MYPLACE: Aims and Objectives

The central research question addressed by the MYPLACE (Memory, Youth, Political Legacy & Civic Engagement) Project is:

**How is young people’s social participation shaped by the shadows of totalitarianism and populism in Europe?**

Key themes addressed include:
- Understanding the legacy of totalitarianism and populism;
- Mapping youth participation and civic engagement;
- Exploring receptivity to new radical and populist political agendas.

Case study approach

The MYPLACE project used a case study approach, using 30 carefully selected research locations (illustrated in Figure 1) which provided within country contrasts in terms of hypothesised receptivity to radical politics. MYPLACE work strands include:
- Questionnaire survey (N = 16,935, target = 600 per location) of young people aged 16-25;
- Follow up interviews (N = 903, target = 30 per location with a sub-sample of these young people);
- 44 ethnographic studies of youth activism, in 6 thematic clusters;
- Ethnographic observation at 18 sites of memory including expert interviews with staff (N = 73), focus groups with young people (N = 56) and inter-generational interviews (N = 180).

Thematic Reports

The aim of this series of thematic reports is to present a general Europe wide thematic analysis of young people’s views, attitudes and behaviour towards a range of social and political issues. This report focuses on content on history and memory and will cover the following areas:

- Interest in recent history;
- Significance of historical events;
- General interest in history;
- Importance of commemorating the past

Format

Each page presents a specific theme and contains descriptive narrative, quotes from interviews and two graphs presenting questionnaire survey data. One graph presents the theme by the 30 research locations (colour coded into clusters of locations). These second graph illustrates a demographic breakdown. Quotes cited as ‘Interviewee’ emanate from follow up interviews with a subset of the survey sample of young people while those cited as ‘Activist’ are from young people interviewed as part of the ethnographic case studies.

Statistical techniques have been used to construct derived variables (Factor Analysis) and test reliability (Cronbach Alpha or Correlations).
Interest in recent history

Young people do have interest in recent history, with 29% stating that they are ‘very interested’ and 56% stating that they are ‘a little interested’.

The MYPLACE survey asked respondents about their interest in the recent history of their country. Recent history was defined as the last 100 years. The responses have been standardised on a 0 to 100 scale, with 100 representing the greatest level of interest.

The overall average for all locations is 57.4 (n= 16,780, sd = 32.2), demonstrating medium levels of interest in the recent history of the country. This varies from Jena (DE-E) with 77.5 with the highest levels of interest to Vyborg (RU) with 30.7 with the lowest levels of interest.

Young people have knowledge of recent history and are able to evaluate various events and periods of time.

“INT: Err, so, in terms of more recent history, which period do you think. I mean, let’s say twentieth century, which period.
RES: Nineteen twenties, probably.
INT: Why?
RES: Things started to change, didn’t they? Well, well between the nineteen twenties and nineteen forties, I’d say, I know that’s quite a big gap, but that’s when, you know, things started happening. Erm, but it was still all, like, erm, people had to work for what they had, you know, and I think that’s, that’s what I like about those kind of periods. You didn’t have a choice, you had to.
[Interviewee, UK]
Significance of historical events

The MYPLACE project revealed that there are particular historical events that resonate greatly with young people across Europe, whilst others are deemed less significant.

The MYPLACE survey asked respondents to rate a number of events in world history in terms of how important they believe they were for their country: ‘World War I (1914 - 1918)’; ‘World War II (1939 - 1945)’; ‘Cold War (1945 - 1989)’; ‘Fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of socialist regimes (1989-1991)’; ‘The Holocaust’; ‘Fascism’; ‘Communism’. The answers have been combined to demonstrate the average level of belief in the significance of historical events. They have been standardised on a 0 to 100 scale, with 100 representing the greatest level of belief.

The overall average for all locations is 69.6 (n=14,214, sd = 18.0), showing relatively high levels of belief in the significance of historical events. This varies from Jena (DE-E), 84.4 with the highest levels of belief to Narva area (EE), 53.6 with the lowest levels of belief.

Young people talk about World War II, in particular as being a significant historical event for their own country. However, not all young people see the importance of referring back to these historical events, preferring to focus on the present day.

“I dont like history. I think it is not important to think about history, the future and current time is important. You cant change history”
[Interviewee, Slovakia]

Locations in East Germany, West Germany and Russia have the highest levels of belief in the significance of historical events. Locations in Estonia, Slovakia and Portugal have the lowest levels of belief.

“Well, that many people are still fascinated by the Second World War, by especially what Hitler achieved, many teenagers in particular. I think that they are fascinated by it and are swayed by it”.
[Interviewee, Germany (East)]

Figure: Demographics breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age 16-18</th>
<th>Age 19-21</th>
<th>Age 22-25</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>PC1: High</th>
<th>PC2</th>
<th>PC3</th>
<th>PC4: Low</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>PK1: High</th>
<th>PK2</th>
<th>PK3</th>
<th>PK4: Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>63.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
General interest in history was revealed to be relatively low across Europe as a whole.

In order to measure general interest in history, the MYPLACE survey asked respondents to state how often they had done the following things in the last 12 months: ‘Played a video game that re-enacts events in the 20th century’; ‘Watched a film that was set in recent historical circumstances’; ‘Watched a documentary about events in the 20th century’; ‘Read a novel set in recent historical circumstances’; ‘Read a non-fiction publication about the recent past’; ‘Visited a museum with an exhibition about the recent past’; ‘Participated in a discussion about history at school or in college’; ‘Talked with your parents about the past’; ‘Talked with your grandparents about the past’; ‘Attended a veterans’ parade or showed support during a remembrance day’; ‘Researched family history’; ‘Visited a webpage with historic content/discussions’. The answers have been combined to plot the general level of interest in history and have been standardised on a 0 to 100 scale, with 100 representing the most interest.

The overall average for all locations is 32.1 (n=15,315, sd = 19.8), demonstrating very low levels of interest in history. This varies from Rostock (DE-E) with 44.5 with the highest levels of interest to Barreiro (PT), 19.8 with the lowest levels of interest.

Locations in Germany (East), Denmark and UK have the highest levels of interest in history compared with locations in Portugal, Hungary and Georgia where interest is the lowest.

More than one-fifth (22.8%) of the respondents had not watched historical films (the most frequent activity). Perhaps for young people learning about history is more about the everyday lives and culture of friends and family in past decades.

“Well I saw recently a movie about this Tannenberg’s battle. That this was quite interesting, but actually if to think like really then it was quite horrifying. How many people died in there and all such stuff”.
[Interviewee, Estonia]

“INT: So what is fascinating about seventies?
RES: Music. That’s when it was all, erm, like your dad was telling me, we’re going to go and see The Who in June […] And I find it absolutely fascinating, that erm, like, when he was meeting his wife, my mother-in-law, erm, they didn’t have a ‘phone to communicate, they had to arrange to meet each other, and, you know, they’d say, “oh, I’ll meet you here next week” and things like that.”.
[Interviewee, UK]
Importance of commemorating the past

The considered importance of historical events and commemorating the past increases amongst those who belong to the majority and is also determined by parental social class.

The MYPLACE survey asked respondents to determine how important it was for their country to commemorate its past. The answers were plotted to indicate an overall attitude towards commemorating the past represented on a 0 to 100 scale, with 100 representing the greatest belief in the importance of commemorating the country’s past.

The overall average for all locations is 76.6 (n=16,694, sd = 21.8), demonstrating high levels of belief in the importance of commemorating the past. This varies from Telavi (GE), with 95.0, with the highest levels of belief to Forstate & Jaunbuve (LV), 61.4 with the lowest levels.

Locations in Georgia, Estonia and Greece have the highest levels of belief in the importance of commemorating the past. Latvia, Slovakia and Spain have the lowest levels of belief.

Young people may consciously commemorate historical events or be unaware of them. However, many comment on the politicisation of historical commemoration and recognise that some historical events are not as black and white as may be pinned during commemoration.

“[Politicians] should not let people forget about the good things and better days we had in the past.”
[Interviewee, Georgia]

“I even don’t know about such a date and that something happens on that day”
[Interviewee, Latvia]
General Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the young people across Europe who participated in this study, all the fieldworkers and the various public, private and voluntary organisations who supported the fieldwork. We hope to have done justice to the collective efforts of so many people in our analyses. Without funding under the EU’s Framework 7 programme none of this work would have been possible.