MYPLACE (Memory, Youth, Political Legacy And Civic Engagement)

Grant agreement no.: FP7-266831

WP7: Interpreting Activism (Ethnographies)

Deliverable 7.2: Transnational cluster report

Cluster 4 Gender and Minority Right Movements

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<tr>
<th>Editors</th>
<th>Khursheed Wadia</th>
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<td>Version</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>November 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Package</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliverable</td>
<td>7.2 Transnational cluster report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissemination level</td>
<td>PU: Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP Leaders</td>
<td>Hilary Pilkington and Phil Mizen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deliverable Date</td>
<td>31 January 2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Document history

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<th>Version</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Modified by</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>20.01.2015</td>
<td>First draft</td>
<td>Khursheed Wadia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>22.01.2015</td>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>Hilary Pilkington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>30.01.2015</td>
<td>Revised draft incorporating researcher comments</td>
<td>Khursheed Wadia</td>
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1. Introduction

This cluster responds to a number of questions asked by the MYPLACE project. Apart from answering some of the more fundamental questions such as ‘to what extent are young people in Europe engaged in political and civic action’ and ‘in what modes of political and civic action are they involved, this cluster also provides an answer to the question ‘what are the bases (ideology, identity, issues) for young people’s solidarities in Europe today?’

This report presents a synthetic analysis of young people’s activism in six organisations/movements, each constituting a discrete ethnographic case study within Work Package 7 of the MYPLACE project. The six case studies, described further in Section 2 of this report and clustered around the thematic label ‘Gender and Minority Rights Movements’, are as follows:

1. The NGO Helping Hand in Tbilisi, Georgia which campaigns for gender equality, the rights of disabled people and against homelessness;
2. The association Latvia for Tibet in Riga, which calls for an end to Chinese rule in Tibet;
3. The Estonian LGBT Movement based largely in Tallinn;
4. The Indignant Feminists (Feministes Indignades), an ‘assembly’ of feminists which sprang from the 15th May Indignados movement in Barcelona, Spain;
5. UK Feminista, a national feminist organisation in the UK which operates from London;
6. The Ambedkar Buddhist School in Ózd, Hungary, which educates children and young people mainly from Roma communities.

The above case study organisations/movements make up the ‘gender and minority rights’ cluster because: a) they commonly oppose discriminatory thinking and practice based on one or more of the following - gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and religion; and because, consequently, they b) campaign to advance the rights of women or LGBT populations or socio-economically disadvantaged groups or religious minorities or those marginalised on account of their ethno-cultural background and minority status. Therefore, in this respect, the cluster demonstrates coherence. However, the case study organisations/movements are different in terms of the issues with which they are concerned and which constitute their raison d’être and this has presented some challenges in carrying out the meta-ethnographic synthesis.

During the initial implementation of this work package, these organisations/movements were located in the more broadly-conceived cluster ‘social movements’ which included anti-globalisation, anti-poverty, global justice, ecological, feminist, gay and lesbian rights organisations and movements. However, the decision was taken to eliminate such broad clusters among concerns that the huge diversity of organisation types and activities within such broad clusters risked making transnational analysis less meaningful. This gave rise to smaller clusters including that of ‘gender and minority rights movements’. As one of the smallest clusters, initially comprising only four case studies, the ‘gender and minority rights cluster was extended through the inclusion of three more although in discussions preceding the writing up of the cluster reports it was decided that one of the case studies (that of the German Anti-Discrimination Group) would be moved to the Cluster ‘Anti-capitalist/anti-racist/anti-fascist movements’.
While this cluster came to be governed by the more focused twin-themes of gender and minorities, one problem remained; that of maintaining a sample of respondents aged between 16 and 30. This problem was more marked in some case studies, e.g. *Feministes Indignades*. However, it does reflect the findings of political scientists and sociologists that both citizen-oriented and cause-oriented activisms\(^1\) in Europe attract older activists; an average of 46 years for those involved in the former type and 40 years for those who participate in cause-oriented acts (Norris 2003: 11). Nevertheless the problem arises as to what extent one can talk about young people’s activism across the cluster and how far the different aspects of activism are generalisable when a significant proportion (36 per cent of all respondents lies beyond the upper age limit of 30 and when one takes into account the varying respondent sample sizes across the six case studies – 15 or fewer respondents in each of three case studies, 19 in one and 30 respondents in each of two case studies. The section below presents the scope of the data in greater detail.

2. Scope of the data

This section presents the scope of the data which has been gathered and analysed for the D7.1 reports and synthesised here. In addition, it includes a short description of the six case studies which make up Cluster 4.

2.1 Introduction to the case study organisations/movements

The case study organisations/movements composing this cluster are described below. The full report (deliverable 7.1) for each ethnographic case study may be consulted at: [http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/deliverable_7.php](http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/deliverable_7.php).

The NGO *Helping Hand* (henceforth HH) was founded in 2009 in Tbilisi, Georgia. It is an influential NGO whose activities fall into two categories: a) support and advocacy for the rights of women and girls and of migrants (refugees for the most part); b) the development of youth volunteerism in Georgia. In both its advocacy work and that of developing young volunteers HH focuses on issues of social deprivation (homelessness in particular) and disability among the populations it serves. As an ethnographic case, HH offered the opportunity of studying three aspects of young people’s social and political engagement: varying types of activism; how volunteerism is developed in a country where it has no roots and why young people are drawn to it; the extent to which volunteerism in Georgia has contributed to young people’s social and political engagement.

\(^1\) Norris (2003: 5) defines citizen-oriented repertoires as those pertaining to elections, parties and other formal political structures/institutions while cause-oriented actions are related to specific issues and policy concerns and are therefore exemplified by consumer politics (buycotts, boycotts of certain products for political or ethical reasons), petitioning, demonstrations, protests. Norris acknowledges that the distinction between these two types of activism is not clear-cut and that overlaps occur, as in the case of political parties organising mass demonstrations or an elected representative being petitioned about a specific cause or policy issue.
Latvia for Tibet (henceforth LT) is one of many activist organisations which emerged across Europe in 2008, before the Beijing Olympics, when protests and riots swept through the Tibetan capital Lhasa, calling for political separation from China. Thus, LT campaigns in favour of Tibetan self-determination and for a free democracy in Tibet. LT was formed through a merger of three groups: Youth from Andrejsala, a district of Riga (included mainly students, artists and representatives of various alternative cultures in their early twenties); young people interested in or practising Buddhism; and high-profile intellectuals and political figures. The selection of LT as a relevant case hinged on its youth profile; the fact that its members draw parallels between Chinese control over Tibet today and Latvia’s history of submission to Soviet rule; and the firm connection that LT members make between their ideals and worldview of global justice and their social and political action.

The Estonian LGBT movement, based in Tallinn at the Oma Maailma Avardamine (‘Expand Your World’) Centre began to emerge from in the late 1980s although LGBT groups and NGOs were only properly established after 1992 following the decriminalisation of male homosexuality. The LGBT movement in Estonia brings together lesbian, gay and transgender groups whose common aims are the protection of sexual minorities from discrimination and violence and the advancement of equal rights for LGBT populations. While the LGBT movement is organisationally chaotic and ideologically diverse, it has gained strength in the 2000s and these very features make it a case worth studying. As an ethnographic case, the movement allows for the study of multiple sexual identities and different types of activism and also for the study of the interconnections between lifestyle and emancipatory politics.

Indignant Feminists (henceforth FI) emerged in Barcelona, Spain from the 15-May Indignados movement of 2011, combining militancy and the struggle for a feminist space. Their proximity to wider sectors of the population and the fact that they appeared during 15-M movement make them a leading feminist group throughout and beyond the periods of the Indignados’ mobilisation. The FI’s protests and campaigns have centred not only on the gendered impacts of the economic crises since 2009 but also on the prevalence of sexism within the Indignados movement. Not only do they provide a particularly interesting case study of movements or groups in the context of austerity politics but if a historical map of the feminist movement in Spain were to be drawn, the FI can be seen as helping to build the feminist agenda, drawing on past feminist experience.

UK Feminista (henceforth UKF) is a leading feminist organisation based in London. It was formed in 2010, in a context of economic downturn and the election of a Conservative-led government which at once embarked on an austerity programme which hit ordinary women harder than it did men. It is a small, non-membership organisation which supports and provides training and resources for feminist activists around particular issues. It is therefore primarily a mobilising structure. UKF is part of an upsurge in feminist activism which may be understood in terms of waves, the first and second waves being the movement for women’s suffrage over a hundred years ago and the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s/1970s. UKF constitutes an interesting ethnographic study through which young women’s activism may be studied both in the current context of economic austerity and in relation to past UK feminist movements.
The Ambedkar Buddhist School (henceforth ABS) in Ózd, Hungary was established in 2007. Its curriculum and teaching are inspired by Ambedkar, an Indian lawyer, civil rights leader and first Justice Minister of independent India and whose work and life symbolised the fight against caste discrimination and advancement of Dalit (‘untouchable’) rights in India. The ABS of Ózd is located in an area of high socio-economic deprivation and is a ‘second-chance’ school for Roma pupils failed by the state sector. Embedded within the community, the school provides formal education and training to young Roma, advocates for their rights and tries to produce active citizens. As an ethnographic case the school provides a means of studying the transmission of democratic values, the production of active citizens and how young people from disadvantaged and discriminated populations engage with social issues affecting their community.

2.2 Overview of the data

For each ethnographic study, the bulk of the qualitative data was gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which were recorded, transcribed and uploaded for coding in Nvivo; participant observation of meetings and other events related to the organisation/movement being studied which was recorded by researchers in field diaries. In one case only (that of HH), interviews and participant observation were supplemented by a focus group meeting which was recorded, transcribed and coded. In addition, the six case studies also generated a substantial amount of textual (flyers, posters, campaign resource packs, organisation annual reports and so on) and audio-visual data (photographs and audio/video clips of events and meetings produced by the researchers; images, sound and video clips captured from relevant web sites either through screen shots or downloads). The average period of fieldwork for this cluster lasted 15 months, with the shortest being nine months (HH) and the longest 19 months (LT, LGBT movement, UKF).

The data synthesised for the purpose of this report takes the form of:

- Node memos which were produced through the coding (using Nvivo) and analysis of semi-structured interview transcripts and in one case (HH) of field diaries and focus group discussion. For each study, Level 1 nodes, closely reflecting semi-structured interview content, were produced and grouped thematically under Level 2 or ‘family ‘nodes relating to the sections of the interview schedule and to the research questions of the individual study. Node memos contain the description of the content of Level 2 and Level 1 nodes.
- Respondent memos which were generated after each interview took place and which provide socio-demographic data for individual respondents and information relating to the interview context which may influence interpretation of the data gathered;
- Case study reports (D7.1).

In only two case studies were field diaries (produced from participant observation of meetings, events etc.) uploaded to Nvivo and coded but they had not been translated into English and hence were not consulted for this report. It should also be noted that for one
case study (ABS), the only data available for synthesis is the D7.1 report. The table below presents an overview of the data synthesised.

Table 2.1: Overview of data synthesised

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<th>Average no of Level 1 nodes</th>
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<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12 (total 301)</td>
<td>15</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LT</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13 (total 341)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBT Movement</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3 (total 26)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>FI</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14 (total 509)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKF</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8 (total 193)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✓</td>
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Table 1 shows the variation between cases in terms of Level 1 and 2 nodes produced. The number of Level 2 nodes per case ranged from 9 to 36 whereas the average number of Level 1 nodes per case was between 3 and 14.

3. Key findings

3.1 How do young people inhabit, interpret and own their organisations?

This section presents a synthetic analysis of young people’s experiences of being part of an activist organisation and their own understanding of such experiences. Thus, it looks at young people’s perceptions of democratic principles and practice within their organisation, their responses to issues of hierarchy and leadership, feelings of belonging or otherwise vis-à-vis their organisation, their commitment (or lack of it) to the organisation, what they feel they get from being part of a collective, their understanding of how the organisation is viewed by the public and their assessment of its future. Five concepts are derived from the data reviewed and analysed across the cases in this cluster:

- A place where you belong
- Blurry leadership: ‘we are all leaders’?
- Gaining human capital
- Uncertain futures
- Looking in from the outside
3.1.1 A place where you belong

This concept expresses what many of the respondents across the cluster organisations felt; that the organisation or movement provided them with a sense of belonging which lacked in other spheres of their life. The idea that young people who participate in non-mainstream or radical organisations and movements are motivated to do so because it allows them to construct a social identity, thus giving them a sense of belonging in a rapidly changing world of risk and uncertainty is not new and has been explored in both scholarly works and policy-oriented reports (Beck 1992; Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Murer 2011; UNDESA 2003). Much of the literature on young people, political and civic participation/activism which considers and contributes to citizenship-building among this population underlines the importance of having a sense of belonging in order to become agents of change and that being connected in social networks with other young people can provide this. However, much of the literature lacks discussion based on empirical research of how such a sense of belonging is perceived and experienced.

Broadly, belonging was seen as inhabiting, both emotionally and physically, a space (purpose-built and hence long-term or spontaneously constructed and therefore transient) where one felt at ease, safe and where one was allowed to be oneself. This broad sense was captured as follows:

It was so nice to be able to find a place where I could talk with people that I had been meeting at demonstrations and events for many years in Barcelona and with whom I had no ties. We always say that we fell in love ... it was a feeling like that, very much about building a space to relate and be able to talk with our colleagues that had been fighting alongside us all this time ... (Amanda, FI, Spain)

Feeling at ease, safe and being oneself meant that certain elements prevailed; for example, that the organisation or movement was open, friendly and welcomed diversity in terms of people’s ethnicity, faith, class, gender, sexuality and able-bodiedness, that friendships were easily cultivated, that activists cared about and trusted one another and ultimately that one shared a common identity with other activists. These elements were mentioned singly or in different combinations by cluster respondents. The idea that openness to people from different backgrounds was an important part of any organisation which had equal rights and social justice at its heart was frequently put forward. Thus in the case of HH, although the volunteers formed a fairly homogeneous group (mainly young, Georgian women who were in or had recently completed higher education), the organisation welcomed all, responded to the needs of socially diverse populations (e.g. refugee migrants, young women from conflict zones, orphaned children and young adults, homeless people, disabled youngsters) and collaborated with various other NGOs. For Vera, a young volunteer, HH was ‘the friendliest organisation compared to others, when you come here, they are like family to each other. They have no problems; it feels like “home” [...] Everything this organisation does and the people give you that impression (Vera, HH, Georgia).

The importance of openness and friendship was echoed by respondents in other case study organisations also. For example, LT respondents spoke about being surrounded by ‘very sincere and open people’ (LFT26, LT, Latvia) who were ‘calm and harmonious, and [...] at the same time they are not completely [...] but in general, this bunch of people is pleasant and calm [...]’ (LFT3, LT, Latvia) while ABS was presented by its pupils as being open to their
religious beliefs and social background and careful to show links between Buddhist philosophical principles and Roma culture rather than trying to impose Buddhism on them.

In both UKF and FI, there was concern that feminist spaces must be open so that acceptance of different social identities, diversity politics and intersectionality did not only take place at a discursive level but that such politics were also practised day to day. So although FI activists included women from other parts of Spain and Europe and some from South and Central America, activists regretted the fact that immigrant women (from the developing world), women from minority ethnic groups; working class women, those working in feminised sectors such as domestic work barely figured in their activist base. However, they pointed out that the FI were working with or had, in the past, worked with some of the groups of women mentioned above. Similarly, although UKF is probably the most diverse of the organisations in this cluster, some respondents felt that there weren’t enough women of ethnic minority origin, women with disabilities and transgender women. One commented:

It’s like when I went to that UK Feminista event and yeah they always talk about women but all they do is universalise the White woman’s experience and it’s just really frustrating and […] somebody was talking about the LGBT movement and I was like ‘well what LGBT movement are you talking about here?’ and then she didn’t know what to say because she knew she was talking about the White LGBT movement. (Deanna, UKF, UK)

Another young woman, a wheelchair user, explained:

Erm, with Feminista […] I’d seen them and I’d followed them on the internet and things like that but […] I just, I wasn’t (pauses). I have a tendency to get grumpy with, erm, large feminist groups when, erm, it comes to sort of disability matters, erm, cause […] I think they do their bit and I think they really, genuinely want to, erm, be sort of intersectional and things like that? But they don’t […] I don’t see them sort of saying to their members things like ‘the disability rights community is having this huge battle for this. Come on guys – get involved’. (Erica, UKF, UK)

However, the testimonies presented above cannot be considered to refute the sense of belonging felt by respondents generally given that their sense of belonging and ease drew on other elements besides diversity within the organisation/movement.

Other than openness and diversity, organisation/movement members saw care for one another, trust and not being judgemental as features that were important in creating a sense of belonging. This came through in different ways across Cluster 4. Thus Natalia (FI, Spain) declared, ‘We take care of each other, we worry about how the others are […] I think that we know the emotional part is important’. Asmati (HH, Georgia) expressed similar feelings, ‘I like most of all that they care about me […] Even when I don’t have time, they think about helping me. I think they care about volunteers, youth and this caring is the most

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2 Intersectionality may be defined as the recognition that different axes of oppression intersect to produce different impacts on different groups of women and on the relations between these groups.

3 All the FI respondents self-identified as ‘white’ and had all completed university while one was a continuing university student.
important thing at the Helping Hand for me’; as did respondents from LT (who felt safe in
sharing a similar worldview with other activists, even those with whom they had only
communicated online), from ABS (respondents and teachers believed they had built up
special bonds of trust) and UKF (where activists spoke of being ‘close’, ‘part of a family’ and
drawing ‘emotional support’ from one another).

Finally, to feel a sense of belonging, it was important for activists to be able to name and
experience a specific, collective identity (whether adopted or invented by them). Collective
identity has been the subject of much of the analysis surrounding social movements and
networks (e.g. as a means of explaining processes that structuralist, rational-actor, and
state-centred models miss out or of identifying the contexts in which different relations
between identity on the one hand and interest, strategy or politics on the other hand
operate), however here is not the place to discuss such analyses. What is important to note
is that a collective identity was named and shared by respondents in the case studies as a
way of expressing belonging to a specific group. For FI and UKF activists proclaiming a
feminist identity was conscious and deliberate; not only was it a way of revitalising a
stigmatised identity and of ‘paying respect’ to feminists who had contributed to social and
political change historically but also a way of making their collective praxis real to others.
For other activists in the other cases, naming an identity was not always conscious and
deliberate. Thus it can be argued that HH activists developed what may be termed a
‘volunteer identity’ which set them collectively apart in society given that volunteering was
a relatively new concept and practice in Georgia about which many ordinary citizens were
suspicious. At LT also, adopting a collective Buddhist identity and becoming part of the small
but stable Buddhist communities in Latvia gave many activists a set of clear values and a
sense of purpose and belonging and drew them into political action in favour of Tibetan
independence. The fact that Buddhism and its communities are unknown or ignored in
Latvia added to respondents’ sense of being part of a particular socio-religious community.
Where the young people at ABS were concerned, their common experiences of social
exclusion, discrimination and geographical segregation in Hungarian society led many to
hold on fast to a Roma identity and a sense that it could only be positively expressed within
the school which constituted the only place of belonging outside their home and family. The
connection between Roma identity and the sense of belonging to ABS developed as the
school’s programme of turning high school drop-outs into active citizens impacted on the
pupils and was then cemented when the school came under threat of closure precisely
because it provided a place of learning and safety to Roma youngsters.

Thus far the discussion above omits mention of the Estonian LGBT movement because it
may be considered a refutational case where the concept ‘a place of belonging’ is
concerned. The LGBT movement in Estonia has a short history and is still struggling to
advance acceptance of non-heterosexual identities not only within Estonian society
generally but also among non-heterosexual minorities themselves. The difficulty of fostering
self-acceptance among LGBT people has meant that at best the movement is loosely
organised, and at worst fragmented and unable to bring together the elements which create
a sense of belonging among its members. While activist organisers open doors to LGBT
people of all social backgrounds (including ethnic Russians) they have found it difficult to
mobilise young people who remain fearful of revealing their sexuality because of the social
repercussions they may face:
Right now I see that people are afraid to be out even among the community, to belong into this gay community ... Yes ... that’s how I see Estonian gay community today ... (Anna, LGBT Movement, Estonia)

and

Problem is when some people fight for marriage legislation and then some gay men somewhere say, that they don’t want or need it. Many shout-outs that split our community. (Anna, LGBT Movement, Estonia)

Also because of the fragmented nature of the LGBT movement it is difficult for those who do invest time in organising it to establish extensive bonds of trust and friendships beyond the small groups/parties\(^4\) in which they participate. Thus although the LGBT movement may be characterised quintessentially as an identity movement, it is one where there is reluctance or resistance to the embracing and sharing of a specific identity, whether gay, lesbian, queer, bi-sexual, trans:

We actually don’t feel that this community exists, that there’s this clearly defined community. Actually, this community is so heterogeneous that it’s not possible to describe it as one group [...] people don’t want others to say that, like, you belong to this community, they’re just people who happen to be gay or lesbian, but they don’t feel like that makes them part of any community. (Helle, LGBT, Estonia)

However, more recently, pockets of trust, friendship and collaboration have developed between individuals and groups - often those involved in similar activities e.g. artists or those working in the NGO sector and much of this is due to the work of the OMA (Oma Maailma Avardamine - Expand Your World) centre in Tallinn which strives to bring together various sections of the LGBT community to work on specific issues such as supporting HIV-positive people and their families. As one respondent puts it, ‘Well, to me it actually seems that you have to create the conditions, like, why not at that OMA centre, so that young people would like dare to come out of the closet, so that they would feel that they do have a safe place where they can come’ (Brita, LGBT, Estonia).

3.1.2 Blurry leadership: ‘we are all leaders’?

Over the last decade, many protest movements and activist organisations across the world have been marked by the phenomenon of ‘leaderlessness’; that is, organisational forms without clearly identifiable leaders. Hence the Occupy movement is characterised as ‘leaderless’ and when millions protested in Tahrir Square (Cairo) in 2011, or when tens of thousands of students protested in Gezi Park (Istanbul) in May-June 2013 or occupied the streets of Hong Kong in autumn 2014, there were no stand-out leaders with whom the authorities could negotiate. ‘Leaderlessness’ does not connote lack of leadership and/or disorganisation but rather dispersed leadership which encourages collective responsibility, accountability and efficacy. It echoes the watchword ‘we are all leaders’\(^5\), represents a real

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\(^4\) Because there are very few locations in the voluntary sector (such as the OMA centre in Tallinn) where LGBT people can meet and begin to build networks there has been a reliance on gay, lesbian/women’s parties (some private, others open) to provide such a space.

\(^5\) This phrase is attributed to the Industrial Workers of the World activists who tried to land a ferry at Everett, Washington in 1916. When asked by the local sheriff and his armed guards as to who the leaders were, they
praxis within the above-mentioned movements and has antecedents in the anti-authoritarian social movements (women’s liberation, gay rights etc.) of the 1960s and 1970s and the alter-globalisation movement of the late 1990s and early 2000s where protests were coordinated rather than led.\(^6\) However, rather than utilise the concept ‘leaderless’ movement/organisation here, the term ‘blurry’ leadership is introduced because among the organisations being considered in Cluster 4, there are some where a distinct (though nameless) leadership operates which eschews authoritarianism in the way of contemporary social movements and activist groups; some whose activities and development tend to rely upon the initiatives and action of certain individuals (LT and UKF to some extent); some where leaders are not really detectable (FI and Estonian LGBT movement). This variation makes for what might be termed ‘blurry’ leadership. Blurred lines of leadership often develop from a conscious thinking that conventional authority can only be resisted and even overturned by unconventional forms of power and alternatives to hierarchical authoritarianism. Often it has served activist organisations and movements as an effective strategy when faced with hostile authorities whose first instinct is to look for leaders who can be neutralised.

The cases HH and ABS may be seen as refutational ones in respect of ‘blurry leadership’. In the case of HH, one of Georgia’s most influential NGOs, leadership is distinct. The organisation has a known founder, a physical location in Tbilisi and a formal leadership structure (with two women at the helm) which oversees the numerous projects led by volunteer coordinators and implemented by young volunteers. Although there are identifiable leaders at HH, they are not known publicly as charismatic figures with access to mass media organs through which they can put across their message - they do not enjoy the status of certain NGO leaders in the UK such as Shami Chakrabarti of Liberty or Camila Batmanghelidjh of Kids Company whose organisations have gained high public visibility because of their leadership. Similarly, as an educational establishment, ABS has a clear organisational structure led by a senior management team of teachers and administrators who are known locally in the Roma community but not beyond. Moreover, there is an elected student council whose members receive training in order to make them more effective in voicing student concerns to school leaders. There exists a distinct leadership in both these organisations but it is shared and/or delegated and hence the members (young volunteers at HH and junior teachers and students at ABS) see and experience leadership as diffuse, democratic, communicative and consultative rather than personalised, closed off and prescriptive. At HH, what is most appreciated by volunteers was that they are always updated with information about projects run by the organisation, that their participation in various projects is supported and that HH accommodates volunteers’ needs and interests when allocating them to different organisations. At ABS, students valued the special relationship they had with the school’s teachers and management where formal terms of address were dropped in order to increase ease of communication and encourage students to approach school leaders as partners. In both cases there existed a positive view of leadership and an appreciation of democratic practice within the organisations.

answered ‘We are all leaders here’. The massacre of activists which ensued at Everett is remembered in the album ‘Fellow Workers’ recorded by Utah Phillips and Ani DiFranco in 1999, under the Babe records label.

\(^6\) Although the concept of ‘leaderless’ movement is mostly used today in relation to movements of the left, the term has its origins in white supremacist movements of the 1980s and 1990s; see Garfinkel (2003).
In common with HH and ABS, UKF has had a clear management structure since its foundation in 2010, with a board of directors akin to trustees which employs paid workers; in 2013, a director who oversaw the day-to-day running of the organisation and two organisers/campaign workers responsible for developing grassroots activism and supporting projects across the UK and on gaining and maintaining a media presence, in both mainstream and alternative media. As UKF has gained funding from well-known charitable trusts, it has been bound to operate its leadership and governance structures in a way that has fitted in with its funders’ expectations. In addition UKF’s founder and paid director until January 2013, has been a high-profile public figure having published her critically acclaimed book on today’s feminism (*The Equality Illusion* 2011); having been named ‘the most influential feminist’ in the UK and one of the country’s most ‘Influential figures on the political and media landscape whose ideas and beliefs will shape the world we live in’ by various national newspapers (see *Guardian* 2010; *Observer* 2011); and having appeared frequently on national Radio and TV since 2010. However, unlike HH and ABS, it can be argued that UKF should be considered a part-refutational case only in terms of blurry leadership and democratic functioning and that is because of the type of organisation it is. UKF is not a formal membership organisation and hence the question of leadership vis-à-vis an activist base does not arise in the same way as it does with organisations such as HH or even LT (see below). UKF is unique because the social change model it has adopted from movements such as People and Planet means that it does not on its own initiate and fight particular campaigns. Instead it supports grassroots feminist activist groups/organisations around the UK by providing campaign resources and training, helping to build links between activists and women’s NGOs and raising public awareness of the need for feminist activism. Moreover, UKF does not align itself with any particular ‘brand’ of feminism and consciously adopts an inclusive position in terms of those to whom it provides resources. It therefore facilitates the involvement of as many people as possible in both local and national campaigns/projects in favour of its stated goal of achieving social, economic and political equality between women and men, and consequently supports whatever forms of participatory and pluralistic democracy that grassroots feminist activists adopt.

It can be argued that LT conforms more to the concept of blurry leadership in that some form of leadership has been exercised to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the period in the organisation’s history, but that it has not been obvious. In the LT case, leadership is blurry and members’ perceptions and experiences of it vary. Hence some respondents have named a particular figure as leader while others have referred to a collective three-person board which was elected annually and yet others have spoken (often ruefully) of members initiating actions or making decisions only when necessary or when emotions run high. Hence, one respondent explained:

To the extent that we communicate, we communicate by e-mail, what and at which moment we’ll be doing something, what’s happening where, if, when, let’s assume in this situation we have wait for the torch, we get informed or Jānis Mārtiņš Skuja has his finger on the pulse, as our leader, and then we meet. (LFT13, LT, Latvia)

Another experienced leadership in the following terms:

These three people, who are like the leaders, have remained. [...] It’s not like we control everything. Everyone does something [...]. I am the one who sends out information. I am like the coordinator and project manager. (LFT6, LT, Latvia)
While others felt:

As I currently see it, a majority of the association’s activities are based on the emotion of the moment, on a high from the moment. There’s some kind of an event and, then, can we do something to benefit this event. Then we put in the effort, do something and then there’s peace and quiet again (LFT11, LT, Latvia).

Every so often there’s some challenges, let’s say, the 10th March is approaching, what shall we do, what ideas are there? But see, in principle, this should be taking place over the whole year, so the person, how can I say it, we forget them for six months to a year, and then when a year has passed, then we go looking for them. I think these management things haven’t been completely fixed up (LFT5, LT, Latvia).

The kind of varying views and experiences, expressed above, of leadership within movements/organisations with blurry leadership are not uncommon and depend on members’ level of involvement and closeness to core activities. At LT, individuals’ levels of involvement fluctuated according to the period of time, type of activism and emotion felt and if involvement in activism can be imagined in terms of concentric circles around the epicentre of the organisation, then very few people were to be found in the circle closest to the centre of LT; the majority moved between the mid and outer circles. While the looseness of leadership at LT may have provided opportunities for democratic politics, the sense that there was a lack of tight management at the centre and that apathy prevailed among members predominated.

Finally, the cases of FI and the LGBT movement fit in most comfortably with the concept blurry leadership. The FI is an assembly-based movement with no designated leaders. The assembly is the hub of debate and discussion and is the main collective decision-making space. Additionally, there exists, within the assembly framework, a structure of issue-based working groups (e.g. communications, self-defence, motherhood, liveable lives) from which decisions are relayed to the general assembly. Decisions at both working group and assembly levels are reached through the direct participation of those present. However, because the assembly and its working groups are also a space for socialising then this contributes to a blurring of how debate and discussion feed into decision making and how relationships between individuals and groups may influence the process.

Direct participatory democracy and horizontal leadership (‘we are all leaders’) are important to FI activists who eschew representative democracy and the vertical leadership structures that it generates:

I think that the people’s participation must be real. I mean, I really believe in basic participation, in neighbourhood participation, in resident meetings, in neighbour associations and in parent associations or where you have links, because that is the only way, you know, to somehow really participate. The political party system is corrupt; it leads nowhere and does not represent us at all. (FI, Amanda, Spain)
In common with FI, leadership within the Estonian LGBT is also blurry. Of all the movements/organisations in this cluster, the LGBT movement is arguably the most fragmented, composed as it is of a number of organisations. If there is some kind of coordinating structure to be discerned then it is in the form of the OMA centre, in Tallinn. However, the OMA centre coordinates the activism and activities of organisations which use the resources it provides (office space, meeting rooms, knowledge, competence and experience of staff of the LGBT Association) around issues of LGBT rights etc. which need to be placed on the political decision making agenda. It does not constitute a decision making instance in itself.

In both the case of FI and the Estonian LGBT movement, the lack of leadership structures allows for the development of flexible, ad hoc, horizontal structures which arise in response to emergent issues and the perceived needs of activism. In these circumstances, many rather than few take up functional roles which ebb and flow with mobilisation at any given point in the protest/activist cycle.

3.1.3 Gaining human capital: ‘They taught me how to think and [...] gave me an important social network too’

While social movement/organisation scholars have focused extensively on activism, the development of social capital\(^7\) and increased commitment to political and civic engagement (Dixon and Roscigno 2003; Gould 1993; McAdam 1988), they have to a large extent ignored what activists and volunteers get out of being part of social movements/organisations and activist networks in the way of human capital\(^8\) and how the latter can be used to further activism and/or professional development. Few studies have explored the links between activism, developing human capital and increased commitment to political and civic engagement (see Van Dyke and Dixon 2013). One of the themes to emerge from the Cluster 4 case studies is that of gaining human capital through activism/volunteering and the formation of ‘professional’ activism. This theme came through quite clearly in four of the cases, namely HH, UKF, FI, and ABS and less so in the case of the LGBT movement and not at all where LT is concerned.

In the NGO HH, many of the volunteers spoke of the benefits of volunteering for a large NGO with connections to other civic and political organisations. They felt that working at HH had helped them develop organisational skills and attention to detail and to manage interpersonal and professional relationships:

I gained experience that in the work process everything should be structured, organised; you have to take into consideration every detail when you plan something. It’s not like, I want to do this all of a sudden. Many details need to be considered and agreed upon. In this regard, I gained a lot of experience, so that if I need to do something by myself, I will use the experience. Besides, relationships, there are limitations and relations with those people mean a lot.

Before, I did not know how to behave with people with limited abilities and now

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\(^7\) That is, the cumulative value of social ties and networks and benefits such as trust, reciprocity, information, cooperation which flow thereof.

\(^8\) the cumulative value of civic/political knowledge, acumen, skills, experience and activist training possessed individually and collectively which can be channelled towards achieving wider individual or societal goals
I know how to talk to them, etc. Before becoming a volunteer, I did not know that. (Mareh, HH, Georgia)

It was felt that gaining such skills and experience meant having an advantage when applying for jobs and progressing in one’s career:

I don’t know how much it can be counted as a working experience, but probably first of all you begin a career. It is counted as work experience. I’ve seen many CVs and applications where you should write working experience in a specific column and also volunteering. Correspondingly, when you have experience working as a volunteer, this column is not left blank and you can write something interesting there and probably the word volunteerism itself sounds good to the employer and it is important for a future career. (Sona, HH, Georgia).

The very direct connection between volunteering/activism, increasing one’s human capital and correspondingly one’s employability or more generally one’s commitment to social action was made far more explicitly and deliberately by volunteers/activists at HH than in some of the other cases. In the case of FI, for example, several activists acknowledged that they had gained both social and human capital as a result of being part of a significant social movement and hence had been empowered to pursue goals which had previously seemed unattainable:

They taught me how to keep believing or to hold more strongly to the thought that we can do things in the collective. I mean, I keep believing in the groups and I keep believing that we can learn from each other and I keep thinking it is possible. They empowered me in my position. I mean, in terms of my position, I have more arguments when taking a position as a feminist. They taught me how to think, and especially how to think with friends, to think with feminist allies, to think about violence (the different types of violence), to think about types of violence I couldn’t identify before, such as the violence of the state, which now I can detect and point out. They gave me an important social network too. Through the Feministes Indignades, I’ve been contacted for job offers, or if some fellow member finds out that I’m unemployed, she might give me a little job doing something or other. (Berta, FI, Spain)

However, Berta’s linking of her participation in FI, the social and human capital gained and the concrete outcomes in terms of her increased knowledge and job offers comes over as a ‘natural’ development of her participation rather than instrumental.

Given the mission of UKF as a mobilising and resource-providing organisation, young activists are trained in civic and political skills, provided knowledge about the social and political contexts of issues around which they are involved and encouraged to take part in on-going feminist projects and campaigns or to start their own. This building up of both social human capital, through the annual UKF summer schools for example, is widely acknowledged and valued among young feminists though mainly in
relation to their becoming more civically and politically aware and involved in feminist issues and campaigns:

(name of UKF campaigns organiser) was saying that she would come into my sixth form and maybe help us sort out the feminist society, because I need a bit of help with that, and she said she’d be happy to do that so, I’m, I’m going to keep in touch with (name of UKF campaigns organiser), with any more opportunities for maybe even me going into other schools and talking and stuff like that … (Cora, UKF, UK)

UKF’s approach to activist training has been criticised by some feminists who believe that activism should generate knowledge skills and experience ‘organically’ (in the Gramscian sense) through the process of ‘doing’ rather than being formally taught how to ‘do’:

I mean look at things like UK Feminista with a board, a management board, formal funding, they organise, it’s very top-down, they organise summer schools where they teach people how to do activism. You don’t go along to a group and do it yourself, you get taught by professionals how to do it and you get suggestions for how to do lobbying, petitions, organised demonstrations. You don’t, you don’t get formal help on how to join hands around, you know, a building or a military building and shut it down for a day, no. (Frankie, UKF, UK)

However, this view is counteracted by others who argue that as long as professional activist training serves the common social good then it should be supported:

(...) as for the professional activism thing … I’ve seen, like increasingly trans groups are starting to get meagre amounts of funding, and people are now living on something slightly below the minimum wage doing trans activism, and people are therefore beginning to complain about professional trans activists and I find that quite scary because if you can make money making the world a better place, I don’t see a problem with it, I don’t think you’re profiting off the oppression of others, like if you can get, if you can manage to get someone to pay you so you can work full-time to help people, like the payment is so you can leave, you know, it’s so you can eat, it’s so you can function as a human being and entertain yourself, like, I, I think it’s a step away from like traditional problems of capitalism if people are getting paid to do activism, paid to undermine the system, so yeah, I don’t have a problem with that (...). (Reese, UKF, UK)

Some organisations and movements rely on those who are trained in activism through NGOs and other agencies due to the difficulty of mobilising ‘organically’ formed activists. This is true of the Estonian LGBT movement which relies not only on ‘celebrity LGBT activists’ and artists and intellectuals who present LGBT issues through their work but also, and in large part, on ‘professional’ activists:

That’s the whole problem with everyone, they all have their own lives and work, and even though their hearts are in it and they want to contribute, then in
reluctant these people, like, may not get things done. So the responsibility, well, rests on us, the ones who are doing it as a paid job, and we actually do have more time as a resource available for us. ... the support that the others provide is more moral support ... even though sometimes we do agree that you do this and you do that, in the end these things might not get done. (Helle, LGBT movement, Estonia)

Whether or not training in activist knowledge, skills and human capital accrual always has a positive effect on the ‘do-ers’ and society at large is a question which is also posed. At ABS, for example, awareness among the Roma students (especially those on the school council) that civic/political skills and knowledge learned can be used to further Roma rights and interests rarely translated into action. For example, the school council which was meant to be a leader of student action seemed mired in inertia:

Interviewer: Could you tell me, how this election [to the school council] looked like, who nominated you, or did you want another candidate?

Ildikó: I did not want to be this. It was the class. All of them wanted me. And they wrote it on papers, who voted for whom, and so I became that.

(Ildikó, ABS, Hungary)

And many individual students felt compelled to take part in political and civic activism:

Mátyás: Once I was at a demonstration, and I felt like a sheep.

Interviewer: Once we were together in Budapest on one, did you feel like a sheep even there?

Mátyás: Yes, it was then when I felt like a sheep. It was the first demonstration in my life and I just felt that I was marching after the crowd. People are making noise to call attention to themselves and we are just marching, marching after the crowd. I was just like a sheep. I just marched unconsciously. Even if I knew why I was marching, I was unconscious. I can almost say it was not my decision.

(Mátyás, ABS, Hungary)

There is a debate about activist training, professional activism and the building up of human capital whether through NGOs, protest movements or civic education in schools where questions are raised about such activism and human capital accrual getting in the way of change in the long run. In 2011 Occupy Wall Street for instance made a statement of autonomy where the existence of ‘professional’ activists (trained through NGOs mainly) working towards social transformation was acknowledged but where it also warned that such activists would not be tolerated if they were seen to be undermining the autonomy of the movement.
3.1.4 Uncertain futures

The question of stability and long-term viability is one which affects all social movements and organisations. Scholars have long studied cycles or waves of protest where multiple sectors of society come together around particular issues in order to effect social change. Thus a cycle of protest is a rapid expansion of social movement action in geographical scale, multiplicity of social groups participating and level of contestatory activity. Cycles peak as new interpretive frames, tactical innovation and new groups come into being. But they decline over time due to diverse factors among which are state repression, the winning of reform from the state often coupled with the state co-opting activists, dwindling resources and activist exhaustion (see Tarrow 1989) and arguably blurry leadership or leaderlessness which is not an issue while mass activist responsibility for decisions and actions/activities operates. There is far less research on cycles of action and professional activism linked with NGOs and not-for-profit organisations which have proliferated since the 1980s as a neoliberal politics has increasingly shifted social and welfare responsibility to this sector from the state (Milligan et al. 2008; Kyle et al. 2014). However, since the global financial crisis of 2008 and resultant slow-down of economies across Europe, governments have slashed public and third sector funding. This has put the stability and long-term viability of many NGOs and community organisations at risk.

In this cluster, the social movements/organisations studied have been dependent on a combination of local and/or national government funding, individual donations through fund raising, charitable trust bequests and activists’ free time, social and human capital. Since the 2008 financial crisis, governments in all the case study countries embarked on economic austerity programmes which (in)directly reduced the financial stability of the case study organisations and posed a question mark over their future. The case of ABS in Ózd was the most critical. The school relied on funding from central government as a religious school but it was also dependent on local state schools renting out classroom space relatively cheaply. But cuts in funding, due to an imposed change in the school’s legal status as a religious establishment, meant that it lost central government funding. In addition, anti-Roma bigotry and discrimination within and beyond the community in which ABS was located meant that it was unable to rent cheap classroom space and function normally. Despite the efforts of teachers to keep it open, it finally closed not long after the main fieldwork was undertaken in Ózd by the MYPLACE researchers. While ABS was not directly impacted by austerity measures, the factors which conspired in favour of its closure emerged in a climate of economic downturn when competition for scarce funding can be ferocious.

LT also has faced decline over the past few years for the various reasons explained by its members. LT reached its peak in the run up to the Beijing Olympics in 2008 when the spotlight fell on China and its occupation of Tibet. LT membership has dwindled since then as the issue has been dropped by the media:

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99 For example, in 2010 the Spanish government announced a €15 billion austerity plan whereas £40 billion worth of austerity measures were initiated in the UK, in the same year. The post-communist states which had seen spectacular GDP growth rates in the 1990s and early 2000s, crashed equally spectacularly after the 2008 global financial crisis when Baltic state and East-Central European governments imposed some of the harshest austerity plans and economic cuts in Europe.
In 2008, people wrote about Tibet, showed it on television almost every day. There was a great deal of information and people felt that it was very simple to get involved, as you were on a sort of common wave. This wave of information declined, and interest in the matter also, to a degree, declined. (LFT5, LT, Latvia)

The decline in interest in Tibet also meant that LT’s funding was affected as the latter was constituted entirely through individual public donations. The decline in public interest has also led to demoralisation and apathy amongst LT members many of whom felt that the organisation had lost its raison d’être:

There is a point to it, but it’s really how all of us measure the point of it. I gather, that it’s very hard to measure it in a tangible way, for example, if we now tried to measure, what has happened in the four years that ‘Latvia for Tibet’ has been established, what’s been achieved, well I think that the results aren’t really very large and tangible. (LFT5, LT, Latvia)

In common with LT, the Estonian LGBT movement has difficulty in mobilising young people and increasing activism. This is seen by established activists as one of its weak points because the lack of critical mass is seen to de-legitimise LGBT issues:

The community, as such, does not exist, see? And that’s the whole point [...] let’s say, if a community came together and activists grew out of that community [...] I have been cussed out many, many times, in Angel, in X-bar, who the hell are you, coming to represent me, right [...] umm, so it’s really a stupid situation, isn’t it? So I’m only representing myself and what I have thought could be good to a lot of people like me [...] for example, in Sweden and other Nordic countries, right, like [...] yeah, there’s something that has grown out of it [...] but we don’t have that. There are just a few individuals, who have just, well, started things on their own and that’s why they also don’t have that, so to speak [...] well, support of the community. (Lisa, LGBT movement, Estonia)

However, the four main organisations comprising the LGBT movement have managed to secure funding so far to keep going. The funding of the Tallinn OMA centre by the Open Estonia Foundation has been a lifeline and many LGBT organisers believe it has strong potential for future community building and recruiting younger activists. In addition, with LGBT issues being kept alive at the European institutional level by activists, the current cycle of LGBT activism looks likely to continue across member states for some time yet.

HH has fared better than the above-mentioned organisations in austerity climate that has prevailed in Europe because it is one of Georgia’s largest NGOs and receives funding from more than one source and also because it has a large pool of volunteers who are managed well on the whole. Despite this, HH volunteers are acutely aware that funding is difficult to come and that financial instability threatens not only HH’s various projects but also their capacity to raise further funds:
Raising funds is very problematic for us, because we need resources to support more projects. This problem mostly concerns providing the volunteers with transportation, food. (Salome, HH, Georgia)

The feminist movements in Spain and the UK, as represented in this cluster by FI and UKF respectively, have been in an ‘up’ phase of activism since 2010 with a particularly intense phase of activism occurring in both cases, in 2011-2013. FI went through a particularly active phase between May and December 2011 when assemblies drew 700-800 (mostly young) women at a time. Both these movements are at risk of being affected by some of the decline factors noted above, in particular decreasing financial resources (in the case of UKF), activist burn-out and blurry leadership. The FI have to some extent followed the trajectory of the 15M movement, i.e. the movement has lost much of its vigour and strength (Abasalo, Gilbert and Wainwright 2014). Even though new feminist activists continue to be politicised, the horizontal leadership structure involving assemblies of 100s of women takes up individuals’ time and energy as decisions are reached through the agreement of all present. Such a model is difficult to sustain over a period of time and activist burn-out seems inevitable.

Although the FI remain active as an online movement and in specific neighbourhood projects/issues around Barcelona, assemblies are not frequently held – the last according to its web site (http://feministesindignades.blogspot.com.es/p/actes-dassemblea.html) was held in March 2014 although the last news items published in their blogs were dated 18 December 2014 and they continue to be active on Twitter (January 2015).

UKF is also at risk of experiencing decreased mobilisation and activity. It relies on charitable trusts for its core funding (Rosa, UK Fund for Women and Girls) and grants to support specific projects (e.g. Joseph Rowntree for the Lobby of Parliament training project). Its day-to-day operation is managed by 2.5 members of staff which means that the constant pressure of mobilising activists around various campaigns along with grant-raising activity is unlikely to be sustained over a long period of time in the current climate of austerity and continuing budget cuts in the third sector.

3.1.5 Looking in from the outside

A positive public view of social movements and organisations matters; a negative one can create obstacles in achieving movement/organisational goals. For the social movements and organisations in this cluster, what the general public thinks of them is important as the achievement of goals is strongly tied up with the winning the people’s hearts and minds not just in terms of concrete goals but also in terms of a political/ideological position. In addition, for organisations/movements whose survival is dependent on financial support from public, third sector and private funders, what the media and policy makers think of them is also of enormous importance.

Across the cluster, respondents in all the organisations were concerned that they should be seen in a positive light but were concerned that often they were either portrayed negatively, particularly by populist media and politicians or they were completely ignored. However, a number of organisations/movements have enjoyed strong public support,
including the support of high-profile celebrities and political figures. For example, UKF and its director Kat Banyard, have had positive coverage in the broadsheets (Guardian, Independent, Observer), significant air time on the BBC (Newsnight, Today Programme, Women’s Hour) and Sky TV news and participation at their events from individual journalists and MPs across the three main parties (Caroline Lucas, Yvette Cooper, Amber Rudd, Jo Swinson). Partly this support has emerged because the small team which runs UKF has understood the importance of cultivating media and political contacts and have done so effectively but also because UKF is seen as a dynamic champion for gender equality during a period of austerity politics which has disproportionately impacted negatively on women and because they have provided young women with a voice through campaigns and projects whose themes resonate strongly with them and also the public (e.g. Lose the Lads’ Mags).

LT has also had support from a number of MPs who formed a Tibet support group in the Latvian parliament and who have used their position to initiate parliamentary debates on human rights and Tibetan independence. In addition, in the early years of its operation, LT were successful in mobilising well-known public figures and their friends in support of independence and democracy in Tibet, including those in cultural and sporting fields such as the composer Peteris Vasks, journalist Anda Leiškalne, physicians Peteris Klava and Peteris Apinis, musicians Ansis Klintsons and Aigars Runcs, athlete Martinš Rubenis, writer Laima Muktpavėlė, University of Latvia professor Janina Kursite and others. This support is now more latent as the issue of Tibet has become less news-worthy.

While UKF and LT have garnered support from public figures, FI has had widespread support among women in Barcelona’s neighbourhoods. To some extent, public support for FI derives from that enjoyed by the 15M movement generally – at its peak the Indignados had the support of 73 per cent of the population (El Pais 2011). However, FI’s feminism combined with its critique of capitalism has drawn thousands of young women whose employment prospects are grim and older women from popular neighbourhoods who would have previously given support to the mainstream left and who have been hit hard by government austerity policies.

Despite the public support which has helped the three above-mentioned cases to mobilise large numbers of people around campaigns and projects, respondents often seemed more aware of public cynicism or hostility towards them either because they felt people were ignorant about the issues concerned or because they disapproved of ‘loud’ public protests and militancy:

> There are aggressive people, others are sympathetic, there are those that hurry past and don’t understand what we want from them. All sorts of people. They simply don’t understand why we are standing there. What are those flags, why is this necessary, what is it for, why are we talking about it?’ (LFT26, LT, Latvia)

Or because they were politically or morally opposed:

> So in that sense maybe there is people out there who are very old-fashioned saying ‘oh, those’ [FI activists] who see it [FI] with contempt because they see it as radical and as people doing weird things, right? (Monica, FI, Spain)
LT activists were certain that the government’s soft stand on China and disapproval of LT protests had led to a news embargo on their activities and campaigns:

They [politicians] have closed their mouths, and unfortunately an instruction has been given to the media not to distribute such information, which we send about Tibet, about events. Then, it looks like we have only one, one internet portal, which is a large news portal which publishes some sort of information, but other magazines, I’ll tell you that it’s been forbidden for them, just so that they don’t annoy China. (LFT6, LT, Latvia)

In contrast, the LGBT movement and ABS were not always seen in a positive light due to the prevalence of anti-gay attitudes in Estonia and anti-Roma sentiment in Hungary. While Estonia is not labelled an ‘anti-gay country’ in the same way as Russia for instance and there exists a basic level of legal protection for sexual minorities, it is nevertheless seen as a highly heteronormative society with low awareness of LGBT issues. In addition the LGBT community itself can be reticent about fighting back against discriminatory practices and prejudiced public opinion. This means that LGBT organisations are generally not viewed sympathetically by the public:

[...] I’ve been saying for years now, that through activism you can’t make changes in Estonia, it rather reminds people all the time that we are different and how we are different. It produces anger and negative strong reactions – we are moving away from the goal we are trying to achieve [...] (Ralf, LGBT movement, Estonia)

Where ABS is concerned it is surrounded by anti-Roma attitudes and prejudices in the local community, manifested in the popularity of the Jobbik party which ran a successful anti-Roma campaign in Ózd during the 2010 legislative elections and which has since campaigned on various local issues (such as the ‘World Tent’ project) around the slogan ‘may Ózd not become a Gypsy capital’. Arguably, the negative attitudes towards ABS at community level are what finally led to its closure in 2013. This is the view of some at ABS:

The intercultural tension is very high. The World Tent project already blew the fuse because the Jobbik launched a mendacious campaign about what would happen here. The edging out of our school fits this process. (Anna, ABS, Hungary)

Finally, in the case of HH which is known in Georgia, there appeared to be a lack of strong feeling either in favour or against the organisation. While HH managed to encourage a respectable level of public participation in fund-raising events such as fun runs etc, the volunteers also detected a degree of indifference towards volunteerism upon which HH relies. The reason given by most respondents was that volunteering in Georgia was not sufficiently developed. In the view of one volunteer the main reason for people’s indifference was lack of information:
I am sure that 90 per cent of people don’t volunteer because they don’t know what volunteering is. They also don’t know where they can volunteer and what they can do. (Mareh, HH, Georgia)

Interviews with HH volunteers also showed that generally people they knew were not volunteers themselves because they considered volunteering a useless activity as it is unpaid. However, there was hope that volunteering with organisations like HH would come to be recognised by the public and become a normalised activity in time.

3.2 How do young people understand and experience their own activism?

The aim in this section is to show how young people understand and experience their own activism, focusing on the meanings they attach to it; the emotions they experience while taking part in action and activities aimed at bringing about social and political change; the relationships they build with fellow activists; and the impact that activism has on their personal development. The following concepts are drawn from the synthetic analysis carried out:

- Friendship
- Extending activist relationships
- Becoming empowered, finding a voice
- Being/becoming who you are
- ‘Let’s make this life better’

The literature on social movements and social movement organisations provides many explanations as to how and why activism occurs. In her study of transnational social movements, Reitan (2007) introduces a model in which three forms of attribution produce distinct solidarity paths leading to collective action/activism. These are the ‘worthiness’ of particular issues and of those affected by them; ‘interconnectedness’ with those whose struggles are related to one’s own; ‘similarity’ with activists sharing the same identity which may be harmed or threatened by change. This model allows the integration of at least two of the main strands of social movement theory\(^\text{10}\), relevant here, which see collective action as:

a) a rational and novel response to new situations and/or opportunities in society (see resource mobilisation theorists such as McCarthy and Zald 1987; Kitschelt 1986);
b) as the construction and preservation of collective identity which provides a means to question all facets of the social order, from the state to civil society and interpersonal relationships; hence collective emotional experiences are recognised as an important part of social movement dynamics (see new social movement theorists such as Melucci 1989; Castells 1983).

However, before undertaking a discussion of the above concepts, this section presents an overview of the forms of activism in which young people take part.

\(^{10}\) The other main theoretical strands cover (irrational) collective behaviour and
### 3.2.1 Forms of Activism

The action/activities of citizens in the public sphere, aimed at bringing about change or making a difference, have been categorised variously. Traditionally political scientists focused on conventional political activity aimed at influencing government directly or indirectly (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995: 38). For example, action and activity undertaken to directly influence government includes lobbying MPs or demonstrating against specific policies, while indirect influence may be exerted by voting and having a say in who makes decisions. This narrow definition of ‘doing politics’ or activism has been challenged by social scientists concerned to de-emphasise elite behaviour on the one hand and that of the voting mass, on the other hand, in order to include action and activities which fall between the areas of mainstream institutions and voting and, in doing so, to acknowledge the contribution made by certain often overlooked populations (women, ethnic minority groups, young people) to political and social change (e.g. Heath et al. 2013; Jowell and Park 1998; Lovenduski 1986; Marsh, O’Toole and Jones 2007). An expanded definition of activism would therefore include ‘unconventional’ political activity such as direct action and protest at grassroots level in favour of social and political transformation and also citizen involvement (collective or individual) in civic arenas where organised voluntary activity is aimed at helping others in a community in order to find solutions to social and other problems and eventually bring about change (Zukin et al. 2005: 7). Such a definition is used here.

The forms of activism identified in this cluster of case studies range from individual to collective action and activities in the political and civic arenas and from conventional (or formal) to unconventional (or non-formal) actions and activities. A noteworthy aspect about the forms of activism undertaken by the young people (whether individually or collectively) attached to the case study organisations/movements in this cluster is that very few were found to be individually active in political institutional politics due to a high level of distrust in politicians (deemed ‘corrupt’ and ‘out for themselves’) and alienation from formal electoral and decision making processes because, as they saw it, their participation ‘makes no difference’ to political decision making and outcomes. Where they participated in actions aimed at politicians and political institutions, it was collectively; e.g. signing petitions or lobbying elected representatives and government officials as part of a campaign related to a specific issue. Although most eschewed formal politics, many claimed that voting was a responsibility owed to their great grandparents or grandparents who had fought hard to gain the vote.

The majority of respondents across the Cluster 4 cases were involved to a lesser or greater extent in civic and political activism at grassroots level. The forms of activism may be categorised under the following headings:

- **Street politics** - demonstrations and rallies against specific government policies and laws (e.g. against China’s occupation of Tibet, against austerity policies); themed marches (e.g. gay pride, Slut Walk, International Women’s day, Billion Women Rise against violence against women, Reclaim the Night etc.); civil disobedience actions (e.g. chaining oneself to police barriers in the street, forming human barricades to...
disrupt traffic, hunger strikes); occupations (e.g. of workplaces, classrooms, municipal buildings); flash/smart mobbing (e.g. dance-offs in public squares, pouring into subway stations or shops to highlight an issue); walking or streaking in public (e.g. to make a point about one’s sexual autonomy); distributing leaflets, putting up posters, canvassing people.

- **Cultural and lifestyle politics** - multi-arts festivals with a political message (e.g. Ladyfest and gay pride); street and community performances of music, theatre, graffiti and other art; reading groups; cinema screenings and art exhibitions with political content; concerts and parties in commemoration of significant dates in the national calendar (e.g. Latvia Victory Day, 100 year anniversary of women’s suffrage events); lectures, seminars, discussion groups and summer schools (e.g. on women’s suffrage, feminism, LGBT liberation and rights, Tibetan history, how to campaign); boycotts (e.g. of Chinese goods in protest of China’s occupation of Tibet) and buycotts (e.g. in favour of fair trade) of goods; ‘coming out’ as a statement of support for LGBT rights.

- **Service and community activism** - volunteering for charities and not-for-profit organisations; paid work as activism; activism through formal education; fund-raising for specific causes (e.g. through fun runs, ‘market’ stalls); working with other community, national and transnational organisations; working with statutory agencies.

- **Digital activism** - writing/communicating ideas, opinions, knowledge, skills (e.g. through blogs, organisation/movement websites); mobilising (through Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp etc.); online campaigns and petitions; production of campaign material.

- **Formal politics** – voting; party membership; being an elected representative in national or sub-national legislatures, writing to or canvassing/lobbying politicians, signing petitions.

- **Organising the organisation/movement and its members** – meetings/assemblies; working groups; online messaging and communication.

Under each of these headings activism is aimed at:

- raising one’s own and public awareness of political and social issues
- developing organisational resources and collective and individual knowledge, skills and leadership
- mobilising members and wider publics to participate in events
- alliance building with other organisations and movements.

The table below shows the forms of activism in which respondents across the six case studies participated. The popularity and frequency of each form is indicated by a five-level colour code: red for high, purple for medium, green for low, yellow for one-off and grey for none (also includes not known).

**Table 3.1: Forms of activism**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Street politics</th>
<th>HH</th>
<th>LT</th>
<th>LGBT movement</th>
<th>FI</th>
<th>UKF</th>
<th>ABS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Themed marches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acts of civil disobedience</td>
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<td>Hunger strike</td>
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<td>Flash/smart mobbing</td>
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<td>Occupations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walking/streaking naked</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distributing leaflets, putting up posters, canvassing etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural &amp; lifestyle politics</td>
<td>HH</td>
<td>LT</td>
<td>LGBT movement</td>
<td>FI</td>
<td>UKF</td>
<td>ABS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multi-arts festivals with a political message</td>
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<tr>
<td>Street and community performances (music, theatre, graffiti etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cinema screenings &amp; art exhibitions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commemorative concerts/parties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lectures/seminars/discussion groups/summer schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boycotts &amp; buycotts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coming out</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service &amp; community activism</td>
<td>HH</td>
<td>LT</td>
<td>LGBT movement</td>
<td>FI</td>
<td>UKF</td>
<td>ABS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volunteering for charities/not-for-profit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paid work as activism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activism through formal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Fund-raising</td>
<td>Working with other community, national and transnational organisations</td>
<td>Working with statutory and political agents</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Digital activism</strong></th>
<th>HH</th>
<th>LT</th>
<th>LGBT movement</th>
<th>FI</th>
<th>UKF</th>
<th>ABS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing/communicating ideas, knowledge, skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mobilising</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online campaigning, petitioning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Producing campaign materials</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Formal institutional politics</strong></th>
<th>HH</th>
<th>LT</th>
<th>LGBT movement</th>
<th>FI</th>
<th>UKF</th>
<th>ABS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voting (including intention to vote when voting age reached)</td>
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<td>Not known</td>
<td>Not known</td>
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<td>Not known</td>
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<tr>
<td>Party membership</td>
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<td>Not known</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elected membership of national/sub-national legislature</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing to/canvassing elected representatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Signing petitions</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Organising the organisation/movement and members</strong></th>
<th>HH</th>
<th>LT</th>
<th>LGBT movement</th>
<th>FI</th>
<th>UKF</th>
<th>ABS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meetings and assemblies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working and discussion groups</td>
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In summary, Table 1 shows that three of the six case study organisations (i.e. HH, LT and the LGBT movement) focus their activism more in the civic arena and place considerable emphasis on the development of volunteerism and on working with other agents particularly those in the third sector (less so with those in the statutory sector). This is not surprising given their location in post-Soviet societies which do not have a history of volunteerism. These organisations are therefore keen to be part of a more dynamic volunteer-supported third sector while maintaining a certain distance from the state.

However, the LGBT movement in Estonia differs from HH and LT in that it embraces some forms of cultural and lifestyle activism more easily given the alternativeness of LGBT culture and lifestyles generally and given that it draws inspiration from western LGBT movements which developed in the 1960s and 1970s. One organisation, ABS, is strong on the development of civic and political activism through formal education as this is one of its main commitments to the disadvantaged populations that it serves in Ózd (Hungary); however it is weak in all the other categories of activism presented above.

Respondents attached to FI are highly active in street politics and radical forms of protest though less so in the civic arena. As in the case of the post-Soviet societies, this may be explained by partly by the under-development of civil society in Spain due to its history of corporatist authoritarian rule over almost 40 years and the type of political regime which developed after the Transition period, but also by a political culture which has encompassed a strong thread of anti-system politics which played out in the mass (largely peaceful) street protests of the 15M movement from 2011 onwards. In fact, Spain has witnessed high levels of protest since the 1990s in comparison with other European countries.

Finally, UKF benefits from its location within a highly developed civil society and from the cultural and social capital which its organisers, funders and supporters possess; thus those who are attached to it are found to be moderately to highly active in British civil society. UKF also raises awareness of feminist and women’s issues through street action, building alliances with other organisations and social movements - in so doing it combines strategies and lessons learned from previous feminist movements (of the early 19th century and of the 1960s and 1970s) with the exploitation of new digital technologies to the full. Thus there are few forms of activism among those presented in Table 3.1 which UKF does not deploy.

Table 3.1 contains sketchy information about formal political activity. The most likely reason is that young people feel removed from formal political institutions and processes, are less likely to be involved in them and will therefore talk about their connection with them least. Although voting probably represents one of the most common formal political activities among respondents, there is a lack of information on this aspect of formal politics in four of the six cases in the cluster.
3.2.2 Friendship

This concept relates to Reitan’s ‘similarity’ (with activists sharing the same identity) as a form of attribution leading to social action. It also encompasses the emotional aspect of social action as often activist networks either overlap with or become friendship networks. The importance of informal friendship networks has been highlighted by scholars of social movements and this is borne out across four of the cases in this cluster. Respondents within this cluster spoke of two aspects of friendship and activism which may be seen as two sides of the same coin. The strongest views about activism and friendship were expressed by UKF and FI activists. First, they spoke of activism as a way of finding new friends or deepening existing friendships or, for FI activists, even as an ‘infatuation’ (enamoramiento). One UKF respondent spoke of the indivisibility of feminism and friendships

I just wanted to be part of a group which gave me something more, more feminist actually, because it’s emotional support, friendship and laughing and doing and that’s what feminism means to me. (Estelle, UKF, UK)

Similarly, for Dolors, an FI activist, the boundaries between activism and private life/friendships were fuzzy:

I have been clear for some years that the networks that sustain me are my friends, as well as the political networks I have, which are very blurred. And I have non-politicised friendships that I know will always sustain me. And to me, that is very political. (Dolors, FI, Spain)

Another UKF respondent saw friendship as an essential factor in maintaining the emotional well-being of activists:

Some links are being sustained because you then create friendships and I think again it comes back to relationships and I think that is so important in activist networks because you get burnt out and because sometimes you are doing difficult things or whatever, it helps you, I don’t know, stay a bit more sane or grounded. (Roxy UKF)

Second, friendships were seen as a way of extending activist circles and getting people to take collective action together. So, for Berta having friends in FI made it much easier to be involved in street protests:

We are pretty close between us. I have said before that on the inside not so much, eh. We have our conflicts, we don’t have one only thought, etc. But it is true that when we do an action on the street, as we have enough things ready and we already know each other - we have been together for two years now - we can see complicity. (Berta, FI, Spain)

And for Robyn, having friends and personal relationships meant that last minute mobilisation can be undertaken effectively and sustained over a period of time because one can appeal directly to friends:
I have had so many discussions with people from different countries, things where I’ve met them at different festivals or we’ve worked on different projects together and because you’ve come together in something you are really passionate about there’s something which has, there’s staying power to it and I think there’s something quite queer about it as well. You know, I’ve done a lot of travelling to events, staying at people’s houses, these very, very informal networks which again are really important because once you have these networks then you can mobilise when there’s a sense of urgency for something you have all these different networks in place that hopefully you can draw on people and I think it is quite important because you know you’ve got a lot of Facebook and Twitter mobilisation, all this kind of stuff, but for me if you don’t have the relationship behind it, it’s less convincing, it’s less kind of sustainable, because people are more likely to get involved with things. (Robyn, UKF, UK)

Making friendships through activism was also spoken about by members of the other social movement organisations in this cluster although in less impassioned terms:

I am meeting with people who think alike and we are good. We are not very many, but even besides those being physically present, there are also many who cannot make it for some reasons, but they are with us in their thoughts. There are many such people.  (LFT13, LT, Latvia)

And:

Probably communicating with new and strange people, the opportunity [to do this]. (Tina, HH, Georgia)

The themes of friendship through activism and extending social action through friendship were absent from the ABS case where the students did not form ‘natural’ activist networks even though they were introduced to different forms of civic and political participation. In this respect ABS may be considered a refutational case here. Where the LGBT movement is concerned, although friendships existed and emerged to some extent from activist networks, they appeared not to be sufficiently utilised to develop and sustain activism as fear and suspicion within the LGBT movement undermines the friendship-activism link.

### 3.2.3 Extending activist relationships and alliances

The importance of extending activist relationships and forming strategic alliances beyond one’s immediate activist circles emerged as an important concept within this cluster and is also one emphasised by social movement scholars who argue that such extended activist relationships or alliances allow social movements and organisations to share resources (Brecher and Costello 1990), overcome problems of identity politics (Walby 2001), develop alternative subjectivities, discourses and imaginaries (Melucci 1989) and solidify the very basis of their agency (Jakobsen 1998). This concept can be associated with Reitan’s ‘worthiness’ of particular issues and also ‘similarity’ with activists sharing the same identity. It suggests not only that activists make rational decisions in forming alliances, particularly
transversal alliances, but also that their identification with other activist groups opens up different experiences, feelings, perspectives. Respondents gave several examples of alliance formation across this cluster and of what such extended activist relationships offer.

For the Estonian LGBT movement in particular, alliance formation played a key part in two respects; first, in order to share resources:

> We’re really happy about a few of our partners. One of them is the Estonian Union for Child Welfare, with whom we have a wonderful relationship, and we’re really relying on their support, especially in the question of adoptions. And then there’s the Estonian Sexual Health Association and clearly they would support us. Then there’s the Tallinn Youth Work Centre … they are very supportive when it comes to spreading all kinds of information … Of course, there’s the Estonian Human Rights Centre. Even though they deal with different human rights issues, they actually do deal with LGBT topics a lot too. (Helle)

And second, because it meant gaining moral support from similar-minded social movements and organisations given the difficulty of mobilising the LGBT community and of gaining public backing. Hanta explained:

> We go to their [anarchist] events, they come to ours, and somehow we provide this moral support for each other. The Anarchists were the heteros who were brave enough to come to Pride, who were brave enough to march. Things aren’t right and we’re ready to support you so that things would change. (Hanta, LGBT Movement, Estonia)

The LGBT movement valued the links forged with animal rights and vegetarian/vegan activists and also with organisations abroad which provided alternative models of social action and knowledge about LGBT issues.

Other organisations/movements in this cluster also engaged in strategic alliances. For HH it was important to collaborate with other Georgian NGOs (such as the Women’s Fund and Georgian Young Lawyers Association among others) mainly to widen the experience of its young volunteers in the NGO sector but also to be able to share the resources available for certain campaigns.

For feminist movements and organisations strategic and transversal alliance building has always constituted an important part of social action. Thus both UKF and FI have extended activist relationships and work in alliance with other feminist organisations, often across ideological/political differences. For example, UKF summer school panels and workshops have included speakers and facilitators from feminist organisations such as the London Feminist Network whose stand on prostitution and sex work on the one hand and the inclusion of men and transgender activists in feminist social action on the other hand, is

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11 Transversal politics (or alliance) offers the possibility of engaging in democratic dialogue across differences. It encompasses the idea that movements/organisations/activists can achieve what may appear to be divergent goals by neither imposing a single universal which refuses to recognise that ‘differences’ exist, nor retreating into such differences as absolute and/or essentialist.
diametrically opposed to that of UKF. UKF has also promoted or been part of campaigns along with other feminist groups and organisations around specific issues such as the ‘Lose the Lads’ Mags’ campaign which urges supermarkets and other stores not to stock men’s magazines which objectify and demean women. Similarly FI respondents believe they enjoy good relations with other feminist groups and have built strong links with them in Barcelona and elsewhere in Spain. In Barcelona, they have constituted the main link between autonomous feminism and more institutionalised feminism (some of whose thinking and practice would be anathema to FI activists) as represented by Ca la Dona:

The more autonomous, Occupy-linked feminism, up to Trans October, up to movements that maybe are closer to being institutional, like Ca la Dona, and that are also very composed feminism, you know, and that have been very separated throughout history, and I think the Feministes Indignades have served as a bridge bit [...] Like I participate in Trans October or in autonomous feminism and another woman is in Ca la Dona or in the World March of Women and we all meet there [...] (Libertad, FI, Spain)

What has made such alliances possible is the context of the economic crisis. Because FI’s origins lie in the 15-M Indignados movement, FI activists have retained close links with the parent movement and also with other anti-capitalist organisations/movements, immigrant support and anti-police repression groups. These links have help solidify FI activism and a feminist identity while at the same time enabling the FI to share resources with other feminist groups.

LT has only had contacts with a limited type and number of organisation - mainly Buddhist religious ones and some human rights organisations in Latvia and elsewhere, demanding independence for Tibet. Consequently, LT has not reaped the benefits of extended activist networks in the way that the organisations mentioned above have.

Lastly, ABS remains an isolated case in this cluster and has not had the possibility of extending the activism it teaches in school not just due to the lack of resources but also because it operates in a highly intolerant context – described by one of the school’s teachers as:

In this town, in this micro-region, Nazi ideology has no ideological rival. This is a very strange situation ... In Ózd, what we experience is .. even those who identify themselves as people with humanitarian or a civil rights way of thinking, even those take on the wildest speeches of Jobbik. This is a very exciting situation that a town becomes the hostage of such an ideology that has no space in Europe at all ... When I see that we work with many Roma minority leaders and none of them is armoured ideologically against this problem. So, they take on the fascist blah-blahs. Even the Gypsy minority leaders. This is shocking. (...) It would be nice to have social forces or civic organisations that stand firm on the ground of human rights. But in Ózd, we have not met them. (Dénes, ABS, Hungary)

Given this scenario, it is unsurprising that the school became increasingly isolated and eventually closed at the around the time that the MYPLACE fieldwork in Ózd, Hungary ended.
3.2.4 Becoming empowered, finding a voice

Historically and today, young people have been under-represented in civic life and political decision making in Britain and elsewhere whereas a democracy should allow all its citizens ‘a collective voice and a point of negotiation over the issues that affect them’ (Power Inquiry 2006: 270). Hence young people are more likely to be attracted to activist movements and organisations through which they might make themselves heard. The idea of becoming empowered and finding a voice through activism was expressed by respondents across some of the cases. ‘Finding a voice’ was linked to a range of positive emotions and taking on an activist identity. For example, Eka, a young volunteer at HH felt that she had gained more confidence in herself and greater self-esteem since she had worked with others at the NGO. Others reported that being in a collective of people who were passionate about what they believed and did gave them a feeling of empowerment:

They taught me how to keep believing or to hold more strongly to the thought that we can do things in the collective. I mean, I keep believing in the groups and I keep believing that we can learn from each other and I keep thinking it is possible. They empowered me in my position. I mean, in terms of my position, I have more arguments when taking a position as a feminist. (Berta, FI, Spain)

For Inés, the sense of empowerment was tied in with attaining a feminist identity:

And for the first time, I was not ashamed to say ‘I’m a feminist’. Now, when I say ‘I’m a feminist’, I say it with pride. And before the events in the square, that wasn’t the case. I became empowered in this respect: ‘I’m a feminist. I’m not ashamed and I’m proud’. (Inés, FI, Spain)

More implicitly, finding a voice within a collective was also linked with feelings of having achieved a goal:

Oh, it seems to me that after it people couldn’t still calm down because of such elation, as if you have proved something. There was a thought that we could hold hands at one point like during the Baltic Way, forming a huge line. It was so cool! (LFT7, LT, Latvia)

Finally, finding a voice collectively was for some a means of channelling anger or fear in a positive way. So, for a number of activists in the LGBT movement, in Estonia, having collective spaces such as the OMA centre in Tallinn meant they plucked up the courage to come out from ‘underground circles’ into the open to declare their sexuality knowing they did not have to face any repercussions on their own. As far as many UKF activists are concerned, getting together with feminists and voicing grievances collectively gave them the means to channel fear and pain or anger against patriarchal power generally or more specific and injustices against women into strength and thus feel empowered.
3.2.5 Becoming/being who you are

Becoming and being who you are is driven by the emotions of social action and is one which emerges frequently within this cluster of cases. This concept can be linked with Reitan’s ‘similarity’ (with activists sharing the same identity) as common experiences of social action can shape an activist identity which locks on to the inner world of the activist to make her/him who s/he is.

Most respondents within this cluster became involved in activism around particular issues because they wanted their action to reflect their values and who they felt they were. Thus the motivation to act did not stem from a calculation of costs and benefits to the activist as conceived in the rational choice approach nor from a negation of self-interest as in the ‘altruism’ approach. What it derived from, as part of the identity construction process, was the activists’ desires and concerns that certain qualities be represented in their actions and lives. This fusion of an inner world of qualities and values with an outer world of action, in order to be or become the person one is, may be detected clearly in the idea ‘the personal is political’ among FI, UKF and LGBT respondents.

Margarita, an FI activist describes the fusion of inner and outer worlds or the personal and political in the following terms:

And then also situating activism as something very personal in your everyday life and how it pierces through you from all sides. Before, maybe I saw it, I don’t know, I saw it more from the working class, you know, from the worker-labourer-social class aspect or more from the academic or theoretical approach, I don’t know, but now it’s like I am pierced from all sides, you know? From my work, from my thinking, from my desires, from what I feel.

Interviewer: The personal is political.

Margarita: Of course! For me, this was what did it: this discovery.

(Margarita, FI, Spain)

For Hanta also, the possibility of demonstrating publicly and politically the person she was constituted an essential part of activism:

This march [gay pride] is a very strong statement of will and desire and viewpoints. Something that you cannot leave aside, while that is so powerful and visible ... To feel once in a year that no matter what you say, I still exist, and I do not have to apologise all the time or be in a defensive position. I can walk along the street and be who I am! (Hanta, LGBT Movement, Estonia)

While activism provides some with a means of expressing who they already are, for others it contributes to the person they become. One LT respondent felt that activism had contributed to his personal capacity to live in a democracy:

The obtained benefit [of activism] is greater peace of conscience. I believe it’s an active expression of sympathy which I can offer living in a democratic country. (LFT1, LT, Latvia)
Another LT respondent felt that activism developed the ‘good’ in people so that they could express themselves politically, in this case to speak about repression in Tibet:

I realise now that it’s my own choice and ... that if good people do not in any way speak about the wrong things happening in the world, then all these bad things will continue to exist and that is all that is needed for them to exist ... So, I myself have realised that I do not want to keep silent about it. I do not wish to hurt anyone and offend anyone with my words. I just wish people knew my opinion. If somebody can accept it and if it also helps his conscience becomes clearer, he can also accept it, but I don’t expect everyone to accept it.’ (LFT11, LT, Latvia)

HH activist Levan echoes the idea that activism can change how one thinks and therefore the person one is, ‘Yes, experience and more a mental, right way of thinking. So I changed my mind about things. I saw them differently before (Levan, HH, Georgia).

The person one is/becomes ties in with the concept of ‘making a difference’ which is discussed below.

3.2.6 ‘Let’s make this life better’

One of the motivations driving activism within social movements and organisations is the desire for social and politico-cultural change. Within this cluster, the belief amongst respondents that they have the capacity to bring about change for the better has inspired their involvement in the organisations/movements concerned. The concept ‘let’s make this life better’ (taken from the interview with Anna, LGBT Movement, Estonia) can be considered to carry a number of different meanings; from helping others in practical ways, to influencing policy with a view to reforms, to influencing and changing public opinion about an issue, to a radical transformation of society, its structures and norms. It may be associated with all three of Reitan’s solidarity paths to activism (see above) and is underpinned by both rational and emotional approaches to social action as not only does such social action have the potential to improve society but also brings an emotional reward to the activist.

At one end of the ‘let’s make life better’ scale lies social action designed to give practical help and advice to people who may be in an economically precarious position or who are unable to help themselves due to ill-health and other problems but which is not aimed at bringing about radical change. Such help and advice is offered by HH respondents in their role as volunteers. The social action of volunteers, especially in a country like Georgia where volunteering does not have a long history, also has the potential to change public attitudes towards the idea of spending one’s free time in return for non-material gains. Volunteers themselves are clear that their action brings them sufficient emotional rewards to want to continue with it. As Mariam states, ‘The most positive side is probably finding in yourself something that you can do many things for another person without self-interest’ (Mariam, HH, Georgia). For Asmati also, volunteering offered the possibility of contributing to a better society while also helping herself:

Why I decided to be a volunteer? Since childhood I had a dream. I wanted to do something good and to make the world a more joyful place. I was asked as a child, and I said that volunteerism is when I can give my positive energy to many
people, my warmth and I think what I do is a good thing. For my self-realisation, for myself. It is very important to be a volunteer and do something good.

(Asmati, HH, Georgia)

At the other end of the scale are activists and organisations/movements with ambitions to change society more radically, using radical and innovative methods. Located at this end are FI and UKF. As anti-capitalist and feminist, FI seeks a more radical, even revolutionary, transformation of society than UKF:

To me, being in the Feminist Indignates has brought much self-fulfilment, it empowered me extensively. I’m now at a point where we’ve been at it for some two years, and this Enamoramiento that some of the others talked about, right [...] Where I’m not constantly stuck in a feeling of ‘oh!’; I’m not subdued [...] I’m changing the world and in a practical sense, I would like to have a revolution and change the things, slightly. (Monica, FI, Spain)

Like the HH respondents, Monica also acknowledges the gains she makes out of her commitment to FI and activist life.

As a politically broad movement, welcoming feminist activists of diverse ideological backgrounds, UKF seeks to bring about ‘a world where women and men are equal’ but does not talk about overthrowing systems of oppression other than patriarchy. Thus some UKF activists will be motivated to influence policy and seek legislative change while others will militate in favour of eradicating patriarchy and what may be seen as interconnected systems of oppression (e.g. capitalism, racism). Their motivation for socio-political and cultural change, as shown by the respondent below, is fanned by the excitement of being part of a dynamic movement, among other emotions:

It’s quite sort of exciting and fun to be part of a group that’s passionate about changing things, you know, something, a specific issue, or just generally wanting a better deal for women. (Estelle, UKF, UK)

Finally, one may position LT somewhere between the two ends of the scale where activists draw emotional reward from seeking democratic change in another society with whose struggles they identify strongly:

See, first of all we must be morally responsible for the fact that when Latvia was trying to regain independence we also asked for the whole Western world to help recognise [the right of Latvia for independence]. Latvians, who lived abroad, organised actions, chained themselves at embassies until the small Island [of Iceland] was the first to say: yes. What a joy this was for us! We were shedding tears! We were enraptured! Today small Tibet is seeking global support. Why couldn’t small Latvia be the first one to do this? Believe me, the name of Latvia would be written in the history of the world forever. (LFT8, LT, Latvia)
3.3 What are young activists’ perceptions of politics/the political?

A number of studies undertaken over the past few years in Britain and elsewhere have tested the widely-held view that in a context of falling voter turnout, low party identification and membership, and general disillusionment with politics, young people in particular are either apathetic, cynical, and uninterested in politics or that they have a weak sense of commitment to liberal democratic systems in the West. However, not all the evidence gathered through such studies supports this view and while it may be the case that there is a broad lack of allegiance to formal democracy and its institutions because they appear to offer little meaning, it has also been demonstrated that young people display a high level of interest in political, economic, social and cultural issues and in particular those which impact them directly. This interest and the desire to address certain issues and problems are expressed through social and political action other than formal political participation (Henn et al. 2002; O’Toole et al.). The findings of the case studies in this cluster largely corroborate those of the previously mentioned studies. In this section, the main aim is to consider young activists’ understandings of and attitudes towards politics and ‘the political’ and their connection with politics. In order to do so, the following five concepts are discussed:

- Dormant democracy
- Politics: a trick, a game
- A politician’s promise? ‘Like an advertisement: pick me, pick me!’
- Disengaged voters
- New politics, new citizens?

3.3.1 Dormant democracy

The idea of the dormant democracy sits in opposition to one of democracy which is a continual, on-going process of renewal and inclusion of voices. A large number of respondents in this cluster who talked about democracy favoured the principle while expressing reservations about its practice. This view was mostly to be found among respondents in the HH and LT cases. However, others, especially among FI respondents, conveyed their outright disenchantment with the practice of democracy.

The main standpoint to emerge among those who favoured the principle of representative (liberal) democracy but who were concerned about its practice in their own country and elsewhere, was that democracy was the only viable system of governance in the world and therefore there was little option but to support it:

Well because we think that democracy is the best method of governance, which should become predominant in the whole world, I think that’s what it is and other ideologies are invented by the government, as they strive for power and ruling the world and considering this, it’s not interesting for me and I think that there should be no other ideology besides democracy, liberal democracy of course, but there is no ideal democracy in the world, that’s a fact. (Mariam, HH, Georgia)

The idea that a perfect democracy was unrealistic was echoed by another respondent (mis)quoting Churchill:
Certainly, it [democracy] influences all spheres, system of justice as well as a sphere of justice as such. Therefore, I assume Churchill was the one who said that democracy is a bad system, but it is the best one the mankind has ever come up with […] (LFT10)

Others found a justification for democracy by pointing to poor models in countries other than their own. For example, when asked to what extent democracy was real in Latvia, one LT respondent stated that despite its negative aspects Latvian democracy, was going in the right direction. He justified it in the following terms:

INT: To what extent democracy is followed in our country?

LFT24: More than in Russia and Belarus […] if you look at what is going on in Russia, you see that religious freedom is (sic) human rights, and there is less freedom compared to Latvia. Since I am in favour of freedom, I value political system we have in Latvia higher. Certainly, you can admit that the regime in Russia has its own meaning and sense, but, I personally, appreciate that I live in a free country where I can openly express my views or take an interest in anything I enjoy. (LFT24)

And another respondent felt the same:

INT: Our state is democracy, to what extent this democracy coincides with reality?

LFT28: I assume to a greater extent than it is in other countries. Probably there is room for improvement, but the situation is not that bad (LFT28, LT, Latvia)

For the respondents whose views are represented above, what counted in favour of democracy was freedom of expression and association and the opportunity provided by liberal democracy to choose and dismiss their representatives and leaders, albeit every four years. On the other hand what sullied the name and practice of democracy for them was political and economic corruption, the exclusion of diverse viewpoints in political debate and decision making and the almost permanent incumbency of political representatives in sites of power. But these deficiencies were outweighed by the advantages as they saw them. Only one respondent expressed unequivocally, ‘we live in a democratic state with no democracy’ (LFT23, LT, Latvia).

Among UKF respondents there was little if any explicit discussion about the principle of democracy and the gap between principle and practice. Only one young activist referred explicitly to (representative) democracy as desirable though far from being perfect:

I guess there’s always a hierarchy in nature and things, but for there not to be need for that hierarchy to exert its power in a detrimental way … we still need a government and we still need democracy but we also need for people to feel like they are also powerful in their own way (Eliza, UKF, UK)
Other UKF respondents who accepted parliamentary democracy and working within it implied, in arguments about gender equality, that a society where women did not have equal representation and power, whether in socio-cultural, economic or political institutions, was an incomplete democracy. The low representation of women in elected assemblies in the UK was indicative of the shortcomings of democracy for a number of respondents.

The sharpest critique of democracy came from FI activists the majority of whom rejected representative democracy as a model to be emulated. Some saw it as a misrepresentative of the will of the people:

But yes, democracy seems like an interesting term to me originally, but it doesn’t interest me as a political model at the moment. And of course, if I have to talk about the state of democracy all over the world, it looks like a parody to me.

(Libertad, FI, Spain)

Others saw it as a deficient if not impossible model of governance under capitalism:

I think it is rather obsolete. There has never been a full democracy, but it is increasingly obvious that capitalism is incompatible with democracy, that financial interests are pulling the strings beyond the façade of going to vote every four years, that in the end they don’t represent us, that the people in government today do not defend the interests of most of the population, but are defending the continuity of their own status quo. And our voice isn’t being heard. (Natalia, FI, Spain)

Many FI activists were also very clear about the alternative model to representative democracy:

I think that the people’s participation must be real. I mean, I really believe in basic participation, in neighbourhood participation, in resident meetings, in neighbour associations and in parent associations or where you have links, because that is the only way, you know, to somehow really participate.

(Amanda, FI, Spain)

The FI critique of democracy echoes that of the 15-M movement and those like it which have emerged elsewhere in advanced industrial societies which is that there is a fundamental fault in the capitalist system which cannot be resolved by the standard representative, multi-party democracy and that the answer lies in horizontal organisation, local communities and direct democracy.

3.3.2 Politics: a trick, a game

Young people’s conceptualisation of ‘politics’ influences what they think about this sphere of activity and the way in which they connect to the political. The study of the cases in this cluster reveal that the majority of young people buy into traditional notions of ‘politics’ as
the sphere of formal political institutions (parties, government, elected assemblies) and processes (voting, lobbying and so on) – hardly surprising given that these traditional notions hold sway. The way in which politics is conceptualised therefore establishes a divide between the issues and problems which concern young people and the ‘real deal’ of (formal institutional) politics. This divide leads to the view among political decision makers, media commentators and academics that young people are apathetic, cynical or uncommitted to politics as defined traditionally. In addition, it leads young people to declare that they are uninterested in politics, that they are not political people. Not being interested in politics was a theme common to all the case studies and was expressed by those who saw themselves as apolitical (e.g. Eka, Georgia) as well as those who said they were interested in and active around certain socio-economic, cultural and political issues; e.g. Brianna, UK; Mareh, Lela, Sandro, and Nino all from Georgia. It is important to note that among the latter category of respondents, being uninterested in politics meant not caring for and/or displaying a cynicism about the everyday, knock-about politics one observed in parliament and other formal political institutions. They did however care deeply about political principles, political history and culture and the impact of political decision making – in other words, about how politics should be.

The reasons behind the disinterest in politics varied although certain themes recurred. Most reasons sprang from the negative view of politics held by the many of the respondents. First, the idea that politics was a trick or game to be played at the expense of ordinary people was a recurring one, particularly among LT and HH respondents. Asmati explained it thus:

For me politics is like a black box, a desire of opening of which I have never had in my life, because I think that politics is like the chess technique, when the chiefs are in action we are all pawns and therefore this feeling is humiliating for me and that’s why I don’t get involved with politics. (Asmati, HH, Georgia)

Iago (HH, Georgia) and Sona (HH, Georgia) repeated the idea that it was a game, a ‘method’ or a ‘trick’ while an LT respondent it described it as follows:

I repeat myself saying that politics is a word game. It is an emotionally strong word game; therefore, I treat it as a mirage. (LFT14, LT, Latvia)

Second, for some respondents politics represented a world where capitalist business and political interests met, inevitably rendering it ‘dirty’ and/or corrupt (LFT26, Latvia; LFT28, Latvia; LFT30, Latvia; Mareh, Georgia; Sona, Georgia; Amanda, Spain; Clara, Spain). The politics/capitalism/business/corruption nexus was emphasised strongly by FI activist Clara:

An unsustainable economic system based on materialisation, consumption, the difficulty of sustaining life and a constant accumulation of capital and monopolies. I think there is an economic problem that social problems and such come from. And then, politically, I think that there is a problem of political corruption on the one hand and that we can’t trust them anymore because every day something new comes up. (Clara, FI, Spain)
Given that anti-capitalism is one of the pillars of FI’s ideology, Clara’s welding together of capitalism, politics, corruption and social problems can be expected. However the idea of politics as a business also came up elsewhere although it was not expressed as a problem of capitalism but as one which is part and parcel of the political ‘system’:

I have almost understood the system, and I see that it is all in vain. There are groups of people with their own projects, business projects and the state is somewhere along the line, somewhere where business is organised and that is it.

(LFT29, LT, Latvia)

While many of the activists in the UKF case study expressed disenchantment and a lack of interest in formal politics (and this was mainly among the younger respondents, in their teens), there was little indication from them that this was because they viewed politics as a dirty game and the political system as corrupt. Where UKF respondents said they were uninterested in formal politics it was because they felt it was not possible to wield any influence in that sphere in order to bring about real change. A large number of respondents, particular those in the older age range, though involved heavily in grassroots action, did to a lesser or greater extent engage with formal politics. They, and UKF officially, have not called into question the capitalist system in the way that FI does. This was observed by one UKF sympathiser:

I think there’s often a view that they [UKF] are quite liberal feminists because of a lot of the ways that they work, particularly in terms of lobbying government, using the equality acts and those sorts of legislative approaches, and just because they’re just so bloody organised … but I think what they’re missing is, is any sort of class based analysis or any sort of socialist philosophical approach …

(Roxy, UKF, UK)

The difference in the types of negative attitudes to ‘politics’ between UK respondents and their counterparts in Spain and East/Central Europe may be explained partly in terms of prevailing impressions of ‘clean countries’ and of politics being less tainted in long-established liberal democracies like Britain than in southern, eastern and central Europe states whose histories are marked by non-democratic political regimes and cultures. Such impressions surveyed and reported annually by groups such as Transparency International (2014) (and picked up by the media) so-called clean and corrupt political systems and public institutions become further entrenched in the popular imagination.\(^\text{12}\) In addition, in the UKF case study, a certain sense of optimism reigned among respondents about their capacity to bring about change through means other than formal political ones – thus while formal politics was relevant, it is not the only sphere of interest and participation. This sense of optimism is captured in the concluding remarks of Frankie’s interview:

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\(^{12}\) In 2014, out of 176 of the world’s countries, the UK was ranked the 15\(^{\text{th}}\) least corrupt country compared with Georgia ranked at 50, Hungary 54, Latvia 55. Spain and Estonia fared better with a ranking of 37 and 26 respectively (Transparency International 2014).
In my experience, if you organise it, they will come. If you build it, they will come. Young people are excited about politics and political engagement, they’re excited about thinking that they can make a difference, that they can change the world, that they can matter, that they as a person are having an impact on the world and if you give them the opportunity to do so, they can’t fail but be inspired by that. (Frankie, UKF, UK)

In this cluster, young people’s overwhelming response to politics in terms of formal political institutions and processes is that they are uninterested or will not give the time of day to this sphere of activity and thinking and their negativity appears to betray cynicism. However, they rationalise their responses clearly and in doing so indicate that there is a process of analysis and critique contained within the responses which then produce a conscious decision to disengage from (formal institutional) politics. Kum-Kum Bhavnani argues fervently that the disengagement, borne of negativity and cynicism, may be seen as a political stance in itself, that it would be wrong to label young people as apathetic or cynical and that such disengagement may even act as a powerful impetus to political engagement at a later stage (Bhavnani 1991).

3.3.3 A politician’s promise? ‘Like an advertisement: pick me, pick me!’

As politicians are primary actors in the political system, young people’s views of politicians are closely tied in with their stance on politics. The concept ‘A politician’s promise? …’ is constructed from the idea put forward by a young woman, an LT sympathiser, who likened politicians to products being advertised, each promising all kinds of rewards if (s)elected. Given their largely negative opinion of formal institutional politics, it follows that politicians generally and political parties are not held in high regard either. A number of themes emerged from the synthesis of the cluster data as to how politicians are viewed.

The idea that politicians made promises which are hardly ever kept was put forward strongly. In particular, politicians were seen to make promises prior to elections as a means of getting into power:

Well, no, I think a promise is just like an advertisement: pick me, pick me! Well, this is all great. Only, it is in their interests if they promise a playground. Yes, we will construct a playground. Still, maybe they will build it so that the people would not completely […] Basically, I don’t particularly believe in the promises of politicians. No. (LFT19, LT, Latvia)

Many argued that where promises were kept, this was done in a selective way, to ensure that important categories of supporters and voters (e.g. their banker friends) were kept appeased:
Or, these politicians who promise to help the people and promise to do things for the people, they don’t do things for the people. They do things for themselves and for their buddies, no? [...] Politicians and bankers. But they’re not in favour of the people and this makes it into shit. This makes it horrible, it’s horrendous. (Berta, Fl, Spain)

Apart from being self-serving in terms of their political interests, politicians were also described as money-grabbing, cowardly, remote from ordinary people and uninspiring – it was felt that there were no politicians who enjoyed the standing and reputation of Gandhi or Churchill for instance among ordinary citizens. Similarly mainstream parties were also seen as a lost cause if one wanted any kind of inspiring, change in society:

Yeah, I guess so, again, like, this is an issue with young people but I’m also a victim of this is that politically, we’re not very engaging in like politics ...in party politics definitely ... I don’t know anything about current, you know, manifestoes, and things like that and, and I’ve been asked by a friend so like, you know, will you join the Labour, like the Labour society at Cambridge and I was like no, I think, I just feel like party politics is just not, it’s just never really radical enough for me. (Jalayah, UKF, UK)

While the broad view was that politicians (and their parties) were worthy of neither trust nor respect, some put forward the idea that politicians simply reflected the society of which they are the product:

If people mutter something about the state, I simply don’t like it. Besides, I believe that everyone has the government [...] people get what they have deserved. It’s their all reflection in the mirror. They are actually people just like us. (LFT28, LT, Latvia)

Moreover, this view was tempered by nuances especially when individual politicians or parties were named. This occurred when parties or politicians were being compared or when there were policies that had been carried through which appealed to the respondents. For instance, Erica explained how she got into Green Parties politics:

Cause I was a bit disaffected with Labour ... but, erm, except, like, Caroline Lucas was sort of amongst them [at a Green Party conference in 2010] and at the time, like, Natalie Bennett, who’s – well, now become their leader – erm also, they just they just seemed really, like strong, right on, they knew what they were talking about, they, erm spoke with authority and – but not in, sort of, like, a, in a way that would get your back up, erm and I thought they were just fantastic. The stuff that they were – you know – their key areas were a little bit different to mine; like I joined the Green’s cause their social justice stuff I thought was fantastic compared to some of the other parties. (Erica, UKF, UK)

Eliza also felt that although ‘there’s not one really great party’, her family would ‘never ever in a million years’ vote for the Tories. In the same way, a young HH volunteer who
did not support any of the Georgian political parties felt there were nevertheless some positive factors to be acknowledged such as the slashing of the crime rate in Georgia while the National Movement was in power and Renate, an activist with the Estonian LGBT movement also liked none of the parties but recognised that the Social Democrats were the best of the parties and were therefore supported by her.

In a few cases (e.g. Brita, Estonia and some FI members), despite having an anti-party stand or being at odds with a party ‘s policies, activists had joined up. Brita (Estonia) explained why she supported the Estonian Reform Party:

> When I lived in Tartu I joined them, they had a really cool young politicians club. Actually Reform Party is pretty homophobic, but I didn’t have problem with it at that time, since then I have stayed … (Brita, LGBT movement, Estonia)

And Amanda from the FI made known that:

> Although there are even some that are members of political parties in Indignadas, I think it is super curious thing, no? Because we spoke against the political parties, but one of our colleagues was a candidate in the last elections, so, all these weird things that happen in Feministas Indignadas, that is kind of funny – I believe. (Amanda, FI, Spain)

### 3.3.4 Politically disengaged voters?

This concept encompasses the idea that although many of the young people across this cluster of case studies whose views were sought were uninterested in politics or cynical about it, they nevertheless felt it was important to vote and be counted. The politically disengaged voter was particularly present among HH, LT and UKF respondents. Although FI respondents appeared not to have discussed voting, it may reasonably be assumed that a number of them did vote given that some were known to have party affiliations. However, it is known that those who hold very libertarian views do not vote in order to make a political statement. These are the critical abstainers.

In Georgia, although party affiliation was rare among HH volunteers, they reported that there was a high level of participation among volunteers and their friends in national elections. But for a few cases where HH volunteers expressed doubt about elections, saying that the Georgian government’s conduct was not transparent, most volunteers saw voting as a right and duty through which they could be agents of changes. This interest emerged prior to the parliamentary elections of October 2012 which were dominated by two important factors: the belief that change was possible through mass public participation as the Gldani prison protests\(^{13}\) had demonstrated a month before the elections; and the

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\(^{13}\) The Gldani prison protests were sparked off in September 2012, all over Georgia, by the highly controversial TV broadcasts of leaked video recordings of torture and rape at Gldani Prison in Tbilisi. Shocked by the brutality of the prison regime, protestors called for humanity and justice. The protests led to an overhaul of the prison system.
creation of a strong opposition party, Georgian Dream which supported some of the Gldani tortured prison inmates deemed political prisoners. HH volunteers referred to the prison scandal as a turning-point event for them which changed the way they saw politics and which pushed them towards political involvement. As one respondent put it:

This event changed my life and my attitudes. Now I know that I will always vote and I have a feeling that my voice will be heard. Before this, I was politically indifferent and now I will always participate’ (Salome, HH, Georgia).

Another young woman noted that although she was ‘totally apolitical’, the only political thing that she did was to vote in elections (Eka, HH, Georgia). The idea of voting as right and civic obligation came through across all the cluster cases mentioned above.

In the Latvian case also, LT respondents appeared to show little interest in the election process, often believing that ‘my vote won’t change anything’ (LFT30, LT, Latvia) but then voting all the same because they felt it was a citizen’s duty. For some respondents, the reason for participation was that the opportunity to vote existed and should not be given up (LFT15, LT, Latvia). For others the argument was that if one did not vote, one then did not have the right to criticise the political situation and that in any case it was more positive to contribute to the process and vote:

If I stand by and don’t express my opinion at elections or referenda, then what right do I have afterwards to say – look, you’re doing the wrong thing. But, actually, I myself have done nothing. I think that everyone has to watch what’s going on. Maybe one should not condemn wrong actions as much, but come up with one’s own ideas and thoughts and wholeheartedly say what we could do better. (LFT11, LT, Latvia)

Other than the reasons indicated above, young people voted also because of strong family traditions of voting for a particular party:

I’d definitely vote [the respondent was not of voting age] because I’d feel like there’s no way that I would not but I would have, it would be a difficult choice because alright, my mum’s voted for Labour pretty much all the time so, I think I feel like it’s family kind of thing that just it feels like the normal party to vote for is Labour but [...] the leader of the Labour Party, I wouldn’t want as the leader of the country so I find that an issue [...] so, I’d probably, just out of general ethic vote for Labour because I’m more liberally minded, I don’t think I’d vote Conservative, no, I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t think I would, no, no. (Alexia, UKF, UK)
The examples above show that a number of factors counter the disenchantment that young people feel about politics in order to produce the disengaged voter. The concept of the disengaged voter is supported by recent research carried out by Demos (see: Birdwell and Bani 2014) where 1,000 14-17 year-olds and 500 teachers were questioned about their attitudes and aspirations to employment, civic and political life etc. The Demos study reported that the young people they talked to had overwhelmingly rejected Russell Brand’s recent call not to vote (BBC2 2013; Brand 2014) and that 84 per cent of those surveyed said that they would vote when they reached 18 - the voting age. However, as the report points out, in the UK at least, there is a disconnect between young people’s intention to vote and actual voting turnout as indicated by the decline in the youth vote over the past three general elections.

3.3.5 Third way: neither left nor right?
The concept of ‘neither left nor right’ has a history and is resurrected each time governments and politics shift in a rightward direction. It was heard in the 1930s when European fascists were looking for a tag to represent a stance against both capitalism and communism and also during the Spanish Civil War when Falangists adopted a position which purportedly neither defended the rich nor put the poor above the rich. In more recent times, the call ‘neither left nor right’ became more common with the rise of neo-liberalism in the early 1980s and the collapse of the USSR at the end of that decade; and this has arguably produced ‘third way’ politics which have brought together economic policies which, traditionally and historically, would have been considered of the Right and social policies which would comfortably fit into a left-wing mould (Giddens 1998). Added to this mix is a normative emphasis on civic responsibility where citizens apparently make decisions for themselves while the state provides a framework for negotiation. The effect of this has been to erode traditional left-right distinctions. Here the concept ‘neither left nor right’ is borrowed to show that many young people no longer identify with left-right divisions and are often unaware of what they are supposed to mean.

As far as the concept ‘neither left nor right’ is concerned, it is useful to consider the cases of the LGBT movement, HH, LT and ABS together as there is a common context in which left-right divisions are undetected or consciously rejected. In these four cases, the context of emergence from behind the ‘iron curtain’ and post-communism has generated a society in which consumption and competition (in an accelerated process of economic liberalisation) are key components of dominant ideologies and where such components have become a feature of (party) political practice, replacing old-style communist partisanship which placed one firmly on the left. In this context it is hardly surprising that young people are unaware of the concepts of left and right or have rejected them.
In the Estonian case, for example, although respondents did not refer to left and right explicitly, certain activity mentioned was considered to take place within the sphere of left or right. Political activism around LGBT issues, for example, was ascribed a left-wing position by many as it was associated with ‘communist activists’ and was therefore viewed negatively in society at large. Because of the negative association of the term, some respondents (e.g. Ralf, Lisa, Chris) rejected the label. In Georgia and Latvia also conceptions of left and right did not figure among respondents. The latter were drawn to HH and LT precisely because these organisations were not ideologically driven but fitted into the third way, ‘neither left nor right’ mould where associative life was preferable to partisan militancy and where issue-based campaigns were favoured over the defence of a political idea or position. It therefore follows that respondents in these two cases were unable to properly distinguish between concepts such as radicalism, extremism, populism and how these fitted into a left-right ideological framework (HH) or to define the politics of various political parties (LT). Discussion of left and right did not emerge in the ABS case either where pupils were being taught to become engaged citizens through civic and associative rather than party political activism.

The cases of FI and UKF are different to those mentioned above, in that respondents either implicitly or explicitly acknowledged the terms ‘left’ and ‘right’ and their meaning in application to themselves or others. They may therefore be considered as refutational cases. As feminist movements/organisations are engaged in emancipatory politics, both UKF and FI are part of a tradition which includes both new and old left influences. In this respect, one respondent observed, ‘I think within feminism so much of it is quite naturally, or not necessarily naturally, but quite inherently, left wing (...)’ (Roxy, UKF, UK).

In the UKF case, where respondents discussed concepts of left and right it was either in relation to the understanding of these terms or to their application to themselves, others or political parties. While none of the respondents were sure of the origins of the terms, most believed they knew what they meant and were more often than not correct although most of the conversations revolved around the term left. As far as conceptualisation of the terms was concerned, those who discussed them admitted frequently that they had not grown up knowing them but had only come to understand them once they became activists. One respondent felt that school curricula should include the teaching of politics and political concepts:

(…) there’s such a lack of understanding about it; a lack of understanding about politics at a young age. I mean, I’d love to see politics properly taught at schools. I didn’t know what the difference between left and right wing was by the time I’d done my GCSE’s, and I went to a very good school and we had very targeted, like, PSE lessons and things, but none of that came up. (Erica, UKF, UK)
A number of respondents used the term ‘left’ or left-wing to describe their own politics. Hence, in relation to herself, Roxy explained:

I think that there is still a distinct division between left and right. I think that what’s been interesting has been the way that it’s become so much more pronounced since the coalition government. ‘Cause I remember thinking kind of before the election, you know what, I know that I’m left wing but I, I don’t know that I’m that left wing and then as soon as the Tories got in I was like yes, I am. There’s, there’s nothing that radicalises you quite like having a Tory government again, which, ‘cause I was only ten when Labour got in, in 97. I had, I had been aware of all the stuff that had gone on (Roxy, UKF, UK)

Furthermore, for Roxy, the re-emerging left-right split in Britain was evidenced by the various political responses to Tory politics since 2010:

it’s interesting the amount of libertarian, communitarian anarchist ideology that’s coming through that really is against the state, ‘cause there’s definitely a lot of stuff against capitalism and big business and that sort of thing but increasingly with a Tory government there’s actual anti-state ideologies coming through and the idea that we do need to organise in an alternative way. So yeah, I think it is a lot more pluralist, maybe than it has been in the past, but I think that there is still very much an identifiable left-right split. (Roxy, UKF, UK)

Another respondent talked about the right-wing political background of others:

… the girls and boys that come in, in the sixth form, it’s quite scary because a lot of them have gone to very either religious or private or right-wing schools and not only are some of them quite right-wing, well to come to [name of school]you need to be quite liberal because otherwise you’re gonna hate it, but not only are they quite right-wing, some of the boys especially, are quite sexist. (Eliza, UKF, UK)

In the above example, the term ‘right’ is clearly associated by Eliza with being conservative, religious, believing in private education and being sexist and in opposition to her own stance.

Some respondents, however, were not quite so sure about their positioning on the left-right spectrum. As far as Alexia was concerned, she was:

[…] somewhere along the spectrum because I just find there’s no distinct like party anymore, to me they’re just a blur of policies, I find politics quite a kind of hypocritical kind of like thing I don’t, I don’t really, I don’t, I enjoy politics but I prefer more kind of, I don’t
know, I have an issue with like, I, I don’t know who I’m going to vote for, I have no area on the spectrum [...] I have different like views on politics and then if you apply like a different, like an economic view on that like, I have, I have a varying spectrum [...] (Alexia, UKF, UK)

Alice (UKF, UK) also felt that her political stand varied depending on the issue and therefore she found it difficult to label herself as either left or right.

Finally, FI is the most explicitly ideological of the cases in this cluster, placing itself firmly on the left of the political spectrum as a feminist, anti-capitalist movement and questioning whether being feminist can mean anything other than left-wing:

‘My name is feminist and then - well, it is implied, is it not? I do not think there is a right-wing feminism’ [...] We are, like it or not, inside the left, in a left-wing social movement, where feminists cannot stop being present, so it couldn’t be done any [other] way. But it is the feminist demands. (Ada, FI, Spain)

In describing themselves, FI activists were clear in their identification with the left, whether, for example, socialist Marxist (Federica), radical (Cristina) or libertarian (Libertad). FI activists’ affiliation with the left often stemmed from family involvement in left-wing politics (Clara, Margarita, Judith for instance):

(...) I've lived surrounded by [...] I mean, I come from a militant family. They were members of a left-wing radical political party and I've been very aware of the whole issue there, of politics, of militancy (Margerita, FI, Spain)

The discussion above indicates that in the case of civic organisations and social movements, particularly of those in this cluster which emerged in post-communist countries, the concept of left-right divisions is obsolete or rejected consciously as part of communist history. The concept of ‘neither left nor right’ can be justifiably applied to this sub-cluster of cases. However, as feminist movements influenced to some extent by second wave feminist and new left thinking (UKF) and by both new and old left ideas (FI), UKF and FI do not easily conform to the concept ‘neither left nor right’ if at all.

3.4 How are young people’s activism, attitudes and everyday lives shaped by the past and the present?

The aim of this section is to understand how young people’s attitudes and activism are shaped by aspects of the past and present including the influence of historical events...
through memories transmitted, influence of the family and religion; being part of a social ‘picture’ beyond a specific cause/campaign/issue, identification with the struggles of others past and present; and current socio-economic realities. This exploration is undertaken by considering the following concepts:

- People around you: ‘one of the most important ... is family’
- The past and its influence in the here and now
- Thinking and doing through religion
- Being part of a bigger picture
- Present realities

Not all of the above concepts (except that of family) apply equally to each case study in this cluster. In some cases, the past influences young people’s attitudes and activism far more than in others; or where religion guides the thinking and actions of some respondents, it plays little if any part in others’ lives. The uneven applicability of concepts appears particularly marked in this section than in any of the previous ones.

3.4.1 People around you: ‘one of the most important [...] is family’

This concept captures the idea that the most important influences in one’s life are exerted those by whom one is surrounded most consistently. The most-named categories were family, friends and teachers although the influence of family was by far the most preponderant. In the majority of cases family influence produced broad continuity in the attitudes of respondents rather than change. Family was the domain in which the widest range of issues, personal and political, was discussed and where arguments and reasoning could be tested out. Often, it also this domain provided a model for living. However there were cases where family dynamics caused change in respondents’ attitudes and political behaviour.

For example, the transmission of feminism through the family was a strong theme to emerge in the UKF case. Many respondents spoke of feminist mothers and feminism seemed a part of normal life as they grew up. Feminism was ‘common sense’ (Estelle) and Roxy’s experience summed up what a number of respondents had experienced:

I was brought up by a feminist mother and so it’s kind of, like in the water, so my mum was active in feminist activism in the eighties [...] and that sort of thing, so when we were being brought up it was always just kind of there, it was an obvious thing of ‘feminism is good’, ‘women should be equal’, ‘don’t accept that you’re secondary to men’, all of that sort of thing, so I think I always had kind of an implicit understanding of all of those things [...] I was always aware of it and I was always proud of it. (Roxy, UKF, UK)

Even in families where mothers (or in some cases sisters and aunts) did not declare themselves feminist, they often provided strong female role models in terms of the job they did, the role played in civic or associative life or simply in terms of being forceful personalities (Brianna, Penny, Eliza, Alexia, Deanna, Jalayah among others). Fathers too were at times described as feminist or respondents spoke of the equal division of domestic labour at home which influenced them in the belief that life was or should be about equality.
between women and men both in the home and outside it. Moreover, their feminism went hand-in-hand with a broader left-wing stance - some respondents came from labour voting or more committed left-wing families; one recounted how her father had given her Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* to read when she was ten or eleven (Tina) and others told of being taken on anti-war demonstrations as children and of discussing politics round the dinner table at home.

Many FI respondents also came from emphatically left-wing families which inspired their anti-capitalist thinking and activism, drawing them to the 15-M movement. Their left-wing background tended to be radical or revolutionary rather than social democratic (see 3.3.5) and they had grown up seeing parents involved in militant actions - in anarcho-syndicalist, communist or libertarian left parties and movements: ‘[…] basically, since I was born, I’ve been watching various forms of militancy. My father is - well, is now retired, but really more or less he’s still a militant at the CGT… (Judith, FI, Spain). Within such families, political discussion would have focused more on issues of the left than gender and feminism but many of the respondents’ feminism was inspired by an egalitarian family model (e.g. Natalia) and/or mothers or grandmothers also being involved in militancy as much as fathers/other male relatives - ‘my parents have been both, eh, young militants. My mother, in the Communist Party’ (Clara); while Marcela’s grandmother fought in the Civil War against the nationalists and was forced into exile, in France.

There were a few instances among both FI and UKF respondents of sexism and damaging power relations in the family which pushed them towards feminism and in search of a different model of intimate partner/family relations. For example, Berta (FI) and Robyn (UKF) told similar stories of deeply sexist relations and domestic violence within their respective families. Finally, feminist activism in both cases also developed as a result of young women coming into contact with radical politics at university and through the courses they studied and by friendships cultivated once they had left home.

In the case of the LGBT movement, friends and LGBT circles rather than family supported respondents in their initial decision to come out and become politically engaged. Because of the deeply taboo nature of non-heterosexualities it would appear that families rarely proved a safe haven, at least to start with, for respondents to talk openly about their sexuality and involvement in LGBT politics. One respondent explained: ‘I think my mom knows, but we haven’t talked about it directly. She has told me, that she isn’t interested in talking about people’s bedroom stories etc’ (Hanta, LGBT movement, Estonia). Others (Anna, Chris) spoke of parents not just fearing alternative sexualities but more so the backlash their children may suffer if it was found out that they were engaged in gay activism: ‘The bigger problem for my parents is not that I’m homosexual but that I’m activist. You can keep your child’s sexuality among family, but being a gay activist not [...]’ (Anna, LGBT movement, Estonia). Although in most cases families eventually accepted their children’s different sexuality, political activism around gay issues was not encouraged.

The family featured as an important shaper of social and political attitudes and behaviour of young people in the other three cases also although there were no overriding ideologies or political orientations at play in any of them. The majority of HH respondents for example, mentioned family members as their most favoured interlocutors - family was where they discussed personal and political issues. Three common themes emerged from interviews with HH respondents: first that many parents were active citizens and that respondents followed in their path discussing politics, voting, taking part in protests etc. though there
was little if any mention of partisanship on respondents’ or their parents’ part (except in the case of Iago whose parents supported opposing political parties thus exasperating Iago and isolating him from family discussion); second, that there were rarely marked divisions over political attitudes and behaviour within families although Nino disagreed with his father who he felt was too dogmatic and Lela condemned her parents’ hypocrisy in going on demonstrations but not allowing her to do the same; third respondents trusted their parents’ opinions and political orientations on the basis that the latter had greater experience of life and were therefore better placed to judge political ideas, parties and government.

LT respondents also followed their family in terms of their civic and political engagement. Not only did family, particularly parents, transmit knowledge about political and civic institutions and processes but they also handed down beliefs and values through the example of their own activism:

My mother is a historian. She is interested in politics and my brother studied politics, then my dad went around various actions. Maybe all that together. I have never thought of it. I just considered that it ought to be like that... Well, yes, maybe this is from my parents because they brought me up in that way, politically active, though mother did not get involved really. Dad was more active, he went to barricades, the Baltic Way. We, too, I think, with my brother took part. We were very small. (LFT2, LT, Latvia)

However, many respondents stressed that though they were influenced most by parents, they also spoke with friends and colleagues at work and that ultimately they made up their own mind:

INT: To what extent do your parents’ views influence you?

LFT20: Well, probably, rather strongly but I can’t quite understand it. Probably on the unconscious level their views affect me.

INT: Do you listen to them?

LFT20: Well, yes, I do but I also make my own conclusions. If they tell me something and this seems insane to me, of course, I won’t listen to it but otherwise I do listen.

(LFT20, LT, Latvia)

The role of grandparents in handing down and preserving historical memory was also mentioned by several respondents across the case studies, particularly in the passing down of historical memory through stories of significant events in the case study countries (e.g. Berta, Spain; Marcela, Spain; LFT21, Latvia; Alexia, UK; Alice UK).

Finally, in the case of ABS, although respondents attended a school whose main aim was to turn them into active citizens, this was only partly achieved and the majority followed the attitudes and mixed patterns of political and civic engagement established within their family and immediate community.
3.4.2 The past and its significance in the here and now

This concept is related to the idea that historical memory and knowledge may influence people’s political attitudes and behaviour. This section considers the experiences (through older relatives etc.), memory and knowledge that respondents possess what they make of such memory and knowledge and how that contributes to the shaping of their thinking and activism.

First, as far as the historical knowledge of respondents was concerned, this varied across the cluster. While history and knowledge of it was not a feature of daily life and activism for respondents, most possessed some awareness of major national or global events which had affected their country in the past. It is difficult to quantify knowledge possessed; for example, what constitutes ‘average’ knowledge? For this reason, in terms of respondents’ knowledge of history, the commentary below considers only the historical themes/subjects of which the respondents were aware and little if any attempt is made to compare knowledge of history across the case studies. It should be noted that little is known about the historical experiences and memory handed down to ABS respondents, the knowledge that they possess and how their attitudes and political behaviour might be shaped by past events.

For many of the respondents historical knowledge amounted to naming and understanding, to a lesser or greater degree, what were considered significant events and prominent figures of the past, of which some were commemorated publicly while others had caused great controversy and were therefore remembered but not honoured. Moreover, for some historical memory and knowledge was dominated by the recent past while for others history was about the more distant past.

Hence, for almost all HH respondents, memory and knowledge of history involved the recent past - the period since Georgia’s secession from the USSR in 1991 and mainly the ‘Rose Revolution’ of 2003 and the August 2008 war between Georgia and Russia in the secessionist region of South Ossetia. Some of the respondents spoke of past events being instrumental in changing their worldview and politics, maintaining for example that the Rose Revolution marked the biggest event and change for their generation of young people because it was followed by numerous important changes:

    Probably, the Rose Revolution was decisive not only for me, but also for the whole of Georgia. It made many sudden changes and many changes followed it and probably this was fundamental after the nineties. (Focus Group member, HH, Georgia)

The view that the Rose Revolution changed a young generation’s attitudes to political participation because of the changes which followed seems to be supported in analyses and commentaries on the Rose Revolution; see for example Kandelaki (2006) and Hash-Gonzalez (2006) who draw attention to the high levels of young people’s participation in the 2003 events and after, through youth activist organisations such as Kmara and the Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association among many others and also Ascherson’s (2004) account of the many democratic measures taken after November 2003 such as the dramatic increase in state budget revenues, the fight against corruption (e.g. disbanding of the Traffic Police), the
democratisation of universities through a reformed examinations system and so on – all of which were issues close to the collective heart of young people.

Others felt that the August 2008 War constituted as significant an event in their life as the Rose Revolution, arguing that it influenced the country’s political, economic and social development for the worse and that it marked a retrograde step for Georgians vis-à-vis the democratic achievements of the Rose Revolution:

For me it was the August war [...] because it influenced the economy and impeded the development of the country [...] We were at a certain stage of development. We were developing slowly and this war drew us back for more than two years, almost back to the nineties. (Focus Group member, HH, Georgia)

While the evidence here and elsewhere suggests that identification with this part of Georgian history can be seen as that of a particular political generation, formed by common historical experiences, memory and knowledge, other data indicate that historical memory and knowledge vary not only among different social groups but also within the individual and that therefore the political attitudes and behaviour of young Georgians towards post-1991 events are not always predictably similar (Campo et al 2013: 11-13).

For Latvian respondents knowledge of history related mainly to the Second World War, Soviet rule of Latvia and the quest for independence from the USSR between 1987 and 1991. While the Latvian respondents, like their Georgian counterparts, may be seen as part of a generation of young people who shared very specific historical experiences, memory and knowledge of events, including and following independence from Soviet rule, there appeared to be a greater variation in attitudes towards these events and the impact the latter had on them and Latvians generally. A number of respondents (LFT14, LFT23, LFT24, LFT25, LFT27, LFT28) claimed never to think about the past and its influence on them because they were entirely uninterested in history while a few more (LFT10, LFT18, LFT22, LFT23, LFT29) said they rarely discussed the past with family and friends. The disinterest and rejection of Latvia’s past among LT respondents was summed up by a young man of Russian origin:

INT: Do you mean that you are not interested in the history of Latvia at all?

LFT14: I’ll let you into a little secret, I don’t even remember when the First and Second World Wars started and ended, and I’m not gonna remember it. (LFT14, LT, Latvia)

The respondents who expressed an interest in Latvian history tended to be those whose parents or other family members had taken part in historically significant events such as the Baltic Way (August 1989)\(^\text{14}\) and the Days of the Barricades (13-27 January 1991)\(^\text{15}\). These respondents were of Latvian origin of course and their view of the past, their political attitudes and behaviour stood in sharp contrast to those of the Russian respondents. The

\(^{14}\)The Baltic Way or Chain of 1989 was a demonstration of two million people who formed a human chain across the three Baltic states in protest against continuing Soviet rule and in favour of independence.

\(^{15}\)Barricades were built in the streets of Riga and other nearby towns to protect key sites of political power from Soviet attacks following Latvia’s declaration of independence in 1990.
difference between young Latvians and Russians was most acute in relation to the period of Soviet occupation and rule which the majority of respondents acknowledged as a problematic part of history. The Russian respondents judged Latvian attitudes towards almost every aspect of Soviet rule as wholly negative and felt that this led to their current sense of ‘paranoia’ (LFT15) that Latvia and its culture could be subjugated again at any time. Latvians on the other hand argued that the Soviet occupation and subjugation of Latvian peoples and their culture was a fact that should not be called into question nor justified in any way:

In my opinion, history is clear enough and this political situation is well known. It’s clear who occupied whom, although a large part of Latvia’s population still doesn’t agree that Latvia was occupied. Maybe they don’t make up the largest part of the population, but there are still people who hear about it for the first time. They must be convinced. The question of what is taught in schools, in history lessons and why this history is taught in such a distorted way arise. (LFT10, LT, Latvia)

These tensions and arguments were clearly at play during the referendum campaign of 2012 on Russian becoming a second official language through constitutional amendment. The memory of Soviet rule and repression in Latvia also partly explains why respondents chose to back the cause of Tibetan independence from Chinese rule.

What the young Latvians and Russians shared in common was their attitude towards the various commemorative events, e.g. Republic day on 18th November or Victory Day on 9th May. Although many of the respondents understood that such events were significant in terms of preserving historical memory they failed to honour and/or celebrate such occasions in the way that older generations did. They put their (and other young people’s) attitude to such events down to the fact that they did not feel patriotic or that such events were hijacked by politicians and parties to serve their own ends and therefore not worthy of commemoration:

These are past events no longer celebrated and, in my opinion, refer to the belligerent parties which were at war against each other at that time and they are important to commemorate for those people and perhaps their relatives precisely. I don’t feel that this concerns me in any way. (LFT18, LT, Latvia)

Having made these points, many of the respondents (Latvian and Russian) attended Latvian Independence Day celebrations, for example, but more so because they went for the free concerts, fireworks and entertainment. However, Victory day (9 May, commemorating the defeat of the Nazis in Europe) has caused considerable tension over the years between Russians who celebrate it in their thousands, at Riga’s Soviet-era Victory Day memorial, and Latvians who view it as a reminder of the Soviet occupation. While ethnic relations between young Latvian and Russians are much improved when compared with their parents’ generation, there still remains a tension over whose ‘story’ about Russian rule in Latvia should be preserved and told to future generations.

Similarly, many of the Estonian respondents also had knowledge about the history of their country’s incorporation into the USSR until 1991 and the impact that this history had on
political activism generally and gay activism in particular. The fact that alternative lifestyles, including gay culture, were strictly confined to the private and underground spheres of social life during the era of Soviet rule meant that activism around LGBT issues after 1991 was low-key with activists lacking the political confidence and will to discuss and act upon issues of sexual difference.

Besides, some LGBT respondents had bought the dominant view that sexual difference was a problem and that in order to live a hassle-free life, it was necessary to hide their sexuality: ‘Right now I see that people are afraid to be out even among the community, to belong into this gay community (…) Yes… that’s how I see the Estonian gay community today (…) (Anna, LGBT movement, Estonia). The latter view was attributed by LGBT activists to those of Russian background in particular because the Russian Estonian community was seen to be far more conservative and introverted compared with Estonian majority society: ‘Russians are telling those dramatic stories, how someone is kicked out by their parents, saying you’re not my son or daughter anymore (…) (Renate, LGBT movement, Estonia).

It is only very recently that activists have started to campaign on issues with a greater sense of self-assurance and the idea that society needed to change its attitudes and accept sexual difference rather than that LGBT people should live a false existence.

For FI and UKF activists, historical memory and knowledge stretched further back into the 20th and 19th centuries, focusing on emancipatory feminist (UKF) and working class movements (FI) of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: e.g. the Spanish Civil War (1936), the Francoist dictatorship and the transition of Spain to democracy (after 1975) in the case of FI respondents and feminist movements such as the Suffragettes in the case of UKF respondents.

Hence FI respondents made references to the Civil War and the period of authoritarian rule which followed under Franco because many had grandparents and parents who had lived through those times (see above under 3.4.1) but more relevant to them was the period after 1975 when Spain entered a democratic era because this is the period (initially of hope and promise followed by disillusionment with mainstream democratic institutions) from which their politics had emerged. While the past did not figure in the everyday politics of FI respondents, parallels were drawn now and then between militant action and state repression today with similar situations during the Dictatorship, for example:

Repression, repression is another big subject. See, because quite often you hear: ‘Oh, that’s a lot like during Francoism’, right? Or you see photos, typical photos on Facebook, from 1968/2008, and it’s like they’re the same photo, only that one is in colour and the other is in black and white. Yeah, (…) it’s good to realise that this has been going on for a long time or that we’re going backwards, or I think we never left it behind. (Libertad, FI, Spain)

There were occasions when history intervened in activism, e.g. International Women’s Day (8 March) events often brought together different generations of activists where older feminists spoke of the gains women made during the Second Spanish Republic (1931 - 1939) and shared their Civil War experiences with younger ones; or activist workshops which occasionally focused on the history of feminism in Spain and in which FI respondents took part. Some respondents felt that a convenient amnesia existed in relation to the impacts on
Spanish society of the Civil War and Dictatorship especially where past leaders had escaped punishment for what amounted to brutal crimes against humanity:

I think there is a quite a lot of amnesia here. I mean, the legal issue surprised me a lot, that they weren’t tried. I mean, it seems incredible to me […] I think it’s one of the things that shocks me the most because I don’t think you can grow if you don’t heal. Without having a little justice. Or rather, it’s like the same: the guys had already died, but at least we could know who killed them, how many people, how, all the people affected. I think it’s something that is really missing here.

(Amanda, FI, Spain)

The notion of convenient amnesia about the Civil War and Dictatorship and the question of how Spain has dealt with the legacy of Francoism have been debated since 1975 (Freedland 2011). There is a view that Spain’s political classes sacrificed justice in order to avoid further civil strife; the left-wing historian Jorge Reverte has argued, ‘We had to make an agreement in order not to fight another civil war’ (Ibid).

Hence those respondents who referred to Spain’s transition to democracy after 1975 held a highly critical view of it, not only in terms of the political silence over the past which was established but also concerning the political and economic pacts which were made between members of the political classes. In Sara’s view:

We had this Transition that was all ’Cover it up, shut up and carry on’ (…). Memory is in the body, repressed, right? Like I think that a memory of struggle is not something that you can find everywhere, or rather, in every person, you know? And also because I think about it in relation to other countries where I’ve been and they have a very different relationship to this subject, where there was obviously an interest in recovering memory. And here, no, it’s the opposite. There is an interest in burying it, you know, in hiding it. (Sara, FI, Spain)

However, there was a (minority) view that 1975 marked a cathartic moment which gave way to positive and dynamic social and feminist mobilisations:

Yes, yes. You felt really different. But […] no. For me yes, the transition […] in social terms, right? In political or economic terms, it was something else. But socially, the dictator’s death was like uncorking a bottle of champagne. At the time it meant some pretty big changes in behaviour, in our everyday lives. It was the time when feminism was strongest. Yes, yes, for the people who had started to think and all, years when I wasn’t around. But [it was there] in consciousness raising groups […] the days of ’76 didn’t come out of nothing. People were already thinking. (Federica, FI, Spain)

While the past exists in FI respondents’ experiences, memory and knowledge (conveyed mainly through family) and while it informs their political attitudes towards issues of democracy, the state and the conduct of politicians and governments since 1975, it is also the case that it does not form part of their everyday discourse and actions, that most of the time it lurks only in the shadows of their political consciousness.
Similarly UKF respondents did not ordinarily refer to the past when discussing their day-to-day politics and activism but most, when questioned whether they were inspired by previous feminist or other activist movements, demonstrated varying knowledge of previous feminisms. First wave feminism and the movement for women’s suffrage was referred to most frequently. This knowledge had been gained mainly through history classes at school or university or through special projects (e.g. Birmingham Library’s suffrage project aimed at schools which saw the making of a documentary by local schoolgirls entitled ‘Fight for the right’) and commemorative events (e.g. the ‘Parliament and suffragettes’ workshops run by UK Parliamentary Outreach throughout the UK and the 2014 main lecture and exhibitions at the houses of parliament aimed at schools and universities) which formed part of the 2013/2014 centennial celebrations of the struggle for women’s suffrage.

A number of arguments emerged from discussions about past feminisms, feminist women and their achievements: first, that in consciously constructing a feminist identity, it was important to honour past feminisms and feminists who had made personal sacrifices so that future generations of women could enjoy certain freedoms (Eliza, Alice, Alexia, Giselle, Simone, Cora among others); second, that exploring women’s and feminist history provided a useful methodological tool for telling one’s own story and that of other women today (Robyn); third, that it was important to generate alternative memories in order to recognise the achievements of women whose histories were untold (Lili, Robyn); fourth, that it was important to counter dominant state interpretations of past movements and figures – e.g. the recuperation by the state of the suffragette legacy while drawing a veil on other figures and struggles (Robyn, Lili, Estelle). In relation to the last two points, Robyn explained:

Well it’s so interesting like who gets remembered as well. I don’t know (...) but the whole kind of Sylvia Pankhurst stuff, like she was working-class oriented and she was very much an anti-imperialist and there was that fight to get a statue of Sylvia, was it, there was one on the plinth in erm [...]  
I: In Trafalgar Square?  
R: Yeah in Trafalgar Square and then that got vetoed and then they wanted to have her somewhere near Parliament and the House of Lords rejected it. The Sylvia Pankhurst Trust had got permission from the council and all that kind of stuff and they were all like ‘she has nothing to do with Parliament’ and it’s like so funny because you’ve got her mother whose statue is beside Parliament but was put up in 1930 which was only put up because it was, well it was the work of the suffragette fellowship which was this group of ex-suffragettes that formed in 1926 to kind of make sure the suffragettes were remembered but what’s interesting about that is that the whole kind of focus was on the Pankhurs so all your other perhaps more kind of interesting anti-war, anti-imperialist, more working-class, all these sort of suffragettes have been forgotten. It’s interesting about the Conservative thing because Emmeline Pankhurst became a Conservative in her later years and she is very much reclaimed by the Tory party.  
(Robyn, UKF, UK)

While the state, school history books and young women honour first wave feminism and its achievements, the same cannot be said about 1960s and 1970s feminism. Many UKF respondents (particularly those in the 16-21 age range) possessed far less knowledge about...
second wave feminism. They acknowledge it as a movement which had brought women sexual freedoms through the struggle for contraception and abortion rights but many also saw it as a movement which included anti-men currents and which had tended to universalise women’s experiences across boundaries of ‘race’, class, sexuality, physical/mental ‘ableness’, geography. Frankie summarised young women’s and activists’ attitudes towards the two movements as follows:

I mean I think that is part of the general resurgence of feminism that’s been happening since the 2000s and the increased media profile of feminism and I think younger activists in particular are hungry for a history, an education, a knowledge of what went before and I think it is all part of that. I also think there’s a certain comfort or liberalism about focussing on the suffragettes, even though they were incredibly radical and I think sometimes people don’t realise how much so, but now I think they’re now perhaps safe whereas the second wave is fraught with problems. (Frankie, UKF, UK)

Thus UKF respondents are willing to be linked with previous feminist generations and have respect for their achievements. They use the language of 1960s and 1970s feminism (sexism, patriarchy, women’s oppression etc) and also some of the campaigning tactics of first and second wave movements to get their message across to a wide public. While some have reservations about the politics of both previous movements and while the history of feminism is not a driver for respondents’ activism on a daily basis, overall the historical memory of feminism has contributed to the creation of a feminist identity which influences their political attitudes and behaviour.

3.4.3 Thinking and doing through religion

This concept emerges out of the synthesis of data in only three of the cases in this cluster: LT, HH and ABS. It encompasses the idea that religion in contemporary Europe plays a part in shaping people’s political attitudes and activism; it is expressed by one of the LT respondents simply as ‘sifting’ through of all the information he receives, all that he experiences, says and does through his faith, namely Buddhism (LFT29). The idea that religiosity is a force in an individual’s politics has been increasingly examined in academic studies and surveys in the 1990s and 2000s as adherence to and practice of religion has intensified in the Muslim majority world, in the post-communist states of East and Central Europe and also in pockets of secularised western society. Such studies have shown that religion can offer direction as to the form of beliefs and ethical norms an individual follows. Moreover, religion may also serve an institutional function by linking the social, economic and political lives of individuals (e.g. see Rosta 2012; Leeege and Kellstedt 1993, PewResearch 2013). This section explores the extent to which religion impacts on respondents’ thinking and actions and what role it plays in bringing them together as civic and political activists.

In two of the three cases (LT and ABS) Buddhism can be seen to play an important life role for respondents. In the case of LT respondents Buddhism was chosen because Christianity had not worked for them. Hence, many held a critical view of Christianity, Latvia’s majority faith. It was presented as a religion imposed on individuals at an early age when free choice cannot be exercised. Some respondents (e.g. LFT22, LFT28 among others) had experienced
church as an unwelcoming and joyless place when they were young and had therefore turned away from it early on in life. Others (LFT8, LFT15, LFT21), as they grew older and were able to observe and analyse Christian thought and practice, developed a more trenchant critique of the Christian Church pointing to centuries of unfulfilled missions e.g. in respect of bringing about peace and alleviating poverty, discrimination and other hardships for ordinary people and also condemning its attempts the world over to get a foothold in political institutions and processes and thereby increase its power and control. On a more personal level, some respondents felt that Christianity and the Bible simply did not provide a clear enough path towards a purposive life. The majority of respondents were seeking an alternative faith and spirituality which would lend positive meaning to their daily life and this was found in Buddhism.

The basic Buddhist principles of compassion, non-violence, social inclusion and engagement, the exemplary life of Buddhist faith leaders and the teachings found in its religious books were seen by respondents as inspirational and have therefore had a considerable influence on the way they approached and lived life and enabled them to make sense of the world around them. Moreover, Buddhist principles have underpinned the demands of many political movements in Asia; e.g. the demands of India’s ‘untouchable’ (Dalit) populations for the dismantling of Hinduism’s rigid caste system and greater social, economic and political rights and, more relevant to the discussion here, the demands of ‘free Tibet’ protest groups worldwide for an end to Chinese repression and rule in Tibet. Thus, Buddhism has allowed LT respondents to not only find a particular way of living but also a means of expressing themselves politically:

I wish everything could be alright with this country [Tibet]. I have such feelings, such empathy, since I have a Buddhist conviction, that all people are equal. Everything should be alright with everyone. This is what I want, this is my compassion. I wish everything was alright, I wish it from the bottom of my heart.

(LFT15, LT, Latvia)

In addition, by bringing them together, Buddhism has provided LT respondents with a sense of belonging and permitted the creation of a collective religious and political identity (see also 3.1.1).

The case of ABS is different to the above in that here religion, namely Buddhism, created an institutional structure in which young people of non-Buddhist, Roma (Christian) background came together from necessity rather than choice, in order to be given a ‘last chance’ to continue high school education and at the same time learn to become active citizens in their community through various parts of the curriculum and extra-curricular activities. ABS was not a faith school and did not aim to teach Buddhism as a religion. Instead it promoted Buddhist principles of non-discrimination, social inclusion and positive engagement within one’s community in order to re-integrate Roma pupils from highly disadvantaged social backgrounds, and who had been definitively excluded from the state school sector, into education. While pupils were strongly attached to their Christian background and were not looking for alternative faith-based or spiritual guidance (as was the case of LT respondents) many acknowledged that the Buddhist worldview could be applied to a non-Buddhist way of life:

Interviewer: What do you know about the Jai Bhim Community?
József: [name] was our religion class teacher.
Interviewer: What religion does he teach, Buddhism?
József: Yes. He is a good teacher {...}
Interviewer: And what is your relation to Buddhism?
József: No relation.
Interviewer: But the religion class was good, wasn’t it?
József: I liked it, since it was also about Roma people and it was linked to them. I liked that class [...]  
Interviewer: And did anyone convert to Buddhism?
József. Nobody. We were not dealing with Buddhism [as a religion] in this class.  
(Anna, ABS, Hungary)

One of the teachers explained further:  
We don’t push them into Buddhism, therefore, there is no pressure on them that you have to be like this or think like that. And they cope with it easily and usually when asked about this issue, they say ’I am Christian, but many things in Buddhism are very good.’ They definitely do not want to change religion. In Alsózsolca, our Methodists are true Methodists indeed but they do not refuse Buddhism. [...]  
Interviewer: How many of your students will convert to Buddhism, what do you think?  
Anna: It is possible that none of them. But if you ask, how many of them will know more about the world, about themselves and their own soul [...] For I have seen that they are meditating and there are some who take this more seriously.  
(Anna, ABS, Hungary)

However, although ABS respondents accepted Buddhism as an approach to life rather than as a religious practice, although they were encouraged by the school to join demonstrations and sign petitions, and although some voiced opinions about political and human rights issues quite articulately, the vast majority were not pushed by Buddhism’s principles of community engagement to act independently in the civic or political spheres.

HH may be seen as a refutational case where the concept of doing and acting through religion is concerned. That it is a refutational case is noteworthy given that HH operates in a country where: the Orthodox Georgian Church became a potent symbol of resistance to the USSR (Rapp 2010: 152); post communist leaders stressed the importance of religion in identity and state building processes; the Constitution recognises the special role of the Church in the country’s history; and where this Church claims the allegiance of 85 per cent of Georgians. (Charles 2010: 3). In this context the fact that HH respondents did not report religion as a key factor shaping their political attitudes and behaviour is unexpected.
However, in discussing religion and religious organisations, many of the HH respondents displayed a critical attitude with lack of trust emerging as an important sentiment:

R: I don’t trust [the Georgian Church].
I: Why?
R: Because, first of all, I don’t think I have ever had relations with them, probably because of their views. I have different values. So, there is no convergence between me and them.

(Sandro, HH, Georgia)

Antipathy towards religious organisations in particular the Georgian Church also stemmed from the notion that the latter abused its powerful position, often violating the rights of other religious groups and not leaving room for other confessions to exist. Those who did not display ill feeling or who were neutral simply did not see religion as an obvious or important force in public life as many Georgians do. Researchers interpreted HH respondents’ overall attitude as characteristic of a particular mindset in youth volunteering at HH – i.e. that they bought into ‘western’, secularised values and aspirations. Researchers observed that they had explicitly made a link with ‘western’ values when arguing that volunteering levels in Georgia had not reached those in western society and that they would work to remedy to this situation. Thus, it would appear in this case that volunteering (and other forms of civic and political activity) is driven by a certain type of ‘western mindedness’ which does not accommodate religious sentiment and commitment.

3.4.4 Being part of a bigger picture

The concept ‘being part of a bigger picture’ also emerged out of data synthesised from a number of the cases, namely UKF, FI, LT, the LGBT movement and HH. ‘Being part of something bigger’ encapsulates the idea that while a particular cause or issue may catch one’s imagination and draw one into activism and a particular organisation, it is being part of a bigger landscape of socio-political and cultural activity and which ensures that people’s attitudes and behaviour do not freeze in time but rather evolve over a period of new or different experiences. This wider landscape of activity, as far as the cases in this cluster are concerned, includes being part of: other social movements, community organisations, national or international NGOs or of arts and culture groups.

A significant proportion of respondents across the cluster was involved in other causes, organisations and activities thus contributing to the cross fertilisation of ideas and action between activist groups. This was the case of both UKF and FI respondents. A majority of UKF respondents were simultaneously members or fellow travellers of not just other feminist organisations and campaigns which focused on specific issues - such as Object (the objectification of women in the media), Imkaan (Black and ethnic minority women’s rights), End Violence Against Women, Women for Refugee Women but some were also involved in other social movements or social movement organisations such as Disabled People Against the Cuts (Erica), Communities Against the Cuts (a Birmingham based movement) (Kristina), the National Union of Students LGBT section (Reese), local anti-fascist, environmental and peace groups (Lili, Frankie). FI activists were also part of squatter movements, local migrant
organisations, anti-repression groups such as *Rereguarda en moviment* and of course 15M which had the most influence on the way in which FI was organised (assembly-based organisation) and on their collective political behaviour (creative, often spectacular action in public spaces). Sol summed up the impact that 15M had on her and other FI activists:

> The ability to share projects, views, practices and a political space with diversity and plurality [...] for me that was an enormous discovery on the political and personal level. Being able to experience all this as wealth and not as conflict was a step that I owe to 15-M [...] (Sol, FI, Spain)

Being part of a bigger picture entailed support for or membership of more than one community organisation and/or NGO. Hence many HH and LGBT movement respondents reported that they supported or volunteered with other organisations – for example HH respondents worked with ‘Katarzisi’ (a shelter for elderly people) and Social Therapy House (offering therapeutic activities to those with disabilities), while some of the LGBT respondents were linked with the Estonian Union for Children’s Welfare or the Estonian Human Rights Centre for instance. In addition the Estonian LGBT movement has been inspired particularly by international movements and organisations, e.g the movement of ‘Pride’ marches which operates in major cities worldwide. Many felt that this kind of multiple membership or ‘followership’ gave them insights into the lives of other socially disadvantaged or politically under-represented groups and hence changed their attitudes politically (with a small ‘p’).

LT respondents tended not to be part of other organisations or movements and were LT members uniquely. This was closely tied with their being practising Buddhists and part of a Buddhist community: ‘The community is the first group of people I identify myself with. I don’t identify myself with other groups’ (LFT16). Nevertheless, as Buddhist principles accord with ideals of environmentalism and protection of human rights some respondents had been members of environmental organisations (LFT7; LFT9; LFT10) or worked with them on a voluntary basis (LFT15).

Finally the participation of respondents in the arts and in cultural activities was evident although not in all cases. Respondents in UKF, FI and the LGBT movement were involved to a greater extent, either using these media to express themselves politically or being influenced by it. They were participants in bands, cultural festivals such as Ladyfest, street theatre and in the making of fine and plastic arts. They used arts and culture to influence and mobilise their peers around feminist, LGBT and anti-capitalist issues and exchange ideas:

> And when I do an exhibition (...) I’m always thinking about the LGBT community. (...) they are probably my primary target audience. Or, well, somehow (...) they are that first mirror from whom I can imagine getting some kind of feedback (...). (Renate, LGBT Movement, Estonia)

Others drew inspiration for their politics through music and other art forms:

> I mean at the moment, my biggest, like, the thing that’s really inspiring me like and it’s inspiring my activism, it’s inspiring the band, it’s inspiring ‘zines I’m
writing, with my band, but, and a lot of feminist organising, I’m inspired a lot by Riot Grrrl […]. (Reese, UKF, UK)

The arts and culture did not feature as a channel of political information or a way of changing hearts and minds in the case of LT and HH. In fact, some activists clearly sought to separate the two: ‘Cultural events – yes, political ones – no, culture – yes. I’m studying to become an artist which means that I’m mainly interested in design, exhibitions, music, and art because, after all, I’m connected with art’ (LFT19). In the case of ABS, a deliberate connection was made between artistic and cultural activity and training pupils to develop a sense of civicism.

Being part of a bigger picture is easier to achieve today as a result of emergent digital media and activists are able to raise awareness, influence, mobilise in favour of a particular cause within a short space of time. Attention (of activists, potential activists and the public generally), as a resource available to social movements and organisations, can be split without expending a great deal of effort; and becoming a member or supporter of more than one movement/organisation can be done with a click of a button.

3.4.5 Present realities: social and economic crises

This section examines the idea that events occurring in the present have an impact on the thinking and actions of young people. It emerged from the synthesis of data in only three cases; that is HH, LT and FI. It was in the latter cases that respondents spoke most explicitly about present realities in connection with how they were thinking and what actions they had taken in order to make sense of these realities. The ‘realities’ that respondents mentioned most frequently included: austerity politics and the impact of cuts on people; political corruption scandals and repression.

In connection with the theme of austerity politics, respondents expressed concern over growing inequalities, unemployment, precarious living standards. FI respondents adopted a fervently anti-capitalist stance in the way they talked about the economic crisis in Spain and the government’s austerity programme. They raged about the impact of the austerity programme on people, describing it as brutal and a form of repression:

The current crisis favours big capitalists and the wealthiest classes of the country, just as is happening in other countries, while the high rate of unemployment, the lack of social protection, job insecurity and the fear of losing one’s job act symbolically as forces of repression. Everything above demonstrates how the state is currently exercising a form of violence over the population that is disguised and concealed, but no less brutal (Comissió Feministes Indignades, Barcelona 2012: 41).

Attention may be defined as ‘the means through which a social movement can introduce and fight for its preferred framing, convince broader publics of its cause, recruit new members, attempt to neutralize opposition framing, access solidarity, and mobilize its own adherents’ (Tufekci 2013: 849)
FI respondents linked the emergence and popularity of the 15M movement and the protest actions of thousands of young people to the economic crisis and austerity politics alone:

We had already come to the point at which it was unsustainable and it had to burst somewhere. Burst by 15-M, with all the criticism that 15-M could have, but for me it was a rather powerful moment when many people went out into the street, many politicised people, many non-politicised people, and it was (and still is) the moment to keep being there, to keep making a network, because for me the great thing about 15-M was that it united many struggles and brought many people closer who perhaps were working on the same things, whether healthcare, education, employment or feminism [...]. (Judit, FI, Spain)

Latvian respondents spoke of the impacts of the crisis too (unemployment, precarity etc.) but in very different terms. Their analysis of the crisis was framed within capitalist economics. Hence they saw the crisis as something that had been going on over 20 years, since the independence of Latvia, but that it had worsened in present times. They believed that tax evasion (LFT28) and huge financial investments in projects of minor importance (LFT14, LFT23) were the key causes of their economic problems. They also saw the economic success of China as a major threat to economic growth in Latvia since goods manufactured in Latvia could not compete against cheaper ones made in a powerful country (LFT3, LFT6, LFT8, LFT11, LFT12):

Some time ago we thought that China was very far away, and that it had no impact on our country, including their cheap goods made in labour camps. If a Latvian businessman wants to create something similar, he cannot beat the low prices. But why can’t he compete? Only because something is going on that shouldn’t be. Therefore, if we ourselves cannot produce what we need and we have to buy goods from them, we cannot increase our wellbeing. We don’t have jobs and we don’t have new companies just because prices are not competitive. (LFT11, LT, Latvia)

For them the answer to the crisis was not militant street action, calling for the downfall of capitalism, as in the Spanish case, but policies which aimed to increase exports (LFT18), encourage innovative and young entrepreneurs (LFT18, LFT29) and support the agricultural sector (LFT21, LFT23, LFT29). There was also some support for the Latvian government whose performance was compared favourably against that of governments in other Baltic and East European states. However, there was agreement that the crisis had impacted particularly badly on young people and that it had had a profound effect on their attitudes to life.

HH respondents (e.g. Mariam, Levan, Mareh) were also preoccupied with the poor functioning of the economy and the hardships that Georgians faced as a result. However, the theme of political corruption and repression as one which was bound up with present realities cropped up more often among HH respondents than any other and the event that every single respondent mentioned as having influenced or changed his or her political attitudes was the Gldani prison scandal of September 2012 and the 2012 parliamentary elections which followed. The Gldani prison scandal (see above) incited most HH
respondents to take part in wide scale political activism. They argued that although people had always been aware of the brutal conditions in Georgia’s prisons, the act of making these conditions known, through uncompromising television images, had dramatically changed people’s opinion. Furthermore, the prison scandal was seen to have influenced the results of the 2012 parliamentary elections which followed. As one respondent claimed:

This event changed my life [and] my attitudes. Now I know that I will always take part in elections, and I have this feeling and I believe that my voice has an essential meaning and if before this I was thinking politically or that I was indifferent towards taking part in elections, now it has changed. And I know that I will always participate. (Salome, HH, Georgia)

Seven respondents thought that the results of the 2012 Parliamentary Election reflected their changed attitudes after the prison scandal and those of the electorate in general. These elections gave rise to the belief among respondents that it was possible to bring about a change of government through the ballot box. They also felt that the post-election period marked a rise in civic consciousness along with the belief that every vote counted.

3.5 Which key ideological and discursive constructs drive young people’s activism around issues of gender and minority rights?

Drawing from a synthesis of the cluster data, this section considers some of the ideological and discursive elements which drive the activism of young people around issues of gender and minority oppression/rights. These constructs, presented as concepts, represent forms of activism which may express defiance or solidarity in the quest for equal rights and anti-discriminatory practice. They are:

- Power and the powerless
- Against violence and repression
- Gender and sexuality: against heteronormativity
- For social justice
- Generation ‘self’? Against individualism

Given the broadness of the above concepts, some overlap between them will be inevitable.

3.5.1 Power and the powerless

This concept, as expressed by young activists in this cluster of cases, represents power as a negative and oppressive force because of the way in which it is distributed and wielded in most societies today. Power was seen to be concentrated in the hands of a few. Hence, at the global level, power was seen to be exercised by the richest nations. At societal level economic power was dominated by transnational corporations, given a free hand by governments to do as they pleased while the political power of elected representatives and national governments was being compromised by a nexus of financial institutions such as big international banking groups, the IMF and so on which dictated the priorities (e.g. austerity programmes) governing national economies. On an interpersonal level, power
resided with those who fell into the ‘unmarked’, category which represents a universalised norm; hence, male, white, heterosexual, able-bodied and so on. In this conception of power, the powerless – subordinate groups (young people, women, ordinary working people) and minority groups (ethnic and religious minorities, LGBT, disabled groups) lacked decision making power in the political and socio-economic spheres, were therefore unable to develop their capacities and were often exposed to discriminatory treatment because of their lesser status. Such ideas were not expressed by respondents in a general discussion about power but emerged when they spoke of politicians, parties and governments, bankers, the rich, white people and so on. Examples of powerlessness in the face of those with power can be found across the cases. For example, Latvian respondents spoke of Latvia and Latvians as powerless in the face of more powerful countries and large foreign investors:

Since management of local enterprises was taken over by foreign investors, young people believe that although Latvia regained independence in 1991, national independence exists only in a formal sense. They believe that the current situation shows that Latvia does not belong to its people anymore and, in their opinion, it has become a business project. (LFT29, LT, Latvia)

And:

Our politicians are cowards. They are unable to stand firm against the temptation of China’s investments, they are unable to stand for moral things that are human rights of the people and culture – to live and survive. China is not even in the top ten investors in Latvia, but we want to pander to it and I simply consider this as a betrayal and cowardice. (LFT8, LT, Latvia)

The feeling of being powerless to bring about social and political change through elections was also strongly expressed by many respondents who felt that politicians courted them before elections but then ignored them once in power.

Respondents also referred indirectly to imbalances of power at the level of intergroup and interpersonal relationships based on race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality and class. These imbalances were often experienced as being excluded or ‘unheard’ or ‘unseen’ which then sometimes led to self-censoring/exclusion among some respondents. Paolo Freire (1921) has written about the development of cultures of silence among those who feel they are not given a voice. For example, Deanna, a mixed race university student, spoke about feeling stripped of power because she was regularly blanked out by white people:

I think that, I think there is a system going on where white people are, well they don’t really see race because that’s just the way they’ve been socialised. But I don’t know, I don’t have any answers on how to deal with that yeah. (Deanna, UKF, UK)

Another mixed race activist explained that it was difficult to be heard at feminist get-togethers:

I think in order for women of colour to speak of their experiences you’d definitely need to have a very sympathetic and welcoming environment where
people are open to listen to those, those ideas and for people not to criticise
them for having those ideas, ‘cause it’s their experiences. (Jalayah, UKF, UK)

Speaking as a queer, working class feminist, Robyn expressed feelings of being dominated
within ‘mainstream’ feminist groups:

I think quite importantly to say is that erm is the way I do activism is very queer
and it is because I am queer and it’s a way of, you are attracted to things that are
perhaps a little bit more forgotten or are a little bit more taboo or a little bit
more illegitimate in a way and I don’t know, I just don’t find, and also it’s kind of
important for me to say as well that my background’s working class as well and
sometimes in a lot more formal groups I find it’s very, very middle class
dominated and that can be very frustrating and a big, big turn off. Whereas I find
in more grassrootsy, perhaps less career feminism in a way, you find a bigger
range of people perhaps and I just find that more, I don’t know. I can relate more
I guess. (Robyn, UKF, FI)

And FI respondents spoke of the sexism and patriarchal power they had experienced in
the Plaça Catalunya when participating in the 15M movement.

Both the perceptions and reality of disempowerment explain in part why respondents and
other young people were drawn towards certain social movements and community
organisations and into voluntary work with NGOs and other bodies – not only did they gain
a sense of control themselves but they also became a part of movements and organisations
which aimed to break down oppressive power structures and (re)establish the rights of
disadvantaged and subordinated populations with whose powerlessness they identified. A
young Latvian activist (LFT11) said he had reached a point when he no longer wished to
collude in a culture of silence and that taking action against China’s occupation of Tibet had
allowed him to stop doing so. Another respondent, Lidia, became an FI activist because it
represented a space free of hierarchical power structures; she said: ‘The horizontality and
equality that exists interested me, that there is a healthy environment, without rivalry,
right? No bad stories, eh, or power structures’ (Lidia, FI, Spain). In the examples above the
respondents’ act of using their voice meant that they gained a critical perspective of their
own powerlessness and that of the populations for whose rights they were fighting. In doing
so they had replaced powerlessness with an enabling force – a process which may be
compared with what Freire referred to as ‘conscientisation’. 17

3.5.2 Against violence and repression

The themes of violence and repression are also recurrent in this cluster of case studies. The
violence that respondents refer to and reject is both real and symbolic and is perpetrated at
different levels and in different forms. The political struggle against violence and/or freeing
oneself from it represents another means of overcoming the oppression of and
discrimination against groups on grounds of gender, race/ethnicity etc. From the synthetic

17 The process of conscientisation entails developing an awareness of one’s social reality through action and
reflection. Action is particularly important as it changes reality.
analysis of the data in this cluster, two types of violence are identified across the cases: violence perpetrated by the state and its agents against oppositional groups and domestic violence against women.

Where state violence is concerned, respondents encountered it directly or otherwise in the case of FI, UKF, HH and LT. In the first three cases, respondents had encountered direct police violence in the context of public protests. The 15M movement protests had brought Catalonia’s mossos d’esquadra local police force, with its long history of brutality, onto the street charging at sit-ins and demonstrations in the Plaça Catalunya and at nearby squats. FI activists were also routinely monitored by the mossos:

We think they do control us (...) Yes we are controlled and, well, they know how we relate, they know how we move, they know who we are (names and surnames), where we live, the phones are tapped, but more as a caution than because they consider us as dangerous people, right? (Ada, FI, Spain)

Consequently, many FI activists joined affinity groups designed to look after fellow protesters during riot charges and worked with the anti-repression group Rereguarda en moviment. This led them to reflect on violence and to formulate a broader conception of state violence to include not just the repressive and oppressive functions of the state apparatus aimed at public control but also the symbolic violence inflicted on people through routine police surveillance and through the austerity programme which had forced hundreds of thousands of people into poverty and a precarious existence dominated by fear:

And of course, from here we cover the subject of repression, but I think that the starting point is much broader, about what violence is, what resistance is, what disobedience is, what topics are that (...) I don’t know if they are typical, but they do serve as a basis for feminist reflection and are open to questioning and breaking with some unquestioned truisms. (Sol)

FI activists encounters with the police had led a critical examination and analysis of the hegemonic concept of political violence as part of a system of state oppression against certain populations.

Very few UKF activists had come face-to-face with police violence. Where confrontations had taken place (student demonstrations against the fees, anti-cuts, anti-war or peace protests etc.) police had been far more restrained than in the Spanish case. One activist described her encounter with military police as follows:

I went on the women on the road for peace tour [...] and I got to Greenham because one of their stops on the tour was Greenham Common and I, that was absolutely amazing for me, having wanted to go there for ten years, and so I liked that, I liked the collectivity of it and there was just a great energy and humour and the whole time I lived at peace camp we had such a laugh, I mean those are the most things I remember, like going on crazy actions and demos in the middle of the night, very irreverent approach to the military and the police and the state like taking pumpkin lanterns into our court cases [...] and defending
ourselves in the most flamboyant fashion, really undermining the processes of the state that we felt were protecting, you know, the multi, you know, multinational corporations and patriarchal military state. (Frankie, UKF, UK)

Frankie’s comment indicates that she and others will have undertaken an analysis of state violence within their group although they reflect strongly on their own non-violent confrontation to the state. While the constraints of space and time do not allow for a full discussion here, it would be justifiable to say that unlike FI, UKF (as an activist development and mobilisation network) has taken a narrower representational approach to the question of violence (see brief discussion below of gender violence), seeing violence as an effect of power rather than an instrument for maintaining the existence and functioning of the state’s hegemonic projects.\(^{18}\)

The theme of state violence was to be found in the HH case study through respondents’ accounts of the Gldani prison scandal which exposed Georgia’s brutal prison regime in which political prisoners in particular were the target of the most severe violence. While it is not clear if HH respondents experienced police violence directly during the mass protests following the exposure of the scandal, many knew of people who had been on demonstrations and were victims of police violence. HH respondents’ knowledge of the reality of state violence does not appear to have led them to analyse state oppression against particular groups and the curbing of rights. In fact interviews revealed that most respondents had a high level of trust in the police, particularly the Patrol Police which was associated with citizen safety and especially after the 2012 elections which were seen to have ushered in a democratic regime.

While the analysis of state violence on the part of FI and some UKF respondents fitted in with a desire to challenge such violence and defeat it, this was not the case with HH respondents.

Discursive action against state violence in the LT case focused on an external state power – that of China. The *raison d’être* of LT respondents’ activism was uniquely the challenging of Chinese state power and violence in Tibet and the restitution of full democratic rights to Tibetans. The basis of LT respondents’ activism was religious but also political. As Buddhists they identified with Tibetans but their identification with the Tibet cause was reinforced by their country’s history of rule by the USSR which Latvians experienced as an illegal occupation. This particular foundation to LT activism meant that a narrow view of state violence was taken by respondents who saw Chinese state violence in Tibet as being no different to violence suffered by Latvians at the hands of the Soviet Union – that is, the violence inherent in communist regimes which are ultimately contemptuous of human rights (and in this case the rich cultural heritage) especially those of populations which have strong religious affiliations and which recognise an authority they consider superior to the earthly state.

The second category of violence, i.e. (male-on-female) domestic or intimate partner violence was discussed mainly by UKF and FI respondents who had experienced it directly within their family or knew of women who were victims of such violence. The issue of gender violence is

\(^{18}\) For an explanation and feminist analysis of hegemony and state hegemonic projects see Nayak and Suchland (2006: 469-70).
an important part of feminist analysis of patriarchal oppression and of the implication of the state in patriarchal structures and processes which uphold masculine domination. It was clear from interviews that this gendered analysis of violence drove a significant part of the activism of FI and UKF respondents on this issue and had even led some of them to identify with feminism – almost respondents in both cases had participated in action against violence against women; e.g. in reclaim the night marches, the annual, international ‘billion women rise’ events normally held on 14 February (Valentine’s Day), the 16 days against violence against women campaign which FI organised in 2012 and many others. This activism is aimed at raising awareness among ordinary women (and men) to take action against gender violence and increasing the rights of victims of violence. The fight against gender violence is seen as integral to the breaking down of patriarchal power and levelling the status of women and girls with that of men and boys. For FI the fight against patriarchy is also linked with anti-capitalism and the fight against the state’s support of capitalist projects which result in violence (real or symbolic) at home and elsewhere.

3.5.3 Gender and sexuality: against heteronormativity

This concept arises from data synthesised across three case studies: the Estonian LGBT movement, UKF and FI. It relates the idea of rejecting discourses and techniques which separate gender and sexuality and organise them hierarchically so that certain categories of identity (e.g. man, ‘straight’) are privileged over others (e.g. woman, LGBT). The dominance of heteronormative discursive practices within the state, family and other institutions leads to the discrimination and marginalisation of those who are not counted in ‘unmarked’, privileged categories. Activism founded on principles against heteronormativity was observed in the cases mentioned above.

Although Estonian society is not anti-LGBT in the way of other Baltic and East European countries, it is described as a strongly heteronormative society where intolerance of sexual difference is not uncommon. So while Estonia became the first of the former Soviet states to allow the legal registration of civil partnerships in 2014, during the run up to the law being passed and since then considerable protest, aimed at obtaining partial or total repeal of the legislation, has been mounted by traditionalist family associations and the Church. In this context LGBT activism has developed within a rather timid movement with often ill-defined goals compared with its western counterparts. This lack of confidence was revealed in interviews with respondents many of whom said that they did not talk openly about their sexual identity nor admit to being LGBT activists: ‘I don’t like to call myself a gay activist because the word has such a negative meaning (...) (Lisa, LGBT Movement, Estonia). Some had even questioned whether the movement of which they were a part should make demands which seemed too radical to the public – e.g. that for the legalisation of civil partnerships. Anna reported: ‘The problem is that some people fight for [gay] marriage legislation and then some gay men, somewhere say that they don’t want it or need it’. (Anna, LGBT Movement, Estonia). The idea that LGBT activism caused problems for the people on whose behalf it was undertaken was reinforced by Ralf:

I’ve been telling for years now, that through activism you can’t make changes in Estonia, it rather reminds people all the time that we are different and how we are different. It produces anger and negative strong reactions [...]. (Ralf, LGBT Movement, Estonia)
Consequently, effective articulation of the movement’s goals, the demands for LGBT rights and coordination of political activities and campaigns with other organisations has been left to a smaller hard core of activists such as Anna and Helle. Whether the gradual breaking down of heteronormative thinking and practices (as reflected by the progressive legislation on civil partnerships) has occurred any more due to activism around LGBT rights than to external factors such as EU equality directives on sexual orientation or to the growing tolerance of younger generations is unclear.

Activism countering heteronormativity occurred more naturally within FI and UKF and was far more visible than in the case of the Estonian LGBT movement. Where the FI were concerned, activists spoke of targeting what they called the heteronormative-patriarchal-capitalist framework, thus indicating that an effective attack on heteronormativity can only be undertaken by aiming to dismantle the patriarchal capitalist state. In this respect, activists often came together in femblocks, i.e. feminist blocks which gathered women identifying themselves in multiple ways (working class lesbian feminist; or immigrant trans feminist). Femblocks engage in street action as much as they do in reflection on theory which feeds back into practice.

Finally, despite the ideological divisions within British feminism, UKF has been careful not to associate itself with any brand of feminism and therefore risk the exclusion of certain categories of activists from its events and campaigns. So for example, taking an intersectional approach to gender and oppression, it has been open to trans activists (unlike radical feminist groups) in fighting heteronormative thinking and practice. While UKF has not initiated campaigns which explicitly counter heteronormativity, it has taken the view that the struggle against normativity starts in one’s own backyard. Its activist conferences and annual summer schools have always included LGBT workshops, panels and speakers – its 2013 summer school included workshops on ‘Queering austerity: LGBTQI campaigning and the cuts which was run by the feminist anti-cuts group Queering Resistance and ‘LGBT campaigning in the workplace and beyond’ organised by the TUC. Nevertheless, it has faced criticism for taking a tokenistic approach. One of the main divisions within feminism where challenging the heteronormative gender order is concerned occurs over the inclusion of trans activists in the movement. Reese, a trans activist recounted the difficulties of being trans within feminist circles let alone wider society where heteronormativity was more entrenched. Her first three years as a feminist activist were spent exclusively fighting battles against heteronormative thinking in the student feminist movement:

I felt several times like I wanted to be doing more than just the trans stuff but there was so much to do because there were constant, you know, there were constant battles over feminism and trans inclusion stuff and there were constant kind of, really major issues affecting trans people which there was a feminist slant on and so that’s what I did for three years. (Reese, UKF, UK)
3.5.4 For social justice
The concept ‘for social justice’ runs through the language and action of activists in most cases in this cluster. Social justice, as argued by Nancy Fraser (1995), may be seen as possessing ‘bivalency’ in that it covers the redistribution of resources (mainly economic but also social, political and cultural goods) and recognition of difference. Moreover, the politics of redistribution not only includes class-based currents but also forms of feminism or anti-racism which seek socio-economic change or reform which counteracts gender and racial/ethnic injustice. The politics of recognition, on the other hand, takes in not just movements which call for the revaluation of identities which have been unjustly devalued (e.g. cultural feminism, black cultural nationalism, and gay identity politics) but also deconstructive currents such as queer politics, critical ‘race’ politics and deconstructive feminism all of which reject the ‘essentialism’ of traditional identity politics.

Demands for social justice form the basis of activism in most of the cases in this cluster where in some cases demands focus more on distribution of resources and others on recognition of difference.

The politics of UKF and FI are based on social justice demands which focus on redistribution as well as recognition. In both cases respondents spoke of the precarious economic conditions that many of them faced themselves and that affected ordinary working people.

FI respondents in particular faced a context of high unemployment and financial insecurity which affected all social groups but in particular women and young people. They were unsurprisingly preoccupied with the crisis and its negative effects and their activism was founded on these preoccupations. Sol’s situation, as she explained it, was like that of hundreds of thousands of ordinary Spanish women and men who had lost jobs or young people who had never had jobs and were unlikely to find one for the foreseeable future:

I’m undergoing a period of change and extreme and continuous precariousness that is really affecting me, and right now I would say that the main issue is that I am tired of the precariousness, even though it’s always been precarious, and maybe that’s why (...) And at a time when I don’t know what will happen to me tomorrow, not only in terms of work, but also in terms of where I am going to live, whether I stay here or go somewhere else […] (Sol, FI, Spain)

Many of these young, educated women (often from a family background of leftwing politics) used the time they had as a result of being without work and prospects into a one of reflection about how and why the crisis had occurred, who it affected badly and who gained from it. It led them to a critique of the existing system, of capitalism, of patriarchy. Importantly it led them to take action as part of the 15M movement and FI. Dolors is a case in point:

For example, I turned the times when I was unemployed into (...) a way that I have of fighting uncertainty, impotence, frustration and anger at my precarious situation, at not having material support from my family, so that if I have a serious financial breakdown, I have one hand on the other side of me […] So that was energy that pushed me hard to speak from below and construct a discourse and action to get rid of it. (Dolors, FI, Spain)
UKF respondents also spoke of the effects of the economic situation in the UK, in big cities. Erica, a wheelchair user who lived on disability allowance described the situation faced by many women:

The lack of support [from the state], the fact that, like, the social funds been cut which means you can only get food money now from the crisis loan – and an Asda [supermarket] voucher’s not gonna help you escape an abusive partner, for example; especially with your children, erm, and that kind of thing. Those are – as far as I’m concerned – that is very, very real, very urgent pressure sort of going on in the city [...] (Erica, UKF, UK)

She also spoke of the motivation to get involved in calling for an end to the insecurity faced by vulnerable groups.

I personally, I think that [...] that if we want social justice, then we need to – the movements [disability rights, feminist, anti-cuts] – need to work together as strongly as possible. And I think it’s important to make sure that individual movements still, sort of, get together on their own and have their individual voices. Cause as we – you know – you see historically through feminism and things like that, if you’re not, sort of, white, middle-upper class, university educated, erm, then actually, sometimes it’s not quite, erm [...] so much for you. So I think there still needs to be like [...] but I’m very, very keen on trying to do what I can in my own little way to try and strengthen the bonds between the groups. So [...] where I do a lot of, erm – in many ways a lot of my campaigning ends up being sort of directed a lot at the disability side of things, especially the most active sides. Which I’d still argue are still feminist issues anyway. (Erica, UKF, UK)

In both cases (FI and UKF) respondents, whether they suffered from the effects of the crisis directly or not, tried to make sense of it, developing a critique which took into account their experiences of being female (in the case of Erica disabled) and poor. This critique led them to take action, make demands for an end to precarious lives and to feel that they were doing something to improve their own situation and that of others.

Demands for social justice which focused on redistributive measures formed a very small part, if at all, of the activism of young people in HH and LT. At HH the respondents came from a relatively secure socio-economic background and were at university or had recently graduated. They spoke about (un)employment being a primary concern of young people, but saw it very much in terms of individual career prospects than as a social problem requiring collective social action. For many of them the alleviation of the negative effects of poverty and social exclusion (which FI and UKF activists considered a result of the violation of social justice demands) could be achieved through volunteering.

Thus Levan stated:

I am most concerned with unemployment and what’s going on in Georgia. I want more people to get involved in this organisation in terms of volunteerism and participation in different interesting projects. (Levan, HH, Georgia)
Similarly, Mareh acknowledged that social and economic disadvantage in Georgia was cause
for serious concern but saw no obvious solutions to the ‘lack of resources’ which was at the
heart of the problem:

For example, there are so many poor people, so many need help and our country
does not have resources to help everyone equally. It would sound like that if I
answered from my professional standpoint. What else I’m worried about?
Nothing, let there be peace and kindness be in the world. (Mareh, HH, Georgia)

LT respondents also recognised unemployment and social deprivation as a major problem in
Latvia:

Many people still remain hopeless. The unemployment and low wages, should
tell something about the situation where the person has worked or so on. How it
is. Normally, how to put it, a normal job that requires higher education, but the
person in Latvia receives minimum wage or some 200 lats. A person alone cannot
simply survive here and it shows a lot about the country (LFT30, LT, Latvia)

While the above respondent’s concern about unemployment and low wages was common
among LT and HH respondents, there was little if any analysis about how the problem might
be addressed. One respondent (LFT18) felt that the state did not provide sufficient support
to poor families, implying that the solution resided in collective rather than individual
responsibility. In both the LT and HH cases, the recognition of socio-economic problems did
not translate into a critique of society or demands for egalitarian redistributive social justice.
This lack of demands for redistributive social justice on the part of HH and LT respondents
fits in with a general trend of claim-making for egalitarian redistribution being dislodged if
not extinguished from the discursive practices of social justice proponents. Nancy Fraser
puts this down to a number of inter-connected factors: the fall of communist states in East
and Central Europe, the rise of free-market ideology and the upsurge in ‘identity politics’
whether progressive or otherwise.

The argument that recognition demands have to a great extent replaced those for
redistribution is borne out in the analysis of data in this cluster. Recognition claims
underpinned much of the activism of respondents across the cases studied. This was
certainly true in the case of HH, LT, ABS and of course the Estonian LGBT movement. Thus,
HH respondents volunteered with organisations dealing with women who had been
demeaned and dehumanised as victims of violence (in the home and in conflict zones) and
with people with disabilities who are often infantilised, trivialised or disrespected. LT
respondents worked towards the restitution of the rights of a population whose autonomy,
faith and culture had been negated through the occupation of their land and the Estonian
LGBT movement represented a population whose sexuality was construed as deviant and
hence devalued in a heteronormative society. At ABS, the work done with Roma pupils (who
formed part of a community marked as different and inferior) was aimed at improving their
life chances. In all these cases, activism was fuelled by demands of recognition and hence
the upward revaluing of particular groups and populations.
FI and LT activists were also involved in protests and campaigns against violence against women; the under-representation, misrepresentation and/or objectification of women in the media and public life; for the rights of women to abortion and sexual freedoms; for the rights of LGBT groups; for the right of migrant women and so on. Their demands too were for recognition and for the positive revaluing of powerless women, LGBT and migrant populations.

Thus, the elements which lend ‘bivalency’ to the concept of social justice are found to a far greater extent in the activism of FI and UKF respondents than in the activism of the other groups in this cluster.

### 3.5.5 Generation ‘self’? Against individualism

The final concept in this section relates to the idea that the generation of young people represented by the respondents in this cluster of case studies is the ‘heartless’ generation chasing individualistic, materialist goals and lacking all sense of social solidarity. This idea emerges from the synthesis of data in only two cases and comprises two elements: that young people have become more individualistic and think only of themselves; that this individualism is fuelled by immersion in a consumerist culture. Both elements suggest a certain pessimism about the future on the part some respondents.

The feeling that individualism was on the rise, that young people cared only for themselves and that they ignored social needs and problems was particularly strong among LT respondents (LFT6, LFT7, LFT13, LFT14, LFT26; LFT29): ‘They don’t care about what’s going on in Tibet, they care only about themselves, their homes, and purses’ (LFT13). This sentiment was echoed in a slightly different way by HH respondents (Iago, Eka, Levan, Mareh) who felt that a good proportion of their peers were only interested in having an easy life of fun without putting anything back into society:

> For my peers, the most important thing is, I think, not to lose free time senselessly. What I mean by senseless is that I have free time too. I spend it having fun with the friends too. I do sports, but there should be something [else]. (Iago, HH, Georgia)

Increased individualism was put down by respondents to three reasons. The first was the predominance of materialism and the rise of a consumer culture not only in their own country but throughout the world, ‘People in my country look more to the material side. They are more materialistic’ (Vera, HH, Georgia); and fear was also expressed that such a culture was invading all spheres of life:

> At the moment it’s propaganda of the consumer culture: “buy instead of feeling, reading, loving, suffering, crying”, be alive, just buy. There’s no slogan – “live!” There’s just the slogan – “buy!” (LFT25, LT, Latvia)

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The second reason given was that young people suffered deep disillusionment with politics and political leaders who set a prime example of serving one’s own interests although only because people had allowed them to do so through their own apathy: If we thought about everyone, then there wouldn’t be this terrible corruption we see today in politics. We don’t think broadly. We think narrowly. This mindset is our severest poverty’ (LFT26, LT, Latvia).

Individualism was also attributed to the emergence of a culture of complaint which went hand-in-hand with increased consumerism. The argument put forward by some respondents was that as it had become easier to earn money after the end of communist rule in East and central Europe, people got used to buying large quantities of goods; however they faced a sudden change in circumstances when economies went into recession and instead of adapting, defining new goals and working towards them, people became used to ‘whining’ (LFT28).

This pessimistic view of young people was not shared by FI and UKF respondents and in this respect these may be considered refutational cases here. Among FI respondents there was only one (Monica) who referred to the rise in consumerism though without more as a statement of fact than a judgement about young people’s attitudes:

> It seems that we had reached a point of well-being, where we have our jobs, we go to the movies, we travel [...] we are like slaves. We live in a society with an economic model in which priority is progress, eating, being, and having a job and being able to have a month’s vacation, and a horrible consumerism ... (Monica, FI, Spain)

Most if not all UKF and FI respondents implied optimism about the future of activism within their respective movements.

4. Conclusion

This report presents a synthetic analysis of six ethnographic cases of young people’s activism in organisations and movements on gender and minority rights. Based on five research questions, the synthesis provides comparisons, interpretations and explanations about the extent of young people’s activism, the types of activism in which they engage and the basis on which young people come together to act collectively. The findings in relation to each of the research questions are presented below

Synthesis of data analysed in relation to the first research question (‘How do young people inhabit, interpret and own their organisations?’) produced five concepts. The first concept related to activists’ sense of belonging to their organisation based on the diversity of organisation members/followers, its openness and the possibilities of forming strong friendships based on trust and a common identity. Respondent testimonies revealed that in the majority of cases young people considered that their organisations provided them with a safe place of belonging and companionship in which ideas and practices could be tested out without fear of judgement. The Estonian LGBT movement emerged as the one refutational case for a number of reasons; the fragmented nature of the movement, societal attitudes to LGBT issues, the negative image of activism in Estonian society and the internalising by activists of negative attitudes towards LGBT groups combined to strip
activists of their confidence to be able to form strong communities which fostered a sense of belonging. The second concept covered the question of leadership of organisations and findings indicated variations in the nature of leadership. Two organisations (HH and ABS) emerged as refutational cases; they did not conform to the model of ‘blurry’ leadership where lines of command are unclear and where collective leadership may be favoured. One organisation (UKF) was considered a partly refutational case because although it had identifiable leaders, its organisational structure meant that power was dispersed throughout its network structure. Only two cases (HH and ABS) conformed to the blurry leadership model. The third concept, through which the question what human capital is gained by activists as a consequence of being part of their organisation, showed that in all the cases concerned, respondents had gained human capital, either in the way of activist skills and knowledge, access to material resources or to useful activist and other networks. The fourth concept related to the question of long-term stability of the organisations concerned. The synthesised data revealed that all the organisations faced an uncertain future. For organisations such as HH and UKF a stable funding landscape and a pool of volunteers was crucial but could not be guaranteed. As a single issue organisation LT relied upon the issue of Tibet remaining salient in the mind of the public and among politicians who were among its supporters and donors whereas FI relied heavily on the continuing commitment of activists in the face of dwindling human resources and state repression amongst other things. The LGBT movement depended not only on activist commitment and volunteers but also on external funding. All these organisations/movements struggled to remain afloat. ABS was the only one which closed due to lack of funding. The fifth concept, relating to the public image of the organisations, led to the conclusion that organisations generally benefitted from one or more of these factors: high-profile leaders (UKF), celebrity endorsement (UKF, LGBT Movement and LT), strong grassroots support (UKF) and respectability (HH).

The second research question (‘How do young people understand and experience their own activism?’) generated the following concepts: activism as friendship, extending activist relationships, becoming empowered, being/becoming who you are and ‘let’s make this life better. Exploration of the concept ‘friendship’ found that the strongest views about activism and friendship were expressed by UKF and FI activists who saw continuity between their feminism and friendships. Friendships through activism also emerged in the other cases. However, in one case (ABS) the low level of spontaneous activism and lack of natural activist networks meant that friendships, where they existed between respondents, were forged elsewhere. In the case of the LGBT movement, activist networks were generally weak and not well-exploited and so although friendships occurred, respondents did not express particular enthusiasm about them. The concept ‘extending activist networks’ applied to all the organisations in the cluster to a greater or lesser extent except ABS which proved to be the refutational case. The idea that activists are empowered through being part of an organisation or movement constituted the third concept. The majority of respondents expressed the view that their activism had given them a voice and had allowed them to express a collective identity or channel feelings of anger or fear positively. This concept is closely linked to ‘being/becoming who you are’ because finding a voice and feeling empowered prepares the ground for self-realisation. Being/becoming who you are was also driven by the emotions of social action and being able to express one’s core values in tandem with the action in which one engaged. For LGBT activists ‘being/becoming who you are’ meant being able to come out with pride; for feminist activists it allowed the fusion of
personal and public politics. For others (LT and HH respondents) it simply meant bringing out the best in themselves and seeing things differently. Finally, one of the motivations driving activism within social movements and organisations is the desire for social and politico-cultural change and making things better whether it concerns small-scale changes such as those achieved by HH volunteers or bringing about social transformation of public attitudes, structures and processes which is what groups such as FI and UKF sought.

Data synthesised in relation to the third research question (What are young activists’ perceptions of politics/the political?) produced five concepts. The first concept ‘dormant democracy’ uncovered two main standpoints among respondents: that despite its many flaws, representative democracy is the best known form (HH, LT and a number of UKF respondents); that representative democracy is a sham (FI). There was no explicit discussion of democracy among ABS and LGBT Movement respondents. The second concept related to young people’s perceptions of politics (in the sense of formal political institutions and processes) and revealed a generally gloomy picture. One of the main themes to emerge was of disinterest in politics due to the corrupt nature of this world, because of the remoteness of political institutions from ordinary voters and young people in particular and because of the near integration of political systems and capitalism. Related to the second concept was that of young people’s attitudes towards politicians. These were closely tied with their views about politics given that politicians are primary actors in the political system. Politicians did not fare well in the assessment made of them by respondents across the cases. They were seen as self-serving, financially corrupt, promise breakers and unworthy of voters’ trust. However, some nuances surfaced when respondents spoke of individual politicians or of certain parties, particularly newer less established ones. The concept ‘politically disengaged voters relates to the contradiction between what young people’s negative views about politicians, parties and the political system and the belief that many among them expressed that voting was a civic duty. Hence many respondents said that they voted while many who were not of voting age expressed their intention to vote. Finally, the concept neither left nor right revealed that many young people no longer identified with left-right divisions and were often unaware of what they are supposed to mean. Left-right divisions meant little to HH, LT, LGBT Movement and ABS respondents. Most respondents were drawn to their organisations precisely because they were not ideologically orientated and fitted into the ‘neither left nor right’ mould where associative life was preferable to partisan militancy and where issue-based campaigns were favoured over the defence of a political idea or position. In the case of UKF and FI respondents left-right divisions bore meaning and many respondents, in particular those in FI, placed themselves firmly on the left of the political spectrum.

The fourth research question (How are young people’s activism, attitudes and everyday lives shaped by the past and the present?) produced five concepts relating to the influence of the family, historical memory and knowledge, religion, being part of a bigger picture and the present on young people’s activism and political attitudes. The first concept showed that the family was one of the strongest influences to shape young people’s political attitudes and behaviour. Those with activist or politically opinionated parents and grandparents often followed in their parents/grandparents’ footsteps and this emerged among FI, UKF and LT respondents in particular. The second concept explored the idea that historical memory and knowledge may influence people’s political attitudes and behaviour. Findings from the synthesised data varied considerably and it is difficult to draw generalised conclusions as
both historical knowledge and memory varied within respondents’ cohorts and across them. What emerged clearly was that for LT, HH and LGBT respondents the period 1989 – 1991 (which saw the crumbling of the Soviet Union and eventual independence of the Baltic states and Georgia) was highly significant and that most respondents believed that it influenced the political development of their country and political attitudes and behaviour generally and more specifically within families. Spain’s transition to democracy and, to a lesser extent, the Spanish Civil War represented important moments in history for FI respondents. In the case of UKF respondents, feminist history (the suffragettes and the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s) had led them to reflect on certain issues and types of activism today. Religion, in particular Buddhism, also shaped the views and behaviour of LT and ABS respondents. HH proved to be a refutational case as rejection of the powerful Orthodox Church of Georgia and of other religious organisations was common among young Georgians and many of the respondents among them. The concept ‘being part of a bigger picture’ emerged out of data synthesised from a number of the cases. ‘Being part of something bigger’ encapsulates the idea that while a particular cause or issue may catch one’s imagination and draw one into activism and a particular organisation, it is being part of a bigger landscape of socio-political and cultural activity and which ensures that people’s attitudes and behaviour evolve over time. Being part of a bigger picture involved being connected to other community organisations, NGOs and arts and culture forums. Many of the respondents in UKF, FI, LT, the LGBT movement and HH demonstrated such connections and expressed the view that being connected in this way had influenced their attitudes. Finally, present realities, in particular the economic crisis that has affected Europe since 2008/9, also contributed to shaping young people’s attitudes.

The final research question (Which key ideological and discursive constructs drive young people’s activism around issues of gender and minority rights?) is specific to the cluster ‘gender and minority rights’ and generated five concepts. The first concept ‘power and the powerless’ represents power as a negative and oppressive force because of the way in which it is distributed and wielded in most societies today, at different levels. While respondents across the clusters did not discuss the concept of power or that of powerlessness explicitly, their perceptions of being powerless both economically, politically and often in personal relations were made clear. In many cases it was the sentiment of powerlessness which formed the basis of respondents' activism and which attracted them to organisations which advocated for powerless social groups. The second concept ‘against violence and repression’ revealed respondents’ experiences (direct and indirect) of violence perpetrated by the state and of violence in intimate relationships. Fighting against different forms of violence and overcoming them represented triumph over oppression and therefore gave meaning to much of the activism aimed at furthering the rights of oppressed groups. The third concept ‘against heteronormativity’ arose from data synthesised across three cases (FI, UKF and the LGBT Movement). It relates to the idea of rejecting discourses and techniques which separate gender and sexuality and organise them hierarchically so that certain categories of identity are privileged over others. The struggle against heteronormativity constitutes one of the main ideological constructs in activism for gender and sexual rights. The fourth concept ‘for social justice’ underpinned the activism of respondents across all the cases in this cluster whether it concerned demands for the egalitarian redistribution of resources or the recognition of devalued identities. Finally, the
concept ‘generation “self”’ explores the idea that young people are becoming increasingly individualist and dismissive of social solidarity ideals which has negative implications for future activism around the rights of oppressed groups and minorities. While two respondents in two cases (LT and HH) supported this idea, others (in UKF and FI) were optimistic about activism and its development in the future.

5. References


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