



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

MYPLACE

Web: www.fp7-myplace.eu

Blog: <http://myplacefp7.wordpress.com/>
Twitter: @ProjectMYPLACE

MYPLACE: MEMORY, YOUTH, POLITICAL LEGACY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

This final policy brief of the FP7 MYPLACE research project involving partners in 14 countries highlights the cross-national research findings and their related implications for European policy agendas

INTRODUCTION

MYPLACE (www.fp7-myplace.eu, <https://myplaceresearch.wordpress.com>) is a 7.9 Million Euro EU funded project, running from June 2011 to May 2015, which uses a mixed method approach across 14 countries to map the relationship between political heritage, current levels and forms of civic and political engagement of young people in Europe, and their potential receptivity to radical and populist political agendas. It focuses on the interconnections between young people's orientations to the past, present and future to show that while their civic and political engagement is structurally rooted in historical and cultural contexts, young people themselves are active agents of social and political change.

Through combining survey, interviews and ethnographic case studies MYPLACE shows the interactions between local, national and transnational patterns of youth engagement and participation and provides new and unique pan-European data sets that not only measure levels of participation but also capture the meanings young people attach to it. Through its holistic focus on the broader historical and cultural contextualization of young people's civic, social and political participation, the project replaces simplistic assumptions of a presumed 'disengagement' from politics with an empirically rich mapping of their understandings and orientations towards local, national and European political spaces. MYPLACE works from this new evidence to identify both the obstacles and facilitators for young people's reclamation of the European political arena as 'my place'. It has significant relevance for European policy agendas, particularly those promoted by the EU Youth Strategy 2010-18.

This policy brief informs of the transnational findings arising from the research and their implications for important European policy agendas. Since only selected key findings of this unique large-scale study can be reported here, the full research reports are available for study and analysis at: <http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/deliverables.php>

Young people in Europe and the ‘politics of memory’

As a result of the research on historical memory it was found that landmarks in family and national events often coincided. The most striking finding is that young people often – though not universally and sometimes with ambivalence - trust family accounts more than cultural sources or official representations. The research shows that historical narratives of the ‘difficult past’ remain influential in forming young people’s attitudes, values and activity today. However this depends on the specific features of national and local historical experiences.

The research, made in cooperation with museum and other ‘sites of memory’ partners in consortium countries, showed that there were distinct political agendas pursued in representing the ‘difficult past’ to wider publics in the 14 countries. Former socialist countries often through state action sought to preserve memories of both ‘problematic’ communist and Nazi eras in order to reinforce conceptions of a more ‘democratic’ and redefined national identity in contemporary times. There was sometimes a failure to be open about national collaboration with Nazi forces (Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Latvia, Estonia, Georgia, Russia). Other sites sought to interpret the difficult past of either dictatorship (in southern Europe) or deindustrialisation and the politics of the Thatcher era (in the UK case) in ‘leftist’ or implicitly critical ways (Greece, Portugal, Spain, UK). Official memory sites in both former ‘west’ and ‘east’ Germany sought to commemorate the victims of Nazi concentration and forced labour camps, and conducted strongly moralist educational programmes with school students. However in former eastern Germany the socialist past is marginalised. And finally, in both Nordic countries (Finland, Denmark) collective memories of war sought to define the origins of contemporary conceptions of national identity, Denmark’s loss of territory to Germany in 1864 and Finland’s defence of it against the Soviet Union 1939-40. There was also a tendency to be ‘silent’ about Nazi collaboration.

The focus groups with young people and intergenerational interviews showed a tendency for them to either be disinterested or distrustful of the officially promoted versions favoured by schools and many sites of memory. There was a tendency to value the accounts of parents and grandparents most; young people, however, do not always accept those views uncritically but actively co-produce them.

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

The survey results showed that the majority of young people considered commemorating the past important. Many young people recognised the importance of the two World Wars, particularly the Second World War, as significant influences on their country’s history. Where applicable, the importance of joining the EU was given almost equivalent importance as the Second World War.

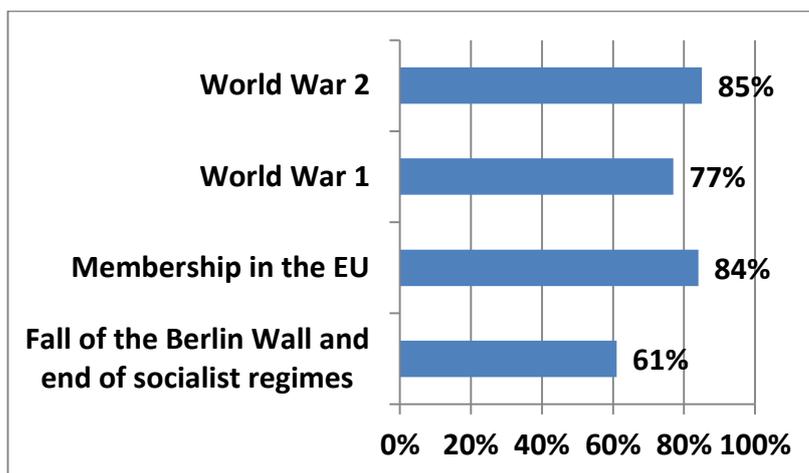


Figure 1. Importance of four events (% saying important or very important)

Young people’s interest in politics and participation in formal politics

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

In terms of issues, young people were particularly interested in, areas which had direct relevance to most young people’s lives - employment, housing and the environment – were of greatest interest, and the European Union, immigration and LGBT rights scored lowest.

Political trust

The average level of trust in politicians is low. However there are significant differences between countries and between localities within them. Considering the results of the survey, young people in Greece, Croatia, Spain and Hungary are the least trustful, whereas those from Denmark, Finland, both parts of Germany and Georgia expressed the most trust.

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

Voting

In spite of generally declining election participation rates among young people the survey found voting to be the most popular form of political participation among young people in the localities across the 14 countries, with 70.3% of those surveyed (and eligible to vote) having voted.

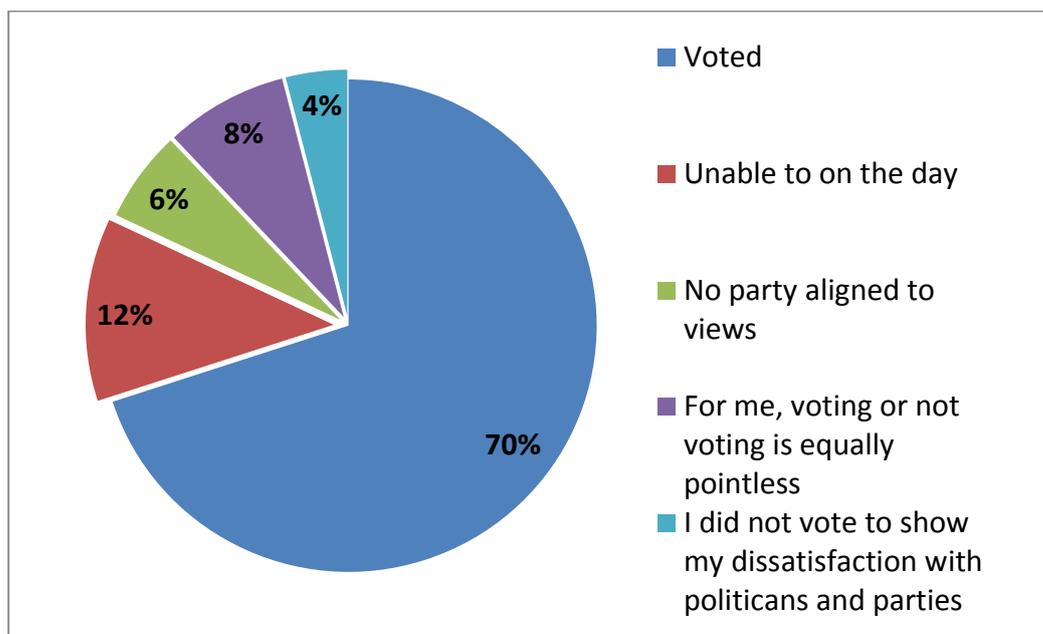


Figure 2. Percentage of (eligible) young people voting and not voting in elections, by stated reason

The propensity to vote is strongly influenced by social structural factors such as class, gender, religion and ethnicity:

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

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

MYPLACE research revealed that young people in Nordic locations (in Finland and Denmark) had the highest levels of membership of civic and political organisations while the lowest levels were found in Mediterranean localities (in Greece, Portugal and Spain), and post-socialist societies (in Hungary, Slovakia, Georgia and Latvia).

Socio-political involvement apart from organisational participation, as measured by 20 different political activities also varied widely. Low levels of involvement were generally recorded in civic and political organisations, with 11 kinds identified including political parties, religious organisations, peace and human rights organisations and anti-globalisation movements. Protest activism was highest in those country locations hardest hit by crisis such as Greece, Portugal and Spain. While social class and educational level are strong predictors for voting, this is not the case with involvement in protest activity.

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

Propensity to xenophobia, far right politics and overall satisfaction with democracy

On the whole MYPLACE respondents held mixed attitudes toward immigrants and were not likely to believe that members of minority ethnic groups made a positive contribution to society. However, attitudes to migrant and minority groups are likely to vary according to country locality. For example, in post-Soviet Latvia and Estonia views towards the significant Russian minority are largely positive. Attitudes to minority groups are more favourable in northern European locations, the two parts of Germany being the most favourable. On the other hand, young people in post-socialist locations, and also those in Greece and to some extent Portugal, express the highest level of negative views towards minority groups and are also more likely to support policies to exclude migrants. In Greece the least trusted group are Albanians. In many locations in Denmark, Finland, Portugal, Spain, Russia and Slovakia the ethnic group most prone to discrimination are Roma.

As a reflection of the above, in Hungarian, Russian and Georgian locations, young people are more likely to favour limiting access by migrants to a range of state resources. Individuals with low levels of education and working class background are more likely to be negative towards minority groups and migrants (however, in Slovakian locations less educated young people from lower socioeconomic groups had more favourable views of Roma). Finally, males are more likely to express hostility to people from minority groups and migrants:

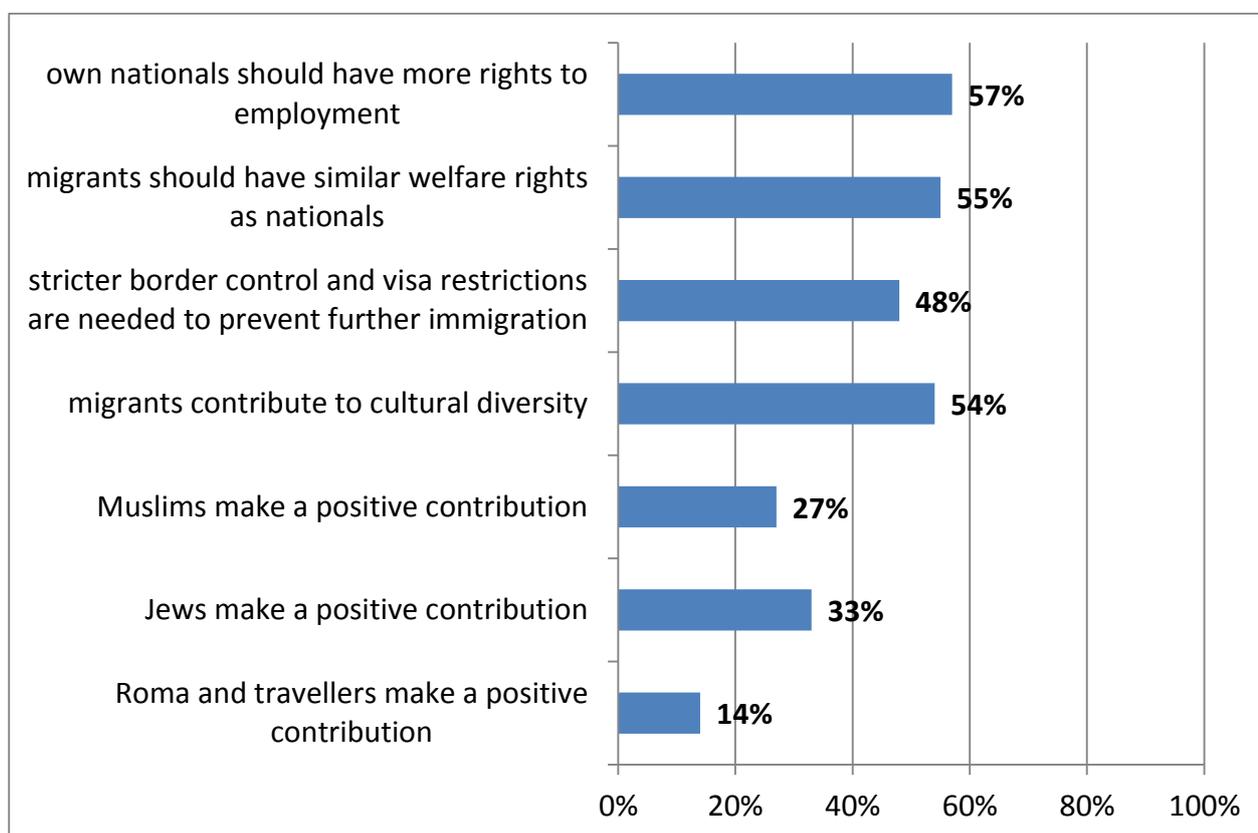


Figure 3. Agreement with statements about immigration and minorities (% strongly agree and agree)

Satisfaction with democracy

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

Levels of support for violence in pursuit of political goals was in the main low, with the highest support found in two investigated locations in Slovakia, Croatia and Russia, whereas the lowest levels of support were in Denmark and two locations in Finland and Latvia.

Females were more often against violence than males.

Young People and the European project

More than half of young respondents reported they were very or quite interested in European issues. There are contrasts between locations in particular countries that reflect wider patterns of engagement or distance from interest in politics.

Trust in the European Commission was slightly higher overall than trust in national parliaments.

Overall the young people were modestly supportive of the view that 'membership of the EU greatly benefits their country'; 49% of respondents agreed or agreed strongly with the statement and 20% disagreed or disagreed strongly.

Young people and political activism: the ethnographic case studies

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

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

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

The Occupy and anti-austerity movements cluster followed a range of movements all of which have challenged austerity and the perceived limitations of current forms of representative democracy. . These include those which, as the Indignados of Spain, and their counterparts the Aganaktismeni in Greece, have led to parliamentary movements for change through Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece. This did not however occur with the UK and Danish Occupy movements.

The cluster on **gender and minority rights** examined a range of movements such as the Indignant Feminists in Barcelona, UK Feminista and the Estonian LGBT movement. Young people active in movements in this cluster emphasised that their organisations provided them with a safe place of belonging and friendship where ideas and practices could be tested out without fear of judgement. The cluster report also showed, however, that respondents felt formal commitments to equality were not always consistently implemented.

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

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

MYPLACE evidence on **participation** provides both good and less good news. Thus while research results do not generally show a 'lost legitimacy' among most young people for political institutions and democracy, much more needs to be done to equip young people with the knowledge and insight into politics that they say they need to enable them to participate effectively.

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

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

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

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

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

With the dominance of neoliberalism at country and EU levels, many young people feel increasingly that they are 'on their own' living in a 'depressing present' with diminished hopes for the future. Thus policy makers need also to deal with the substantive issues associated with economic crisis and austerity if faith in democracy is to be restored, particularly in southern European countries.

Whereas MYPLACE evidence is supportive of the stronger focus of EU agendas on youth, the most important being the EU Youth Strategy for 2010-18, it also raises questions as to whether they can be adequately tackled through dominant economic strategies and soft forms of implementation through the Open Method of Coordination. While young people *have* problems, they are not *the* problem. As the EU Youth Strategy document puts it: 'Young people are not a burdensome responsibility but a critical resource to society'. Thus MYPLACE evidence points to the need for politicians to make more effort to reach out to young people and respond better to the messages coming from the young people who participated in the MYPLACE research. They particularly point to a need for politicians to achieve better outcomes on both procedural issues of democratic participation, and substantive issues of social justice, rights, poverty and equality, both generally and in the way that they impact on young people.

The qualitative and ethnographic research particularly uncovered rich evidence of young people's visions of a better society even where they did not espouse a strong political ideology or advocate radical change in contemporary society. Although the following statements are not claimed to be 'representative', it is felt that there is no better place to conclude this Policy Brief, in the hope that politicians and policy makers will take note:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

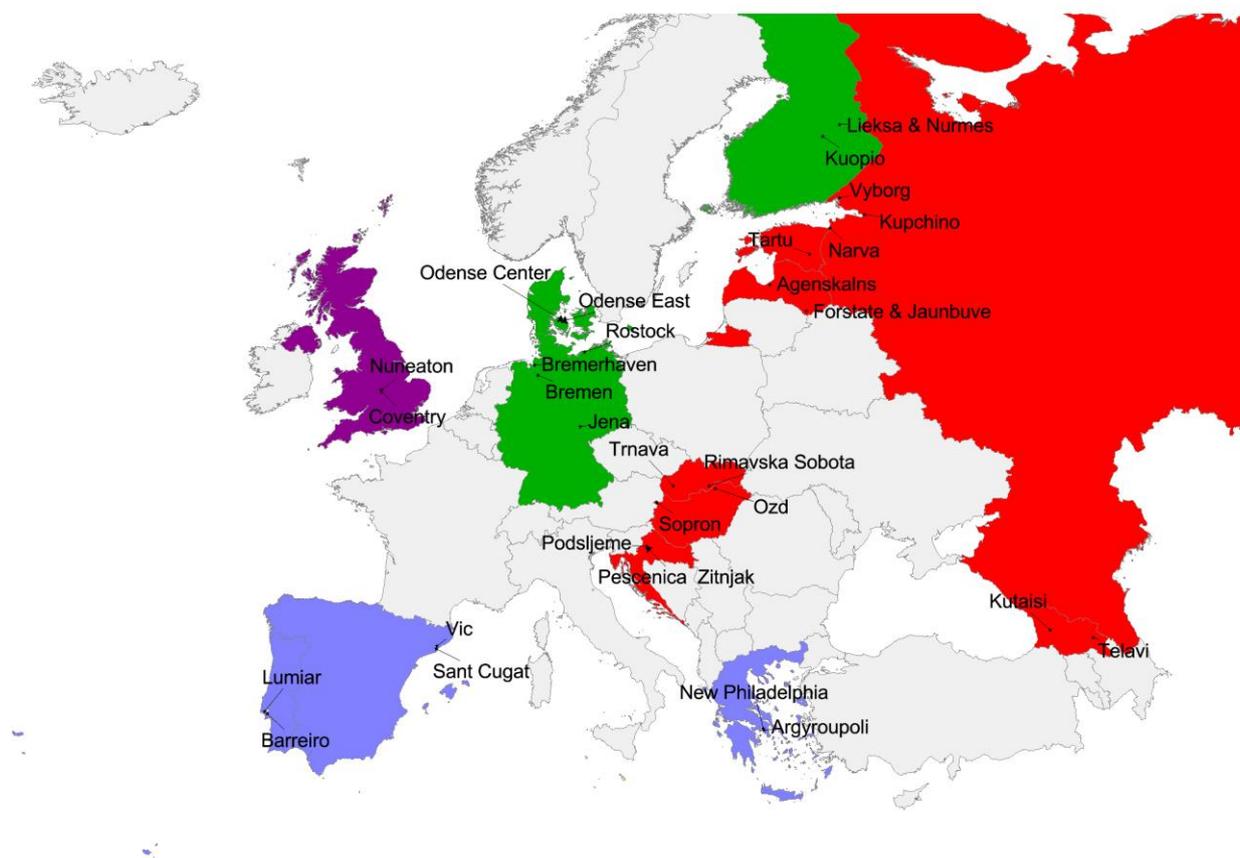
MYPLACE: (Memory, Youth, Political Legacy and Civic Engagement)

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

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

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

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



PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	Memory, Youth, Political Legacy and Civic Engagement (MYPLACE)
COORDINATOR	Professor Hilary Pilkington, University of Manchester, United Kingdom hilary.pilkington@manchester.ac.uk
CONSORTIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Caucasus Research Resource Centre, Tbilisi, Georgia</i>• <i>Centro Investigacao e Estudos de Sociologia, Lisbon, Portugal</i>• <i>Daugavpils Universitate, Daugavpils, Latvia</i>• <i>Debreceni Egyetem, Debrecen, Hungary</i>• <i>Friedrich-Schiller Universität Jena, Jena, Germany</i>• <i>Institut Društvenih Znanosti Ivo Pilar, Zagreb, Croatia</i>• <i>Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, United Kingdom</i>• <i>Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens, Greece</i>• <i>State Institution of Ulyanovsk Research and Development Centre “Region”, Ulyanovsk, Russian Federation</i>• <i>Syddansk Universitet, Sønderborg, Denmark</i>• <i>Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia</i>• <i>The University of Manchester, Manchester, United Kingdom</i>• <i>The University of Warwick, Coventry, United Kingdom</i>• <i>Universität Bremen, Bremen, Germany</i>• <i>Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain</i>• <i>University of Eastern Finland, Kuopio, Finland</i>• <i>Univerzita sv Cyrila a Metoda v Trnave, Trnava, Slovakia</i>
FUNDING SCHEME	FP7 Framework Programme for Research of the European Union – Collaborative project Activity SSH-2010-5.1-1: “Democracy and the shadows of totalitarianism and populism: the European experience”
DURATION	June 2011 – May 2015 (48 months).
BUDGET	EU contribution: 7 994 463 €.
WEBSITE	www.fp7-myplace.eu https://myplaceresearch.wordpress.com/
FOR MORE INFORMATION	Contact: Martin Price (Project Manager) – admin@fp7-myplace.eu
FURTHER READING	All published deliverable reports are available here: http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/deliverables.php