cards) - Party diversity - Left wing - Right wing - Social balance - Representatives of the people - Democracy (mentioned on 4 cards) - People - Power - Justice - Disenchantment with politics? - USA-Europe - Diplomacy - Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Often boring - Politicians to some extent ignorant - Little progress - Dispute - Level? - Bavaria - Culture - Broken campaign promises - Middle-of-the-road tendency - Protest voters - Elections - Corruption - Controversy within the party - Commitment - Politicians - News 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elections (mentioned on 4 cards) - Voting - White House - Congress - Democracy (mentioned on 3 cards) - Electors - Representatives - Bureaucratic - Fischer - SPD - Coalition - German Chancellor - Ministry - Laws - Ordinances - Local council - Election campaign - Red-Green - Möllemann - German Parliament - Chancellor - Stoiber - 3rd Reich - Globalisation - NGOs - Attac (misspelt in German) - Demos - Justice - Adjustment - Parties frequently work against each other instead of cooperating - Demos to indicate (political) opinion - Taking a stand - Newspapers, magazines (TAZ, Süddeutsche, Junge Welt,

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			<p>Jungle World etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Representatives of the people - Party (mentioned on 2 cards) - Government - In Germany often confusing - Participation - Reforms - Problems - Fringe groups - Society - For the people - Organising - Governs our social existence
Lower level of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pension reform - Health-sector reform - Lies - Complicated (mentioned on two cards) - Different parties - Demo - Voting - Domestic affairs (misspelt in German) - Ludwig Erhard (mentioned on two cards, misspelt once in German) - Foreign affairs (misspelt in German) - War - Decision - Pension reform (misspelt in German) - Minister (misspelt in German) - Stupid people - Rubbish (misspelt in German) - Voting - Confusing - Social market economy - Democracy - Embarrassing - Boring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organisation - Representation - Tax - Money - People - Rights - Human rights - Chancellor - Stoiber - Labour - Egoism (mentioned on 2 cards) - Violence - Power (mentioned on 2 cards) - War (mentioned on 8 cards) - Broken promises } politics - Moves the world - World (mentioned on 3 cards) 	

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ANNEX: 2

List/ tables of personal information of all focus groups and interviewees (see 'personal details questionnaire' form on final page of 'overview')