

Article

Controversies and Generational Differences: Young People's Identities in Some European States

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Abstract: This article explores how young people (aged 12–18) in the four Visegrad states of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic are constructing their identities, particularly their sense of attachment to their country and to Europe. This generation is of particular significance, in that they are the first generation for many years to have been born and socialised in wholly independent states that are in a relatively peaceful and stable state. Data was collected through 41 focus groups, conducted in 11 different locations in the different states, and were analysed in terms of the degree of enthusiasm expressed for civic institutions and cultural practices related to the country and to Europe. Two particular areas were identified: the sense of generational difference and the ways in which different groups created “other” communities, within and without their country's borders. These parameters allow us to distinguish the significant communities that these young people are creating in order to make sense of their social and political worlds.

Keywords: identity; citizenship; young people; social construction; Poland; Czech Republic; Slovakia; Hungary

1. Background

Citizenship and national identity have been traditionally associated with defined and limited areas [1]. Since the end of the second world war, this concept has become gradually eroded in many parts of the world, through processes such as globalisation, large scale migration, and the development

of dual citizenship [2] The development of the European Union (EU) has contributed another layer of complexity. Citizens of the countries that are members of the Union are now also citizens of the EU, and this second citizenship gives them rights that are superior to those rights given by their country's citizenship [2]. As the EU has expanded, this citizenship—and these rights—have been extended to include an increasing number of Europeans. The border of the EU has moved between its inception in 1956 and its most recent expansion in 2007 with further border movements planned in coming years.

This article describes part of a small-scale qualitative investigation into how young people—aged between 11 and 18—are constructing their identities and becoming aware of their actual or potential European identity in the four central European countries that form the Visegrad group: Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. These countries are all engaged in a process of change, having become members of the European Union in May 2004. However, there was an additional prior change to the status of the three countries in 1989–1990, when they all became independent of the Warsaw Pact and freed themselves from USSR hegemony [3]. They had been established as three independent states in 1918 (Czechoslovakia as a new state, Hungary as a much reduced part of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Poland as a revived state, following its division in the 18th century by the central European powers). Between 1938 and 1945 they were variously involved in the Second World War: Poland was divided between Germany and the USSR in September 1939 following the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact; Czechoslovakia was forced to secede first part, and then all, of its western Czech territory to the Germans in 1938–1939, and Slovakia was forced to become a client state of Germany. Hungary aligned itself with the German regime. All four countries were invaded by Allied troops in 1944, principally USSR forces, and were rapidly incorporated into the USSR sphere of economic, military and political influence. 1938–1945 was a period of almost unbelievable violence: Snyder (2010) estimates nearly 20 million died in these territories in this period.

These events mean that in 2011, people under 19 in these three countries share some particular characteristics. Other than those over 70 years of age, this is the first generation to be born in the four wholly independent states, and to have been wholly socialised into these self-governing communities. They will have no personal memories of the Soviet period, or of the events leading to the establishment of the independent countries. Parents and various histories will have mediated any narratives they construct of the events before 1989/1990. They will also have become aware, over the past six years, of their country's membership of the EU. These histories are likely to have influenced the ways in which identities have been constructed.

2. Identities and Attachments: A Brief Discussion

Identities are increasingly recognised as being both multiple and constructed contingently [4] and, for some, in a context that includes Europe. Such identities may include a range of intersecting dimensions, including gender, age and region. It appears that a growing number of young people in parts of the EU are acknowledging at least a partial sense of European identity alongside their national identity: the degree to which this is acknowledged varies by nationality, gender and social class, as well as by age [5]. European and national identities are not alternatives, but potentially complementary feelings that can be held in parallel [6]. But what does this multiplicity mean for the young people

involved? This study explores their constructions of identity and citizenship in these countries the early 21st Century.

I draw on three writers in framing this analysis of what a sense of European or national identity might mean. Bruter [7], analysing the emergence of mass European identity, describes the identities of citizens as having a civic and a cultural component. Individuals have differing balances of the “civic” (identification with “the set of institutions, rights and rules that preside over the political life of the community”) and the “cultural” “identification with a certain culture, social similarities, values” [7]. Jamieson and Grundy describe the different processes by which some young people “come to present themselves as passionate utopian Europeans, while for many being European remains emotionally insignificant and devoid of imagined community or steps towards global citizenship” [8].

My research questions began from these frameworks. Do these young people identify with a mixture of cultural and civic aspects of Europe, and how does this relate to the presence of the same two components in their identification with their country? To what extent are young people passionate or indifferent about each? Does their sense of their own identity require the construction of “the Other”, a contrasting outside or alien identity to be held in juxtaposition to their own identity? As the borders of the European Union continue to grow, are there (in the minds of these young people) limits to Europe: Where does the frontier lie?

Generational identity is suggested by a fourth writer, Fulbrook [9]. The experiences of this generation are markedly different to those of their parents and grandparents. In her recent study of generational identities in 20th Century Germany, Fulbrook notes the “construction of a collective identity on the basis of generationally defined common experiences”. Age, she suggest, is “crucial at times of transition, with respect to the ways in which people can become involved in new regimes and societies”. Do these young people perceive themselves as a generation differently available for political and social mobilisation than their parents or grandparents? Miller-Idriss [10] has demonstrated this with a detailed empirical study of young Germans in the early years of the last decade. The study I am now describing suggests that there have been very similar generational shifts in the post 1989 generation in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic Do the young people in either or both countries now perceive themselves as a generation differently available for political and social mobilisation than their parents or grandparents? The complexities and diversities of these societies, coupled with their particular recent history, make them particularly interesting locations in which to investigate the construction of identities.

3. Issues of Methodology

These are complex questions, and putting them directly to young people may not lead to coherent answers. They may not have considered them, yet feel obliged by the interview context to provide “an answer”; they may be constrained by direct questions; and they will probably use the vocabulary of the questioner in their responses. The focus was to be on how these young peoples’ ideas are socially constructed. Social constructions are created through social interaction, in a social context, so my methodology has been to conduct focus groups with small groups of five to six pupils, all about the same age. In a focus group, the researcher introduces a few open-ended questions, and encourages the

pupils to discuss these between them so that they are interacting with each other, rather than with the researcher. For example, here three fifteen year old Polish girls talk about their grandparents:

1. Jadwiga Z. I believe there's a huge difference when I watch them everyday, how they behave, I can see that they are different. The important thing is to go to church and nothing else—they don't go outside. They watch TV all the time to see what is going on in the world. We are often meeting up, we are interested in the future. My grandma says she didn't have a childhood as we have—it was the world war when she was a kid—there were soldiers in the houses—If I were to ask my grandmother “who are you?”, she would probably laugh—I'd have some problem explaining the question.
2. Basia J. Our generation is more open—we have fewer communication problems, we travel easily and eagerly. My parents are not old, but they would prefer to stay in Poland—they are closed. I enjoy meeting other people, other nationalities.
3. Jolanta P. Our grandparents don't want to go abroad or to learn foreign languages—they have a kind of trauma from the past. That suddenly Germans will start to come and will start killing. I don't know how to describe it, but I think they are still afraid of the unknown—something might happen, dangerous.

They are using ideas, language, and vocabulary of their own choosing, rather than responding to the interviewer. The researcher is non-directive-elucidating, guiding, but not focusing or constraining. Thus I might in an interview ask how they think Europe affects their lives, but if they collectively chose to discuss other aspects of their lives, my attempts to “get an answer” are limited.

The discussion points I put were broad, and the result of extensive discussions and trials. The following broad areas were covered, the form of words varying slightly from conversation to conversation, as the context required.

1. How would you describe your identity? (if necessary, prompting with “What do you all have in common?”, or, when Czech was suggested, “What does being [Czech] mean to you?”)
2. Do you ever describe yourselves in other ways, or feel you have difficulties always using this identity?
3. Do you think your parents feel the same way about this as you?
4. Do you think everyone in Latvia feels the same way?
5. How does being in Europe affect the way you think about your identity, and about your future?
6. What is particular or different about Europeans?
7. Can you imagine [Russia/Belarus/appropriate neighbour] becoming part of the European Union?

In the four countries covered in this article, all the focus groups took place in between January 2010 and January 2011. Eleven locations were visited, in each case to some schools in the capital city, some to schools in the vicinity of the capital, and some to schools in a provincial town, ensuring a fairly wide geographical spread.

Table 1. Overview of focus groups.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Locations</i>	<i>Number of schools</i>	<i>Number of classes</i>	<i>Number of pupils</i>
Poland	Olsztyn	8	16	96
	Bialystok			
	Warsaw			
	Krakow			
Czech Republic	Hradec Kralove	4	8	47
	Ostrava			
Slovakia	Banska Bystrica	3	7	42
	Presov			
Hungary	Pecs	6	10	64
	Szeged			
	Budapest			
<i>4</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>249</i>

All names have been made anonymous: each name is followed by the country in which the discussion took place (CZ—Czech Republic; HU—Hungary; PO—Poland; SZ—Slovakia), the age of the young person at the date of the discussion, and their gender (♀—female; ♂—male).

In each location, one to three schools, each with different social mixes were selected, and in each school focus groups were usually conducted with one or two groups of pupils—about five or six 12–14 year olds, and a similar group of 15–17 year olds. Locations were selected in which I had colleagues who were willing to collaborate with me (selected to cover the capital city and one or two regional locations) (see acknowledgments). Each colleague was asked to identify two schools, one in a middle class area, the other in a working class area. Schools were asked to select six to eight pupils from a class, choosing an equal number of males and females willing to take part in a discussion without regard to ability within the class. Permission was sought from all the young people to participate in the focus groups, and, for those under 16, also from their parents or guardians. It should be emphasised that I am not attempting to achieve a representative sample, but to identify the diversity of views expressed. The study is not concerned with legal nationality or status, but young people whose home is now in the country (so if there are significant minorities or migrants, these have been included).

The project would not have been possible without help and assistance from a large number of people, to whom I am indebted: schools and parents have been recruited, arrangements made for visits and, critically, help given in translating many of the transcripts into English. The analysis that follows covers firstly the major themes and then moves towards some tentative conclusions.

4. Identification with the Country and the Nation

There were more references to the cultural manifestations of a country than there were to the structures, institutions and symbols of a nation. In all countries there were occasional references to symbols such as flags, the national anthem, public holidays and to specific national symbols such as

the Hungarian crown and the Polish eagle. Some participated in national day parades, but for most there was little sense of the institutional characteristics of the nation

In the Czech Republic and in Poland there were references to freedoms associated with their country. Bozena J (CZ 15½ ♀) refers to the changes: “in the past people didn’t have chances to be free—since the end of the Cold War people began to feel liberty”. Ludmila K (CZ 16 ♀)¹ said she was not a religious person, “and I’m not forced to be one in our country”.

National institutions and governments were often criticised. One group in Pecs ran through a range of criticisms of their political institutions: the government was divisive helping the rich get richer, and overtaxing the poor; politicians misused European Union funds, had inappropriate educational policies, and many of them cheated. Only the extremists—of left and right—would feel proud of Hungarian politics. Several young Poles referred to the lack of economic prospects: Poles were hard workers, but had few opportunities other than to emigrate.

There were many more references to cultural activities. In sport there were Hungarian references to fencing, water polo, handball and athletics—and in particular historical references to football—Ferenc Puskas and the Golden Team of the 1950s. Various Czech young people referred to their pride in ice hockey, hockey and football national teams. In Poland, Klaudia W (PO 16 ♀) said “when a Polish sports team win, there is some kind of joy even though it’s not exactly me—my country represents something”.

A liking for the country’s food and drink were consistently mentioned. In Poland there were specific dishes—*bigos* and *żurek*, traditional meals at Christmas; national dishes in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Hungarians referred to beer, and a television advertisement for Soproni (“Sörreklám Sopron-Hungary, I love you so”) which claimed it as an Hungarian icon. This also referred to Budapest’s yellow trams—also cited as another national characteristic. In Hungary proprietary products such as *Erős Pista* (jars of *csípős* paprika) and *Unicum* were cited as “representing” Hungarian-ness. Radegast beer was mentioned in the Czech Republic: Ryba B (CZ 15½ ♀) said: “we are a country of beer”.

Dance, dress, music and literature were often specifically mentioned as representing identification with the country. Folk dancing and festivals were widely cited in Hungary. Language was mentioned as a unifying cultural identifier in almost every location. In Hungary, when Fábíán S (HU 13½ ♂) said “we speak the Hungarian language” Katalin L (HU 13¾ ♀) added “no one else does!”

This suggests that there was broadly more enthusiasm for the cultural aspects of their national identity than for the institutions and structures of their country. There were many references to a sense of national pride in the culture and independence of the country. This included an awareness of recent changes—“Our life is much better than that of our mothers and grandmothers. We have much better opportunities in life. There is no oppression” (Gáspár L, HU 15 ¼ ♂). Some felt an obligation to preserve their culture. The valuing of national culture was not confined to those who originate in the country. There were a number of examples of those of foreign or mixed descent affirming their enthusiastic participation and membership of the local culture.

¹ The reference here gives the pseudonym, age and gender of the young person quoted. Where it is not obvious from the context which country the young person lives in, a country code is also given: CZ—Czech Republic; HU—Hungary; PO—Poland; and SK—Slovakia. Square brackets [] indicate material added by the author to a quotation to clarify the meaning.

There was more criticism of national structures and institutions, and of overt nationalism. Politicians were generally held in low esteem. Politicians were also held responsible for the frustrations young people expressed about the national economy: in Ostrava, Varvara O (CZ 11¼ ♀) saw “this country is going to *rozpadnout se* [disintegrate, fall apart]”.

The young people I spoke with were largely patriotic, in the sense that they professed affection for their country and its culture, but asserted that they were not nationalistic. They had a clear perception that there were a number of young right-wing nationalists in the community, and many disassociated themselves from such movements and beliefs.

5. Identification with Europe and, Sometimes, The European Union

Unlike the references to their country, there were more references to the institutions and practices of European bodies than there were to Europe’s cultural manifestations. Many were positive and enthusiastic about the possibilities of study, travel and work in other European countries, and of the European Union policies that supported this. Not all were in favour of European integration, and some were cautious of adopting the Euro. European culture was generally defined less robustly than the culture of their country.

Europe provided solidarity, a cooperative connectivity. The Union means “we help each other that countries are in a group, as a whole” (Miklos S, CZ 12 ♂). Some saw the EU as promoting equality between countries, but others contested this.

The freedom to cross European borders without passports was one of the most frequently cited examples of “Europeanness”. This travel was not only for cultural purposes: Ákos N (HU 15¾ ♂) listed “for studying, for living, for working. I believe I would live more happily and more successfully”. Studying abroad was mentioned by many, from every location and particularly by the older students. The European Union element was not just free movement: specific educational projects were identified: “this Erasmus programme, students can go abroad more” (Gosia K, PO 17¾ ♀). Working in another European country was sometimes seen as an ambition, but perhaps more often either opportunistic, or a matter of necessity. There was a clear perception that the western members of the Union were more prosperous, but this did not lead to any overt expressions of feeling “not European”, or of being othered in some way. This was in contrast to respondents in some of the south-eastern European states, where similar discussions were marked by their references to Europe as being located in the larger, older west European countries.

The institutions of the European Union were seen by many as more than opportunities for travel, study and work. There were references to the democratic process and rights that came with membership. This was not just the democratic processes of decision making, but a recognition of the human rights that were integral to Union membership. This emerged particularly in discussions about which other countries might possibly join the Union in the future, particularly the suggestions of either Russian or Belarus membership. It was only then that most young people (and particularly Polish young people) identified the democratic element.

European culture was characterised by references to diversity and the lack of a definable core. When core elements were suggested—Such as history, being Christian or White—this was invariably

contested by others. A common way of agreeing on European culture was to contrast it with the culture of the USA.

There was general resistance to the concept of “a European culture”. Some Hungarians, when asked to identify what was common among Europeans, contrasted Europe with Hungary, almost “othering” themselves as not European. Most young people claimed that Europe’s distinctiveness was its cultural diversity. “Europe is specific in having many cultures” (Barbora H, CZ 14¼ ♀), and this was often seen very positively.

There was a wide range of degrees of enthusiasm about the European Union, ranging from a committed engagement with Europe to assertions of indifference. Broadly, the enthusiasm was for European institutions and policies, and the indifference or uncertainty was about the conception of common culture.

There were more directly instrumental positive arguments, particularly around travel and study opportunities. This not simply about the ease of travel, but the sense of identity it gave the traveller outside Europe: “There are travelling advantages, Europe-wise. I arrive in Australia and I say I am European” (Bozena J, CZ 15½ ♀).

There seemed to be more expressions of concern about Europe’s effect on cultural matters. National identity, for a sizable number, remained more central to their lives: for them, national sentiment trumped European. Others were concerned that Europe was a potential agent of globalisation or homogenisation. There were a few instances of resistance to a growing European identity. There were reservations about the extent and pace of unification.

In all of these enthusiasm and doubts, there was a pronounced sense that the European identity was particularly associated with the young generation. “I think this is our future—not my parents’ or my grandparents’ the European Union is a chance for my generation to work” (Lujza B, HU 15¾ ♀). Beatrycze K (PO 16¾ ♀) was similarly convinced: “I feel that the younger generation feel more and more European than the older generations”.

So, to this point—if we return to the dimensions suggested by Bruter [7] and Jamieson [8]—we can see that positiveness about the country centres more on its cultural identity, rather than its institutional structures, and conversely, European identity is enthused about more for its institutional characteristics, rather than its cultural manifestations. When being European (and specifically being a member of the European Union) is contrasted with Russia and countries to the east, the liberal democratic ethos of Europe is foregrounded. It is to these contrasts with “the other” that we now turn in this attempt to see how these identities are constructed.

6. The Other: Where Are the Borders of the European Union?

Throughout the group discussions there were instances of various groups being defined in some ways as “others”, construed inter-subjectively as being outsiders. These were not static, but grouped and regrouped contingently as the contexts for discussion changed. Analysis of this helps us see how young people constructed their own identities.

A more focussed discussion often arose when each group was asked, usually after a discussion of what characteristics constituted “Europeanism”, about the possible expansion of the European Union: what additional countries might or might not join? A short list was generally suggested, of countries to

the east (Russia, sometimes Belarus or the Ukraine) and candidate countries (usually Turkey): the discussion on these sharpened their characterisation of Europe, and also allowed debate on what constituted the national and European others.

Russia was objected to on several counts. Firstly, Russia was either not seeking, or would not benefit from joining.; “they wouldn’t even want to be in Europe—they’re big and can fend for themselves”, said Domka B (CZ 16 ♀). Secondly, it was argued that Russia was, compared to other European Union members, too powerful (militarily and economically, or both) to be a partner in a Union; they would misuse this power in pursuit of their own interests. Fear of Russian power was frequently expressed. The equilibrium of the Union would be threatened, and concerns were expressed about being dominated.

Underlying many arguments were apprehensions about historical relationships between Russia (as the Soviet Union) and these four countries. Kató R (HU 13¼ ♀) explained “we got rid of them twenty years ago, and I don’t want them again”. It was the Polish young people who most vehemently raised historical precedent against Russian membership of Europe. Another reasons advanced against Russian membership were that they would never agree to the loss of sovereignty that membership requires.

Not all opinions were against: there were expressions of conditional support. “Russia would have to accommodate to certain regulations to enter the European Union, and have to meet the Union’s terms” (Bartosz C, PO 12¾ ♂). A few suggested possible benefits from Russian membership. For others, Russian entitlement to membership (and the membership of other countries such as Belarus and the Ukraine) was a matter of simple equity and right.

There were similar debates about potential Belarus membership. The strongest objections were political, and came from the Polish young people who lived closest to Belarus in Bialystok. Others argued that Belarus had no need to join—or that there needed to be cultural changes. Membership was also supported on grounds of geography or because it would help Belarusians.

The Ukraine presented more complex discussions. The political arguments had both a comparative and an historical dimension. There were also economic arguments, and others were cautious or conditional. Comparisons with Russia were also used in favour of Ukrainian membership: “Ukraine could be—it has a European culture—but the Russians, no!” (Kinga M, PO 15½ ♀).

The question of Turkish potential membership often had a different tone: the comparator became “us Europeans”. In Presov, Kamila K (SK 12¾ ♀) asked her group “but wouldn’t you say Turks are different to us Europeans?” provoking responses:

1. Ctibor B (13¼ ♂): They’re quite different;
2. Radoslav H (13 ♂): Maybe they have some common customs, but they are very different to us;
3. Mirka M (12½ ♀): Well, it doesn’t suit me—I do not think they’re Europeans.

“They” were often described as being not European: Why was Turkey seen in this way?

One set of reasons was geographical, coupled with distance. But cultural difference was the more significant factor: “Turkey isn’t a European country! It has so different a culture, it’s so different a country” (Lujza B, HU 15¾ ♀). Most young people had used culture as a distinguishing factor in their identification with their own country. Now they used it to distinguishing Europe. “Culture” in this context had particular connotations. “there are some bad things in Turkey” (Libena P, CZ 15½ ♀). What many of them meant was religious difference.

Many constructed Turkey as essentially Islamic, and Islam was constructed as oppositional to Christianity: “these are the two most influential religions, and one does not agree with the other. In Turkey you have people who will kill for their faith, and [in Europe] they would encounter a different religion” (Zora S, SK 15¼ ♀).

Islam was seen by some as potentially violent: they assumed Turks would wish to force Islam on Europe. There were a number of myths about Islam and Turkey. These ranged from questions of worship to more bizarre prejudices.

There were some voices in favour of Turkish membership. As elsewhere, equitable treatment for all would be applicants was upheld: “it is discriminatory stopping them from being in the European Union. If they need help with jobs, why don’t we support them?” (Basia J, PO 15 ♀). Several said cultural differences were exaggerated. Yet others argued that, far from being “the other”, Turks had much in terms of shared history with other Europeans.

These processes of “othering” counties illuminate the ways in which national and European identities were constructed. National identity focused predominantly on cultural factors, while European identity was constructed around institutional practices in politics and the economy. The countries of eastern Europe (Russia, Belarus and the Ukraine) were contrasted with the *individual* countries of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary: the “we” was generally one of these states, and the “other” was predominantly distinguished on grounds of institutional practices (although cultural factors were raised, these were usually those of political culture). But when Turkey was considered as the other, it was usually done as a contrast between “us Europeans” (an identity based on institutional factors) with “the Turkish other” constructed as the cultural other (particularly, but not exclusively, around (presumed) religious practices).

7. The Other: Perceptions of Difference from Parents and Grandparents

After each group had talked about how they would describe themselves and their own sense of identity, they were asked to discuss if they felt that this sense might be different from the way that they thought their parents or grandparents felt. The discussions were therefore not about the parents/grandparents constructions of identity, but the young peoples’ conceptions of those constructions. This presented another opportunity to discuss similarity and difference, and to possibly distinguish “otherness”.

The initial reaction was to deny any difference between themselves and their parents: they thought of their identity in the same way as their parents did. Then greater reflection became apparent “We have a different culture”, Lech D (PO 16½ ♂) explained. Others were more specific: “It’s not about our parents, because they are not old enough to remember the time of communism—but our grandparents, they have greater experience of that tough time” (Olgierd L, PO 15½ ♂); “people who are older—60—may have different ideas. They may have survived a lot of things” (Kata P, HU 13 ♀).

The period of communism and of Soviet domination was discussed with both parents and grandparents. The references are sometimes specifically to the Soviet Union or Russia, and at other times to the period of socialism or communism. The effects of this period on their parents and grandparents are described in three ways: on their lives and behaviour, on their constructions of identity, and on their behaviour now. Parents and grandparents had to learn Russian. There were less

material goods. The young people suggested that living through these times had affected how their parents saw their identity: “My parents think that being Hungary is like being awarded something: they like Hungary so much” (Kati P, HU 13¾ ♀), and this was something that the young people felt that their own generation lacked.

They also suggested that this had affected other aspects of their behaviour, for others, it had marked their views about Russia, which “My mum says it was terrible time and sees that Russia is not a completely free country-maybe my mum is afraid of the past will come again, maybe” (Beta S, CZ 15¾ ♀).

As a consequence of these perceptions of difference from their parents, some young people appeared to create the older generation as the other. Some grandparents had memories of not just the communist period, but also of the second world war. As with parents, in most cases these experiences enhanced feelings of national identity. Some young people felt that they have heard too much from their grandparents: “sometimes my grandmother starts to talk about the War-I just sit there and listen-it’s the thousandth time I’ve heard it”! (Luca R, HU 13¾ ♀).

Striking in all these accounts is the construction of difference from the older generations, sometimes almost with a suggestion of a sense of loss. Gosia K’s (PO 17¼ ♀) account is full of references to grandparents and parents as “they”, and her own generation as “we”:

“I think maybe not our parents, but our grandparents feel the most Polish, because they or their parents were fighting for Poland in the wars my grandma and my grandfather tell me about the wars and how they lived—how it was hard, and how Russians came to my grandfather’s house and stole everything. I think because of these moments in history they feel the most Polish. Our parents also feel more Polish than us, because, they were born in this hard-for-Poland time, they lived under communism. We’ve got an easier life—we can’t really understand how hard it was for these people”.

Differences are identified across a range of attitudes and beliefs. Grandparents are prejudiced against Germans and Russians. Jolanta P (PO 15½ ♀) put this succinctly: “they have a kind of trauma from the past. That suddenly Germans will start to come and will start killing. I don’t know how to describe it, but I think they are still afraid of the unknown—something dangerous might happen”. “I can see that they are different. We are interested in the future”. (Jadwiga Z (PO 15½ ♀).

There were difficulties in communicating with older generations. In Krakow, Jolanta P (PO 15½ ♀) said “with grandparents, it is difficult to talk, because they have had traumatic experiences, and they don’t like to talk about Russia or Germany. You can easily say something “wrong” and they will be angry”. But sometimes parents were also difficult to communicate with.

Finally, many young people described their generation as having different values to those of their parents and grandparents. A particularly significant difference in values, particularly seen in Poland, was about religious expression. Whether Catholic or not, the sentiment was “religion doesn’t matter so much in the younger generation. You can’t see people being really religious, conserving religion, and I think this is the influence of the west, of cosmopolitanism—the concern of this generation are homophobia and euthanasia” (Sergiusz M (PO 16½ ♂). The “affair of the cross” in Warsaw in April 2010 brought this to a head. In the Smolensk air disaster in April 2010 96 leading Poles, including the President, were killed. A cross or remembrance was erected by the crowds outside the Presidential Place in Warsaw, and the Government insisted that the site should be secular, and the cross moved to the nearby cathedral. There was considerable civil unrest at this: but the young people I spoke with

saw this as another example of generational difference. “The older generation was very pro putting a monument there and the younger generation just stood there for fun, just to watch the whole cross affair, and watch what happened”. (Kinga M, PO 15½ ♀).

8. Singular and Multiple Identities

Much of the foregoing analysis has demonstrated that many individual young people are able to exhibit several identities at the same time, while others find this more problematic. Given the focus of the discussion groups, it is not surprising that there were many complex, and sometimes contradictory, accounts of multiple and singular identities put forward. A minority of the young people said that they had a singular national identity: many more qualified this with degrees of Europeanness: the weight of European against national varying, and often being described in contingent terms. Even fewer said that they had a singular European identity. A few insisted that their identity was global. There were also those of mixed national origins, and some who described identities in terms of their town or region, of Slavness, or of religion: some of these presented hierarchies of identities—town, region, nation, Europe.

A few young people seemed to be very largely, if not wholly European, (Olesia M, PO 12½ ♀) explained their sense of being known in a way that corresponds to Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* [11].

Everywhere you go you are surrounded by your friends, people from the same group, natives.

They don’t know you, but they know you—you are a like a distant relative. In my opinion, being European means that everywhere you have neighbours.

The European identity was quite often expressed in terms of contingency. “Being European” was useful if you came from a small and potentially unknown country. There did not appear to be a correlation between such attitudes and the social class of the various respondents, though the background data collected on social class was not always very clear.

There were those with origins in more than one country: most seemed to enjoy the diversity of their heritage and their liminality. Some family members had migrated to a different country, and their descendants have become in some ways alienated from their culture of origin.

These multiple spatially-related identities were sometimes given as a list expressed in a hierarchy of size. Thus Nelek S (PO 15¾ ♂) described his situation: “I think that I’m from Krakow. This is most important for me—it’s my little *ojczyzná* [homeland/mother country]. The next is then Malopolska, and then the whole of Poland. I am Polish, I come from Poland”; and Maciej W (PO 16½ ♂) is explicit about this ordering “from being the smallest one”—the town of Olsztyn, the region Warmia and Mazuria, Poland, and “maybe Europe as well. In this direction, and in this order”.

9. Conclusions

These examples suggest that most described their identities as being multiple, explicitly recognising and acknowledging this. There was a spectrum of the ease with which this could be done: a minority saw themselves with a dominant primary loyalty to a particular town, region or country. Most were both more fluid in their attachments, accepting the multiplicities. Many were able to explain the situations in which they used one identity rather than another. They also distinguished themselves from

their parents, and more specifically their grandparents, in this. The older generations were seen as being locked more into national identities, for a variety of reasons that the young people speculated about. This does not mean that these older people did feel this way: the significance is that this is how the young people chose to construct the beliefs of their elders, and to differentiate themselves from previous generations. The primary reason advanced by young people for this generational difference is that parents and grandparents had been socialised when young into political societies that were radically different from today: situations of war, occupation, invasion, suppression, deprivation and a denial of national identity. This led to the expression of feelings of solidarity based on national, linguistic and cultural ties—and the expression of identities affiliated to the country or nation.

There are implications for this for the way in which citizenship education is approached in these four countries. For such a subject to engage young peoples' attention and commitment, it is important that the curriculum begins by recognising the concerns and orientations of the young people. This may require some greater emphasis on the interplay between European and national decision-making processes, and perhaps—though this would be controversial—some more critical analysis of the national history as a construct, and consideration of more appropriate constructs in the context of the European Union. Proposing such changes would meet some resistance and, if they were accepted, they would take some years to implement.

These young people—all born in the mid 1990s—admitted that they had very different experiences, which many of them suggested explained their different expressions of identity. This provides an interesting parallel to Mary Fulbrook's [9] analysis of generational differences in the construction of German political ideologies.

The generation in this study have not lived through these particular key moments: their parents had done so. The potential "key event" in these young peoples' lives was their country's accession to the European Union in 2004, an event of a very different type. The earlier part of their lives had been in a brief period of total national sovereignty: the latter part in a situation where this independence had been voluntarily surrendered to a larger confederation, the European Union. It is in this context that we see their construction of their countries as largely cultural phenomena—still hugely significant in most of their lives, and the countries' political institutions as of lesser significance (quaint, inept, of a different generation). The institutional structures in which they see their futures playing out are through the possibilities of their own freedom of movement to study, work and live within the European Union, the adherence to economic prosperity, democracy and peace brought about by the Union. But the Union generally lacks a cultural presence in these young peoples' lives. Cultural horizons are, to a large but not exclusive extent, at the country level—language, history, food, tradition. Europe becomes a cultural phenomenon only when exposed to the other, whether this other is America or the (Muslim) East.

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