The practice of participation:

Youth's vocabularies around on- and offline civic and political engagement

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Abstract

In this paper and based on in-depth interviews with young people aged 14-25 years who are active in youth voluntary associations, youth councils, students' unions, political parties or social movements, a qualitative portrait of young people's civic and political participation is presented. It draws on Bourdieu's theory of practice and on culturalist perspectives regarding participation in order to overcome the unproductive myth of youth disaffection. Rather, in this paper it is argued that participation can be better understood as a socially embedded and contingent online/offline practice that is shaped by the interrelation between habitus, capital and fields. Young people who share vocabularies of participation also adhere to a shared habitus of participation produced by different combinations of resources and experiences of political socialisation.

Vocabularies of participation are articulated in three interrelated dimensions: 1) a vocabulary of citizenship orientation, which includes young people's own understanding of participation, their political knowledge and values, as well as their self-positioning in the political field; 2) a vocabulary of citizenship practices, that is, the scale and repertoires of participation; 3) a vocabulary of digital engagement, including young people's own understanding of the digital world and its participatory potential, which is grounded in their own citizenship orientation and their scale and repertoires of offline participation, as well as enabling certain online activities while inhibiting others.

INTRODUCTION

Recent research has countered the 'myth of youth apathy' by disentangling the structure of opportunities and barriers, and the complex motivations that lie behind youth participation or indeed non-participation (Bastedo, 2014; Amnå and Ekman, 2014; Cammaerts *et al.*, 2014; Ekman and Amnå, 2012). While youth involvement in electoral politics is clearly declining, empirical evidence shows that young people engage in a more diverse range of participatory practices – including volunteering, protests, social movements, political consumerism, etc.– which expand the notion of participation beyond the 'minimalist model' of citizenship (Carpentier, 2011).

Therefore, what some label as apathy or alienation, is rather reframed as a form of 'cultural displacement' (Loader, 2007). In this view, non-institutional civic and political engagement signal 'the possible displacement of traditional models of representative democracy as the dominant cultural form of engagement by alternative approaches increasingly characterized through networking practices.' (Loader *et al.*, 2014: 143). This paradigm shift in civic and participation patterns – with each pattern being characterised by different civic skills, a specific information style and distinctive communicative and participatory practices – is grounded in broader social changes, namely individualisation (Beck, 1992) and networked individualism (Castells, 1996), that accompany the emergence of personalised (Bennett, 2012) and lifestyle politics (Giddens, 1991). Whereas the 'dutiful citizen' engages in public life out of a sense of personal duty and through the mediation of organised groups (parties, unions, etc.) and mainstream news outlets, the 'actualizing citizen' model favours a personalised, expressive engagement in lifestyle-related issues, loose modes of affiliation and repertoires of individualised action (Bennett, 2008; Bennett, *et al.*, 2011).

The relationship between communication, media and participation is at the core of each citizenship model. The dutiful style understands information as part of being a good citizen, but as a one-way, top-down communication process from selected authoritative media and political sources. In this communicative relationship, citizens are positioned as recipients of news, the interpretation of which is framed by collective identities and groups belonging. Additionally, dutiful citizens engage in communication practices aimed at institutional actors. Conversely, actualising citizens tend to combine different media and personal sources of information based on trust and reliability, and they expect media platforms to allow participation (Wells, 2015). Consequently, in this perspective youth disengagement is reframed as a disconnection between democratic institutions, which favour dutiful civic styles

in their communication, and the actualising citizenship practices preferred by younger generations.

Moreover, the communicative affordances of social media, it is suggested, facilitate new, individualised modes of engagement that are commensurate with actualising citizenship, thus providing key channels for mobilising youth. However, studies examining the relationship between social media use and political engagement have so far produced mixed results. Some research has argued that creative and interactional uses of social media are positively associated with civic and political participation (Ekström and Östman, 2015; Kahne *et al.*, 2013). By contrast, other studies challenged the idea that social media use has an overall positive impact on youth engagement and delimited this positive relationship to specific practices. For example, Gil de Zúñiga (2012) concludes that the consumption of news via social media is an important predictor of online and offline participatory practices, whereas the frequency of social media use *per se* is not related to citizens' participation. Similarly, Ekström, *et al.* (2014) consider the internet and social media as consisting of distinct spaces – and associated practices – that have different implications for the political socialisation of young people. Drawing on longitudinal data, they observe how young people who are more active in the online news space are more likely to be interested in politics and engage in political talk. Conversely, creative/social interaction spaces have a tendency to draw adolescents' attention from social and political issues over time. Finally, other studies contend that the relationship between online and offline engagement is very weak. For example, Teocharis and Quintelier (2014) argue that the use of social media does not stimulate civic participation; rather, previous patterns of civic engagement lead to more Facebook use.

The relationship between social media, youth cultures and emerging participatory practices, therefore, is complex and not linear. Moreover, young people can by no means be considered a uniform generation adhering to the actualising model of citizenship. There is evidence that the majority of young people still favour a traditional notion of participation centred around voting (Cammaerts *et al.*, 2014), thus adhering to a dutiful citizenship style. In addition, the ideal 'networked young citizen' (Loader *et al.*, 2014) is actually shaped by individual lived experiences. This is how issues of inequalities come into play. So, while both disengaged and engaged young people may share a critical view of party politics, active and vulnerable youth differ in their political skills and their citizenship orientation (Wood, 2014; Bastedo, 2014; Cammaerts *et al.*, 2014), thus having unequal 'voice'. Actualising, non-institutional forms of

engagement appear to reduce inequalities of participation based on age and gender. By contrast, however, they tend to increase inequalities based on education and socioeconomic status (Quintelier, 2008; Sloam, 2014). Indeed, the influence of social inequalities on civic and political participation is evident when looking at 'vocabularies of citizenship', that is, the set of resources that young people mobilise for understanding participation and their own potential for action (Lister, *et al.*, 2003; Thorson, 2012; Lyson, 2014). The broader the vocabulary of citizenship, the wider the repertoires of civic and political practices one has access to (Thorson, 2012).

Whether social media use contributes to soften or deepen patterns of political inequality has been addressed in recent empirical studies. Xenos, *et al.*, (2014) examine the extent to which relationships between social media use and youth engagement may have implications for patterns of unequal political voice and conclude that, while there is a persistent and significant relationship between socioeconomic status and individual or collective political activity, social media use appears to be indirectly related to softening patterns of political inequality. Other studies, instead, suggest that inequalities in online political participation may result not only from traditional stratification factors (i.e. socio-economic status and political interest), but also from inequalities in digital literacy (Schols and Janz, 2015).

In this paper it is argued that Bourdieu's 'theory of practice' (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) provides an invaluable analytical and explanatory tool for examining youth participation and to account for differential access to resources that lead to different experiences and positions along the actualising-dutiful citizenship continuum. At the same time, a Bourdieusian approach allows us to identify common patterns across the diversity of individual lived experiences.

BOURDIEUSIAN ANALYSES OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Central to Bourdieu's theory of practice are the notions of field, capital and habitus. These concepts do not function in isolation, but they are relational and intertwined. The social space is articulated in different fields, that is systems of objective and historical relations between positions, which are 'defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital)' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97). Capital is a social relation and as such it only exists and functions in

relation to the field in which it is produced. Bourdieu (1986) identifies three main forms of capital –economic, cultural and social – to which he adds 'symbolic capital'.

To account for the dialectic relationship between structure and agency, or, in Bourdieu's own words, incorporation (of social structures) and objectification (of individual and collective practices), Bourdieu introduces the notion of habitus - 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations' (Bourdieu, 1977: 72) – produced by the conditionings associated with a particular position within the field. The habitus is thus the embodiment of social structures that function as schemata of *perceptions, appreciations, and actions*' regulating practices and thoughts (ibid: 83 – emphasis in original). As such, habitus engender practices that are adapted to the field, and in so doing reproduce social structures. On the other side, the field is also shaped and transformed by the practices of those who introduce in the field dispositions acquired outside of its boundaries. The field sets the conditions under which capital and habitus may or may not be actualised.

Bourdieu's conceptual triad was applied in a limited number of studies examining youth participation. McFarland and Thomas's study on the impact of youth volunteering on future political participation aims to integrate the social reproduction explanation of political socialisation with a social learning view. Drawing on Bourdieu, they argue that 'the alignment of experiences and resources with certain fields of activity creates a career structure where participants sense a degree of match/mismatch or inclusion/exclusion' (McFarland and Thomas, 2006: 403) and that young people from higher educated and higher income families benefit from resources (capital) and experiences (habitus) that help them lead youth voluntary associations and become politically active once adult. To counter a deterministic conception of social reproduction, however, they conclude that notable variations in the extent to which individuals activate their own reserves of resources and experiences can be explained by understanding youth associations as sites of political socialisation 'independent of class background' (ibid: 421).

In her research on citizenship education, Wood (2014) examines similarities and differences in the scale of citizenship orientation and practice across four school communities in New Zealand. Understanding participation as a socially embedded practice, Wood (2013: 585) emphasises how actors in the same field (a school community) 'adhered to a shared habitus of participation that reflected the combined and interrelated social, economic and cultural capital, or "participatory capital" within a school community'. The 'participatory capital'

shared by students and teachers of advantaged schools is awarded with legitimacy and value and turned into symbolic capital. By contrast, members of the working class or the rural school communities lacked the resources and experiences to access this 'elite/global participatory capital'. Importantly, then, and in line with Bourdieu, Wood analyses the habitus of different actors and the distribution of capital within the field to map out the structure of power relations between different positions within the field. Moreover, she emphasises how young people actively participate in the construction of participatory capital rather than being passive recipients (Holland, 2009).

Drawing on these premises, in this paper it will be argued that young people who share vocabularies of participation also adhere to a shared habitus of participation produced by different combinations of resources and experiences of political socialisation. To do so, different practices of online and offline participation and different civic and digital skills are analysed and related to different participatory habitus. Moreover, the positions of the ideal-typical participatory habitus within the political field vis-à-vis political parties and the formal democratic system will be mapped out. The focus here will be on the UK political field.

METHODS

The qualitative data presented in this study were collected in 2015 in the UK as part of a wider research project investigating the relationship between politics and social media in a comparative perspective from the viewpoint of both citizens and political actors in Germany, Italy and the UK.

In order to provide a varied picture of young people's civic and political engagement, the 16 participants aged 14-to-25-years were recruited through a theoretical sampling among the following categories: 1) members of political parties, students unions, and other formal opportunities for youth participation such as youth councils; 2) activists in social movements or students' cooperatives; 3) volunteers in youth organisations and civil society associations; 4) young entrepreneurs.

Table 1: Participants

Name[1]	Age	Category	Socio-economic background	Other relevant info
Sarah	21	1 - General Secretary SU	Lower-middle class	Family lived on benefits
Matthew	22	2 - Students' Cooperative	Middle class	
Bethany	14	3- Anti-bullying ambassador	Working class	Ethnic minority
Rebecca	21	2- Students' Cooperative	Upper-middle class	
Amy	21	2- Students' Cooperative	Upper-middle class	
Aisha	20	2- Media activist & Students' coop	Lower-middle class	Ethnic and religious minority
Gabrielle	24	1- LGBT Officer	Lower-middle class	
Emily	14	3- Anti-bullying ambassador	Lower-middle class	Single parent household
Myra	17	4- Young entrepreneur	Middle class	Ethnic and religious minority
Deepa	21	3- Volunteering counselor for mental health and anti-bullying	Lower-middle class	Ethnic and religious minority
Andrew	23	1 - Labour Party, SU	Upper-middle class	
Olivia	22	3- Amnesty International	Middle class	Father currently unemployed
Alicia	25	2- Squatter	Middle class	Homeless
Lyla	18	3- Amnesty International	Lower-middle class	Ethnic and religious minority. Family lived on benefits
Dave	25	2- Anti-cuts movement, Animal Liberation	Lower-middle class	
Thomas	16	1- UK Youth Parliament	Middle class	Mother is a mature student, now working as a tutor in the University she graduated

Interviews were transcribed and analysed through NVivo using a combination of inductive and theoretical thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2008). Inductively, three main themes emerged:

1) **Citizenship orientations**: this includes young people's own understanding of participation, their political knowledge and values, their civic contribution (individual or collective), as well as their self-positioning in the political field.

2) **Citizenship practices**: this includes the scale and repertoires of participation.

3) **Digital engagement**: this includes young people's own understanding of the online world and its participatory potential, which is grounded in their own citizenship orientation and their scale and repertoires of offline participation, as well as enabling certain online activities while inhibiting others.

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[1] All names of participants have been changed to guarantee anonymity. Names were chosen based on lists of popular names in the UK the year they were born and lists of popular names for ethnic minorities.

FINDINGS

The UK political field is characterised by political structures that marginalise young voters compared to other electoral system. The first-past-the-post electoral system excludes smaller parties which tend to be more popular among young people, and it provides major parties with little incentives to engage with the issues that many young people care about (Sloam, 2014). The alienation of young people from electoral politics was a major issue raised by interviewees at the time of the fieldwork, which coincided with the campaign for the May 2015 general elections in the UK. More specifically, two main issues emerged, often in association with each other: 1) the 2010 experience, with the Liberal Democrats promising free education and the subsequent disillusion of young people; and 2) the changes in the electoral register with the need for young people to register in order to be able to vote. Both issues are associated with a sense of inefficacy and powerlessness: 'lots of students aren't on the register so if you're not registered to vote well, you don't have any political bargaining power', says Sarah.

In such a context, based on the citizenship orientations that emerged from young people's vocabularies of citizenship, and drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice, three patterns of self-positioning towards political institutions and the democratic system have been identified (alignment, resistance, exclusion/isolation), each characterised by diverse combinations of experiences, resources and competences.

Alignment

Young people who are aligned with formal political institutions and the democratic system share common political experiences and resources – namely, similar political socialisation patterns, media habits and media literacy - even though this participatory habitus may or may not be actualised in forms of political participation. The four interviewees belonging to this group grew up in high cultural capital families – the economic capital is more varied – and have acquired significant institutionalised cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Sarah, Andrew and Olivia graduated in prestigious UK universities in PPE or philosophy, while Thomas (16) is planning his university career in international relations. All were socialised to politics at home, soon developing an interest for the news and dutiful citizenship practices. Everyday civic and political talk has long been recognised as a 'prerequisite for the maintenance of participation' (Dahlgren, 2013: 46), and recent research has confirmed the persistence of parental influence on adolescents' political socialisation, despite changes in

both the family structure and the political context (Jennings, *et al.*, 2009). More specifically, civic and political talk in the family context is associated with the active development of desirable democratic values (Ekström and Ostman, 2013). Moreover, the findings are consistent with previous research in showing that children of highly educated parents are more knowledgeable about politics and soon include news media among their everyday media practices:

> **Olivia (22):** my dad is incredibly politically opinionated, he is one of the most well read people I ever met, even now. And he doesn't work at the moment, his, like, day-to-day activity is just watching news 24, he's just like obsessed with current affairs. I think growing up with him had a massive impact, I sort of wanted to be able to engage with him about that type of things when I was a teenager. I think that started the process of me trying to learn about politics, that I could sort of actually debate with him. [...]

> **Interviewer:** so your father is a main source of political information or, at least, he has been in the past?

> **Olivia (22):** [...] information yes, but not opinion. So, I mean, like, he would always, my first memory with my dad was me asking him who the prime minister was, when I was like 4 or something, I remember saying that "who's the Prime Minister?". So he always has something to say about everything, he'll walk through the door tonight and say "oh they said…" and so, he probably is what started it. But mainly where I get my news from would be online newspapers. And I remember that when I … I think I'm probably not your average 22-year old, in the sense, when I was 15 I decided that like everyday I was going to read the Guardian front page … like on the website and I was gonna write down the words I didn't understand in it and like look them up afterwards, and I had this like log, I don't think most teenagers would be like that, to be honest! [laughing]

In terms of their engagement with the news, these interviewees still conform to what could be labelled as 'dutiful information style' (Wells, 2015) since they rely on selected, trusted authoritative news sources such as the Guardian and the BBC. Despite possessing a discrete level of critical skills - that allows them to explicitly link the political orientation of a news media outlet with the type and style of news content – they do not question the reliability of sources they have recognised as authoritative. Nonetheless, their information practices have changed, having been adapted to a mobile, active lifestyle in which mobile devices and social media play the major role. Especially, the online 'news space' overlaps and intertwines with the 'space of social interaction' (Ekström et al., 2014) and the practice of relational maintenance on social media.

> **Olivia (22):** I have the BBC news app on my phone and whenever I have a moment in the office, when I'm not doing something immediately, I'll flick to it. [...] I get a lot of headlines from Facebook

cause I follow all of the newspapers on Facebook, so I don't really use Twitter that much, and I know a lot of people of my age would, but Facebook... I have BBC, NBC, CNN, the Guardian, Times, the Economist, New Statesman, I have every obvious one and they pretty much fill my newsfeed actually, yeah and whenever I'm sort of scrolling down the newsfeed, looking at stuff by my friends it's interspersed with news all the time.

Whether online or offline, news media use continue to be strongly associated with the development of dutiful citizen qualities (see also Shehata, *et al.*, 2014).

Beyond political talk and access to authoritative news media outlets, aligned young citizens acquired other important civic skills during adolescence, including advocacy, and canvassing. Andrew, for example, became a member of the Labour party in order to be able to vote for the leader in 2010, and took an active role in the campaign. Thomas is a member of the UK Youth Parliament, experience from which he gained knowledge of the political process and political skills:

> **Thomas (16):** I did, they have a residential, where you go to this place in the countryside and all the other UK Youth Parliament members are there, so you meet people from all different locations, and they basically have a workshop that teaches you how to be an advocate and how to write to like local authorities, things like that, they teach you how to be an effective sort of parliamentarian. So that was very useful.

When Sarah, Andrew and Olivia went to university, their citizenship practices varied but remained aligned with the formal democratic system. Sarah and Andrew became engaged in their respective universities as President and vice-President of the respective SU Raising And Giving (RAG). Sarah pursued her career within the SU, running first for the Academic Board and then twice for General Secretary. Olivia had a more fragmented experience, though she volunteered for the local Amnesty International group and the local magazine. These experiences provided already well-equipped young individuals with further civic competences, including the ability to campaign and fundraise, online as well as offline. Though their participation patterns shifted from engagement with party politics to involvement in volunteering and youth representations boards, these more actualising experiences remained within the boundaries of official and legitimate forms of youth participation. As Sarah explicitly comments:

> **Sarah (21):** I was always a political person but I never had the political opportunities, so as soon as I had those opportunities, I really wanted to take them. [...] In school we didn't really have these sort of structures for involvement. There was, like unions didn't exist in my school. So I was always

like someone who enjoyed like extra-curricular. So I was more into like drama and dance. But sort of political activism I didn't do so much of.

These similar life trajectories also converge in dispositions towards political issues and perceptions around their self-efficacy. Indeed, they share an orientation towards national or global political issues (for example, human rights, gender issues, mental health, vote at 16, and the EU referendum), an interest for policy-making and advocacy, and an individualistic understanding of their own experiences. They also gained a strong sense of effectiveness and empowerment from their personal experiences:

> **Sarah (21):** You can change things so easily in the Students' Union. Whereas in other organisations, you know, there's so much bureaucracy and all this sort of things. So having the power to actually really influence things is a privilege.

To conclude, the dominant participatory habitus is characterised by an individual orientation towards legitimised political issues and formal political structures, and is declined in a combination of dutiful and actualising civic practices. Their own understanding of participation is close to the dutiful citizenship model, placing voting and party politics at the core of democratic participation (see also Cammaerts, *et al.*, 2014). However, these interviewees differ from dutiful citizens as they do not participate out of a sense of personal duty and advance critiques towards the current political parties.

> **Andrew (23):** I still see that as the prime, that's immediately what I think of when you say political participation, and I think being a member of a party is still... I mean, it's probably not, but it is what I think of when you say political participation and I know that if you're a member of any sort of pressure group that's another way of doing it. But I don't really see myself joining any soon, just because I think the sort of anti-political party isn't that sensible and actually you really, really need these groups, so make anything happen. I think is really a good thing, political parties, but so I would still say voting and being a member, even if both are still declining

> **Thomas (16):** I think we are heard, but we are not probably listened to in a way that would give us direct influence. So we can do the UK Youth Parliament thing, but at the end the outcome would only be the politicians discuss what we want them to. Whereas when you are voting you have a lot more power, I think, to actually bring about change, so I think democracy is a... real tool for change that young people don't have.

Also, their participatory habitus is differently actualised: Sarah and Thomas are active in formal political structures that grant them full participation in political processes and decision-making. By contrast, Olivia and Andrew, while still adhering to a dutiful notion of

participation centred around the formal democratic system, are currently 'standbyers', that is, they are politically informed and ready to take political action if needed but are not actually engaged in any form of political or civic participation (Amnå and Ekman, 2014).

Resistance

A significant number of young people express a confrontational relationship with the political institutions of representative democracy and the associated normative model of citizenship, towards which they express dissatisfaction, disillusion and even anger. Interviewees occupying a resistant position within the political field can be further divided into two subgroups, each adhering to a specific participatory habitus, and both embodying the key features of the 'networked young citizens' (Loader, *et al.*, 2014).

The alternative participatory habitus

Similarly to the aligned participatory habitus, these young people mostly grew up in well-off, highly educated middle-class families, where they have been socialised to actualising citizenship practices and values. In the excerpt below, Rebecca reflexively engages with the participatory habitus – expressed as a reserve of attitudes and participatory practices – she has been socialised to by her parents:

> **Rebecca (21):** pretty much all of us come from cushy, nice, middle class families, where we have a sort of, I don't know, probably the emotional and financial support that is like a really strong base to be able to do these things. My dad really opened my eyes about… always pushed my imagination about travelling and then you learn more about things and that inspired me to do these things. Actually I didn't know about it, he told me last week that he used to work as a vegetable grower, but little by little he releases this kind of information. […] And [my parents] are no longer kind of active, but it's always been in my imagination I guess to do this kind of things, so I'm very grateful to them to plant this seed in my way of… and enable me to do this.

The life trajectories of young people adhering to the alternative participatory habitus include early experiences of volunteering, from which they developed a strong commitment to active citizenship as an everyday practice, and an interest for issues of sustainability. Participation starts from proximity and engagement in local communities, from which they gain a sense of self-efficacy – from being able to see the direct outcomes of their involvement – which motivates further engagement (see also Banaji and Buckingham, 2013; Cammaerts, *et al.*, 2014). Local civic achievements are a gateway for future involvement in national and global

issues. When it comes to civic orientations, then, these young people are characterised by a combination of local and national/global orientations and a strong sense of belonging to a community. Accordingly, their vocabularies of participation revolve around the expression of a 'we', asserting a collective identity.

In line with past experiences, their current participation practices are embedded in the local community but have global ambitions: they all run and have funded students' cooperatives - namely Matthew initiated a housing cooperative, while Amy and Rebecca run an organic food cooperative. All understand their engagement in the students' coops as both a way to participate in their local communities and as a way to promote an alternative lifestyle and to fight capitalism:

> **Rebecca (21):** part of the reason for its existence it's not only that it is cheap, but also that it is an alternative, to have vegetables and fruit it means you never have to go to the supermarket, it's an active alternative, it is way of living an alternative lifestyle, environmentally more friendly, because all the stuff comes from 9 or 7 miles away or something. It means it's an alternative to supermarket and this big system, and it means bringing back to the small, local community. To me personally I think it's really important.

> **Matthew (21):** you know, when we set up the coop we weren't quite explicitly political, but the existence of the coop is very political because it's a different way of doing housing, it's different around the ideas of who should own and manage and benefit from property, and around the control of where you live, which is all very political stuff.

Whereas research has shown a positive relationship between early volunteering experiences in youth associations and adult dutiful participation (McFarland and Thomas, 2006), the alternative participatory habitus leans more towards the actualising citizenship pole. The actualising style also shapes information practices, characterised by a combination of online mainstream media outlets (the BBC, the Guardian) and Facebook, where young people also keep up with the news from youth organisations and social movements. Compared to the 'aligned' information style, there's more attention for alternative, issue-specific news sources.

Moreover, these young people tend to be more critical about the merging of 'news space' and 'space of social interaction' (Ekström, *et al.*, 2014) on Facebook: sensationalist and 'sound-bite' style of information result in a collection of fragmented stories that prevent a deeper understanding of political issues. However, they value social media as effective tools for timely coordination and engagement in decision-making, fostering the horizontal, non-hierarchical structure of these groups:

> **Rebecca (21):** kind of… [we interact online] as much as necessary… I mean, we have a Facebook
> page and we have, for the market, like a Doodle poll. People sign up every week on this online thing,
> where they can do… For example we had a little bit of a thing, 'cause we didn't know, we realised
> that some of the products, the rice cakes that we were selling had palm oil in them, and we had a
> meeting and we were like 'oh, what we can do?' But we were not many of us at the meeting, so we
> couldn't really decide right there what we wanted to do. And then someone said 'you can say that
> also about Granola', cause it is also very unethical. So we saw you can put, ask a questions on
> Facebook, so we asked 'shall we sell it or no?' and that is really a good way of getting more people
> join the debate, because really, everybody who buys this food is part of the coop, because it's nice to
> have the opportunity to participate.

To conclude, in terms of citizenship model, the alternative participatory habitus favours
actualising practices, such as protests, political consumerism, petitions and DIY citizenship,
without completely rejecting dutiful citizen practices. Despite a shared distrust in political
parties and the Parliament, they seem to value voting as a key channel of participation. Due
to the electoral system, though, the parties they support gain only a few seats in Parliament.
The sense that politicians do not represent young people's interests is thus shared and gives
rise to disillusion and disaffection.

> **Rebecca (21):** I think it's really important to… I guess, support the Green party and it's like, 'cause
> it is getting more and more popular and I think maybe more people are rethinking of it as a viable
> alternative. Even though I think the whole political thing is pretty stupid and it's not necessarily
> democratic, your voice isn't heard, the politics game is stupid

The radical-antagonist participatory habitus

More than any other participatory habitus, the radical-antagonists are 'networked young
citizens' (Loader, *et al.*, 2014): they reflexively engage in actualising citizenship practices;
their participatory practices – including social relations and information practices – are
enacted through social media networks; and their point of reference is represented by 'global
information networked capitalism' (ibid: 145), responsible for corrupting the democratic
system. Therefore, and contrary to the alternative participatory habitus, the radical
antagonist participatory habitus is characterised by a firm opposition to party politics and the
institutions of representative democracy. These interviewees precisely question the
representativeness of the contemporary democratic system. Their dissatisfaction and anger
stems from the belief that politicians do not care about citizens, and from a perceived
disconnection between democracy as a value and the practice of democracy (see also
Cammaerts, *et al.*, 2014). In this light, voting is perceived as an impoverished form of

participation

> **Aisha (20):** I'm a bit wary of party politics! Because, through my experience with investigative journalism, and seeing a little bit of insight into like what happens to our tax money, for example, and military expenditures compared to how much money is spent on education and other spheres, I just kind of feel like, I don't think they are representing my interests and even though some parties do, it's just not enough. I feel like the moment they are in power they'll just be undermined by politics and the existing power structure. I think the only thing we can do is be activists, and voting might be an act but it's just more passive to me. Cause I'm just an anonymous person giving a vote, and it's not enough. I don' think that party politics at the moment works

Consequently, these interviewees exclusively engage in actualising citizenship, such as DIY and radical citizenship practices, including protests, occupations, hunting sabotage, etc. from which they gain a strong sense of collective identity. As the excerpt below suggests, the 'we-ness' they gain from both online and offline participation is also a major source of political efficacy and gratification:

> **Dave (25):** I guess I really learned, especially during the anti-cuts movement... how possible it is for people to make change and achieve things if they work together. That was the main thing that struck me

As much as they resist the power structures of contemporary democracies, from which they feel excluded, they also share a critical attitude towards mainstream media. Among all the interviewees, radical antagonists are also those who have developed more critical skills and have constructed sophisticated and varied media diets, based on individual interests and trusted networks (Wells, 2015).

> **Alicia (25):** I don't personally... don't watch the news, I mean a kind of tend to not watch BBC because it makes me so angry. Mainstream media's a joke, it's corporate and it just makes me angry. So, where do I get my news ... Well you know, you kinda hear about shit! I mean, online usually, from like things that aren't mainstream media. There's problems with that, but there's problems with mainstream media, so you just have to be smart about it. [...] I just sort of like pages and they come up on my wall on Facebook, which... there are some really good ones, there's True Valve, Films for Action is really good, that's more kind of essays, I mean, even just to get any kind of preview of things like the Independent... I wouldn't look at just one thing, so even some mainstream media outlets, you can look at... because you know... cause non mainstream media could be more about specific things so if you want to get an overview you just, you know. It's more about just looking at different things to be honest...

> **Aisha (20):** one is YouTube videos, stuff like The Real News Network or Democracy Now. They publish investigative journalism and interview people. And also just Facebook really, because all the activists' pages have Facebook pages and they just publish their articles [...] and I'm also very aware when I read the articles of their political leaning so I take it into consideration. I take it with a pinch of salt, I know their political leaning, so I know that's a bit biased.

Their critical skills also include awareness of the so-called 'algorithmic authority' (Rogers, 2013; Lupton, 2015). Namely, they understand that search engines do not provide 'raw', 'truthful' data, and critically view results of online queries as the outcome of power relations, characterised by asymmetry and bias. Issues of privacy and concerns for one's digital footprint are also addressed by radical antagonists, who are very knowledgeable about the commodification of networked sociality and participatory culture into a 'culture of connectivity' (Van Dijck, 2013).

> **Alicia (25):** But yeah, I mean, especially online, you can just get a confirmation bias via a feedback loop, so you've got, you know, I mean Google perpetuates this. Because you know, when you are searching on Google from your IP address or if you logged on, even worse, you know, the kind of things you click on will end up becoming the things more likely to be at the top. So it's just a confirmation bias, you're looking for what you think the truth is and Google tells you that's what the truth is

Their higher degree of digital literacy is expressed not only at the level of access to, and critical evaluation of online information, but also in the production of communication. Radical-antagonists are 'social politics curators' (Thorson, 2014), that is, they are actively engaged in sharing political content on Facebook, Twitter and blogs for political campaigning. They are also engaged in more creative forms of media activism, such as citizen journalism.

> **Aisha (20):** I also worked for some other activists in Germany, they are an alternative media news network and I do research with them sometimes [...] it's, like, we just started, it's like a grassroots thing, we started 8 months ago, so we had to learn so many things, like how to contact activists and interviewing them and growing because we started out like 8-10 people, now we're like 40.

A further distinctive feature of those who adhere to the radical antagonist participatory habitus is that peer relations in teenage years or early university years are more influential than political talk in the family context or a common socio-economic background. This important role of peer talk has been rarely explored in the literature on political socialisation. However, there is recent evidence that civic talk with peers is a stronger predictor of political interest and political expression than civic talk with parents (Ekström and Ostman, 2013).

The contribution of peer relations in the development of political interest and democratic values is related to changes in both the media environment and the conditions of childhood and adolescence (Livingstone, 2009; Pasquier, 2005), whereby the influence of peer cultures and media cultures go to the detriment of parents' and teachers' authoritative roles. Indeed, the internet and social media provide marginalised youth with the opportunity to develop connections with like-minded individuals and move beyond geographic – and symbolic – restrictions (boyd, 2014). Networked young citizens actively contribute to their political socialisation through the development of online networks of connections:

> **Aisha (20):** it's quite overwhelming to see the impact and destruction of industry on the environment and you feel it as if you can't do anything, but the moment I started following these pages I realised that many people actually are making life choices like that, I just felt I can do it, you know, because, to be honest at my school I was the only vegan and the only person with global views on being bisexual, no LGBT community existed, and if I hadn't had the internet, where I can actively see people talking, sharing and caring about these things, I just… I think I wouldn't go through it the way I just did it. Because I think the internet can be a good supportive network if you live in a village or conservative environment and you feel like you are the only one, but that's not true.

Exclusion

The last participatory habitus that emerged from interviewees' own vocabularies is shared by young people who express high degrees of alienation from politics in combination with a low sense of self-efficacy. Some interviewees adhering to this habitus are part of ethnic minorities and most tend to be from a low socio-economic background. Civic talk in the family context was rarely part of their political socialisation, nor was watching the news together with their parents. Their notion of participation refers to the traditional 'dutiful citizenship' model: participation is equated with voting, and as such is only actualised closer to elections:

> **Deepa (22):** I have no interest in like politics. The only time I'd ever get interested in some kind of political debate is when it comes to elections. So, for example for us, I think our general elections are coming up soon, I think, I am not entirely sure. This is how much I keep up with it. So when it comes close to the time of the campaigns they become a little bit more like 'ok you guys will be voting soon', I'll be interested then, because I'd be more interested to know what they have to say right now than sort of keeping up to date with it in general

For these young people, boredom for politics and political news is indeed a profound form of disaffection with the mechanisms of representation and the political game, as well as with

political discourse, which they perceive as inaccessible (see also Bastedo, 2014). Whereas older young people complain about politics being distant and not caring for the same issues as they care, younger teenagers claim the right to vote and wished they were taught more about politics in school. For different reasons, then, both share a sense of political inefficacy and feel ill-equipped to vote:

> **Deepa (22):** Personally I just find it really boring. I just find it like three grown men just constantly arguing, arguing, arguing! Like I know some things they say, depending on who takes over the government it will make a difference to us. Like for example the day Cameron took over he changed the university fees. I know the Labour Party at the moment is trying to reduce the university fees from 9000 to 6000. So it's only when it's those sort of topics, students will feel more, not just students but also other young people might be more interested in, cause they talk about general things that we personally might not be too interested in

> **Emily (15):** I think it vote at 16] will be more effective because young people have… a right to know… to know… because young people are the new generation. They are gonna be the ones who are around a lot more. Around for a longer period of time. So they deserve the right to have an opinion on what is happening in their community and their nation

This attitude towards national politics is also reflected in their information practices: they rely on a limited number of mainstream media sources, prefer the short-news format and delve deeper only in the news they are more interested in, such as local news or issues that affect young people, like mental health and bullying.

> **Bethany (14):** I only watch the news when I see something, they have an event talking about what these politicians are up to. Or I read, do you know those little, those writing part at the bottom of the screen when there is news on? I read that sometimes, cause it talks about, it summarises it. Cause I find that it's easier to understand when it's a bit summarised. Even though it's bad and condensed, but I know roughly what is going on.

Accordingly, their citizenship orientation is local rather than national or global, and centred around individual participatory practices, rather than collective. Despite being uninterested in politics, some of these young people are actively engaged (on and offline) in youth volunteering associations, especially those aimed at promoting youth's wellbeing and fighting bullying. Moreover, they are also engaged in creative uses of the internet. Together with radical activists, indeed the 'excluded' young people climb up the 'ladder of opportunities' (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007), though their participatory practices are not political. This finding is consistent with quantitative and longitudinal data that show how engagement in

the creative space is not necessarily associated with the development of public orientation and interest in politics (Ekström, *et al.*, 2014)

> **Emily (15):** The internet is a very important part of my life. I spend literally... like 60% of my life on the internet, 'cause I just find so much more interesting online... that you can do so much more online, than... yeah... I like reading online, cause I have like ... this website where we can read, people can write stories and we can read them, we can share them with each other. And I like obviously looking at photos, at photography, so I can get inspiration for my own photography. I like YouTube, so you can learn more about people online. I have my YouTube channel, stuff like that [...] is about me, about my friends. We all like do videos together. A few of my friends have YouTube channels as well, so we all, like, do video on each other channel. I do like more about us videos... like 24 hours about me, stuff like that

The dynamic nature of participatory habitus

The analysis of youth's vocabularies of participation has shown that young people adhere to different participatory habitus, each characterised by distinctive dispositions regarding 1) citizenship orientations, 2) citizenship practices and 3) digital engagement.

More importantly, in line with Lahire's work (2011), youth's vocabularies emphasise the dynamic process through which a habitus is acquired, and the co-determination of habitus, field and capital. Whereas participatory habitus are influenced by both parents' and class' habitus – from which young people draw schemes, experiences and resources - they are not strictly determined by early socialisation. Indeed, personal life trajectories concur to inform the habitus in various ways. For example, young people may have been socialised to a specific participatory habitus in a durable way, but may later in life lack the opportunities and motivations to activate it, as in the case of some 'aligned' interviewees who are now 'standbyers' (Amnå and Ekman, 2014). By contrast, Gabrielle has grown up in a 'laid back' family, where 'politics was never really spoken about', as she puts it. When she went to university, however, she was far from alienated; indeed, her gender and sexual identity shaped the conditions of her socialisation to an aligned participatory habitus:

> **Gabrielle (24):** When I came to uni there was no women's football team so I started one. There wasn't an LGBT society, so I set that up. I also ran in the student elections and was elected as LGBT Officer. And I'm doing a lot of stuff of that sort, I am debating whether to run for the elections again, for Vice President of the SU

Therefore, we recognise in line with Lahire (2011) that individuals inhabit a plurality of social worlds. As a consequence, their habitus is far from homogeneous. Interviewees' vocabularies provide numerous examples of the potential gaps between 'dispositions to act' and 'to believe' (Lahire, 2003), and the contradictions (Thorson, 2010) generated by fractures between personal trajectories, political habitus, differential capitals and personal position in the political field. For example, as general secretary of a SU, Sarah is involved in formal political spaces, and adheres to a traditional notion of democracy, as she explicitly links voting with 'bargaining power'. Nonetheless, her self-understanding of participation is contradictory and she describes herself as being on a more actualising end of the participatory practices spectrum than she actually is:

> **Sarah (21):** I used to be really involved with the Labour Party when I was younger, and participation for me was going out and canvassing on the doorstep and getting people out to vote and em, now that I'm more disenfranchised I think that participation is about signing petitions or em, going on protests, eh, joining campaign groups, and doing something more activist, more activist-based things

Finally, habitus is shaped by the field, while simultaneously shaping it. One exemplary case is provided by Matthew who, in the course of the same interview, shifts from an individualised vocabulary of citizenship when he speaks of his experience within the SU, to a vocabulary centred on a collective 'we-ness' – when speaking about the housing coop:

> **Matthew (22):** I was in the Board of Directors for that, I have been elected and I was also involved in the political campaigning for the organisation. So that helped me a lot about campaigning business and ways of organising within organisations. So it was important, one of the student officers helped a lot with using their time and things. But as the cooperatives we are very much autonomous, one of the coop's principles is autonomy and independence, so we try to within organisations.

CONCLUSIONS

Before discussing the implications of the findings for further analysis and future research, it is important to address the limitations of the present study. The sample on which this paper is based is limited in size and diversity of young people's experiences. The composition of the sample is problematic if we consider that, in the UK, education has a strong relationship with participation, independently from socioeconomic status (Sloam, 2014). While this is a work in progress – more interviews will be carried out in the UK, Italy and Germany – socioeconomic inequalities, and their influence on online and offline participation, are likely

to be minimised by interviewees' educational achievements. At the same time, the fact that most interviewees are or have been university students is consistent with evidence that actualising citizenship practices are stratified along the lines of social and educational inequalities (*ibid*).

Acknowledging the aforementioned limitations, I argue that a Bourdieusian approach to youth participation provides an analytical framework for thinking of the correspondence between attitudes, practices, skills and knowledge, and one's position in society. Moreover, it shows that participation is about different positioning in the political field and unequal access to resources. This is in line with many studies on young people and political inequality. The analysis of youth vocabularies of participation has also shown that participatory habitus combine practices and civic styles of both actualising and dutiful citizenship models, against a clear-cut paradigm shift.

Also, the adoption of this framework responds to the comparative nature of this specific research project: mapping youth participation within the political field provides an analytical tool to inform qualitative cross-cultural comparisons, where different political fields can account for different youth's participatory habitus, and variations within the same participatory habitus across countries.

Finally, the findings are consistent with prior research showing that the relationship between social media use and youth participation is not clear-cut. Indeed, young people's use of social media is diverse: those still adhering to a dutiful civic style create a hybrid social media space which combines news and relational spaces; young activists who engage in online and offline actualising citizenship make political uses of social media, including citizen journalism and media activism; by contrast, young citizens who are more politically disenfranchised are actually engaged in a variety of creative uses of social media.

Acknowledgements

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