

Introduction

The articles in this special issue are written by psychologists, sociologist and political scientists participating in the European Commission funded project "Orientations of Young Men and Women to Citizenship and European Identity", <http://www.sociology.ed.ac.uk/youth>. This project is ongoing and these articles report first findings. Data gathered during this project capture the views of young adults in the Czech and Slovak Republics on the eve of joining the European Union. It enables comparison of their views with the concerns of their peers in other member states.

The project was designed to explore the views and experiences of young men and women, aged 18-24, in ten sites, five pairs of localities, across Europe. The sites were chosen because of their location in paired regions or nations with histories of interconnection and tension whose legacy may produce different orientations to Europe. These are the city of Vienna in contrast to towns in the Bregenz district in the region of Vorarlberg in Austria; the town of Chemnitz in former East Germany, in contrast to the town of Bielefeld in former West Germany; the city of Madrid in contrast to Bilbao in the Basque Country in Spain; the city of Manchester in England in contrast to the city of Edinburgh in Scotland, in the UK; and the city of Prague in the Czech Republic in contrast to the city of Bratislava in the Slovak Republic. Their linked histories have left contrasting contexts in terms of socio-economic environments and arguably also in approaches to engagement with Europe and the European Union. In four cases, the pairs of localities are situated in two autonomous parts of the same nation state, but never-theless have somewhat different economic circumstances, different local nationalisms, and, it is widely argued, different patterns of engagement with other parts of Europe. Prague and Bratislava were once also cities within a single nation state. Since their separation, Slovakia has had poorer economic fortunes and arguably Slovaks have been more likely to look eagerly towards the European Union, with more fervent hopes that their new membership will improve their new state's economic and social standing.

In each of these ten localities data have been gathered through surveys with random samples of 18-24-year olds who have been resident in the locality for at least five years. The design focuses on people in specific towns or cities rather than drawing samples of young adults from across the whole of the participating regions or nations. This is because it is easier to understand how people feel about 'region', 'nation' and 'Europe' if attitudes to these units are studied in comparison to how people feel about a particular local place. The wish to compare people living in particular local places made it necessary to require that people had lived in their place of residence for a number of years. Hence the project sought those who had been residents for at least five years. In order to further unpack the potential of young people viewing themselves as 'European', comparison with a group of local young people whose circumstances make them particularly likely to be pro-European has also been built into the research design. In each locality, the researchers also sought out a 'target' sample of such young people, for example, students studying combinations of European languages, European law or European studies. The surveys of the random samples and target samples were then followed up by smaller numbers of more in-depth interviews and, in some cases, other qualitative techniques such as focus groups. Relatively little of this qualitative material is reported in the articles that follow in this volume, as analysis is not yet completed. Nevertheless, some of the papers do draw on qualitative analysis.

Debate about the future of Europe is the context of the project. All the articles are engaging with its central aims of further understanding young people's commitments to citizenship and the likelihood of them developing a sense of being 'European citizens' and having a 'European identity'. An understanding of young people's orientations to themselves as European requires analysis of young people's accounts of more local and national attachments including their attachment to their town, region and nation and their opportunities, experiences and views of exercising citizenship at more local levels. The surveys asked about city, region, nation and Europe in a number of different ways. They included questions about strength of attachment to place, naming the city, the 'region', the country and Europe. Questions were also included that asked more explicitly about nationality, for example, by asking about strength of feelings about 'being' a person of a particular region or nationality. There were also questions which asked about the significance of 'being from' and being a particular nationality in terms of 'how you feel or think about yourself as a person'. Taken together, the articles demonstrate how using a range of questions to approach the topic provide greater purchase on the relative significance of city-region-nation-Europe, for respondents.

The articles by Macháček on young people in Bratislava and Prague, and by Grad, Ros, Garcia and Rodriguez on young people in Spain, explore the relationship between national and European identity. Macháček powerfully illustrates the impossibility of understanding the meaning of Europe for young Slovak and Czech people or their attitude to the European Union without knowledge of the histories of the Slovak and Czech Republics. The contrasting opportunities for young adults resident in Bratislava and Prague have led to the former to placing greater hopes on membership of the European Union. It is clear that the experiences of young European citizens in the Slovak Republic after May 2004 will be of particular significance for their sense of European identity, since that identity is bound up with very high hopes of a better life as members of the European Union. The relationship between regional, national and European identity is explored in detail in the article by Grad, Ros, Garcia and Rodriguez focusing on young people in Spain. They show that European identity is not as important as a Spanish identity for young people in Madrid but that for young people from Bilbao being Spanish and being European are almost equally insignificant in importance compared with being Basque.

In all of our sites, more young people express attachment to either their nation or their region than to Europe. The proportion of respondents expressing attachment to Europe was particularly low among residents of Edinburgh. The article by Grundy and Jamieson focuses on the orientation of young people in Britain to local, national and European citizenship. It notes that young people's experience of citizenship in Britain was potentially changed and diversified

when many of the powers of the British state were devolved to a Scottish parliament and a Welsh assembly in 1999. Many commentators at the time hoped that this devolution would result in a long term revitalising of interest in politics and citizenship in Scotland, by bringing the parliament closer to the people. However, comparison of the experiences and views of young residents of Edinburgh, Scotland with the residents of Manchester, England, shows that there have only been relatively modest affects. Scottish young people are more likely to vote in all elections, including the European elections than their English peers and they are similarly more likely to be engaged in civic organisations but not dramatically more so. In terms of voting in European elections, as the article by Spannring, Wallace, and Datler illustrate, young people from Edinburgh still show less enthusiasm than those from the other study sites, including Bratislava and Prague where the right to vote in a European election had not yet even been obtained.

Advocates of a 'Europe of regions' hope that strong regional identities will generate parallel strong European identities. At first reading these two articles by Grad et al and by Grundy et al may seem to suggest that this is unlikely. However, there are also clues that education, knowledge and experience of Europe beyond immediate regional and national boundaries could make a difference and recalibrate regional and European nationalism. Grad et al. notes evidence that learning about the European Union at school, experience of visiting other European countries and mastering European languages contribute to reinforcing a sense of European identity beyond national-regional nuances. This is strongly demonstrated in the article authored by Fuss, Garcia & Rodriguez which focuses in particular on the impact of language skills and visits to other European countries. The authors show that their analysis supports the assumption that a sense of European-ness can be fostered by encouraging the learning of foreign European languages and personal contacts across Europe beyond national borders. A conclusion also supported in the article by Spannring et al.

One of the background debates that informed the study concerns whether a sense of self as a citizen is gaining importance over a sense of self as a particular nationality. Various questions in the survey ask about aspects of what might be described as 'active citizenship' from being willing to vote in local, national and European elections, participating in civic organisations and taking an interest in a range of political and social issues. Comparison of young people's voting activities are made across the study sites by Spannring, Wallace, and Datler. They found that young people in Vienna and Bregenz were more committed to voting than young people from the other cities in the project and that the EU-election was not as low a priority in terms of the hierarchy of when-you-go-out-to-vote as it was in other study sites. The authors suggest that this is a consequence of a higher level of knowledge of the European Union, more language skills and more experience with foreign countries among their respondents than in many of the other study sites. They conclude that knowledge of the European Union, language skills and experience with foreign countries are conducive to interest in European politics.

A number of the articles also show that there is much more to young people's political and civic engagement than whether or not they vote. Spannring et al. show that educated Austrian young people remain engaged with European social and political issues despite cynicism about the capacity of the European parliament to be sensitive to their concerns and doubts about the calibre of its members. Grundy et al. shows that young people in Manchester and Edinburgh retain wide ranging interests in social and political issues despite a more significant disengagement from party and parliamentary politics. Across most of the study sites, a large proportion of young people express interest in a range of social and political issues. Here there was another contrast, however, between young people from the Czech and Slovak republics and all of the other sites with the partial exception of Chemnitz. Fewer young people in the Czech and Slovak republics and to a lesser extent in Chemnitz were interested in a wide range of political and social issues, partly reflecting the very different histories of forms of civic engagement in their communist past of their societies.

An issue that the majority of young people (over 70%) claimed interest in across all sites except Prague and Bratislava (just under 50%) was 'equality between men and women'. In their article, Bianchi and Láštiová explore attitudes to gender in Prague and Bratislava in some detail, exploring the relationship between gender identity and European identity. They report that women in Prague and Bratislava, as in the other sites, are more interested in issues of gender equality than their male peers and are less likely than their male peers to use most gender stereotypes. They also document that women have an associated stronger sense both of their own gender identity and of being European. This leads them to tentatively conclude that women's stronger sense of gender identity is a 'compensatory' response to social disadvantage and that their higher European identity reflects the nature of the hopes they place in the Europe Union for a 'better future'. The relationship between the hopes of young people in Prague and Bratislava and European identity explained by Macháček also has a gendered dimension. The work of Bianchi and Láštiová indicates the significance of EU policies of gender mainstreaming, not only for gender equality but also for sustaining a European identity, at least among women of the succession states for whom a 'better future' involves greater gender equality.

Finally, it is important to note that the project itself is a form of European cooperation that has made new connections between researchers and enhanced academic networks across the territories of Europe. For those who have participated in this project, it has raised our sense of common cause, giving us practical experience of speaking across boundaries of discipline and state. At the same time, it has provided each of us with a more detailed and experiential knowledge of regional and national diversity. Our meetings have travelled around our different localities and we have shared local cuisines and customs as we have struggled with our common cause. Many aspects of the process of working to a shared design and collaborating over our analysis have been difficult but we have remained convinced that collaborative and comparative work across boundaries is worth the effort. Inevitably, our own European identities have been altered and enriched.

