European Journal of Developmental Psychology

ISSN: 1740-5629 (Print) 1740-5610 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/pedp20

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To cite this article: Shakuntala Banaji, Sam Mejias, Ragne Kouts, Filipe Piedade, Vassilis Pavlopoulos, Iana Tzankova, Alena Mackova & Erik Amnå (2017): Citizenship's tangled web: Associations, gaps and tensions in formulations of European youth active citizenship across disciplines, European Journal of Developmental Psychology, DOI: 10.1080/17405629.2017.1367278

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2017.1367278

Published online: 31 Aug 2017.

EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY, 2017
https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2017.1367278

Citizenship's tangled web: Associations, gaps and tensions in formulations of European youth active citizenship across disciplines

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ABSTRACT

How does academic literature across various disciplines conceptualize and empirically address active citizenship? What are the potential benefits and dangers of dominant epistemological and ideological perspectives on 'good citizenship'? Our paper engages with these questions by drawing on literature across 8 disciplines. We used textual analysis software T-LAB to quantify and visualize co-occurrences, word associations and thematic clusters in the abstracts of 770 texts gathered by eight country teams and original in-depth qualitative analyses of ideological positions and discourses taken up in a selection of key texts across the corpus. Our paper elaborates the findings: that many of the key themes surrounding young people and citizenship in the literature share little or no connection with European citizenship; that there is a significant gap in the literature on young European citizens; and that studies connected to internal, status-based factors connected to citizenship are far more prevalent than those examining external, practice-based factors or dissidence and dissent. Our conclusions examine the potential normative implications of the disjuncture between dominant conceptions and critical accounts of youth active citizenship.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 21 May 2017; Accepted 27 July 2017

KEYWORDS European; youth; active citizenship; literature review; T-LAB 9; discourse analysis

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Full Corpus Abstracts: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.886324
Bibliography: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.886320
This article was originally published with errors. This version has been corrected. Please see Corrigendum (https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2017.1382106)

Introduction

What do scholars, policymakers and practitioners mean when they discuss 'active citizenship?' How can conceptualisations of 'European' 'youth' and 'active citizenship' as discussed in cross-disciplinary literature form the basis of an integrated theory? These questions lie at the heart of the EU Horizon 2020 Constructing Active Citizenship with European Youth (CATCH-EyoU) project from which this paper arises. Through a series of multi-disciplinary research activities across eight countries,[1] CATCH-EyoU explores the nature of what it means for young people to conceptualize, understand and perform citizenship in different contexts and currents, and to do so in an active manner. One of the more significant aspects of the project centers on analyzing the ways in which the vast theoretical and empirical literature on young people and citizenship contributes to the discursive and evidentiary formation of a European youth active citizen imaginary. The notion of a European active citizen whose citizenship is expressed through participation is one which has gained prominence since the early 2000s amongst trans-European policy groups and non-governmental civic organizations (Biesta, 2009). These groups are ostensibly seeking to find ways of binding citizens, who have very different political histories and cultural interests, together into a participatory democratic community of new and old European Union member states. In tracing the history of this notion of European active citizenship through a range of policy directives, Milana (2008, p. 214) concludes that active citizen participation is a 'dominant discourse' currently used to 'legitimize the union' rather than to ensure actual inclusion of diverse groups of citizens. While the finding that democracy is operationalized more in favour of those who govern than in favour of citizens will not be new to those who work in the field of citizenship research, this definitional tension between the democratic interests of different groups of citizens and the interests of the newly expanding body, the European Union, in relation to ways of regarding and promoting active citizenship and participation at a time of heightened economic uncertainty and new media connection informs our sample and analysis (below) and differentiates it from previous reviews of literature on citizenship and civic action. In examining existing scholarship in this arena (Amnå & Ekman, 2014; Benhabib, 1999; Hoskins & Villalba, 2015; Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2011 and many more) via a systematic meta-review, and in providing a critical epistemological take, this article presents original findings arising from (1) a quantitative thematic analysis of a corpus of 770 texts across 12 disciplines and sub-disciplines, and through (2) an in depth thematic qualitative analysis of methodologies, epistemologies, and ideological discourses in a selection of key texts across the corpus. Our findings problematize the key frames and themes that currently surround young people's active citizenship in a European context. To facilitate this exercise, we analyzed abstracts of (N = 770) texts gathered by each country's university teams. Taken together these built an aggregated data-set of academic literature in eight broad disciplines: Education,

[1]Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom.

History, Media and Communications, Policy Studies, Political Science, Sociology, Philosophy and Psychology, and four sub-fields of Psychology: Social Psychology, Political Psychology, Community Psychology and Developmental Psychology.

Methods

Each participating country team collected and reviewed literature in specific disciplinary fields (see Table 1 below). In the first stage, using the T-LAB 9 software platform, our analysis highlighted associative thematic relationships between key terms and concepts related to youth active citizenship in Europe. In T-LAB 9, *Word Associations* create a visual chart highlighting co-occurrence and similarity relationships between individual words, to give an indication of some of the more closely associated terms and concepts in relation to our literature review of youth active citizenship in Europe. The key unit of analysis that formed the T-LAB 9 corpus were individual abstracts and textual summaries selected by each team as indicative of how each discipline or sub-discipline addressed youth active citizenship within the selected texts. In the second stage, a more limited sample of full texts (approx. $N = 200$) was subjected to detailed qualitative analysis. This is discussed further in the methodology section below.

First stage quantitative textual analysis using T-LAB 9

The 8 teams each produced a list of the most important contributions in their respective fields of study that investigated issues related with youth, active citizenship, and Europe. They then selected between 40 and 200 significant texts in timeframes most relevant to their discipline or sub-discipline. Our rationale for the sample was organized around inclusion criteria which attended to: the disciplinary specialisms of each national team; publication quality, impact, and sphere of influence of texts using our searched keywords, synonyms or antonyms in each discipline or sub-discipline; language- and country-specific biases (particularly the need to attend to studies in languages other than English where these had significant theoretical implications); the need to attend to excluded voices and delegitimized forms of civic action that might affect definitions of active citizenship and Europeanness; and the need to pay attention to a wide range of conceptualisations of youth, participation, and active citizenship. While our initial

Table 1. Number of collected texts per university and discipline/sub-discipline.

Discipline	University	$N = 770$
Sociology and Philosophy	London School of Economics and Political Science	$N = 168$
Political Science	Orebro University	$N = 68$
Education and History	University of Porto	$N = 99$
Media and Communications	University of Tartu	$N = 49$
Policy Studies	Masaryk University	$N = 46$
Developmental Psychology	University of Athens	$N = 185$
Social Psychology and Political Psychology	Friedrich Schiller University	$N = 42$
Community Psychology	University of Bologna	N =113

searches yielded nearly a thousand texts, after the removal of grey literature, repeat studies by the same authors, and inconsequential or discredited research, the final corpus was 770 books and papers. These 770 texts are not split equally between disciplines. In particular, due to the number of texts from psychology sub-disciplines, a disproportionate number of psychology texts (over 300) are represented in our corpus. The table above outlines the distribution of texts.

More or less theoretically driven literature reviews comprise a third (33%, or 257 out of 770) of the full corpus and quantitative studies abound. Table 2 presents the distribution of methods across the corpus according to number of texts falling into each method:

Keywords and sample

All teams followed the same format in conducting keyword searches for the literature, including but not confined to the following terms:

- Active citizenship/citizenship/civic participation/political participation/activism
- Young people/youth
- Europe/EU/European
- European citizenship
- Youth citizenship
- Europe/EU/European youth

Table 2. List of methods used in full corpus.

Method	Number of texts
Theoretical review	199
Quantitative (survey – *N* > 500)	90
Literature review	58
Mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative)	57
Quantitative (survey – *N* unspecified or specific quantitative analysis)	54
Quantitative (longitudinal study)	49
Qualitative (semi-structured interview)	47
Quantitative (comparative or cross-national study)	34
Desk research	30
Case study	30
Quantitative (survey – *N* between 100 and 500)	22
Qualitative (focus group)	18
Qualitative (comparative or cross-national study)	17
Qualitative (participatory action research)	8
Qualitative (survey)	8
Qualitative-ethnographic (participant-observation)	7
Qualitative-ethnographic (life history narratives)	6
Quantitative (online survey)	6
Field mapping	6
Documentary analysis	5
Content analysis	5
Qualitative-ethnographic (field notes)	3
Discourse analysis	3
Quantitative (Pre- and post-intervention survey)	3
Thematic analysis	3
Quantitative (survey – *N* < 100)	1
Factor analysis	1

Contributions were collated, cleaned, checked and verified by the London School of Economics team before being entered as a data-set on the T-LAB9 software platform. Two forms of texts were categorized as the key unit of analysis across N: (1) abstracts of peer- and non-peer-reviewed journal articles; and (2), where no printed abstract or blurbs existed, original summaries by CATCH-EyoU researchers.

Benefits, limitations, and opportunities of textual analysis using T-LAB 9

While an effective tool for highlighting connections between themes and concepts, T-LAB9 can only provide broad thematic results, and is not intended to offer analytical detail within themes or fine-grained discursive comments, all of which we undertook in the second stage of analysis. Robust results are contingent on the inputting of accurate data in the corpus, which we therefore checked multiple times. Our study adjusted for the challenge of irrelevant associations by filtering out the most irrelevant key-terms frequently mentioned (see table 3, below). Finally, it is important to note that a high frequency of occurrence is not the only criteria for, or even the most theoretically useful means of, using the T-LAB9 software. Gaps and absences in association are also of significance for overall analysis. The researchers felt that certain words and concepts relating to both *identity* (for instance, girls) and *discourse* (for instance, radicalization) generally might provide insight into some of the ways in which these concepts were addressed in the corpus. It was therefore decided to create a list of words associated less frequently with citizenship that might prove analytically useful, and then to limit the occurrence threshold in order to select and conduct analysis, in addition to analyzing most frequently occurring key terms. The added keywords along with rejected keywords are listed in Table 3.

Using T-LAB9

T-LAB9's word association visualization tool provides a clear visual logic for understanding the strength and weakness of conceptual relationships between words within a body of research. For each visualization, the shorter the distance between the central term and any other key term, the closer the association. However, it is important to note that the visualization figures (see example in Figure 1 below) only provide *relative degrees of association***,** meaning that associations are not contingent on how many times they occur overall, only how often they occur in relation to overall co-occurrences. In the visualizations discussed in the analysis section, the 'strong' connections are those located closest to the centre, while the 'weak' connections are furthest away.

Table 3. Keywords added to and removed from T-Lab9.

Removed		
Aim	Change	Paper
America	Concept	Personal
American	Country	Provide
Argue	Draw	Result
Article	Explore	School
Attention	Focus	Shape
Base	Journal	Study
Book	Little	Survey
	Notion	Understand
Added		
Boy	Islam	Racism
Dissident	Islamic	Radical
Dissenter	Islamophobia	Radicalization
Female	Male	Teenager
Feminism	Multicultural	Teenage
Feminist	Multiculturalism	Teen
Girl	Muslim	Violent
Girlhood	Racial	Violence

Second stage qualitative analysis

The thematic and discourse analysis of (approximately $N = 200$) texts involved each team using disciplinary expertise to (1) describe and historicize and (2) discuss critically, a range of relevant definitions, epistemologies, methodologies, associations, correlations, and explanations in the literature on youth active citizenship in Europe. The key to this aspect of the analytic process was to try to give a solid basis for new knowledge about youth active citizenship in Europe and biases within its current conceptualisation. As such, our purposive sample of nearly 200 texts was chosen to reflect (a) the dominant tendencies in the theorisation and researching of a particular set of terms surrounding European Active Citizenship and Youth Active Citizenship (which were categorised around particular themes such as 'rights and duties', 'belonging', 'electoral democracy' and 'identity'; (b) the research questions animating sub-fields of the disciplinary areas at different historical periods since the second world war (why certain questions at certain times? Which questions have been disregarded and why?); c) ideological and epistemological tensions within disciplines (for instance between individual and collective understandings of civic action; or with regard to the significance or otherwise of structural inequality in assumptions about 'basic' levels of civic participation; and d) the range of descriptive and normative accounts, and the ways in which these tensions either identified and provoked or side-stepped and ignored critical self-reflection. Throughout this selection, and in line with theorisations of Critical Discourse Analysis by van Dijk (2003) and Fairclough (1992), the powerful social role played by normativity – the establishment through discourse and operationalizations via discourse, of sets of norms as determinants for civic behaviours, attitudes and identities – as

a widespread, if unacknowledged, strategy for inclusion and exclusion of actual young citizens from various levels of the European public sphere was one to which we paid specific attention.

The sections that follow immediately below present analysis and critical discussion across the two stages, in terms of: (1) the ways in which the overall corpus indicates the presence and relative coherence of theories within the literature discussing 'European youth active citizenship'; and (2) the ways in which existing literature on Europe, young people and active citizenship frames and endorses, or problematizes and challenges, normative conceptualisations in particular epistemological and ideological traditions.

Results

Most frequently occurring key terms

Unsurprisingly, the most frequently occurring key terms reflected the search terms used to source the literature: 'political,' 'citizenship,' 'civic,' 'young,' and 'participation' were most frequently occurring (see Table 4). One salient finding was the relatively low position in the top 20 (12th) of the word 'European,' considering that it was one of the primary keywords use in the literature searches.

The main themes evident from this list are those connected to:

- Systems and Structures ('Political', 'Social', 'People', 'Research', 'Education', 'Policy', 'Community')
- Practices ('Citizenship', 'Civic', 'Participation', 'Engagement', 'Examine')
- Status ('Citizenship', 'Young', 'Youth', 'European', 'Citizen', 'Student', 'Group', 'Identity')

Table 4. Twenty most frequently occurring lemmas/key terms.

Political	882
Citizenship	671
Civic	640
Young	615
Youth	574
Participation	573
Social	547
People	533
Engagement	385
Community	353
Research	350
European	330
Education	312
Citizen	293
Development	280
Examine	240
Student	228
Policy	219
Group	214
Identity	213

Associations of most frequently occurring key terms

Associations with Europe are conspicuously absent from the key-terms most frequently occurring in the corpus, including 'Political,' 'Youth' and 'Young.' Europe does share a close association with the key-term 'citizenship,' but not with 'citizen' or 'civic,' suggesting that many of the key themes in our research corpus are not specifically connected to Europe.

Table 5 shows the 2–5 words most closely associated with the most frequently occurring key-terms, with the strongest associations listed first. 'Europe' and 'European' only has one meaningful close association – with 'identity'. This could suggest that there is a prevalence of studies on individual and internal factors and processes connected to European citizenship rather than external factors and group processes.

'Youth' and 'Young People' have relatively close associations to 'civic' and 'political' participation and engagement in the literature, but *no associations to Europe or the EU*. This absence is a concrete finding, but it does not address the quality of associations between key words that are actually connected (see discussion section below). 'Participation' and 'engagement' each contain similar associations, with 'civic,' 'political,' 'youth,' and 'young' being the four closest associations for both key-terms. This would appear to indicate that (1) the terms are used synonymously in the literature to signify some form of youth citizenship involvement; or (2) that the literatures in our corpus on young people and citizenship are primarily interested in *either* youth participation *or* youth engagement as distinct concepts; or (3) the association occurs when articles are interrogating whether or not young people are engaged in civic or political participation; (4) when they are asserting that young people have notably low civic participation; and (5) when they are demonstrating that young people

Table 5. 2–5 closest associations per keyword (closest association listed first) ($N = 770$).

Political	Participation/young/people/civic
Citizenship	Education/active/European/right
Civic	Engagement/youth/participation/political
Young	People/political/youth/participation
Youth	Civic/young/engagement/participation
Participation	Political/civic/young/people/youth
Social	Political/capital/participation
People	Young/political/participation/youth
Engagement	Civic/political/youth/young
Community	Sense/service/youth/activity
Research	Young/youth
European	Union/Europe/Citizenship/EU
Education	Citizenship/curriculum/IEA/civic
Citizen	Citizenship/political/democracy/young/participation
Development	Youth/positive/community/program
Examine	Civic/political/youth/adolescent
Student	High/university/teachers/education
Policy	Citizenship/European/practice/youth
Group	Ethnic/social/civic/participation/people
Identity	European/formation/identification/national/political/social

have normal, different or higher levels of participation than older adults. In the qualitative analysis below we demonstrate how these various ways of positioning participation and engagement as expressed in the thematic visualisation suggest very different definitions of youth citizenship and engagement, some of which are limited, traditionally linked to authority, or conformist, while some are critical and anti-authoritarian.

Of the top ten most frequently occuring key terms above, the closest associations all share similar thematic connections: to politics, participation, and young people. This finding is logical in light of our search criteria, but it reveals a distinct absence of conceptualisations of Europe in any of the disciplinary fields or subfields. The exception to this finding is the key term 'citizenship.' Citizenship is the *only* top ten most frequently occurring key-term that has a close word association to 'European.' However, unlike the rest of the top ten key terms (with the one exception of 'social'), young people or youth are not closely associated to the key-term 'citizenship.' This suggests that none of the disciplinary literature surveyed contains significant investigations specifically related to European youth citizenship.

Associations of identity and status-based key terms

The key-term 'identity' was most strongly associated with 'European' (see Table 5), possibly suggesting that the literature on the theme of identity tends to be motivated by an interest in questions of European identity; this is almost certainly a reflection of the over-representation of psychology texts in the overall corpus. Other strong associations were with processes linked to European political identity development: 'identification,' 'Europe' and 'formation' were the next closest associations. While these associations are either implicitly or explicitly focused on the general concept and neutral identifier of 'identity,' the inclusion in this analysis of more specific terms – about gender, race, religion, age, and value-laden terms describing forms of activism – allows a closer look at some of the key associations in the surveyed literature corpus. In the sections that follow, we examine the associations with such key terms found in the corpus, beginning with competing ideas of action.

The spectrum of activism: from active to dissident to radical

One of the first ways in which the study sought to understand concepts of action or 'active' citizenship in the surveyed corpus was by comparing the main terms embodying the concept. A comparison of 'active,' 'activism' and 'activist' returned different associations reflecting their specific usages. While 'active' was most closely associated with positive or neutral concepts such as 'citizenship', 'education', 'participation', and 'priority', 'activism' and 'activist' appear to have strong associations with ideological positions: 'dissident' was the strongest word

association for 'activist', while 'feminist' was the strongest word association for 'activism.' This suggests that the word 'active' as used in the context of much literature on citizenship is critically de-linked from the political and ideological connotations of an 'activist' or of 'activism.' It is, thus, unconsciously, contingently, or deliberately de-politicized.

Examinations of the word associations for 'dissident' and 'radical' (see Figure 1) were similarly revealing, showing a complete absence of references to citizenship, Europe, or even young people. Instead, many of the terms with associations tend to be those that are often rhetorically paired with such words in academic literature. Examples include 'dissident activist,' 'radical agenda,' 'radical protest,' and 'dissident conflict.' The T-LAB 9 linguistic analysis of the corpus thus already begins to reveal normative biases and limits of the types of investigations into citizenship being carried out across disciplines.

Age

'Adolescent' and 'Adolescence' were key-terms most closely linked to developmental and age-related statuses, including 'parent', 'adulthood', and 'childhood.' This suggests that their usage in the literature may be more closely linked to certain texts in sub-disciplines that focus on developmental growth of young people, such as education or developmental psychology. There is a notable absence of any association between these terms and terms like 'active citizenship' or 'Europe'. The key-term 'teen' was most closely associated with the concepts of 'responsibility' and 'family.' Strikingly, 'teen' as well as the separate terms 'teenage' and 'teenager' shared no links to 'active citizenship' or 'Europe'.

Gender

Unsurprisingly, gender specific key-terms – 'male,' and 'female' were – most strongly associated with their gender opposite. 'Male' or 'female' key-terms are rarely associated with the actual word 'gender', indicating that mentions of the respective genders are descriptive. Although there are weak associations for concepts such as 'volunteer' and 'involvement' (male), 'activism' (girl), and 'empowerment' (female), neither active citizenship nor Europe are associations. The lack of associations of other key terms with the concept of gender in turn suggests a lack of investigation of gender as a structural issue in relation to European citizenship. Similarly, the term 'feminist,' while most strongly linked to the term 'girl,' appears to be disconnected from conceptual links to Europe, youth, or citizenship (see Figure 3).

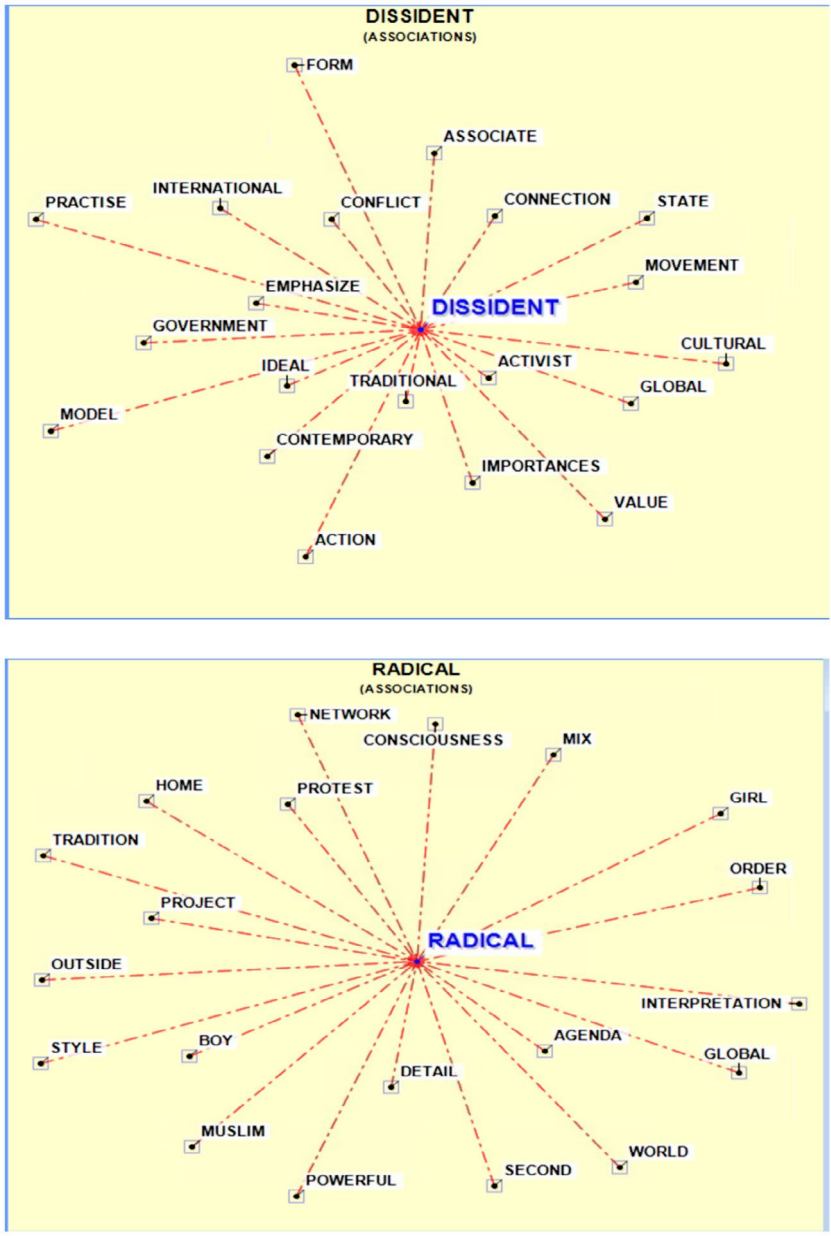

Figure 1. Word associations for 'dissident' and 'radical'.

Religion and race

The term 'Muslim' contained strong associations with discussions of terms 'radicalization,' 'Islamophobia,' and 'religious,' suggesting that the available literature across all disciplines provides a narrow and stereotyped frame for exploring

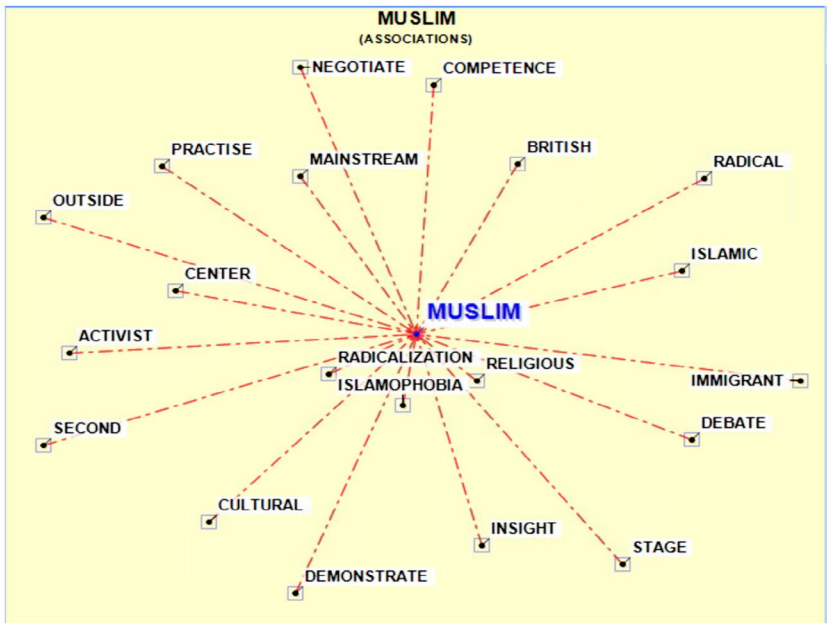

Figure 2. Word associations for 'Muslim'.

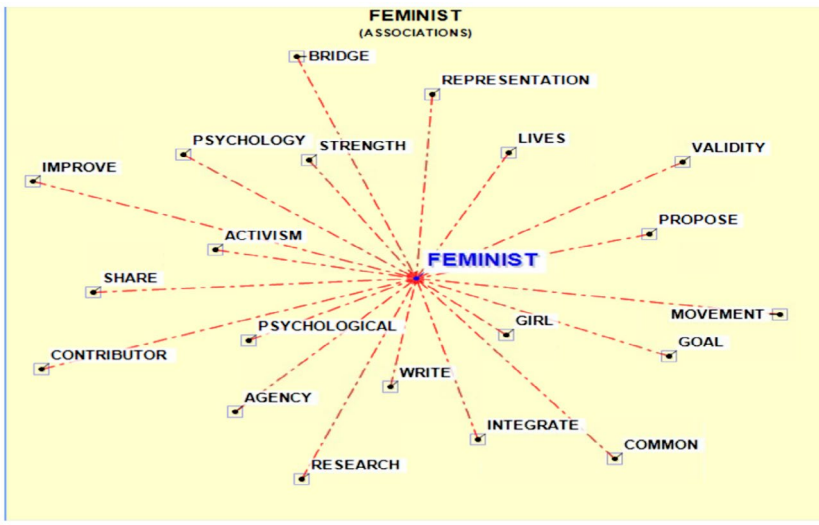

Figure 3. Word associations for 'feminist'.

Muslims in association with youth active citizenship. This was confirmed by our closer reading of the literature, in which critical discussions of active young Muslim citizenship within European communities were few and far between,

and discussions of Islamophobic discrimination equally rare. It does not, however, discount the possibility that texts that discussed active youth citizenship in more positive ways did so without indicating any of the religious affiliations of the young people therein. Investigations about 'British' identity did have an association with 'Muslim.' (Figure 2).

The terms 'multicultural' and 'multiculturalism,' which have 'racial' as an association, are closely associated with 'ethnicity,' 'migration' and 'integration' as well as 'geography' and 'globalisation'. The key-term 'racial' was strongly associated with 'ethnic,' 'explanation,' and 'background'. These words suggest the use of the key-term racial as a way to categorize ethnicity within the texts rather than as a way to describe inequalities within existing patterns of citizenship. The appearance of 'parental' as a close association could suggest either discussions of sampling procedures where racial categories were allocated based on parental race, or issues around family-background and race being a central theme. The term 'racism' was also analysed. It contained no close associations apart from the terms 'justice' and 'define,' and none concerning Europe, youth or citizenship. In short, these racially signifying terms, like many of the terms discussed in the previous sections around status and identity, are completely disconnected from the literature on Europe, young people, and citizenship (Figure 4).

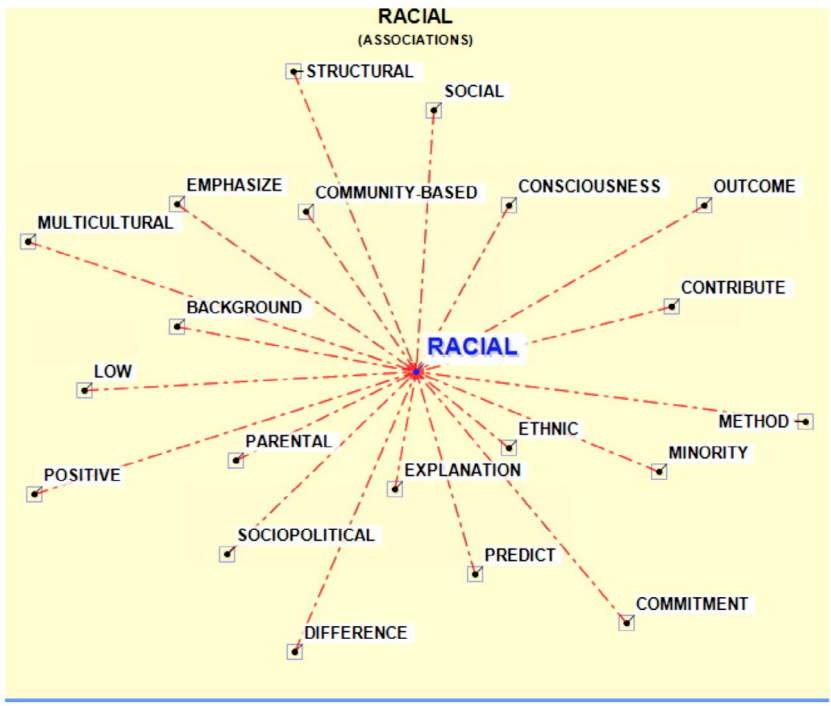

Figure 4. Word associations for 'racial'.

In summary, the key terms in the corpus analyzed above, which could be considered as religious, social or political positionings or practices, or as distinct identities – from radical, feminist and dissident to racism and multiculturalism, to adolescent, teen, boy, girl and feminist – are notable in their lack of association with concepts of engagement, participation and citizenship in most of the literature.

The importance of qualitative analysis

Broadly, the findings of our T-LAB when analyzed alongside qualitative thematic literature analyses together reveal three tendencies. First, the concepts of 'active citizenship' and especially of 'European youth active citizenship' remain theoretically and empirically underdeveloped. One of the first things discovered, on probing the language of texts that use the terms active citizenship further was that a preponderance of literature assumes a shared normative understanding of active citizenship as a more active version of 'good', responsible civic and political action, that respects rules and boundaries set by government and nation state. However, when we analyzed them comparatively, we found that these terms consistently *mean* different things to different scholars and practitioners in different epistemological and ideological traditions across disciplines. Second, the critical, inclusive and also anti-democratic dimensions of active citizenship as both *status* and *practice* remain on the periphery of theory and literature reviews on young people, citizenship and Europe. Further, there is in tension between the significant minority of critical reflexive empirical studies that question the assumptions and power structures underpinning normative views of citizenship and the majority of informative but somewhat unreflexive empirical studies. Finally, methodologically, quantitative studies and literature reviews outnumber qualitative and ethnographic studies, particularly in psychological sub-disciplines. While our broader T-LAB sample did contain a few critically reflexive survey-based studies, these were fairly atypical. The preponderance of quantitative (and particularly questionnaire-based studies) with a lack of reflexivity in the kinds of questions asked and scales used to derive variables such as percentage of voluntary action or civic interest amongst young people, leads, we contend, to particular types of normative conclusions dominating (e.g., Trust in media is a sign of greater active citizenship; participation indicates commitment to democracy whereas lack of participation is a sign of apathy); and the more complex nuances being misunderstood: (What are young people actually doing online? Which groups of youth have access to newspapers? Is some participation anti-democratic?). Problematic over-generalizations and lack of reflection were, of course, also to be found in qualitative work, with interviews inflected both by linguistic and demographic variables (such as the ease of access to those speaking national languages, and to student populations, as opposed to homeless or working-class youth). Additionally, even some of the

theoretical and conceptual papers fail to interrogate their own assumptions with regard to social welfare and access to democratic resources, while others use circular measures that define democracy and participation in relation to each other and to the rule of law without taking into account unjust systems, depleted democratic regimes and unfair or prejudiced laws (cf. Biesta's (2009) critique of work by Hoskins et al.) We discuss all three tendencies below.

A qualitative semantic consideration of the actual abstracts reveals that T-LAB9 findings are often open to several potentially divergent interpretations for each association. We exemplify this through discussion of the finding that 'Youth' and 'Young People' have relatively close associations to 'civic' and 'political' participation and engagement in the literature, but *no associations to Europe or the EU*. Qualitative analysis reveals that the association occurs when texts are (1) interrogating whether or not young people are engaged in civic or political participation; (2) asserting that young people have notably low civic and political participation or contesting this assertion theoretically by reviewing the literature which asserts it; and/or (3) demonstrating that young people have normal, different, or higher levels of participation than older adults or than would be normatively desirable in a democracy. Our close reading of the literature below appears to confirm that the overwhelming number of texts with a correlation between young people and citizenship or civic fall into the first category (the question of *whether* youth participate) or the second category (the question of *how frequently* youth participate).

In over half the sample we see an interest in relationships between (1) individuals and social groups, (2) residents of Europe and their governments, and (3) theoretical *definitions* of democracy or citizenship and civic *practice(s)*. A number of studies also investigate the extent to which social and environmental factors (such as modes of governance, media, schooling, family relationships, economic context or social attitudes to race, gender and ability) build or erode a sense of self-efficacy and of solidarity with others, or interact with individuals' dispositions and intersectional experiences to increase affinity for others within communities (which are conceived both geographically and via the notion of interests). While these experiences are also being documented and discussed at group level (Kimberlee, 2002; Vromen, Xenos, & Loader, 2014), several studies still measure individuals' subjectivity within, identification with, and practice of democracy and citizenship via individual scales, factors and variables (Hoskins & Villalba, 2015; Maganelli et al., 2014).

It should be noted that while there is nothing intrinsically problematic with examining either proficiencies or deficiencies in relation to particular agreed upon norms of social interaction and value – and indeed many critical social scientists are busy doing this in relation to attitudes on human rights, migration, gender and race (Gordon, 2010; Lister, 1997; Ribeiro, Malafaia, Neves, Ferreira, & Menezes, 2014) – the norms themselves, the data on which they are based, and those who collect this data or set norms, must be subjected to qualitative

scrutiny if a study is to count as epistemologically reflexive. Within these parameters, one key finding of our qualitative review is that far too many concepts and methods with regard to youth active citizenship are deployed uncritically and unreflexively.

Phenomena such as educational attainment, legal status, identification and ideology that connect individuals to groups and to social contexts are key arena for research in relation to young people's political development, civic networks and values. 'Social capital', 'empowerment', and 'resilience' are all concepts that received serious attention within the literature, particularly in sociology and social psychology. Several sociologically oriented studies are based on an assumption that the measurement and study of 'social capital' and 'trust' can show pathways to agency, empowerment and resilience, and can reduce disaffection, exclusion and apathy. Studying factors associated with these concepts aims to provide guidance on the proficiencies and deficiencies of individuals – and particularly of younger individuals – or systems and groups in relation to widely accepted civic, political, and democratic norms.

Discussion

Ideological assumptions and normative definitions: a problematic picture

Unsurprisingly, ideas about democracy are deeply normative, yet do not always expand on what kind of model of democratic society the authors wish to implement or on the fact that the quality of democracy and citizenship may vary. The findings of our TLAB analysis demonstrate a strong association across the larger corpus between the terms citizenship, active and democratic. However, close discursive analysis shows that the normative nature of the conceptualisations of participation and citizenship across many of the 200 texts varies widely between authors from different political and ideological traditions. Although not in all cases, several influential studies fail to make explicit, and where they make explicit sometimes do not reflect upon or interrogate, their own conceptualisations of participation and citizenship (see discussion in Banaji, 2008; Ferreira, Azevedo, & Menezes, 2012). In fact, the assumption built into some of the studies is that *what democracy is*, *why participation matters*, and *what citizenship is* are transparent, universally understood, and shared sets of values that can be taught to all young people as they come of age and absorbed in a coherent manner.

For instance, the widely voiced 'concern' about the decline in youth voting rates and the near moral panic about the democratic deficit amongst the young (Banaji, 2008; Banaji & Buckingham, 2013) are both premised on an assumption that the authors' evaluation of the significance of voting is the absolute 'truth' and that many young people's *not voting* suggests an insufficiency in their learning process about democracy or an apathetic disregard for the processes of democracy. Although this may be the case in some instances, the need to ask

questions about people's reasons for not voting and to re-evaluate the significance of voting in the context of social contexts has begun to change the ways in which communications scholars, psychologists, political scientists and sociologists are approaching these topics (Bruter & Harrison, 2014; Coleman, 2013). While a correlation between key terms is easy to spot via our T-LAB 9 analysis, only a minority of the literature critiques the assumptions and contemplates the underpinnings and presuppositions built into particular scholarly associations of the terms 'young people', 'citizenship', 'active' and 'democracy'.

Dutiful vs. dissident citizenship

Unexplored tensions between conceptualisations of citizenship in different traditions of social science can give rise to opportunities for critique. Distinct philosophical perspectives position politics and citizenship as foundational elements of the human experience. Aristotle (1920), in the third book of his seminal work *Politics*, defines citizenship as fundamentally oriented around the emergence of the city-state (polis), which facilitates the associative conditions for political action. According to Aristotle, the city-state is not just a sum of citizens but an organized form of life, with justice acting as the moral framework that both holds the city together and is an innate attribute of humanity. Following in this tradition, it is possible to trace the patterns of a normative view of *the good citizen* and the *ideal democratic state* through the various literatures: its influence is to be seen in a preponderance of our sample and in the emphasis on participation as a key facet and measure of citizenship, as well as in the development of other composite indicators.

In contrast, some scholars emphasize the continuing links of normative notions of citizenship as status and/or duty to structures of conformity, oppression and inequality. In this view citizenship is yet another structural condition characterized in part by struggle over the values through which all people can and should be equally treated (Amaya, 2013; Lee, 2006). Such insight is almost absent when it comes to the construction and rhetorical deployment of the idea of citizenship in the European context. As Kallioniemi, Zaleskienė, Lalor, and Misiejuk (2010) argue, active citizenship can even be considered as a fairly passive phenomenon in Europe: as the ideology of a nation-state, as a socio-politically constructed attitude, rooted in emotionally grounded feelings, like love and loyalty toward nation-state.

The key point to note is that critical studies in our corpus point out the irony of a practice such as 'active citizenship' actually being a passive and conformist phenomenon that encompasses some worthy activity but also some unquestioning acceptance of ideas and values of the nation, and that maintains social reproduction of structural inequalities. Building on these insights, some scholars examine which 'civic actions' are intrinsically democratic and which might also be useful to the state in dictatorships or other authoritarian regimes (Banaji,

2008; Banaji & Buckingham, 2013; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). These scholars investigate ways in which the interplay of citizen action, dissent, critique, abstention, and governance-from-above or through representation can enhance and refine the experience of democracy and the quality of democracy for all groups.

Our study suggests that there is no necessary connection between particular disciplines and particular versions of active citizenship. Family, school, peers, associational life, activism and media – which continue to be significant arena for the study of political socialisation and the formation or suppression of human beings' consciousness as citizens – are all phenomena that can be approached in very different ways depending on the epistemological and ideological foundations on which scholarship is grounded.

Conclusion

Both the qualitative discussion and the T-LAB 9 review of most frequently occurring key associations in the literatures of Education, History, Media and Communications, Policy Studies, Political Science, Sociology, Philosophy and Psychology, shows that there is more work to be done theorising what a young 'European' 'active citizen' is, and how this imagined citizen may differ from active citizens in other, non-European contexts. Many of the themes and key-terms that occur most frequently in our corpus share no connection with Europe – they may be inclusive of Europe in their theory and research, but they are not *explicit of or specifically conceived around* Europe and thus do not contribute to on-going efforts to develop theory on European civic and political formation. While a small number of education, political science and sociology texts are taking up this theme, there is also a notable gap in scholarship on *young European citizens*. The concept of a European *youth* citizenry thus needs theoretical and empirical development.

Findings discussed in the previous sections imply that where the literature reviewed discusses Europe, it focuses more on questions and debates around *status* than on active citizenship *practices*. Our surveyed literature associates young people with the terms 'participants' and 'engaged' or 'learning' and 'developing', rather than with the terms 'active' 'activist' or 'dissident.' However we theorise this terminology, the representation of youth in Europe as political agents is all but absent. There is little mention of gender – or of any 'problematic' or challenging identities in regards to youth citizenship. While there are many texts that discuss how young people learn about and engage in citizenship behaviours through education and schools, there is little interrogation of the quality of this education or the criticality of its versions of citizenship.

Even after attempts to cast the net as wide as possible in order to capture the most cutting edge and reflexive studies within each discipline, the literature we gathered and examined tended to focus on dutiful, conformist, electoral and institutional forms of citizenship across Europe. Further, several influential studies treated these as the *desirable norm* against which other forms of direct,

critical or dissident citizenship can be found lacking. Many of these influential approaches to citizenship have investigated fundamental aspects of young people's interests and experiences of communal civic life in Europe and provided helpful interventions, while others have alienated groups of young people from the erstwhile European project and even from democracy in its current workings, through a lack of understanding of their experiences, contexts and motivations. Problematizing the normative, but sometimes concluding by endorsing new and different norms, most critical accounts of youth and active citizenship take a keen interest in the contestations, exclusions and injustices permitted by state sanctioned discourses on citizenship. Along the way, they critique the manner in which widely accepted citizenship norms are often set arbitrarily and ahistorically by particular powerful groups of adults within unequal power structures. As yet, too few studies research or suggest new imaginaries of citizenship and new political futures for young people in the European Union and beyond.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

The research reported in this paper was funded by European Union, Horizon 2020 Programme, Constructing AcTiveCitizensHip with European Youth: Policies, Practices, Challenges and Solutions (www.catcheyou.eu) Grant Agreement No 649538. Filipe Piedade's contribution was supported by his PhD, financed by the FCT-Portuguese Science and Technology Foundation, under the Doctoral scholarship (BD/123619/2016).

Acknowledgement

The views and opinions expressed in this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Research Executive Agency of the European Commission. Additionally, the authors would like to thank Elvira Cicognani, Isabel Menezes, Petr Macek, Frosso Motti-Stefanidi, Peter Noack and Veronika Kalmus for the data which were collected by their team to be used in this paper.

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